

THE RISE OF A MEGAPOLIS: TEHRAN'S MORBID SUBURBAN TOWNS

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Abstract

Concentration in the growing trend of urbanisation in the Third World Countries and the subsequent exercise of policies such as 'growth pole' are among the reasons for the formation of conurbation or the formation of the megapolis. Iran is no exception to this rule and in the growing formative trend of modern urbanisation, the reliance on oil revenues and the increasing import of commodities has caused a dramatic immigration of the village people to the capital city. The unfair distribution of revenues and the income difference between the city and the village and the facilities in large cities have led to an increased population in the capital. The inefficient economy in the agricultural sector caused by improper planning has brought about a decline in agriculture and ruralisation. On the other hand, the large ratio of oil revenues as a one-product economy and the growth of administrative bureaucracy are to be considered as the main reasons for the influx of the villagers into the capital city. The most important damaging corollaries of this trend can be categorised as imbalance in socio-economic growth, uncontrollable immigration, environmental problems such as air pollution (Tehran has continued to rank among the most polluted cities in the world for the last ten years), and the decline on the managerial level due to increasing concentration of costs, and the wastage of time and labour. The article examines the development trend of urbanisation in Iran, one of the more important countries in Asia and sheds light on the formative phases of the first pattern in urbanisation. It also investigates the morbid disorders in urbanisation and structural rupture on a national level and the emergence of a metropolitan area which makes up 20% of the whole country's population.

Keywords: metropolis, immigration, Tehran, urbanisation.

Models for the Spatial Development of Megacities

In the model of the spatial development of megacities in the world, there are a number of different patterns which offer diverse images of their megacities in view of the existing situations in those countries. The phenomenon of the spatial development of megacities occurs on account of the soaring prices in lands and buildings as well as the transference of population and activities therein and it gradually becomes manifest in some of them which are representative of third world countries in the shape of unsymmetrical structures on the outskirts of the city. This causes a distancing between the work place and the residence, increase in distances, increase in urban traffic and the ever-increasing destruction and pollution of human and natural environments.

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In the process of structural sprawling which leads to the morbid explosion of megacities like Tehran, there is also the possibility of dynamism in unity in such a way that sprawling spots on the outskirts of the megacities merge together and join the interrelated system of the megacities.

This urban phenomenon (Conurbanization) is the result of synchronic spatial sprawling and merging which by virtue of the remaining vacant spaces on the outskirts of large cities, gradually become crammed with unsymmetrical structural spaces, leading to some particular form of spatial development known as the explosion of the large cities in third world countries (Saidnia 1999: 61).

Research Methodology

Using a practical method, the author has focused on a case study of descriptive nature and utilises a quantitative-qualitative analysis in data analysis by using population statistics. Also in this research, the writer has used the library research method and field work.

Development trends in Iran's population in the twentieth century

It seems a futile attempt to investigate the features of urbanisation in Iran without studying the structure of population growth. As one of the undeveloped countries in South-western Asia, Iran is considered one of the youngest countries in the world in terms of its over 3% growth of population. In view of the young population in the country, there is a considerably large rate of immigration to their cities and the future of the country is gravely threatened by a heavy burden in terms of housing, unemployment, hygienic conditions, and urban management. Until 1921, Iran enjoyed a favourable urban system and urbanisation.

In 1806, the population of Tehran was estimated for the first time to be 30,000 people. In winter of 1807, the population was estimated at 50,000 people. The most documented record of Iranian population dates back to 1900 where the population was estimated to be 9,860,000 in general and 2,033,000 people in urban areas. Of this population, 20.6% lived in 99 urban spots in the country (Bharier 1985: 339).

According to these figures, in 1900, there were 99 cities, a ratio of 20.6% of urbanisation and the population of the cities was relatively small. The large number of the cities was comparatively small but the urban hierarchy was relatively proportionate. Despite an absence of an official census in Iran until 1956, it can however be claimed that the urban system of this country enjoyed relative congruity from 1867 until 1956 and that there was a balance in the urban system and network and no city excelled another city (Bharier 1985: 341). Since 1956 when the first national census was conducted, the population has begun to increase dramatically and during a span of forty years, it tripled between 1956 and 1996. From 1956, the population of Iran reached 19 million.

In 1966, with an increase of 6.5 million, the population reached 25.9 million. In 1976, with an increase of eight million people, the population jumped to 33.7 million and in 1986, the population reached 49.5 million, a drastic increase as compared to the last four years. This dramatic increase in population was caused by factors such as the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, improper implementation of family planning, the outbreak of

Iran-Iraq war and subsequent immigration. By 1980, the city limits had expanded to 515 square kilometres, bringing the population density to 10,587 persons. In 1986, the figure was again rising at 11,729, a 10.8 per cent increase from 1980.

The percentage of families living in one-room dwellings, one of the best statistics for getting an idea of the conditions in which a city's poorer classes find themselves, dropped from 24.1 per cent in 1980 to 15.3 per cent in 1986 (Kanö 1996: 435). In the national census in 1996, the population reached 60 million. The growth rate of population in this decade witnessed 31% in comparison with the last decade. In other words, the growth rate of population was 1.65% per year. From 1976 till 1986, the population witnessed an increase rate of 3.8% and reached 48 million from 39 million of which 6% pertained to immigration. It is obvious that the urbanisation growth rate has increased from decade to decade.

During the past decades, population has gained momentum in its tendency towards urbanisation. Immigration from villages to cities is the main reason for rapid urbanisation. According to the 1956 national census, there were 5,799,000 city dwellers, 31.4% of urbanisation rate, and there were 199 cities. The most important feature of urban system is currently the existence of a conurbation called Tehran (as capital city) and some suburban towns.

According to 1966 national census, the urban population of Iran was 9,790,000, the urban ratio was 38.7%; the number of the cities was 271 and the growth of the urban population stood at 5%. The most important feature of the urban system in Iran in this year is the increase of the population in Tehran in comparison with the urban population in the entire country, the increase in the number and size of the large and medium cities in comparison with the previous decade, the increase of small towns and the decrease of their population in comparison with the urban population in the previous decade and the existence of one single million people city in the whole country.

According to the 1976 national census, the urban population was 26,485,000 people, the number of the cities was 496, the urbanisation ratio was 54.3% and the average annual growth of urban population reached 5.4%. The most important feature of the urban system between the years 1971-1986 was the increase of population, the size of the large cities, the increase of inflation of the villages and the cities and the absence of medium-sized cities. In 1991, the urban population was 31,837,000 people, the number of the cities was 514, the urbanisation ratio was 57% and the average annual growth of population between 1986 and 1991 reached 3.46%. According to the 1996 national census, the urban population reached 36,700,000 people, the number of cities reached 614, the urbanisation ratio stood at 61.3% and the average annual growth of population reached 3.17% between the years 1986-1996. In view of the above-mentioned analysis, the population ratio living in urban areas jumped from 31.4% in 1956 to 61.3% in 1996.

The rapid growth of population led to a large number of problems including poverty, unemployment, increasing property prices, insufficient schooling and hygienic facilities, inappropriate public transportation, environmental pollution and congestion in big cities. On the basis of this assumption, the population of the country in 2001 reached 44,771,000 people in urban areas. In other words, 66.4% of the population was composed of the urban dwellers. According to published statistics of the 2006 national census, the urban population of Iran 48,245,000 people.

Factors Influencing the Growth of Urbanisation (Urban Concentration)

Increase in oil revenues: The increase in oil revenues coupled with overwhelming volume of imports seriously damaged the agricultural sector and brought about an influx of the villagers into the city. The cities lacked planning system and most of them did not have any urban planning and if they had, they would not have been practical.

Unequal distribution of revenues: The rift in incomes in the cities and villages as well as between small and big cities and the availability of facilities in big cities were among the factors which contributed to population growth in big cities.

Emulation of consumer behaviour: Following the increase in oil revenues and emulating the West, urbanisation found its way in a trend which was not in the least proportionate to the economic growth in the country and the ratio of urbanisation gained momentum only with the injection of consumer goods in the society.

Pattern of land ownership: One of the main factors which accelerated immigration to other cities was land reforms introduced in 1962 which continued in three different phases until 1974. Owing to the land reforms, pieces of arable lands were created in fanning units. The division of lands and the economic inefficiency augmented immigration to the point where the agricultural sector which had long satisfied an overwhelming part of public needs was relegated to almost nullity. In view of the increase in oil revenues, the agricultural sector has faced setbacks every year, leading to an increasing trend in immigration from the villages to the cities.

Technological growth: Since 1921, on account of the increase in oil revenues and the introduction of assembly technology, the cities have begun to increase in number every year and subsequently, large cities have taken shape with burgeoning suburbs. For the past two or three decades, urbanisation in Iran has had three features as following (Saidnia 1999: 32):

1. The increase in the number of large cities and megacities on account of immigration.
2. Increase in the number of small cities caused by overpopulation in the cities; major villages were developed into cities.
3. Relative stability, the ratio of urbanisation in medium-sized cities

The increase in revenues and consumption in the cities, the decline in agriculture, and ruralisation and the political-economic practices of the government caused a massive influx of the villagers into the cities and the development of administrative bureaucracy in large cities. Consequently, the population of Iran doubled in less than thirty years.

The increase in costs, the wastage of time and labour force, unbridled development, imbalance in economic and social growth, uncontrollable immigration and the saturation of possibilities in large cities for accepting population, environmental problems caused by waste dump, increase in pollution in air, soil, water and landscape, the concentration of administrative systems and economic and commercial centres, the existence of main terminals and major service sectors are among the main damages caused by population concentration in megacities.

Model for Spatial Development in Tehran

The periods of the spatial development of Tehran can be introduced as follows:

- The formation of old Tehran (1891-1920)
- The renovation of the city of Tehran (1921-1961)
- The emergence of the Megacity of Tehran (1962-1991)
- The emergence of the suburban towns of Tehran (1992-2008)

The Emergence of Morbid Suburban Towns on the Outskirts of Tehran

Although the growth rate of population declined in the city of Tehran over the last two decades, the comparison of the figures about Tehran testifies to the fact that there has always been a marked difference between the growth rate of the population in Tehran and that of the whole country and in the urban parts of Tehran and it has been on the increase with greater promptitude in comparison with the city itself. In other words, since 1976, in view of the population figures and the location of the population, the Megacity of Tehran has been taking shape and the city of Tehran has increased its growth from its legal boundaries into a wider area. In other words, although the city of Tehran itself has achieved a status of stability in population, its surrounding areas have been extremely open to immigrants and this has caused a phenomenon known as over-urbanism.

The important spatial-structural developments in Tehran in this period include the increase of creating small towns, tendency towards poor areas (shanties and slums) and uptowns in different geographical directions. In the wake of urban development and creation of new cities in the vicinity of Tehran, the phenomenon of town creation has stretched to neighbouring cities and major suburban directions. This paved the ground for the creation of suburbanisation and satellite towns near Tehran.

The increasing spatial development of Tehran from 1961 till 1971, and the over-complication of its administrative affairs entailed planning for and supervision of urban growth on a national level. In this regard, the first comprehensive plan for Tehran was drafted modelled on the western paradigms after years of studying and was approved in 1968. The duration for implementing the plan was estimated to cover 25 years (until 1993).

However, owing to economic powers wielding influence and on account of lack of supervision over land ownership, the land mafia continued to sway hold on the suburban lands and thus increased the property prices in the city and in the suburban areas. It went to the point where parts of the residential, rural and arable regions in the east and northwest, west and northwest and south were expropriated and so these parts were incorporated into the urban network (Nazarian 2002: 111). As a result, the aftermaths of unbridled development such as suburbanization, illegal establishment of industries and destruction of environment were accelerated. In the meanwhile, the absence of a comprehensive developmental plan and uncoordinated management subjected the city of Tehran to a series of sporadic reformative measures which were accompanied by a number of ups and downs and trials and errors.

Model of Spatial Development of Tehran Megacity

In view of what was said above, the role of Tehran became unprecedentedly more complicated and extensive from 1953 with the establishment of capitalist system, the implementation of land reforms (1962), the disintegration of traditional relations in rural and urban areas, the massive influx of the rural immigrants into the cities, the rapid increase of oil revenues, the rapid growth of service sector, the development of economic and communicational infrastructures, the rapid increase of basic industries and assembly and the subsequent wide development of administrative system. In this period, the city of Tehran turned into one of the largest markets for attracting population, investment, labour, income and services in Iran. The corollary of this period was a variety of contradictions and tensions which are manifest in all spheres on a national level in Iran (Madanipour 1999, p. 75).

Until the nineties of the twentieth century, the development of Tehran was connected and unified. Yet, by virtue of various reasons, inhomogeneous development gained great momentum on the margins of the city of Tehran. The dynamism of inhomogeneous development on the margins of Tehran manifested itself in different ways such as the enlargement of suburban towns, the conversion of the villages into towns, and the enlargement of villages (the creation of small towns and new towns).

In the thirty years of development and change (from 1960 to 1990) approximately 108 villages were merged and dissolved into the megacity of Tehran. During this period, about 60 small towns were created in the suburbs of Tehran and until 2006, the number of the small towns reached 84 most of which emerged with no organised plans (Nazarian 2000: 31). During the nineties of the twentieth century, the city of Tehran was turned from a normal Asian capital city into an important city in terms of politics, economy, military and regional. The aftermath of the above-mentioned currents was basically the emergence of an urban area consisting of Tehran, 48 urban points with municipalities, 12 small towns on the margins of Tehran which created a conurbanization on a national level.

For the last three decades, the development of the urban area of Tehran has not followed any particular policies or strategies, or coordinated plans. The result was the settlement of informal groups of low-income, leading to suburban towns and centre of social problems in the megacity. It is quite understandable that this phenomenon caused economic-social and environmental consequences.

Thus, the population growth of Tehran as a megacity materialised. Today, with the formation of the centralised urban points on the margins of the city, the multi-central pattern naturally emerged in Tehran conurbanization (Ghamami 2004: 33).

Research findings

One of the features of the spatial-structural forms of the Tehran (conurbanization) is that the populated cities and villages and the main centres of activities have not sprawled symmetrically on the main paths but have taken shape in the form of fairly independent zones or areas in certain marginal points and along the main paths and given shape to cities and villages which are fed by a main route or associated with a prospering agricultural

area. At the same time, these elements are strongly interrelated in terms of residence, work place or services and their growth is materialised in their interrelated associations. As a result of these developments, the urban centres surrounding Tehran have developed drastically on the one hand and on the other, the wide development of suburban communication networks has caused economic, social and structural phenomena in the Tehran suburban towns.

The city of Tehran was developed dynamically until the seventies of the twentieth century but afterwards, the development increased rapidly in the suburbs. The most important factor in linking this large conurbation is the creation of highways and main routes between Tehran and other suburban cities which consist of five main parts. There is always a marked difference between the rate of population growth in Tehran and the cities. In the conurbation (Tehran) the population increases more rapidly than in the main city.

The trend of the urban growth was relatively regular until 1966 and afterwards, the saturation of the megacity's population led to the formation of small towns in the suburban areas of Tehran and created the first conurbation in Iran (Athari 1997: 46). During the past three decades, the urban population of the legal boundaries has doubled and has mounted up to 6.76 million from 2.72 million, the population of other parts of the province has increased 4.9 times bigger and has mounted up to 3.59 million from 736,000. The functional role of the conurbation includes almost all parts of the province. This province covers an area of 18,000 square kilometres and has now a population of 12 million people. Therefore, it can be claimed that the economic life of the whole country depends on this city.

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