

Research Paper

Main Intergovernmental Conflicts among Urban Management Actors of Small Cities Case Study: City of Natanz, Iran

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Abstract

There are studies about interlocal relations of local governance, but it would be unique to explain these in urban management mechanisms of unitary country in Middle East, like Iran. One of the important issues for the city's urban management system is its state actors' interrelations and probable challenges of this process, which mentioned by terms like inter-local, intergovernmental, or inter-organizational relations and is the main issue of this article. Present study aims to find the main challenges in the Iranian multi-level intergovernmental relations, especially in local-level urban management of small cities. After a review of conflicts among local actors in Iranian town's administration, the contradictory components are summarized in the propositions. In order to better explain findings and utilize the opinions of local decision makers of Natanz city (the study case in Iran), the importance of existing conflicts and challenges was measured via questionnaire and interview. Through factor analysis method, such propositions as lack of updated plans and programs (prepared at national level but for local level), and the unbalanced proportion between scope of duties and authority at local level, are among the most important concerns of them.

Keywords: Local governance, Urban management, Interlocal relations, Small cities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The accumulation of humans around the world for the survival of life, the emergence of multiple settlements and the distribution of population in the rapidly expanding area of the territory have created new conditions for its particular needs. The increasing urban population in these years, coupled with increased socio-political conflicts and the demand for services and facilities, highlights the early signs of a sense of need for the formation of small-scale local governments. This kind of government, as a local power, in the urban management system of different countries can play a facilitating role in or, at the same time, be an obstacle to development. In fact, one of the

important issues for the city's urban management system is its state actors' interrelations and probable challenges of this process, which mentioned in researches [1-8] by terms like interlocal, intergovernmental, or interorganisational relations. Over the past years, numerous scholars [9-14] have used concepts, such as decentralization, local autonomy, local discretion and accountability to examine such relations. And some of them [10, 12, 15-19] tried to measure its dimensions by different top-down or bottom-up methods. In fact, most of them sought to find out conflicts and challenges among different types of local state actors, officials or non-profit organizations at different scales [5, 20-22]. In studies on local government, various definition have been presented for the concept "decentralization" [23-28]. In the example of Iran, with the experience of decentralization, a type of "delegation" has

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occurred, and a great deal of “devolution” seems to have remained. This research tries to explain the dimensions of the main conflicts and issues in the process of urban management in Iranian small cities (communities with less than 30000 population) in a bottom-up way, according to actors’ perceptions. The concepts of small and medium in relation to the city, industry, company or collections, are used to separate them from their initial and large scale. Size or population is one of the main criteria for categorizing cities, which is often used because of its ease of use as well as difficult access to other economic and social criteria [29-32]. For this purpose, Natanz city, as a case study, has been studied to better explain the topic and explore the findings through local participants’ perceptions.

1.1. Municipality and city council, the main formal local state actors in Iran's urban management system

Knowing about and explaining the forms of local governance and leadership in small cities, one can define so important dimensions and elements affecting their development process [29, 33-36]. It could be more beneficial if used as a way to find cooperation solutions for cost reductions in small-sized municipalities with fiscal stress or tight budget [2, 4, 37- 38].

In Iran, considering the effects of national and provincial organizations on urban management, three levels of national, regional and local significance can be identified. At the national level of management, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, and the Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture are the main actors. In sum, it can be said that each of the ministries and organizations of the country that deals with the city affects the management of the city in a way through their duties and responsibilities. Local state actors operate within an overlapping jurisdictional environment, creating various types of intergovernmental exchange [3]. At regional level, provincial councils of urban planning, the Article 5 of the Establishment Act of the Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture of Iran, the Provincial Council and other councils, such as the Traffic Council, the Supervisory Commission (article 48 of Industrial System Act), Article 2’s Commission and Commission for the Investigation of Urban Construction. At the local level, the formal and informal elements making decisions on urban management are influential on the city's future. Municipalities, city councils, governorates, and informal elements affecting urban management are considered [39], which their involvement in the governance system is based mainly on personal contacts and initiatives [4].

The members of the parliament (local representative), religious actors and some members of the local communities, social and economic groups, are included in

“informal actors” category. In some cases, the informal interlocal relations mean that politics, power and contingency tend to assume primacy over law, institutions and consistency, in guiding the relations between the different levels of government and it would be often difficult to diagnose or analyze. This type of relations are usually as important as formal mechanisms, if not more so and they can hold the system together through unwritten rules or principles both in vertical and horizontal administrative aspects [6].

Local governments often have a dual status; on the one hand, they must do local affairs by polling locals in accordance with the law; on the other hand, they must act as the representative of the central government. The municipality, in the Iranian field of urban management, is an organization that utilizes patterns and concepts of urban management. It is responsible for the administration of municipal affairs. There are several types of relations between formal actors in urban management, like city council-mayor, mayor-city council, and absolute councils. The Iranian system is so similar to city council-city manager type [40-41]. The new type of city council and mayoral election framework in Iran began to be used just since 1999 [42].

Elected local organizations, especially municipalities and city councils, are governed in different ways in different countries. In some countries, such as Iran, local elected organizations that have public goals (such as municipalities) are run uniformly. It means that all the cities, in proportion to their population, have the same election and administration mechanism for city councils. The city council members select a mayor from themselves or their alternative choices for a period of 4 years. In all cities, the duties and powers of the council are identical and the responsibilities and powers of the mayors are similar. While in some countries, local organizations are governed by diverse patterns [43]. In other words, the municipality (in accordance with Article 5 of the General Accounting Law of the country) is a public and non-governmental organization with independence and legal personality, and supervised by the city council, which is elected by the people. The city council is also considered as one of the important elements of the urban management system as well as a decision-maker with a small degree of local-level legislature, which must have a functional integrity to play its role in fulfilling the duties of policy-making, implementation and monitoring of all matters related to the limits of the city and related organizations at a local scale [44]. In summary, the elements constituting the Iranian urban management system and the scope of duties are listed in Table 1.

As indicated in the table above, municipal administration institutions, at the local government level, only have the ability to decide on the scope (also limited).

Table 1. Iranian urban planning and management system; levels, duties and responsibilities *

Institution	Scope of intervention	review and modification	supervision on implementation	Implementation	approve	Supervision on planning	Planning	Policy making
Supreme council	Iran's Supreme Council of Urban Development and Architecture	☐	✍	✍	☐		☐	☐
	Technical Committees of the Supreme Council				✍			
Ministry of road and urbanism	Department of Urban Planning and Architecture (Secretariat of Supreme Council)		✍		✍	☐	☐	☐
	Provincial Department of Roads and Urban Development		☐		✍	✍	✍	✍
Provincial council	Provincial Planning and Development Council				☐			✍
	Professional Working Groups on Infrastructure and Urban Development				✍	✍		
Commission Article 5 of the Establishment Act of the Supreme Council		☐	✍		☐			
The President's Office. Deputy of Strategic Planning and Control				✍			✍	☐
Ministry of the Interior (provincial branch)						✍	✍	
Consulting Engineers		✍	✍				✍	
Municipality and City Council				☐	✍		✍	
✍ Supervision and Observation		☐ Decision-making and approve			* Data from [50]			

1.2. Challenges of relationship between local and national governments in iranian urban management system

According to available studies, in Iran, the municipality and city council, as the main actors of urban management, in the form of local government, are in conflict with national government and face challenges in this regard. Although governments should have the role of supporting and guiding municipalities, their plans can change the city's directions without paying attention to its local consequences or disadvantages. This case goes back to the structural issues and existing organizations of the municipalities. For example, municipalities have the least role to play in housing programs by the public sector or the least economic role in deciding for cities [42]. In previous years, some authors believed [45] that the continuous changes in governmental policies, social instability, and responding to the people's demands directly through government ministries and organizations have weakened urban and municipal management in the contemporary era, about 40 years ago. On the other hand, the legitimacy challenge in urban management system, along with the separation of urban management and its assignment to government branches, and finally the deprivation of municipalities from government credits for the legal duties of municipalities, have created a complicated condition for local authorities. In other words, there is no appropriate balance between the duties and power of local actors of urban management. Despite the importance of municipalities in providing urban services, issues such as the shortage or lack of sustainable sources of income, the inefficient administrative and technical system, and the influence and strong attachment to the central government

make them to face with many problems. It seems that the approval and guidance of the mayor from the central government and the necessity of continuous accountability can be considered as an obstacle to the self-sufficiency of local decision-makers [46,47]. In Iran, each ministry organizes its affairs by designating local branches. This situation has caused many problems, such as inconsistency between local public and governmental city administrations. Therefore, the municipalities do not manage the city alone, all national actors (e.g. Organizations for Police, Governorate, Education, Water, Electricity, Gas, Telecoms, and etc.) Have administrative share [48]. Obviously, in such a situation, legal references view urban planning laws just as administrative regulations, and in case of any conflict with the current laws, the urban planning laws are ignored [49]. By the way, the new edition of urban laws about "integrated urban management" is put on the agenda of the parliament, which is going to improve the mechanisms.

Regarding to law, city councils in Iran are not the main actor of urban decision-making. They just have limited authorities to control and direct some activities of municipality, which made them a kind of "municipality council" instead of "city council" [44] they can observe the related activities of other local actors without a legal right to enforce them to act in their plan. They are able to propose some suggestions to local actors. This made them kind of governmental agents who should convince people instead of being people's representatives. Inefficient participation of private sector and the public in deciding on urban management issues results in a lack of interest and participation of people in their own affairs, which could potentially lead to prosperity and the comfort of members

of society. Most of decisions are made by those who are far from cities geographically. On the other hand, the mayors' executive power must be approved by central actors, and this makes the process so centralized [47]. By reviewing the definitions and existing literature about Iranian urban management, some of the possible challenges faced by the local government in the Multilevel Urban Management System of Iran are briefly summarized in the following propositions. (Table 2).

Table 2. Possible challenges in multilevel urban management system of Iran (especially between local and national actors)

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- Disproportionate power and executive facilities at the municipality level with limited scope of tasks
 - Lack of land allocation for the replacement of real estate in projects
 - National planning inadequacy for local actors consensus
 - Weaknesses of required legal and regulatory rules and legislation
 - Inconsistency between governmental actors and municipalities
 - Breaking plan rules by governmental institutes
 - Inconsonance of predicted and real city development and expansion
 - Limited participation of local actors in master planning process
 - Non-updated plans and programs
 - Obligation to coordinate the municipality with other organizations, in particular the higher levels of government, to implement programs
 - Influence of governmental and non-governmental institutions on the implementation of plans and programs
 - Economic and functional unjustifiability of action plans
 - Disproportionate income and cost of the municipality
 - Extending Land occupation inside and outside the city area by state actors
 - Lack of citizens' participation in the implementation of programs
 - Citizens' resistance and opposition against implementation of project proposals
 - Citizen's reluctance to participate in the executive stages of programs
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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is an applied research in which the main contradictions of urban management in Iranian towns are described through an interpretive paradigm and a quantitative process, using quantitative tools to measure qualities. Given the main objective, the Iranian literature and current views has been briefly reviewed using a deductive approach. By extracting some of the important issues in this regard as specific propositions, a framework has been provided for a more detailed study of case examples (especially towns). In order to measure the importance of the proposed propositions and the findings of the initial studies, from the point of view of local decision makers in Natanz city, the sample was analyzed

in a single case study research. To rate and prioritize the propositions, they were presented to the respondents (47 persons) in a form of questionnaire. They were identified through a purposive sampling from local and public decision makers. Using a survey method, the data on local actors' perceptions were gathered through questionnaires and then, creating a database and using factor analysis in SPSS software, propositions were classified. After gathering 5 main factors explaining challenges in the case study, using linear regression analysis, the relationships between factors and general perceptions were evaluated. In the next step, by combining them, propositions were prioritized.

2.1. Case study: Natanz city

In order to document the conditions of a real urban management system, Natanz city was selected as a case study. Natanz city is located in the western margin of the central desert (known as Dashte-Kavir in Persian) of Iran. According to historical evidence, its primary nucleus was formed about 8000 BCE. Its average elevation above sea level is about 1680 meters. Natanz, as the center of Natanz County in Isfahan province, is recognized as the center of main facilities and activities in the region. According to Iran Statistical Yearbook 2016¹, Natanz, with 14122 inhabitants, is considered the most populated urban center in county. Natanz is in a new situation of development and transformation because of new activities, such as tourism and industries, and thereby national migration flows for job and better environmental quality of life. Natanz had a history of urban changes through several kinds of urban decision in different urban administration systems. The municipality, since 1934, and the city council (in new form), since 1999, are formal center of urban affairs in Natanz, but with unsteady responsibility and authority framework, along the activities of other local and national actors, which resulted in diverse effects on town development.

3. RESULTS; HOW THE PROPOSITIONS ARE CATEGORISED FROM THE LOCAL ACTORS' POINT OF VIEW

Based on the challenges from literature, some questions were presented for each proposition. In a structured questionnaire based on a Likert scale, each item was used to examine the extent of the incidence of challenge from the point of view of various local actors of managers, authorities and decision makers. Purposive sampling was used to select actors. In order to maintain the institutional diversity, 47 persons were asked from different bodies such as the governorate, the municipality, the Housing Foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (local branch), the Agriculture Department (local branch), and the current and former members of the city council, local consulting engineers and civil society representatives. At the same time, a series of semi structured interviews were conducted with them to show the relations among propositions.

¹ Derived from Statistical Center of Iran

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The high value of Cronbach's alpha (0.914) indicates the reliability of the survey. Then, data were entered in SPSS software, and using factor analysis command, initial data matrix is entered into factor analysis. Through this analysis, the data matrix is broken into main components (PCA) to form correlation matrix. Considering Bartlett's test components, it is shown that variables are correlated and measurable in factor analysis. In addition, inspecting the value related to the index of sampling ratio (KMO), which is more than 0.5 (Table 3), it is proved that matrix lacks multi-colinearity or mono-linearity and data are suitable to be analyzed.

Table 3. Amounts of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett tests

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy			.543
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		356.967
	df		136
	Sig		.000

After examining initial measurement matrix and table of variances, it is seen that the value of cumulative variance for determined factors is 80%, which in urban research, explanation of a subject with this amount of cumulative variance is acceptable. In addition, it is determined that what percent variance is explained by each of 5 main factors, were shown in Table 4.

According to eigenvalues and the scree plot, those factors with eigenvalue greater than 1 were selected as factors explaining the challenges of urban management in

Natanz city. In order to bring the elements closer to the axis of the factors, reach the highest order and find the items having the greatest factor load in each factor, Varimax rotation was used. After 12 repetitions, weight of each factor was determined in order to eliminate the values below 0.4 for ease of decision making and to select the items that were rated higher in each column in front of the factors. At this step, by examining the items in each category (subset of one factor), factors were categorized based on their nature. In Table 5, the factors and propositions identifying each factor, along with the average dissatisfaction of respondents, are shown.

Table 4. Total variance explained for factors

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	7.438	43.752	43.752	3.669	21.582	21.582
2	2.631	15.477	59.229	3.145	18.499	40.081
3	1.358	7.989	67.218	2.862	16.836	56.917
4	1.200	7.057	74.275	2.181	12.828	69.745
5	1.132	6.661	80.936	1.903	11.192	80.936

Extraction method: Principal component analysis (PCA)

Table 5. Classification of factors based on factor loadings

Factors						Dissatisfaction average	Statements	
Factors loading								
5	4	3	2	1				
Factor 1								
				0,802	3.28	Nonupdated plans and programs	10	
				0765	2.92	Disproportionate power and executive facilities at the municipality level with limited scope of tasks	1	
				0.765	3.08	Economic and functional unjustifiability of action plans	16	
				0.262	2.88	Weaknesses of required legal and regulatory rules and legislation	4	
				0.580	2.56	Breaking plan rules by governmental institutes	6	
Factor 2								
				0.799	3.76	Limited participation of local actors in master planning process	8	
				0.795	3.8	Lack of land allocation for the replacement of real estate in projects	2	
				0.756	3.6	Inconsonance of predicted and real city development and expansion	7	
				0.611	2.84	Inconsistency between governmental actors and municipalities	5	
Factor 3								
				0.870	3.96	Citizen's reluctance to participate in the executive stages of programs	23	
				0.840	2.64	Citizens' resistance and opposition against implementation of projects proposed	22	
				0.755	3.16	Lack of citizens' participation in the implementation of programs	21	
Factor 4								
				0.784	3	Influence of governmental and non-governmental institutions on the implementation of plans and programs	15	
				0.709	3.36	Disproportionate income and cost of the municipality	17	
				0.659	3.48	National planning inadequacy for local actors consensus	3	
Factor 5								
				0.822	2.52	Extending Land occupation inside and outside the city area by state actors	19	
				0.629	3.68	Obligation to coordinate the municipality with other organizations, in particular the higher levels of government, to implement programs	13	

4. DISCUSSION; PRIORITIZATION OF THE PROPOSITIONS EXPRESSING CONFLICTS AND CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NATANZ CITY

Using the respondents' answers to the question on their general views of the conflicts and challenges of urban management in Natanz city (especially, among local and national actors), and five factors derived from factor analysis using linear regression, the regression between each factor and the question on the respondents' general view of the topic has been investigated. First, it's better to make sure that variables are not self-correlated. In order to do this, Durbin Watson test was used and by the score of 1.977 for this test, it would be all right to measure coefficients gained. After an accurate evaluation of existing situation based on factor analysis, next step is to provide a ranking list of issues for further improvements using linear regression analysis. Applying dependent variable of the general view of people about the degree of conflict between urban management actors in the studied city and 5 factors gained as independent variables, it got possible to study the relationship and correlation of each

factor with general perception. According to the results of the analysis and study of the "Beta" column, the degree of dependence of factors on the dependent variable is observed in descending order, and with respect to the significant value of "t" and "Beta", factors 1, 5, 2, 4 and 3 were located.

Finding the importance and relationship of criteria and classifying them in a research are valuable if they would be based on the information provided, and then experts can get informed about different dimensions and make decisions. In this regard, in the following, multiplying "Beta" coefficient of each factor by factor loading of each variable (within its factor) by the amount of dissatisfaction, the criteria were ranked to be investigated. In table 6, the ranking is shown by the level of importance, their correlation with total conflicts majority and level of dissatisfaction by individuals. The items getting a larger value are considered as top priority for consideration. In fact, shortcomings, problems and conflicts related to these issues, which are top priority in ranking table, are among the main causes of the challenges of urban management system in Natanz city from the viewpoint of actors. Table 6 shows the 10 important points with the highest priorities.

Table 6. Criteria ranking to determine the priorities of improvement

Priority	Statement	Priority score	Factor loading	Beta	Dissatisfaction Average
1	Non-updated plans and programs	1.381	0.802	0.525	3.28
2	Economic and functional unjustifiability of action plans	1.237	0.765	0.525	3.08
3	Disproportionate power and executive facilities at the municipality level with limited scope of tasks	1.172	0.765	0.525	2.92
4	Obligation to coordinate the municipality with other organizations, in particular the higher levels of government, to implement programs	1.090	0.629	0.471	3.68
5	Lack of land allocation for the replacement of real estate in projects	0.975	0.795	0.323	3.8
6	Extending Land occupation inside and outside the city area by government actors	0.975	0.822	0.471	2.52
7	Weaknesses of required legal and regulatory rules and legislation	0.946	0.626	0.525	2.88
8	Inconsonance of predicted and real city development and expansion	0.879	0.756	0.323	3.6
9	Breaking plan rules by governmental institutes	0.779	0.580	0.525	2.56
10	Disproportionate income and cost of the municipality	0.640	0.709	0.269	3.36

5. CONCLUSION

Major administrative and executive institutions in Iran's urban management system are divided in the two main national and local tier. Municipality and city council as the last part of urban management ladder, should share their duties with numbers of local branches of national actors. Because of concentrated official-political power hierarchy at national level, moving to local level is a kind of going down in authority and right of independent decision making which would result in institutional collective action (ICA) dilemmas [7]. Also Phillimore has explained that it's not easy to define necessary correlation between the system of government and the degree of centralisation of intergovernmental relations or the relative power between the various levels of government [6]. By

reviewing the Iranian urban administrative system, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the Iran Supreme Council for Urban Development and Architecture, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Deputy Directorate for Strategic Planning and Control, along with all its subsidiary units, are the most important stakeholders in Iran's urban planning and management network. Therefore, the focus of policymaking and decision-making for urban planning at the highest levels (central government) is one of the challenges that the Iranian urban system faces within the framework of management institutions and executive agencies. In Natanz city, as a sample, it is also somewhat referred to the main contradictions of the existing system. As indicated in last Table, the absence of updated plans and programs, the economic and operational unjustifiability of proposals for

projects, the lack of concentration of power and executive facilities in the municipality, and the limited scope of tasks, are issues with high priority. In other word, from the viewpoint of the audiences in Natanz city, the failure of plans and programs, which are often from the national decision-making area, disturbs the activities of the local government in urban management matters. Also argued that the limited power and municipal facilities, as an important local institution in the urban management system, create barriers for local actors to play their role. In general, according to the studies in the present research, investigation of Natanz city, as a case study, it seems that in the multi-level urban management system of Iran, the local government seems to be degraded from “management” to “administration”. In fact, local public actors, with the least power and the possibility of deciding, compared with the national government, are only engaged in implementation of decisions which made at central level. Nevertheless, they have lots of limitations and conflicts in the process of implementation with local branches of national level actors. According to the results of the Natanz sample analysis, the prioritization abovementioned can be considered as an introduction to the step-by-step process to improve the communication conditions of the different decision levels in it. Also, pursuing similar trends with the framework proposed in the present research and other complementary criteria will open up a way to measure and evaluate the urban management system of the country. Study of new dimensions of Iranian intergovernmental relations, especially at local level of small cities’ urban management would be unique in comparison with mechanisms found around the world. This research could be an attempt to explain some aspects of environmental local governance in Middle East context.

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