Explaining the Theory-Practice Gap In Iranian Urban Design Projects Based on Communicative Theory

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Abstract

Referring to the concepts of communicative theory, urban design is introduced as an interdisciplinary knowledge that is involved in political and social struggles. So, it cannot play a neutral and purely scientific role in practice, due to direct interference in the interests of various economic and social groups. The purpose of this study is to identify the basic concepts of communicative theory and to examine the application of these concepts in urban design projects in Iran. Therefore, by examining the philosophical theories affecting the communicative theory, the basic concepts and how these concepts are applied in the process of urban design are set, in the form of a conceptual framework. The developed conceptual framework provides the basis for the analysis and evaluation of selected projects in the next step by using the directed qualitative content analysis method. The results show that by placing the most stages of the urban design process at a very low scale, the projects have been focused only on the technocratic aspects of the process, and the concepts of communicative theory such as power and its role in guiding process, empowerment, and acquaintance of the society with their interests and expectations, and how to participate and follow it up in the form of a process of social learning have been neglected. While communicative theory, as a missing link in Iranian urban design projects, with the reformulation of the relationship between space, designer, people, and the institution of power, considers urban design as a product of processes in which competing discourses, based on communicative action, maximize their understanding scope by accepting multiple interests and configure space in a participatory process. Accordingly, by ignoring the evolution of theoretical knowledge evolution in practice, the knowledge generated in practice will be subsequently incapable of developing and modifying theoretical knowledge and consequently increase the theory-practice gap.

Keywords: communicative theory, urban design process, practice, evaluation, Iranian projects.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the political and social evolutions of the advanced western countries were shifted towards the severe reduction of the government's role and revising its duties and functions (Akbari Motlaq, 2019). The new political and social theories like the theory of "government's shouldering of too many responsibilities" by Anthony Giddens, the theory of "government's legitimacy crisis" by Jurgen Habermas, and the theory of "minimum government" by Robert Nasic have been proposed from various perspectives but they all emphasized reducing the government's role and increasing the nongovernmental institutions' role in the administration of the social life (Allmendinger, 2002). It was under such circumstances that the concepts related to the civil society, civil government, public area, and pluralist democracy found a vast position both in the theoretical arena and the social and political evolutions' domain and the theories pertinent to the method of programming and management for the society were subjected to serious challenges (Faludi, 1983; Friedmann, 1987; Forester, 1993; Innes, 1995; Healey, 1996; Hoch, 2007; Alexander, 2010) . Based thereon, the urban design, as well, was inclined in a critical theory towards the absorption of the social, ethical, and participatory thoughts and theories via taking advantages of the novel social and philosophical changes as well as by correcting and completing the previous intellectual and strategic theories (Lang, 1987, 2005; Banergee, 2011; Cuthbert, 2011; Carmona, 2014). Based on interpretational epistemology, the critical paradigm engaged in criticizing the existing communities and introducing itself as a normative analysis dealing with the social nature of the urban planning and design. It avoided the objective perceptions, stopped giving value to the justification of beliefs, and consciously started searching for ways to pass through the current status (Sharifzadegan, 2015). Therefore, the urban design knowledge, as well, was no longer considered as a science or technique in its common sense rather it was envisioned as an interdisciplinary field of research that deals, in lieu of the decisive and fixed scientific and technical regulations, with the variable and probable social attitudes. Due to its direct involvement in the interests and expediencies of the various economic and social groups, this knowledge is severely engaged in political and social fights and it cannot play an impartial and solely scientific role in practice. Accordingly, social reality is viewed as the product of processes wherein the social actors negotiate about the meanings of the actions and situations (Cuthbert, 2011).

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In fact, since the 1980s, the main question of urban design was about how to guide the urban design process, as a democratic process, on the grounds of democracy, social justice, and life environment stability expansion. Based thereupon, topics like the citizens' participation and consideration of various needs of different population groups that were in the focal point in the previous periods were placed atop of the urban design agenda with a critical theory (Alexander,1971; Relph,1976; Rapoport,1990; Punter,1991, Carmona,2014, Tebi Masrour, 2017; Sattarzad Fathi, 2020, Arabi, 2020). Distrusting the theories based on sciences and technology and worrying about inequality in power dispersion inside the society, the critical theoreticians try to combine the various forms of knowledge based on the three kinds of instrumental, strategic, and communicative intellectuality so as to come up with a comprehensive conceptualization of the basic urban engineering knowledge. That is because the goal is obtaining dialectic knowledge that is needless of the researcher's value-free orientation with the designer clarifying his or her orientation towards the conditions based on conversation and negotiation by heightening the understanding between the involved parties through lingual interaction and mutual perception (Albrecht, 1986). The main essence of this new attitude which accounts for a significant part of the evolution of the urban design under the title of the communicative theory is the citizens' mutual actions in search for meeting their collective needs and fair enjoyment of the time and facilities in space in a process based on communicative rationality. This change in the nature of urban design and its dominant content directly affects the processes required to achieve the goals and products of urban design (Madanipour,1996).

Therefore, this study tries to explain the basic concepts of communicative theory and examine how to apply these concepts in the urban design process. After reviewing the content and procedure of the urban design process based on the concepts of the communicative approach, in the next step, with the aim of examining the application of these concepts in the urban design process of Iranian urban design projects, a conceptual research framework is presented. The necessity of importing and examining Iranian urban projects is that the governing logic of how the problem and design solution are related, with the evolution of paradigms and concepts governing the dimensions of the urban design process, has changed and led to the formation of new models of the urban design process consistent with the requirements of the time and expectations. This paradigm shift in urban design and thereby, the urban design process, is the efforts of academics and professionals to provide concepts and categories overcoming the shortcomings of the theory, and also, to present a discourse to theorists and professionals by referring to which the theory-practice gap can be reduced as much as possible. Accordingly, if the knowledge used in urban design projects in Iran do not pay attention to the developments of theoretical knowledge, in addition to widening the theory-practice gap, the knowledge produced in these projects (practical knowledge) will not be able to develop and modify theoretical knowledge and the knowledge cycle of the urban design process (the interrelationship of theory and practice) will face numerous challenges. It is therefore essential to explain, refine and clarify how theoretical concepts are applied in the professional community; The necessity, that has been tried in this article, is addressed by formulating a conceptual framework based on the communicative theory and explaining the concepts and how to use it in the form of categories based on the stages of the urban design process. This framework sets the ground for investigating, analyzing, and evaluating the contents of the selected projects. Since the investigation of projects relies on the results extracted from the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework studies, the oriented qualitative content analysis method constitutes the research framework of this part of the study and explains the theory-practice gap in the urban design process of Iranian urban design projects.

2. Theoretical Foundation

As it was mentioned, the expansion of the communicative theory in planning and urban design can be realized as the result of failures stemming from the plans made based on the intellectual theory; due to ineffectiveness in practical domains for being expertise-oriented and non-participatory, emphasis on centralization-oriented attitudes in planning and use of society as its statistical source, negligence of people and city-dwellers' social issues and social and contextual imbalances originating from such a type of programs, the intellectual theory, that had encountered dubiousness since years ago, was essentially questioned and doubted during the 1980s and 1990s and this practically paved the way for the formation of the communicative theory (Watson, 2016). The proposition of the communicative theory by the thinkers was under the influence of two primary philosophical streams the first and the most important of which was Jurgen Habermas's communicative action theory which strictly influenced the works by those relying on the communicative process (Friedmann, 1987; Forster, 1989,1993, 2001; Sager, 1992; Healy, 1993,1997; Innes, 1995; Campbell, 1996; Allmendinger, 2002; Hoch, 2007; Alexander, 2010).

Offering the communicative action theory, Jurgen Habermas laid the foundation of the effective and successful planning on the communication methods and discarding the instrumental intellectuality (which is used as the only reasoning in rational planning) as well as on the use of a vaster domain of deductions based on the communicative intellectuality (Yiftachel, 2016). Having adopted a critical attitude towards society, he believed that the human civilization is capable of evading self-alienation and the other consequences of the industrial society and the instrumental intellectuality governing it; he searched for the success key in communication, realized the communicative action as its master key, and knew the existence of the public domain or the public citizenship area as the factor contributing to the stability of this action. Thus, he criticized the reduction of the human action to a purposive intellectual action guiding the economic forces and technology and believed that there has been the second

kind of human action, i.e. communicative action, which is highly influential in the formation of the human communities and their evolution; it is a sort of action that guides the citizens' activities in their decision-makings and no power except the power of the superior reasoning should be applied therein. From the perspective of Habermas, conversation, negotiation, and communication are no more ignored and distorted in this situation, i.e. ideal situation, through power structures and personal interests (Habermas, 1985). In a book on the communicative action theory, he introduced the most important emphases made by the communicative action theory as listed below:

- In the social life arena, the cultural realm is of special importance. Unlike what is thought by the initial Marxists, overemphasis on the economic realm results in fatalism and defection of social analyses.
- The social world is not like the natural world so that the general regulations of the natural world can be also imagined for it as having been done by the positivists rather the role of actors is of great importance in this world; it is a role that has been downgraded in the positivism theories to the extent of a role played by passive creatures lacking any volition.
- The dialectic factor emphasizing the society's collectiveness and justifying the actions between the individuals is the prerequisite to the vast and fruitful social changes with the critical epistemology system, that is manifested in the arena of the social actions elevating the masses' self-awareness and resulting in the human beings' deliverance.
- Planning and policy-making are generally communicative processes but they are in need of flawless and constructive communication. This type of communication possesses prerequisites the most important of which is that instrumental intellectuality should be put aside as the only way of reasoning.
- This action includes a communicative system wherein thoughts are freely presented and have the right to defend themselves against criticisms (Flyvbjerg and T. Richardson, 2002).

Therefore, from the perspective of Habermas, planning and design are considered as democratic interventions taken by actors who negotiate over a series of different and, occasionally, paradoxical values and reach agreements without coercion and imposition and in an open and undistorted space. However, as believed by Tewdwr Jones, participatory democracy relying on communicative planning is not at all devoid of problems and agreed as a value by everyone. He criticized the possibility and the quality of reaching mutual understanding in this theory and believed that efforts for intermediation in line with resolving the disputes or reaching an agreement entail the acceptance of the tendency for a unification in which the free discussions are threatened by imposition (Tewdwr, 1998). On the other hand, Tewdwr Jones criticized the method in which the communication process faces the power as well as the negligence of its essential role in giving the city a shape and believed that "the supporters of this theory imagine that they can change the pillars of power and create a space for discussion by building trust, ensuring the interpersonal relationships and setting the ground for the consensual social learning processes (Tewdwr, 1998). Pointing to this shortfall, some writers like Flyvbjerg believed that the communicative action is a theory about what should be done (ideal aspect) and not what is being done (real aspect). It has also been reasoned that the aforesaid theory lacks the capacity required for understanding the events in the real world in practice; thus, it provides a weak foundation for the creation of effective evolutions because ignoring the role of power mechanism in the world disrupts the correct understanding of the situation and hinders the effective measures and can pose serious doubts to the actualization and effectiveness of the projects (Flyvbjerg and T. Richardson, 2002).

In response to the posited criticisms and in line with minimization of the negative effects of power on planning, the proponents of the communicative planning, including Forester (1989) and Healy (1997) who recognized the political and value-oriented nature of the planning occupation and believed in its ability to express the values and transferring power, tried blending Foucaultian power and Habermasian communicative rationality to bridge the proposed gaps. Based thereon, the concepts posited by Foucault were considered as a framework for explaining the mechanism used for mixing the knowledge-oriented aspect of the urban design and planning with the power concerns in the decision-building environment (Healey,1997; Forester, 1989). As a thinker who has entered the power concept into the contemporary philosophical vista, Foucault believed that there is no discourse free of power and that it can be always validated or suspected and posit and stabilize the power-related and political preferences in an apparently impartial language. Thus, he disagreed with this idea of Habermas that power can be temporarily suspended in the position of performing criticism and evaluation and does not realize it possible for what is termed discourse ethics to be present in the communicative action (Kelly, 2006). Foucault always realized human action as being accompanied by the exertion of power and he has always recounted Habermas's mutual understanding as a fantasy far from reality (Foucault, 1980). Thus, if assistance is sought in Foucault's concept of power for interpreting the urban design process, it can be stated that each of the actors involved in this process expresses his or her own specific discourse at various power levels in the problem-finding and problem-solving process and eventually determines the form and content of the process as a collection of rival discourses and the mutual understanding between them.

2.1. Communicative urban design process

As it is clear, the communicative urban design process is laid on the foundation of thoughts of the thinkers who, meanwhile criticizing the rational programming (top-down intellectual planning), emphasize the communicative rationale with their intended urban design process being less scientific-technical in comparison to the intellectual urban design process. Accordingly, the communicative

urban design process can be defined as a process consisting of two interlaced chains in one of which the general decision-making process is pursued as a scientific-technical topic and, in the other and in interaction with the first chain, a communicative process is followed and special attentions are paid to the multilateral conversation, mutual learning, capacity-building, and launching various partnerships through the application of negotiation and consensus-building skills for actualizing the plans and projects (Golkar, 2011; Madanipour, 2006; Kreiger, 2003; Lang, 2005; Carmona, 2014, Abdolah Zadeh Fard, 2018).

Therefore, what distinguishes the communicative urban design process from the other intellectual and strategic processes is not the process stages but the quality with which the process is monitored by the urban designers; the quality of surveying the communicative process cannot succeed only through mastery over the techniques and technical tools and through solely relying on the collection of information for a site. So, it needs the presence of all the involved discourses, not just the experts of the techniques and holders of the formal power, in the urban design process. Besides resulting in the satisfaction of the rights and wants of various social and political groups, the presence of interested and influential groups at various power levels and thereby in the rival discourses on the design process and their participation in the codification of the goals and design and evaluation of the design options emphasize the effect of the pressure groups and power inequalities in the course of the design process and set the ground for the actualization of the process from the very beginning. Thus, the designers should also learn the communication methods and the techniques required for communication and social relations in addition to the common design techniques. On the other hand, the interested groups, as well, need communicative knowledge and, in order to enter the communicative planning domain, they need general information regarding the recognition of the issues, classification of subjects, prioritization of problems and solutions, interaction with other groups and flexibility in the communications of the urban design process. These are methods based on a form of Friedmann's (1987) social learning process wherein the designer and the other involved actors are envisioned identical and work together. As believed by Friedmann, the gaps between the urban engineers, as the people's lawyers, and the people, as their principals, should be bridged and the former's scientific language should be taught to the latter and the latter's language of the practical realities should be taught to the former. The face-to-face and oral communication between the urban engineers and the people bridges the gap between these two classes (Friedmann, 1987). The important point in this theory and its proposed model is the constant and face-to-face teaching of the actors (designer and citizens) via dialogue and the materials they mutually learn in this conversation.

The presence of the groups engaged in the planning and design process and their participation in the recognition of the issues and sharing various forms of knowledge (the urban designer's technical knowledge alongside the citizens' empirical knowledge) within a framework of mutual learning process make it possible to obtain comprehensive knowledge and thereby, maximally bridging the theory-practice gap (alikaei, 2019). Based thereon, in the problem-finding process:

- Communicative urban design process is commenced with the stage in which the preliminary vista is codified; to do so and at the beginning of the process, the interested and influential groups, such as the plan users, organizations, and institutions influencing the accomplishment and implementation of the plan are identified as the design team's partners and their shares of involvement in the decision-building and decision-making process are specified so that the organizational structure of the plan can be vividly codified. After clarifying the organizational structure of the process and reaching an agreement with the partners on the structure and method of their cooperation, the designers try to communicatively get informed of the wants and interests of the parties involved in planning to illuminate the position of the process in respect to the design problem(s) through a lingual interaction and mutual understanding (Istgaldi, 2015). In this stage, having accepted the presence of the interested and influential groups and thereby the rival discourses in the design process, the designer tries to satisfy the various social and political groups' rights and wants, simultaneously get aware of the effect of pressure groups and power inequalities in the design process and set the ground for the actualization of the process from the very beginning.
- In the second stage, i.e. recognition of the current situation, information gathering is conducted in a selective manner and by determining the priorities and limiting the investigable subjects to some extent based on the preliminary vista (pakzad, 2007). Besides reducing the costs and the required resources, limiting the recognition of the current status to the subjects and issues intended by the interested and influential groups enables the presence and direct participation of them in the recognition and investigation of the weaknesses and strengths of the current situation. The direct participation of the plan users and their involvement in the recognition of the problems add to the social dynamicity of the process, making it distinct from the solely intellectual and technocratic processes. Based thereon, in this stage, the citizens' experiences and their direct recognition of the current situation and the weaknesses and strengths are transferred to the designer; the mutual learning of the designer and the citizens from one another leads to the revision of the preliminary vista and problems and thereby the realistic formation of the design goals based on the various forms of the theoretical and empirical knowledge (Friedmann, 1987).

On the other hand, in the problem-solving process:

- The codification of the design goals and alternatives is carried out in the communicative process by the organization proctoring the plan preparation and based on the plan users and shareholders' wants and participation of various social and political groups and rival plans (alikaei, 2019). The direct participation of citizens in the codification of the design goals and alternatives through

attending the local design workshops provides key information guiding the designers about the codification of design goals and options in addition to leading to the moderation and change of their perspectives regarding the design goals and the suggested options. As believed by Healy, rival discourses can exist inside a program and plan; the quality of these discourses' enhancement and supply in the program is in the focal point of the communicative intellectuality because the design options should be chosen from the rival and various discourses; however, how and on what basis these options form are an issue that often does not enjoy much clarity. In the intellectual theory, these options have been formed based on parochial instrumental-intellectual scales and/or are distorted by the society's powerful forces. In order to avoid this, Healy believes that what the designers should do is accepting different options in a plan via paying attention to the communication aspects in the design and programming process (Healy, 1993).

- In the stage of the final option evaluation, selection and design, as well, the plan should be chosen through the association of different discourses by means of language. In such a process, the participants are encouraged to list the goals and reach an agreement over them based on a communicative method and subsequently take part in offering the ways to reach the goals, designing the suggested options, and evaluating the design options. Thus, in the evaluation of the proposed options stage, they are evaluated technically and in a participatory manner and, by emphasizing the communicative intellectuality and education principle in the communication process, the participants should have the required capacity and vigor for criticism and strong reasoning in regard to the alternative analyses. Although reaching a consensus and an agreement based on the communicative action (interaction and mutual understanding) and strategic action (bargaining) makes the process confront certain problems and threats, the urban design can be given a role to enhance the involved actors' understanding of their circle of interests as well as their circle of responsibilities to solve the problems through making the use of their interdisciplinary knowledge in such a way that the interest overlapping of rival discourses can be maximized (Carmona, 2014).

Therefore, emphasizing three principles, namely "communication", "conversation" and "education", the communication process advances the urban design process optimally and in a communicative manner. Based on the communication principle, this point that how much the process applied in the urban design sets the ground for the constructive communication between people, designers, and formal institutions results in a discussion as to in what way and degree the communication tools and messages are applied in line with conversation and education. The second principle deals with the extent to which the applied planning process incites the people's active participation and encourages them to enter the conversation area for design and decision-making. The education principle, as well, pays attention to the extent to which the offered teachings can enhance the people and planners' communication abilities for a favorable planning process (Allmendinger, 2002, 36-40). The final issue is that if assistance is sought in the concepts of the communicative theory to define the urban design process, it can be stated that each of the actors involved in the process offers his or her own specific discourse in collective decision-making and eventually the form and content of the urban design process is determined by a collection of rival discourses and their interactions which are manifested in a process of communicative action and strategic action. Under such a situation, an overall discourse is obtained through the blending of various discourses; consequently, the understanding of the urban design, as a purely technical and intellectual action and a top-down urban design pattern, is shifted towards a bottom-up urban design pattern as a sort of knowledge stemming from consensus and mutual understanding and based on the communicative intellectuality (Figure 1).

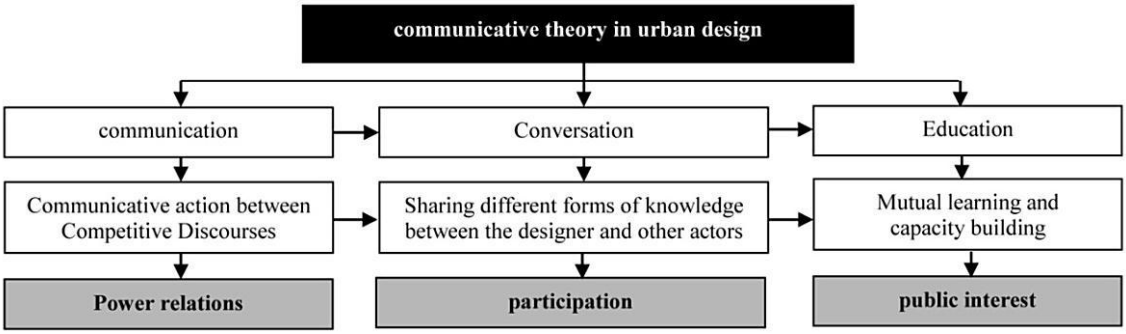

Fig. 1. Conceptual research framework based on communicative theory

2.2. The concepts of communicative theory in the urban design process

The results obtained from the theoretical literature review represent the effect of the epistemological basics and the essential concepts of the Communicative theory (figure 1) on urban design knowledge. These concepts have caused the urban design nature and thereby the urban design process to encounter extensive evolutions in respect to the time and background expediencies. More than being laid on the foundation of the changes in the process stages and steps, these concepts are based on the changes and evolutions of the content governing the process and its effect on the quality of the process monitoring. Therefore, the urban design process is introduced as a reiterative cycle based on the stages of vista-making, status assessment, codification of goals, codification of policies and design options, evaluation of options, design,

implementation, and post-implementation monitoring; and, it simultaneously emphasizes the design, implementation and post-implementation monitoring; however, the quality of the process monitoring is determined by a collection of rival discourses at various power levels and their interactions and participation that are manifested in a process of communicative action and mutual teaching and learning resulting thereof. Thus, referring to the essential concepts of the communicative theory and the indices based thereon, a framework can be proposed for the evaluation of the extent to which the theoretical knowledge can be applied in urban design projects. The intended evaluation framework provides the topics governing how the communicative urban design process is monitored based on the process codification stages and steps and the possibility of investigating, analyzing, and evaluating the urban design process in urban design projects in the next stages (table 1).

Table 1
The study evaluation framework (quality of monitoring the urban design process based on the concepts of the communicative theory)

participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	visioning
27. Recognize stakeholder and the necessity of relationship with them. 28. Develop a participatory process and agreement on the structure of cooperation. 29. Emphasis on the participation of actors involved in explaining values, needs, and possible outcomes in the visioning process.	21. Avoid setting the vision based on the designer's mental pattern, analogy, simile or intuition.	1. Identify stakeholders and their position in power hierarchy.	
	2. Pay attention to the values and visions provided by the authorities as actors of high levels of power. 3. transfer power to the local community, emphasis on values and expectations of residents and users as low level power actors.		
4. Emphasis on a process based on communication action and consensus between Competitive Discourses. 5. Emphasis on capacity building and social education by sharing different forms of knowledge between the designer and the actors involved, in a process of mutual learning.			
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	Survey and analysis
6. Avoiding just scientific analysis of information and emphasizing on issues of actors. 7. Determining the priorities in the allocation of resources and activities based on the interest and participation of the actors and the multilateral decision-making rules.			
30. Relying on global experiences of participation in procedural dimensions. 31. participation of actors in gathering information and recognizing issues and capacities. 32. Reviewing issues by sharing different forms of knowledge between the designer and the actors involved, in the process of mutual learning.		8. Checking power hierarchy in the form of organizational and Executive structure.	
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	Setting goals
9. Avoiding elitism and optimistic trust in the designer's capacity to set goals (technocratic process)			
13. Consulting participation with stakeholders on the goals and decisions taken, and propose competing plans and programs.	10. setting goals beyond bureaucratic process and based on the values, priorities and interests of the actors in different levels of power. 11. Strategic action among competing actors based on the bargaining process. 12. Formulation of goals based on consensus building between competing discourses through communication action.		
22. Providing key information to designers to setting design goals and alternatives through on going communication and engaging actors in a process of mutual education and learning.		13. Consulting participation with stakeholders on the goals and decisions taken, and propose competing plans and programs.	
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	setting alternatives
14- Avoiding rely on the designer's mental and scientific capacities, and develop design alternatives based on the values, interests, and priorities of competing discourses at different levels of power.			
33. participation of various social and political discourses and proposing competing plans. 34. achieve practical ways to goals, not just prepare a list of wishes. 35. participation in setting alternatives, through cooperation in local design workshops and training and mutual learning.	23. Emphasis on social norms along with rational norms in policy making and design solutions. 24. setting procedural policies to protect the interests of all actors in the plan.	15. participation of various social and political discourses and proposing competing plans.	
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	assessment
16. Evaluating solutions as the output of the process of dialogue, trade-off, and consensus between the interest of the actors involved, not the technocratic and bureaucratic decisions.			
36. Providing the necessary capacity to critique and present strong arguments by the participants, to evaluate the options and provide alternative analyzes, relying on communication rationality and the mutual learning.	25. Evaluating design options based on social norms and the interests and priorities of the actors involved alongside scientific methods.	17. Awareness of debates related to political decisions and the impact of power inequalities in valuing alternatives. 18. Emphasis on the communication rationality of the designer in order to analyze, judge and convince the parties to the discussion to achieve consensus. 19. Evaluating alternatives according to the decision maker's position in the power hierarchy and the strategies needed to implement them.	
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	design
37. participation of stakeholders in the design and development of proposed projects, by attending and participating in local design workshops and providing key information to guide			
participation	**Public interest**	**Power relations**	Implementation and monitoring
38. awareness of the participatory group, including the people and the investor in the areas of participation and how to participate. 39. Provide effective solutions for attracting financial contributions from the private and public sectors. 40. trust Building and attracting public participation by forming selected groups of owners and their trustees in the form of a facilitation office.	20. role of competing discourses in the feasibility of the proposed plan (determining the executive priorities, investment, guaranteeing participation, guiding and controlling the executive plan, removing legal barriers, ...).		
26. monitoring of the urban environment and contingent decision-making on unforeseen situations and correction of orientations based on the level of satisfaction of the actors involved.			

3. Study Method

In order to answer the main research question and evaluate the application of the offered framework in the selected projects, since, in this section, studies relied on the results extracted from the theoretical foundation studies and the codified evaluation framework, a directed qualitative

content analysis was chosen as the study method in this section. Based on this method, the researcher relies on the concepts and indicators drawn on the literature review, as well as his or her own inferences and judgments to describe and interpret the hidden content of the texts. Thus, in this method, the mere apparent content of the message is not of much value and the researcher moves steps beyond the words or the objective content of the texts and tries to objectively discover and describe the clear and latent patterns of the text based on objective criteria (Mayring, 2000). Based thereon, the directed qualitative content analysis method applies the existing theories and begins its work by identifying the 'main categories' for the categorization of the texts. The main categories extracted from the theoretical foundations are called 'core categories' and the researcher tries to define the key themes of the core categories through the investigation of the existing theories. Relying on the core and main categories drawn on the theoretical framework (table1), the researcher analyzes the text that is termed 'analysis unit'. Thus, it is necessary, in the first step, to make decisions about the analysis unit. It depends on the study questions and the contents of the analysis units (Mayring, 2000).

Figure 2 summarily illustrates the stages of the research method. Also, the next section presents a detailed explanation of the content and the procedure analysis of the projects' urban design process based on the directed qualitative content analysis.

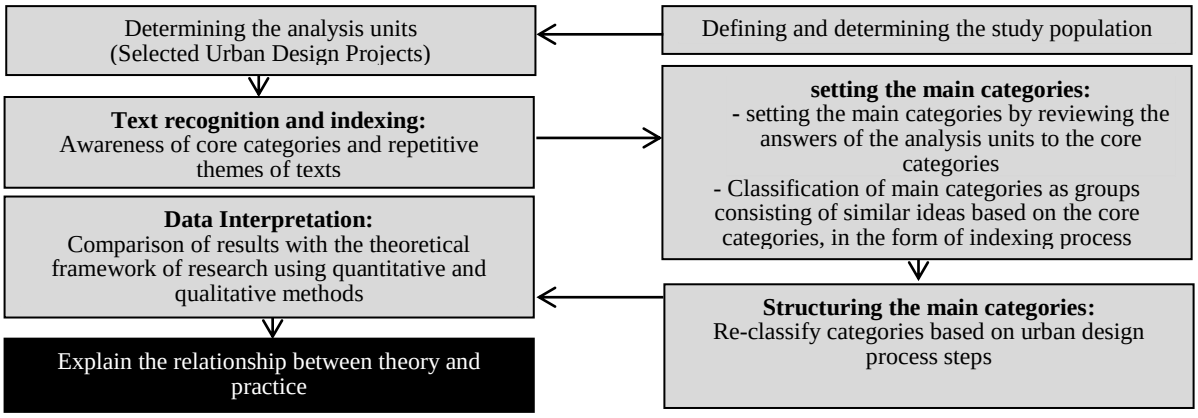

Fig. 2. the stages of the research method

3.1. Determination of the study population

In the first step, urban design projects prepared and approved in the period of 2007-2018 were selected as Study Population. That is because the initial investigations of the study population indicated that the projects prepared till the early 2000s lacked urban design process and cited theoretical content. This shortcoming can adversely influence the results obtained from the investigation of the projects.

3.2. Determination of the analysis units

To define the analysis units or samples, certain scales were defined so that the cases reflecting the study questions can be purposively selected and the validity and the reliability of the results extracted from the selected samples could be guaranteed by preventing random sampling and determining the quantitative sample size . The criteria of purposeful selection of samples and the selected samples were determined as explicated in table 2.

Table 2
The research criteria and selected samples (analysis units)

Criteria	Final selection of analysis units
• Projects related to Iran's metropolises such as Tehran, Mashhad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Karaj, Qom, Tabriz, and Ahwaz (Concentration on the projects related to Tehran due to the result generalizability) • Projects prepared by the Consulting Engineers with degree 1, 2 and 3 in urban design. • Giving the priority to the projects by mentioning the phrase of "urban design" in the title • Selection of one project done by each of the Consulting Engineers; investigations showed that the projects prepared by each of the consultants mostly follow a unit process and identical concepts so there is no need for more projects. • The projects that are important from the perspective of the employer and the consultants in regard of urban development and reconstruction system, theorization, dealing with the concepts of the theoretical knowledge and so forth • Projects related to the city's main structure and spaces • Local projects incorporating various kinds of urban design projects, including the design of the streets and walkways, squares, recreation resorts and worn-out and historical textures • Availability of the project's documents and evidence	1. Quality-based design of 17Shahrivar Street, Tehran, 2011: Tehran zibasazi Organization. 2. Urban design of Ahmad Abad Street, Mashhad, 2007: Mashhad Municipality. 3. Urban design of Chaharbagh Street of District 22, Tehran, 2010: Deputy of Urban Planning and Architecture of Tehran Municipality. 4. Urban design framework of Chitgar Lake and Chaharbagh Street, Tehran, 2010: Technical and Civil Engineering Deputy of Tehran Municipality 5. Urban design framework of Delavaran Street, Tehran, 2009: Deputy of Urban Planning and Architecture of Tehran Municipality. 6. Urban design of Lands of Abbasabad, Tehran, 2010: Deputy of Urban Planning and Architecture of Tehran Municipality. 7. Urban design of Imam Khomeini Street, Tehran, 2010: Deputy of Urban Planning and Architecture of Tehran Municipality. 8. Urban design of Moradaab public space, Karaj, 2015: Karaj Municipality. 9. Local plan with urban design approach of west of Shohada Square, Mashhad, 2013: Deputy of Urban Planning and Architecture of Mashhad Municipality. 10.Urban design of Pilgrimage-Cultural Street, Qom, 2008: Qom Municipality.

3.3. Familiarization and texts coding

In this step and after the purposive selection of analysis units, or case samples, the samples are analyzed and explored based on the concepts extracted from the theoretical literature (core categories). The themes related to the core categories are identified and the open codes related to the core categories are extracted.

Table 3
The application of the topics of the conceptual framework topics in the selected projects

level	Project 10	Project 9	Project 8	Project 7	Project 6	Project 5	Project 4	Project 3	Project 2	Project 1	categories		
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	alternatives	**Public interest**
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23		
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	Assessment	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25		
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Design	
low	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	20	Monitoring	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	visioning	**participation**
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28		
Moderate	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	29		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	Survey and analysis	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7		
low	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	30		
Moderate	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	31		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	Setting goals	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22		
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	Setting alternatives	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	Assessment	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	37	Design	
Moderate	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	38	Monitoring	
High	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	39		
Moderate	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	40		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26		

level	Project 10	Project 9	Project 8	Project 7	Project 6	Project 5	Project 4	Project 3	Project 2	Project 1	categories		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	visioning	**Power relations**
high	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2		
low	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	Survey	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7		
low	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	8		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	Setting goals	
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13		
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	alternatives	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	Assessment	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19		
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Design	
low	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	20	Monitoring	
Very high	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	21	visioning	**Public interest**
high	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2		
low	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	Survey	
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	Setting goals	
Very low	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12		
Very low	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22		

3.4. Codification of the main categories and Re-Structuralization

In this stage, the open codes are combined based on the existing similarity and overlaps and with reference to the evaluation framework. Then, the main codes are presented. These main codes are again classified based on the stages of the urban design process and constitute the main categories of the study. The core categories extracted by indexing and juxtaposing the themes in the texts of the projects are the first output of the content-based analysis of the analysis units. The codification of the main categories provides a basis for examining and evaluating the application of communicative approach concepts in projects.

3.5. Determination of categories application

In this section, the application or non-application of the main categories in each project and then all projects are determined. This step is performed in the following way:

- The application or non-application of the main categories in each of the projects is separately investigated for the stages of the urban design process, and a value ranging from 1 (category application) to 0 (category non-application) is given to each of the categories.
- After clarifying the application or non-application of each category in the selected projects, the application of each category in all projects is categorized from so little to so much based on a 5-point Likert scale (table 3). It is worth mentioning that there is considered an identical weight for all of the topics in this step because all the topics feature equal importance and weight.
- After determining the application of each category in all projects based on a 5-point Likert scale, the frequency percentage and the highest frequency percentage of each point of the Likert scale will be specified. The obtained percentage will show the application of the main categories of the communicative theory in each stage of the projects' urban design process (Table 4).

Table 4
The application of the main topics of the communicative theory in each of the stages of the projects' urban design process

Very high	high	moderate	low	Very low		Very high	high	moderate	low	Very low		Very high	high	moderate	low	Very low		Stages of urban design process
-	-	20%	-	80%	participation	20%	20%	-	20%	40%	Public interest	-	20%	-	20%	60%	Power relations	visioning
-	-	20%	20%	60%		-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	34%	66%		Survey and analysis
-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	-	100%		Setting goals
-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	-	100%		alternatives
-	-	-	-	100%		-	-		-	100%		-	-	-	-	100%		assessment
-	-	-	-	100%		-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-		design
-	25%	50%	-	25%		-	-	-	50%	50%		-	-	-	100%	-		implementation and monitoring

4. Findings and Discussion

A glance at the topics governing each stage of the urban design process shows that:
In the initial vista codification stage:

- Very little application of the topics emphasizing the concepts like identification of rival discourses and investigation of their roles and positions in the power hierarchy, consensus between the rival discourses in a process of strategic and communicative action, and capacity-building and mutual education stemming from this action.
- Little application of the topics concentrating on the power transfer to the local community by considering the values and expectations of the residents and users of the plan (interested groups) as the actors at the lower power levels.
- Much application of the topics related to the values and interests of the power institutions (influential groups);
- Very much application of the topics emphasizing the codification of no initial vista based on the designer's mental imaginations and patterns

The results indicated that unfortunately, none of the studied projects has paid attention to the recognition of the interested and influential groups and the necessity of preliminary communications for clarifying the structure and method of their cooperation in the course of the urban design process (decision-building and decision-making). Participation in this stage of the process is solely limited to the holding of sessions with the influential groups, including employer and municipality, as well as getting aware of the vista considered by these groups for the future of the plan. It is noteworthy that none of the projects has paid attention to the necessity of holding group sessions and face-to-face conversation between the involved actors and their familiarization and mutual learning for reaching a consensus on the plan vista and also that the advisor has taken measures in line with the codification of the initial vista behind the closed doors and based on the power institutions' wants and interests after only receiving the influential groups' perspectives!
The notable point in this stage is the absence of the real participation of the interested groups, including the residents, shopkeepers, plan users, and possible investors, in the codification of the preliminary vista of the projects while this step speaks of the necessity of getting aware of the interested groups' perspectives and expectations in the codification of the vista! The results of the investigation indicated that only 30% of the projects have paid attention to the participation of the interested groups in the vista-building process at the beginning of the process and this is also limited to the preparation of questionnaires for getting aware of their notions regarding the strengths and weaknesses. Lack of group sessions and the individuals' familiarization with the opportunities and facilities that the project can provide for them and mutually taking advantage of their situational ideas and expectations regarding space are amongst the most important problems that cause not only the vista-building process but also the whole stages of the process to face vast challenges because unfamiliarity and non-engagement of the interested groups from the beginning of the process and consequently their non-participation in the course of the process lead to the reduction of the sense of attachment and sense of dutifulness in respect to the plan and eventually result in the diminishment of the actualization and satisfaction of the plan.
In the current status assessment stage, as well, conditions like the vista-building stage are governing:

- very little application of the topics concentrating on the revision of the problems from the perspective of the actors from various power levels and their participation in the determination of the resource allocation priorities and the restriction of the studied subject according to the communication-based multilateral decision-making regulations.
- Little application of the topics dealing with the investigation of the formational and executive environment.
- Moderate application of the topics dealing with the information gathering, problem recognition, and the capacities of the region from the perspective of the residents, shopkeepers, and region users.

In this stage of the process, the participation process has been limited only to the administration of the questionnaire to the residents, shopkeepers, and space users to get aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the region as well as their mental image of the space and the real participation has not taken place in information gathering and getting

aware of the existing problems within the format of the mutual relations between the designer and space users and knowledge transfer between them. It seems that elitism and lack of attention to the values and priorities of the involved actors, along with the unawareness and non-use of the methods making consensus between the actors' numerous and different interests based on communicative methods, have been the primary causes of the emergence of such conditions in the studied projects. Such a lack of awareness and practical ignorance of the values of the actors at the lower power levels in the urban design process has led to the reduction of the sense of attachment and sense of responsibility in them in respect to the plan and eventually caused the actualization and satisfaction of the plan to encounter severe decline.

The investigation of the problem-solving process, including the stages of goal codification, identification of the design options, and evaluation and design of favorable options, as well, represents the so little (nearly 100%) application of the topics elaborating the concepts of the communicative theory. Elitism and optimistic trust in the capacities of the designer (technocratic process), lack of common sessions and proper face-to-face conversation space between the interested and influential groups for codifying the goals, lack of the direct presence of interested and influential groups in the design workshops, and lack of mutual teaching and learning relationship between the designer and participants in the exchange process that can otherwise lead to the provision of the vigor required for criticizing and evaluating the proposed options and the subsequent presentation of the alternative solutions by the participants are amongst the most important problems that can be pointed out.

In the stage of codifying the executive program, little use has been made of the topics that emphasize the presence of rival discourses and their role in the actualization of the proposed plan and trust-building and winning the people's participation. However, 50% of the other topics have been moderately to greatly applied in the actualization of the proposed plan due to the determinative role of the interested and influential groups and they mostly emphasize the necessity of paying attention to the interested and influential groups' values and interests and their participation in determining the executive and investment priorities as well as guiding and controlling the executive plan and seek to remove legal barriers and devise facilities to encourage their presence in planning to implement and supply the financial resources.

5. Conclusion

The results of the present study indicated that the studied projects have dealt with the contents effective in the procedure and quality of surveying the urban design process at a very low scale and what was neglected in this regard is paying attention to the concepts and indicators that have become perfected during the evolution of the urban design and have influenced the quality of surveying the stages of the process. These results are contradictory to the results obtained in a review of the theoretical framework and the determinative role of the communicative theory concepts in the formation and advancement of the urban design process, hence the enhancement of the quality and actualization of the proposed plans. That is because the power institution engages in capturing the power domains of the actors at the lower power levels, increasing its own power through decision-making about and the configuration of the space, and placing the results in its own communication network and activation of them in its own favor in all of the problem-finding and problem-solving stages. Although the power institution's goal of bringing changes about has been, in most of the cases, increasing the quality of space and actualizing the plan, what actually occurs is the absence of the actors from the lower power levels in the decision-making and plan-preparation stages and this has caused their satisfaction of and commitment to the plan to face huge challenges. It can be claimed that the concepts of the communicative theory that have become interwoven with the participation of the pluralist and rival groups at various power levels in the city area constitute a link that is missing and its absence has caused the urban design process in Iran to be separated from the people and the experts have resultantly been downgraded to the tools in the hands of the power and wealth institute for changing the urban setting and stabilizing their domination on all the aspects of the urban life.

Therefore, by reconfiguring the relationship between the space, designer, people, and power institution, the proposed conceptual framework of this study concentrates on the technical and creative dimensions of the space and, simultaneously, inserts the critical aspects of the urban design knowledge into the urban design process by emphasizing the participation and consensus between the rival discourses at various power levels. The reason for this is that the interests are not similar in the problems of the urban environment and the urban design process is faced by numerous actors (interested and influential groups), so, a lot of interests with their recognition and the decision-making based on them necessitate with the knowledge of particular concepts.

To achieve a mutual learning structure in the process of bilateral interactions between public institutions and people, by emphasizing the improvement of design procedures, the communicative theory considers the creation of a facilitated space for the involved individuals and groups as the general duty of the designer and introduces the public want within the format of a consensus reached from these conversations and negotiations as well as from the actors' mutual understanding of the limits of one another's expectations and preferences. It is a theory that tries to, on the one hand, provide interactional and participatory procedures and, on the other hand, proposes value-related, normative, and ethical aspects to pave the way for achieving the maximal interests and satisfactory solutions. Accordingly, if retaking the decision-making power by the people from the power institution based on the communicative methods is considered as one of the urban design goals, both people, as the interested parties, and the power institution, as the influential groups, endeavor to expand the overlapping

domain of their interests in a discourse process and engage in changing the space in cooperation with one another.

Based thereon, the communicative theory offers a new configuration of the interventions made by the designer, people, and the power institution in the space domain and it is in such a space that all the three actors, namely designer, people, and power institution, maximize their understanding of their circles of interests in a process based on communicative actions and accept the pluralist, not the unit wants, to engage in the configuration of space in a gradual and multilevel process. Such a process neither engages, like bureaucratic and technocratic patterns, in capturing the power domains of the people as the actors of lower power levels and increasing its own power, nor places the space solely within the power domain of the people, like the anarchist theories! The quality of interventions made by the designer, people, and the power institution in the space domain is defined with the participation and consensus between the rival discourses at various power levels in the communicative theory and, besides the orientation and navigation of all the stages of the urban design process, it operates as an intermediating ring to provide the possibility of the real actualization of the specialized and technical concepts governing the process and to eventually enable the achievement of a process that is sufficiently flexible in respect to the unpredicted conditions and expediency-based decisions (Figure 3).

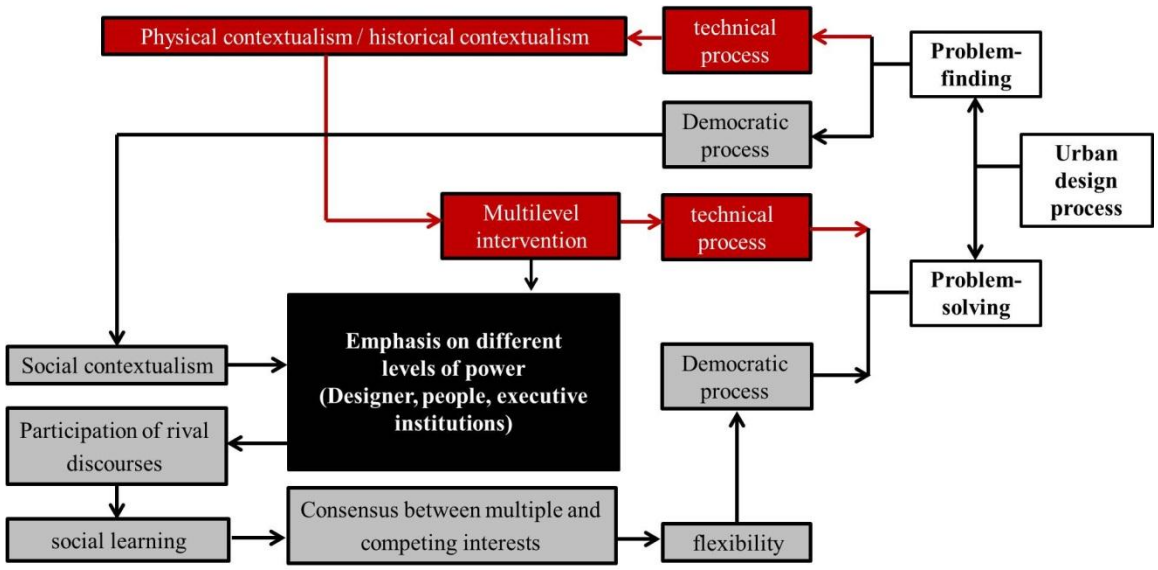

Fig. 3. The conceptual model of relationships between the concepts of communicative theory in the urban design process

According to Figure.3, elimination of the concepts of the communicative theory makes the problem-finding and problem-solving concentrate on only the technical and technocratic aspects of the space. This results in the ignorance of the evolution trend of the theoretical urban engineering knowledge and thereby the urban design and thinkers' efforts for paying attention to the realities and relations governing the society and their role in the formation of space are ignored. If the knowledge applied in the professional projects fail to take the evolutions and progress of theoretical knowledge, the theory-practice gap will be widened, the knowledge generated in these projects (practical knowledge) will be subsequently incapable of developing and correcting the theoretical knowledge, and the knowledge cycle of the urban design process (mutual relations between theory and practice) will face numerous challenges.

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