Evaluation of the position of city development strategy indicators (case study: Marand city)

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Extended Abstract:

Introduction:
City Development Strategy (CDS) is a strategic urban planning framework promoted by the World Bank, UN-Habitat, and Cities Alliance. Its purpose is to enhance urban sustainability through participatory visioning, inclusive governance, improved service delivery, and targeted investment. The growing complexity of urbanization in developing nations has necessitated the adoption of integrated strategies like CDS that aim not only for economic competitiveness but also for environmental resilience, social equity, and institutional efficiency. This study evaluates the positioning and performance of CDS indicators in the city of Marand, Iran—a mid-sized city with historical and strategic significance in East Azerbaijan Province.

Methodology:
The study adopts an applied-developmental approach using a descriptive-analytical research design. The empirical component includes a survey of 100 local experts and professionals in Marand, selected via snowball sampling to ensure broad representation across age, gender, and educational background. Data collection methods include both library research and fieldwork involving structured questionnaires with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$), and validity was established via expert judgment. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS

software, employing Pearson correlation, T-tests, and path analysis techniques to determine causal relationships among the variables.

Conceptual Framework:
The study is based on four main pillars of CDS:

- **Governance (Good Urban Governance):** Emphasizing transparency, accountability, legal structure, and citizen participation.
- **Livability:** Focused on quality of life indicators such as access to healthcare, green spaces, transportation, safety, and social satisfaction.
- **Bankability (Financial Sustainability):** Evaluating fiscal health, infrastructure for banking and investment, digital connectivity, and municipal efficiency.
- **Competitiveness:** Addressing economic capacity, job creation, market access, innovation potential, and institutional agility.

Findings:
Path analysis revealed that *livability* is the only variable with a significant **direct** impact on CDS (Beta = 0.828, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that enhancements in livability factors can significantly influence the success of strategic urban development efforts. However, since livability was treated as an endogenous variable in this model, it did not exhibit an indirect effect.

- *Governance*, *bankability*, and *competitiveness* showed mixed impacts:
  - **Governance** had a low direct influence (Beta = 0.047) and negligible indirect influence.
  - **Bankability** displayed both direct (Beta = 0.038) and indirect effects, particularly as a strong predictor of livability (Beta = 0.402).
  - **Competitiveness** had a moderate direct effect on CDS (Beta = 0.208), though not statistically significant ($p \approx 0.074$).

Further regression analysis revealed:

- *Bankability* significantly influences both governance and livability, making it a key leverage point for holistic urban development.
- *Competitiveness* is moderately dependent on financial infrastructure and indirectly impacts other variables through its effect on livability.

Discussion:
The analysis underscores that in a city like Marand, traditional CDS drivers such as competitiveness and institutional governance may not alone yield substantial improvements in strategic urban development outcomes unless accompanied by tangible improvements in residents' everyday experiences—especially those related to livability.

The results are in line with global CDS literature suggesting that without addressing core urban needs—clean water, sanitation, mobility, safety, and inclusive spaces—policy-level interventions may lack effectiveness.

Marand's urban development bottlenecks are predominantly shaped by:

- Limited integration of citizen feedback in planning.
- Weak municipal capacity in financial management and transparency.
- Underdeveloped infrastructure for investment attraction and service expansion.
- Inefficient urban design that undermines environmental and economic resilience.

Policy Implications:

1. **Livability First:** Investment in public services, safety, health, and urban greenery should be prioritized to unlock broader CDS benefits.
2. **Strengthen Bankability:** Modernize digital and banking infrastructure to attract private sector involvement and financial autonomy for municipal projects.
3. **Participatory Governance:** Establish platforms for continuous citizen engagement and ensure transparency in city planning processes.
4. **Competitiveness Through Localization:** Build on Marand's export potential, industrial zones, and vocational training to enhance job markets and income levels.

Conclusion:
City Development Strategy, as a multifaceted and participatory tool, shows high potential in transforming mid-sized cities like Marand if applied holistically. Among all studied dimensions, *livability* emerged as the critical driver of CDS effectiveness. Policymakers must focus on improving the living conditions of residents as a foundation for implementing broader urban strategies. Moreover, the synergistic enhancement of bankability and governance frameworks can amplify livability improvements, contributing to a more balanced and sustainable urban future for Marand.

Keywords: Competitiveness, livability, governance, CDS, Marand city