

# Good Governance, (as promoting in decision-making process) and its influence on urban strategic plans<sup>1</sup>

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Recieved 13.07.2010; Accepted 26.12.2010

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**ABSTRACT:** Experiences from urban development plans and assessments of their concrete and tangible results in the past decades indicate lack of adequate success of our urbanization system to responding needs of our citizens. This has resulted in need to find a fundamental solution to transforming the centralized system into decentralized. Recent changes in regard to a change of approach from master plan to strategic planning has resulted in an increased sensitivity with regard to enhancement of urban management in addition to the opinion that strategic planning is not in itself a credible replacement for technocratic master planning (top-down) and is not on its own sufficient for sustainable development. In this article, we employ methods of actualization and content analysis to compare the common features of two issues in Iran and subsequently, with an emphasis on correction of structure of urban management system, the concepts of participation of citizens, government, private sector and civic society and enhancement of “good urban governance” with “strategic planning approach” are discussed as keys to the question of solid development. “Public participation in decision-making, accountability, equity and efficiency”, defines both fundamental principles of good urban governance and characteristics of strategic planning and is essentials of a constant environmental, social and economic development.

**Key words:** *Mashhad, strategic planning, decision-making, governance*

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## INTRODUCTION

While investigating the urban planning process in Iran and its outputs, we have to observe that it is obvious to everyone ranging from ordinary citizens to experts that the current urbanization system suffers from stagnancy and is incapable to meet the qualitative and quantitative needs of citizens due to fundamental problems. This system suffers from major legal, structural, organizational and managerial problems and shortages. Environmental pollution, slums and illegal accommodation, poverty, social inequity, lack of infrastructures, inflation and unemployment, Traffic, poor servicing, loss of identity, unpleasant urban views, etc, and the most critical of all, an accelerating growth of urbanization have made life difficult for citizens. If we create a report table of urban development

plans in developing countries such as Iran, we realize that their performance has not been good enough; In addition, in these countries, local and national governments have limited ability to provide accommodation, infrastructure facilities and other services; and today, a revolution in the system of urban development management is considered a critical requirement. In the last years of 1990s, international organizations have declared a policy called “good governance”; a prerequisite for sustainable development. In new solution-finding strategies, development and promotion of urban governance and a boom in its authorization was considered a precondition for sustainable development; in addition, these countries need to gain a better and deeper knowledge of various solution-finding strategies, methods and procedures in regard to active and efficient governance (Otchere and Amanoo,2006,1). At present, due to a general tendency toward urban planning and designing in developed countries, modifications were made from linear methods to strategic and participatory methods. These changes

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<sup>1</sup>Assesment of development plans in Iran-

(Application of design based in planning as interactional approach in macro and micro scale plans)

were made to practical planning and related implementation resulting in their flexibility. This planning method played a vital role in decreasing governmental authority in favor of public and local organizations and paid more attention to the needs and wishes of the citizens. In addition, UN-HABITATS recent experiences illustrate that planning is a key tool in ensuring good governance. not the old-fashioned, top-down, technocratic master planning, but strategic planning helps the city to respond to fast-moving events, to manage change and to improve the quality of life (Narang et al., 2006,4). With regard to recent changes in planning approach in Iran from master planning to strategic planning, it does not seem that such a shift in the planning process can yield efficiency in development plans without considering issues such as urban governance and an increased role of citizens. In other words, employing strategic planning requires a shift in current methods, organizations and rules of urbanization in addition to flexibility in decision-making that can guarantee benefits for all citizens.

### Statement Problem

Planning process and implementation of urban development plans with master planning pattern (traditional) planning, especially in developing countries, has not led to appropriate results. Some of the main reasons for this inefficiency include: decision-making process without stake-holders participation, utilization of scientific methods, putting emphasis on frame problems instead of urban socioeconomic problems and disregarding urban resources, environments and local circumstances; So, in order to create balance between socioeconomic and environmental requirements at present and in the future together with optimal utilization of rare resources and a comprehensive and orderly confrontation with basic issues leading to acceptable results (with an emphasis on implementation, participation and supervision methods), utilizing sustainable human development has created a new pattern and model in the knowledge field of urbanization and urban management. This shift of pattern, employing new concepts such as citizen participation and accountability, equity, efficiency and empowerment in the framework of good urban governance will ultimately result in exaltation of living standards and quality among urban citizens. Now, following recent changes in Iranian urban development plans and employing strategic planning to create urban development plans and analyzing them taking circumstances of Iran's cities and towns into consideration, these questions have surfaced:

- 1) In effect, can a characteristic transformation in urban development plans from master to strategic, yield satisfactory efficiency?
- 2) Which strategies can we employ to change the current urbanization system and provide appropriate circumstances

to realize strategic urban development plans? And at present, how can we achieve the desired urban development plan?

### Research Method

The main structure of research is based on actualization and content analysis methods and depends on recent changes in urbanization knowledge and process of urban planning in the domain of theoretical principles, and finding the roots and origins of plan and urban development management failures in practical domain. Investigating development hurdles reveals a significant inefficiency in previous urban development plans and other numerous obstacles to the new strategic process, also poor local planning demonstrates a poor urban governance in Iran; as a result, analysis and comparison of common characteristics of strategic thinking and good urban governance is a good way of suggesting solution strategies for a continuous and evolutionary process of urban development plans in the path of sustainable development.

### 1- Strategic planning, conceptions and principles

#### 1-1 Definition of urban development strategic planning:

Urban development strategic planning is a new approach in urban development, management and planning which relying on the principles of urban sustainable development, is based on drawing perspective, compilation of development goals, comprehensive and orderly confrontation with basic urban issues (urban key and structural issues), effective and optimal utilization of rare resources (protection, maintaining and promotion of environmental quality) and achieving appropriate results for the public (with an emphasis on implementation and participation). (farnahd, 2005, 6.)

#### 1-2 strategic planning characteristics

One of the significant features of this sort of planning is trying to avoid centralized, imperative and linear planning which not only requires division of planning responsibilities among different levels of management or national, regional or local decision-making authorities, but also requires participation and cooperation of all forces involved in urban existence. From this viewpoint, strategic-structural planning is based on facilities of local organizations, local community and citizens' participation (Mehdizadeh, 2007, 317).

In a conformal analysis, characteristics of urban development strategic planning can be redefined in brief as follows:

It puts, as much as possible, the emphasis on combination of individual and social benefits, combination of present and future, and consideration of interaction between economic, social, environmental and physical factors.

- In strategic planning, there is differentiation and bilateral cooperation between the two processes of decision-provision and decision-making.

- Strategic planning is considered as kind of continuous process and not production of the final result.
- It is based on circular process (bottom-top-bottom) instead of the linear method (current situation, analysis, design).
- In strategic planning, decision and action or planning and implementation have been combined together and are taken into consideration interactively and with feedback.
- In strategic planning, studies and information are used for decision-making; therefore, picking out information and the inclination of studies toward the designated goals is one of its principles of methodology
- In strategic planning, there is no definite anticipation and the future situation is reflected as a perspective with taking various options into consideration and it is continuously exposed to revision and correction over the course of time (Farnahad, 2007, 6). Strategic planning with taking the above-mentioned characteristics into consideration is distinguished from other kinds of planning; in addition, its most significant feature is its ability to be realized that has given it a particular credibility; as a result, strategic planning has close links with management and implementation and is intrinsically based on taking measures.

## 2-Urban governance, concepts and theoretical principles

One of the most important points to be discussed is how process of urban affairs management can be investigated in a theoretical framework. Until 1970s, the lowest level of governance was considered “local government”. In general, local governments collected tax and offered some limited services to the citizens. Being influenced by trade, commerce and general administration points of view, what was known as “administration of urban affairs” was given the name “urban management” in 1980s. A new subject found its way to development seminars and research based studies called “governance”, however, urban management is a managerial process which creates and maintains urban infrastructures and services; on the other hand, urban governance is totally political process. This process is defined by settlement center of United Nations as an effective and efficient solution to urban problems. Those local governments who are accountable and carry out their duties with cooperation of the civic society are able to deliver this service, such an urban governance process results in enhancement of citizens’ living quality.

### 2-1 Urban governance definition

According to the definition by settlement plan of United Nations, ... the sum of the many ways individuals, public and private plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken –it includes formal situations as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens. governance consists of individual and organizational, private and public methods that administer

citizens’ social affairs. Governance is a continuous process that homogenizes various or contradictory benefits and results in taking participatory measures. According to the definition, urban governance, in addition to formal organizations and citizens’ social capital, involves informal contracts in which citizens and organizations have reached agreement and realize they are beneficial to them (UN-HABITAT,2002,P17). Urban governance has been illustrated with the following rules and principles:

- \* **Sustainability:** or the balance economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.
- \* **Subsidiarity:** implying that the responsibilities as well as resources allocated to the lowest - appropriate level in order to achieve efficient and result in better effective delivery.
- \* **Equity:** of access to basic necessities as well as decision-making processes.
- \* **Efficiency:** cost-effectiveness in delivery of services and management of resources.
- \* **Transparency and accountability:** of decision –makers and all stakeholders and freedom from corruption.
- \* **Civic engagement, and citizenship:** effective participation of all urban dwellers in decision-making and active contribution to the common good.
- \* **Security:** not only of individuals but also of their living environment (Narang & Reuters word, 2006, 3).

## 3-Strategic planning and good urban governance( the key to urban development)

Decentralization and relying on civic society and local communities to administer urban affairs, creation of a homogeneous urban and local managerial organization, and regular accountability in administrative system along with utilization of social economic and environmental indexes, tasks inviting the people marginalized from central decision-making to participation, supporting democratic and decentralized aids from both urban and rural administrative organizations. These strategies does not provide a comprehensive list of requirements of urban sustainability, on the other hand, they are indicators of a vast range of coordinated measures in various fields. Achieving desired urban development, is the result of relying on the principle of sustainability and establishment of good governance (Sarraf, 2000, 13). Recent experiences of United Nations settlement plan has revealed that strategic planning is a credible key means for good governance and sustainable

development and not the old traditional central planning. Required strategies to guarantee sustainable development include boosting environmental planning executive management and new managerial policies. The practical strategy to achieve this goal is considered supporting the rules and criteria of good urban governance and propagation of widespread decision-making process. Practical habitat experience demonstrates a new policy based on change of policy of governments from directly providing goods and services to empowerment for good urban governance. "Habitat II" considers this policy as the most practical strategy to achieve sustainable human settlements. This principle is distinguished with a significant strategy: Decentralization of responsibilities and resources to local governments, a return to democratic principles in local and national levels and also encouraging civic society participation in chorus with promoting economic growth and the threats regarding environment (Narang et al., 2006, 4). Since selective strategic planning, with practical tendency, is participatory, it conforms to urbanization. Providing sustainable development and social justice in addition to promotion of living standards and urban environment are pillars of strategic planning. Decentralization and shift of power from central government to local levels, cooperation with private sector and civic society, believing in consensus, increase in responsibilities of public sector, and identification of the fields of cooperation between the government and public sector are the criteria in common between strategic planning and good urban governance.

### 3-1 What characteristics do strategic planning and good governance have in common?

Strategic planning and good urban governance have common characteristics, so developing a mechanism to actualize their common characteristics in all levels of decision-provision, decision-making and implementation is required in a cooperative process to guarantee sustainable development. The requirements are as follows:

- **Public participation and civic engagement:** Public participation is the foundation of the new planning approach and is a significant sign of urban governance ... participation of all citizens especially women, the poor ... that in addition to empowerment in the participation process, is the foundation and basis of urban governance....
- **Social justice and equity:** availability of urban life requirements to all vulnerable citizens especially the unemployed, women, children, ethnic and racial minorities and the handicapped, to achieve this all members of the community should feel they have a share in the community and have not been marginalized.

- **Accountability:** Accountability in urban governance addresses issues related to mechanisms for transparency in the operational functions of local government; responsiveness towards the higher level of government; local population and civic grievances; standards for professional and personal integrity and the rule of law. These are also crucial considerations in the strategic planning approach.

### 3-2 Analysis of urban sustainability in two levels:

It is totally obvious that strategic planning cannot create a city with good living standards on its own, without good urban governance. Undoubtedly, in the new approach of urbanization and strategic planning science, the government, civic society and private sector should participate. In order to eliminate lack of sustainability in urban body, it is necessary to link the systems of decision-provision, decision-making and implementation to achieve common goals of strategic planning, urban governance, eliminating lack of sustainability in the body of managerial organizations, more responsibility and influence ability in administration of affairs and submitting the duties. Principally, sustainability is simultaneous realization of sustainability in economic stability, environmental protection and social justice; therefore, sustainable development depends on reorganizing local administrative system and the method of interaction with citizens. Researchers such as Innes(1990,1988), Lindblom and Kohen (1979) and Schon (1983) argue that citizens have ordinary knowledge which can guarantee that policies recommended in plans can help impact local circumstances and values( urban development research committee, 2008,104). Citizens' intervention can in addition to obtaining information, result in understanding and agreement on issues and their solution methods. Based on this approach of urban of prospective urban development depends on agreement on various issues in various fields, so it is required that the analysis of urban sustainability is carried on in the following two levels: A. Social organization of processes and creating networks of various role-players and efforts to utilize public opinion in policies regarding future of local domains in the framework of sustainable development; and

B. Exchanging views in regard to urban sustainability based on plans and their related goals in such a way that communities and their socioeconomic and habitation tendencies move toward sustainable development (Astleithner and hamedinger,2003, 5).

### 3-3 most important hurdles to utilize strategic planning approach in regard to urban governance in Iran:

A study carried out by the center of architecture and urbanization studies and research, in connection with Iran's

urban planning system has led to following results in regard to urban development plans and the problems faced by urban governance:

- 1) Not taking the benefits of beneficiary groups into consideration, nationally and locally;
- 2) Lack of attention to benefits of stakeholders in developments plans;
- 4) Lack of financial security to attract citizens' participation;
- 5) Uneven and unjust distribution of added value resulted from implementation of urban development plans;
- 6) Not paying enough attention to problems regarding slums and low-income citizens;
- 7) Not giving credibility to local governance; and
- 8) Not specifying a framework for intervention of local governors (center of urbanization research and studies, 2008, 125).

In other researches, most important hurdles in the domain and process of Iran's strategic planning have been listed as follows:

#### **A: hurdles in the planning environment**

- 1) Central government units are in charge of planning;
- 2) Absence of specified mechanisms and relevant rules to attract participation of citizens and nongovernmental organizations;
- 3) Absence of homogeneous special planning in national, regional and local levels;
- 4) Absence of a uniform management for metropolitan areas;
- 5) Absence of an organization with the responsibility to carry out strategic planning for metropolises (in a permanent way);
- 6) No independence of local organizations (city councils and municipalities) and limitation to their area of authorization;
- 7) Poor structure of municipalities and councils;
- 8) No respect for the law as a social value in the country;
- 9) Absence of organized nongovernmental organizations as representatives of beneficiary groups; and
- 10) Poor citizenship culture and citizens' lack of enough information on municipal performance and responsibilities.

#### **B: hurdles to planning process**

- 1) Planners', managers' and executives' fear of citizens' participation;
- 2) The planning process in use has not been taken seriously; and
- 3) Lack of success in linking planning systems with performance systems, etc. (Moradi Masihi, 2005, 256)

#### **4-Studying recent experiences in strategic planning (in metropolis of Mashhad):\***

Experiences acquired in major cities of Iran in the past decade specially in metropolises such as Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Tabriz, Isfahan, etc. with regard to little

success of urban plans, proved to the people in charge of urban problems, the requirement of a new approach based on assessment and pathology of current methods and procedures while taking valuable global experiences into consideration. These approaches should use new knowledge, patterns and methods that are more consistent with Iran's local circumstances. In order to realize this idea due to previous experiences in Tehran and other metropolises it was decided to create new comprehensive and detailed plans with cooperation of all related decision-providing, decision-making and executive organizations, by creating a local organization with a mission to produce, guide, pilot and revise the plan. In line with this process, and due to an agreement between the Islamic council, Mashhad municipality and the department of housing and urban affairs, the association of urban development planning and studies was established and commenced operating. Now the comprehensive and detailed plan of Mashhad with a strategic inclination is being produced under the supervision of the above-mentioned association. In this plan, entire city of Mashhad has been divided into 7 areas of planning. In the new comprehensive and detailed plan, in an interactive process, in addition to presenting a vision, growth pattern and development of entire city, growth and development pattern of each area is being designed and planned. The process of a new comprehensive plan of Mashhad with the strategic tendency consists of 8 stages: presenting vision, future-oriented investigation and analysis, goal definition, assessment and selection of the best scenario, compilation of goals, compilation of strategies, compilation of the strategic plan, method and arrangement of implementation, supervision and revision. Description of cooperation services of planning domain consultants consists of three sections: first, development pattern of planning of the areas; second, detailed plan; third, cooperation with urban management based on the previous section of plan-providing consultant services, in a continuous process will cooperate with municipalities of various regions. In Mashhad's experience, three levels of planning have been extracted from comprehensive plan and a planned process was formed in line with achievement of long term goals of plans and goals of the comprehensive plans. In this suggested structure, Mashhad planning has three levels: first, comprehensive level; second, level of planning areas; third, detailed plan level. These three planning levels are linked together and in an interactive process interact on each other. In this three level process, there are other factors that expose planning to constant changes and assessments (Farnahad, 2008, 6).

According to the studies of the consultant of Mashhad's new development plan, the most strategic issues of the city are as follows: first, the method of confronting urban



over-expansion; second, space-related inequalities of Mashhad metropolis, which have been based on basic ideas and principles in organizing city expansion 1- containing body over-expansion of the city with a dense city tendency in space-body expansion 2- confronting socioeconomic inequalities (second problem) adoption of a new decentralized strategy and the possibility of capital, activity and population redistribution. Accelerating growth of the city of Mashhad is still continuing. Imbalance and inequality between the western and Eastern section of the city with regard to facilities and urban services is totally obvious. According to the authorities around 700,000 people are currently living in 60 population nucleuses in outskirts of the city in problematic and ill-accommodated tissues in such a way that all regions of Mashhad's are facing the challenge of inadequate accommodation. This is a fundamental challenge for Mashhad's urban development and its urban management at present and in the future. With such an image of Mashhad's basic issues and the fresh process of providing new urban development plans in this metropolis and based on author's experiences in cooperation with this organization and also based on the main topic of the article, the following subject-matters related to the process of creation of Mashhad's urban development plans are presented:

### **Achievements and positive points of the process of plan creation**

- Establishment of a local organization and agreed upon for plan creation, guidance and piloting;
- Strong participation between municipality and Islamic council of the city;
- Consultants' strong and continuous connection with executive body of district municipalities;
- Establishment of development councils in the field of planning;
- Exchange of information between consultants of comprehensive plan and detailed plan;
- Establishment of an interactive three level planning system;
- Passing some decision-makings onto lower levels by comprehensive plan;
- Modification and completion of type 12 services with special attention to Mashhad's specifications;
- Taking qualitative subject-matters and urban strategic planning into consideration; and
- Establishment of an information bank reference bank.

### **Major weaknesses in the process of plan creation**

- Absence of people's participation in the process of plan creation;
- Problems in cooperation between municipalities of areas and

consultants;

- Lack of strong presence of effective and executive organizations in development;
- Lack of a mechanism for plan implementation during plan creation;
- Absence of required modifications in municipality for transformation and coordination in the new planning process;
- Insufficient coordination of opinions and methods among consultants who design the plan;
- Hanging authorities and occurrence of new problems despite previous mutual agreement in the process;
- Not paying enough attention to nonstructural subject-matters;
- Absence of legal means for beneficiaries' appeal; and
- Absence of nongovernmental organizations, etc. as members of beneficiary groups.

Although investigation and assessment of Mashhad's comprehensive and detailed plan exceeds the scope of this articles, it should be noted that the new planning approach of Mashhad because of shortages, theoretical and practical problems and legal inefficiencies has shaded utilization of strategic plan instead of comprehensive plan and this has resulted in that the final product distances from the enhanced structure of a new approach. However, presence of many strong points especially in delivering plan creation to a local organization and attracting local experts' and executives' participation into the process is considered a new revolution in the planning system of the country, in line with good governance and achieving sustainable development.

### **Findings**

Theory of urban governance is a new perspective in urban management that is both theoretical and practical. In order to find a solution to shortages and challenges of new urbanization and transformation from centralized system into decentralized system, revolution in urban management system, realization of "principle of good urban governance" is a requirement. Findings of this article indicate that with regard to new strategic urban development plans as a substitute for traditional plans in the Iran together with its related principles, methods and techniques from the direction of compilation and utilization of urban modification process is possible in all various educational, technical and executive levels specially support and backup of urban governance rules and criteria. This study can only be considered as part of required key operation for urban system of the country. A strong emphasis for this revolution is put on taking conditions of the revolution in decision-providing methods and propagating into consideration, comprehensive decision-making processes, modification of rules and boosting local community. It is obvious that this

should be conceptualized in juristic, legal and managerial context of the local community. In other words, utilization of strategic policy requires a change in method and technique of planning, flexibility and indefiniteness. Flexibility in various decision-making levels which guarantees benefits of all elements of all elements of the society requires revolution in legal context and urban management; otherwise the result of decision-providing would be nothing more than documents of previous comprehensive plans. The second subject-matter which relates to the field of spectrum of scales indicates the point that planning and executive activity cannot be separated as before. Nowadays, the best and most effective urban constructors are those who get involved in the development process realistically and take the mechanism of realistic financial forecast of the development into consideration from the beginning of designing and planning process. In this article, it was also tried to demonstrate that strategic planning with a participatory, Selective and action-based policy can significantly help identify priorities and movement of resources in their realization. Public participation in development decision-making, transparency and accountability of decision-makers toward beneficiaries, in addition to just utilization and allocation of resources are all considered as primary and common principles of strategic policy and good urban governance.

## CONCLUSION

General strategies of strategic planning is based on strong support and implementation of the rules it has in common with urban governance especially cooperation of local individuals and citizens' close participation. In the paradigm of urban governance, it is assumed that in order to eliminate problems such as increase in urban poverty, tendency toward overconsumption, racial, social and economic inequity, and the three domains of government, civic society should act cooperatively. Although this necessity has been investigated and discussed in various ways in recent years, the important and essential conclusion is that the precondition to achieve sustainable development and goals of strategic planning is establishment of homogeneous and efficient urban management with their required authorities. On the other hand, regarding current circumstances and for the efficiency of urban development plans, it is recommended to firstly establish a permanent legal local organization that will take the responsibility of creating urban development plans ( as a continuous and dynamic activity) and its guidance and piloting in a cooperative process. In the organization of piloting structure of the plan, in order to encourage citizens' participation, with provision of a special unit and a specific location for the public to give them information and receive wishes, opinions and complaints. Also,

holding sessions with representatives of various groups with experts in areas for cooperation in development will create transparency in planning resulting in an increase in citizens' responsibilities. In addition, establishment of consultative committees is required for all stages of the process of provision, investigation, ratification, execution and supervision. Next step is "organization establishment" and this policy involves process stabilization and long term executive measures and requires longer time and more support from local and national managers. Citizens' systematic participation in the framework of civic organizations and the possibility of participation of social and nongovernmental organizations in urban development management are some of basic priorities of development. In this process, the required context to achieve social justice and necessary support for all vulnerable classes and their representatives in the process of decision- providing and decision-making should be provided. Next important step is establishment of urban strategic and uniform management which is, in fact, the leader of change-action. At this stage, giving the position together with governance to council means giving them responsibility along with authorization; organizational reinforcement and internal motivation is required for change. In addition, it is required to create information bases during the course of the process from provision to implementation (execution). And plan revision is necessary to create the required mechanism for appeal and defending citizens' rights in urban development plans needs and authorities' accountability. In this case, realization of urban good governance and strategic planning in urbanization, in addition to meeting quantitative needs, provides the context to promote environmental quality and social equity and coordination of public and individual benefits and national and local identity and in short urban sustainable development. Strong emphasis, in this policy and urban good governance, is put on an increase in citizens' role and it should be so.\*Please note that the analysis of the new comprehensive plan and detailed plan will raise many questions and challenges which will be discussed later.

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