

# Developing Urban Diplomacy as a Tool for Sustainable Governance in Metropolises: A Case Study of Tehran Metropolis

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Urban diplomacy has emerged as a pivotal strategy for addressing the complex challenges faced by metropolises in the contemporary globalized world. As cities increasingly serve as hubs of economic, social, and cultural activities, their role in shaping global and local policies has become more pronounced. The research article titled \*Developing Urban Diplomacy as a Tool for Sustainable Governance in Metropolises: A Case Study of Tehran Metropolis\* by Kazem Ariafar, Mohammad Ali Khaliji, and Behnaz Babaeimorad provides an in-depth exploration of how urban diplomacy can enhance sustainable governance in Tehran, a city grappling with significant urban challenges. This essay elaborates on the study's key findings, methodologies, and implications, offering a comprehensive analysis of urban diplomacy's potential as a transformative tool for Tehran's sustainable development.

Tehran, Iran's capital and a metropolis with a population exceeding 8 million, faces multifaceted challenges, including air pollution, traffic congestion, inefficient waste management, and socio-economic disparities. These issues necessitate innovative governance approaches that transcend traditional local and national frameworks. Urban diplomacy, defined as the international activities undertaken by local governments to foster cooperation with other cities, global networks, and non-governmental actors, offers a promising avenue for addressing these challenges. By engaging in global networks such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and C40 Cities, forging sister-city agreements, and leveraging digital technologies, cities like Tehran can access knowledge, technology, and resources to enhance sustainability.

The study underscores that urban diplomacy extends beyond traditional state-centric diplomacy, enabling cities to act as autonomous players in global governance. This shift aligns with the broader trend of globalization, where cities are increasingly recognized as key actors in international relations. Urban diplomacy facilitates the exchange of best practices, fosters economic development through foreign investment, and promotes cultural and environmental initiatives. For Tehran, adopting urban diplomacy is crucial not only for addressing local challenges but also for elevating its status as a global metropolis.

### Methodology

The research employs a descriptive-analytical approach combined with exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to assess the role of urban diplomacy in achieving sustainable governance in Tehran. The study identifies 50 key indicators, categorized into five dimensions: urban diplomacy, sustainable governance, integration of diplomacy and governance, institutional and managerial aspects, social and cultural factors, and environmental considerations. These indicators, derived from literature reviews, organizational reports, and expert opinions, include metrics such as the number of

international networks Tehran is part of, the percentage of citizen participation in urban management, and the reduction in carbon emissions.

Data collection involved a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale, completed by experts in urban planning, geography, and regional development. The sample size was determined through purposive sampling based on theoretical saturation, ensuring a robust representation of expert insights. The analysis was conducted in two phases: descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) to evaluate the performance of indicators and inferential analysis using EFA to identify underlying factors influencing urban diplomacy and governance.

The EFA results revealed three primary factors explaining 54.069% of the total variance: (1) active diplomacy and international cooperation, (2) environmental sustainability and urban efficiency, and (3) social participation and transparency. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.838) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (0.952,  $p < 0.000$ ) confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. These factors provide a structured framework for understanding how urban diplomacy can be operationalized in Tehran.

### Findings

The descriptive analysis highlights Tehran's strengths and weaknesses in urban diplomacy and sustainable governance. Notably, Tehran performs well in digital diplomacy (indicator x10, mean = 3.54) and hosting international cultural events (x4, mean = 3.48), indicating progress in leveraging technology and cultural initiatives to enhance its global presence. However, challenges persist in project efficiency (x15, mean = 3.19) and equitable service distribution (x14, Gini coefficient mean = 3.25), reflecting inefficiencies in resource allocation and social equity.

The EFA results further elucidate the structure of urban diplomacy in Tehran. The first factor, \*active diplomacy and international cooperation\*, accounts for 32.682% of the variance and includes indicators such as participation in global networks (x1) and international cultural events (x4). This factor underscores Tehran's potential to strengthen its global standing through active engagement in networks like C40 and UCLG, as well as sister-city agreements with cities like Seoul or Tokyo.

The second factor, \*environmental sustainability and urban efficiency\*, focuses on indicators like carbon emission reduction (x18) and water resource management (x47). While Tehran has made strides in environmental initiatives, the relatively low mean scores for water efficiency (3.12) suggest a need for enhanced policies and international collaborations, such as adopting Singapore's water recycling models.

The third factor, \*social participation and transparency\*, emphasizes citizen engagement (x11) and transparency in governance (x12). This factor highlights the importance of involving citizens in decision-making processes and ensuring equitable service distribution, aligning with global trends in participatory governance observed in cities like Amsterdam.

### Conclusion

The study by Ariaifar, Khaliji, and Babaeimorad provides a robust framework for understanding urban diplomacy's role in achieving sustainable governance in Tehran. By identifying key factors—active diplomacy, environmental sustainability, and social participation—the research highlights Tehran's potential to become a sustainable global metropolis. While progress in digital diplomacy and international networking is evident, challenges in project efficiency and equitable service distribution require targeted interventions. Through strategic networking, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement, Tehran can leverage urban diplomacy to address its urban challenges, enhance its global standing, and achieve sustainable development goals. This research not only contributes to the theoretical discourse on urban diplomacy but also offers practical recommendations for policymakers to transform Tehran into a model of sustainable urban governance.

**Keywords:** Urban Diplomacy, Governance, Globalization, Tehran