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# Tears and smiles in the urban protests against local decisions: searching for footprint of power in urban management (Evidence from Tehran)

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## Abstract

To achieve plural power in the urban planning scene, two distinguished parties, including both official and unofficial, should be able to interact with each other. In the absence of participation in the planning and decision-making processes, protests are a way for unofficial parties to force the government to reconsider their plans. The present research investigates the chain of power in respond to urban protests by analysing two case studies from the City of Tehran. The main research question concerned how city authorities in Tehran responded to the citizens' demands by establishing whether, through powerful organisation of the city, people can change the governance trends of city authorities, or if their demands remain ignored or only slightly slowed down the execution of the plans. This study applied Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) for analysing relations between different players (Citizens, Government, Institutions, Guilds etc.) and illustrating the structure of power in both cases. The input data includes interviews and facts from published newspapers and after calculating data with ISM, MICMAC analysis employed to explain the drive power and dependence power of players. According to the results of interpretive structural modelling, citizens' demands in both cases had only a marginal effect on the

governance trends of city authorities. The results also showed that citizens were on the bottom of the power hierarchy to see their demands met.

Keywords: Sociology, Political science

## 1. Introduction

Plurality of power versus centralised power is a major dilemma faced within the urban planning process. Centralisation of power occurs in comprehensive planning, placing the local government and citizens on the top and bottom of the power pyramid, respectively; citizens 'collaboration has no place in comprehensive planning, as the final plan is made based on input from specialists and decisions by the central government (Taylor, 1998). In contrast, collaborative planning is based on an interaction between people and planner (Healey, 1998). In this planning practice, citizens have a voice in creating the urban development plans and are active participants in decision-making (Day and Gunton, 2003). This planning practice is more popular among citizens, and thus public protests against development plans are less likely to be made (McCann, 2001).

Citizens are the major segment affected by urban plans. In general, neglecting people in the urban plan approval process will be associated with certain consequences, including failure to accomplish objectives of development plans, inefficiency of development plans, and public protests and movements (Healey, 2003; Nour, 2011). Demonstration of people in the street and city centres is among the main consequences of neglecting them in the process of decision-making for future urban plans or their demands. Pruijt (2002) argues that public activities against the implementation of development plans have the potential to change governance trends. On the other hand, some researchers, such as Tarrow (1994), believe that political elites do not respond to the demands of protesters at all and will only heed objections raised by their counterparts at the same or higher levels. Although David Harvey argued that the cities in our era are places for emerging social movements against capitalism (Harvey, 2012) and he emphasized on confronting the right to the city of Lefebvre with *capitalist law of value* but the city authorities respond to urban movements such as citizens' protests is a matter of this paper. In the notion of power theory of Gaventa (1982) the purpose of power is to prevent groups from participating in decision making processes and achieving a silent agreement which a violation of this quiescence has not been tolerated by the authorities whether it be an obvious demand to be heard their voice in decision making process, or a minor request to adhere to a public agreement between officials and people.

Analysing Urban protests has been argued from distinguished aspects. For example, Sayeed (1979) argued that urban protest is a main indicator for political change in

Pakistan and it is more important political change indicator than political innovation itself and institutional capacity of society. Based on the right to the city, Kuymulu (2013) analysed urban protests sprawling from Gezi Park to Taksim Square and other public squares across Turkey in order to describing those protest as an opportunity to reclaiming right to the city. Novy and Colomb (2013) represent the term of "spaces of hope" due to new urban social movements in Berlin and Hamburg based on Harvey's hypothesis about the potential role of cultural producers. However, Urban management and organizations and institutions involved in urban plans/projects are different from similar players in west countries (Hesari Asl, 2015). Islamic cultural character of Iranian politics manifest affects urban management and it's one of the differences (Lalepoor et al., 2012). Another one is urban authorities to whom respond which although Islamic city council members elected by the citizens but they are under supervision of and report to Ministry of Interior (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2013). Also, the conflicting of interest in Iran can occur even between people and a public sector where there is no presence of capital effort of gaining surplus value from changing a less economic land use (like green space) to a more profitable land use (commercial one). Hence, to the authors knowledge, there is no research which explains urban protests situations and authorities respond to them in Iran so, it is important to explore players' (beneficiaries, stockholders, citizens, city officials, institutions and organizations) roles within urban protests in Iran which can be conclude to illustration of power chain.

The present research investigates the chain of power in response to urban protests by analysing two case studies from the City of Tehran. The main research question is to investigate how city authorities in Tehran respond to citizens' demands by establishing whether people can change governance trends of their city authorities through powerful organisation in the city (Pruijt's theory), or if their demands are ignored or slow down the plans' execution. To answer this question, definitions of power and the difference between traditional and Foucauldian views of power are addressed via a literature review. The two views of power determine which kind of power can explain status of power chain in case studies of the present research. After reviewing main root of plurality in Habermassian communicative action, the diverse aspects of urban protests are discussed. Another important discussion is explaining features of institutions, organisations and urban authorities in Iranian urban management structure which took a place in the end of literature review section.

In the subsequent sections, the research methodology, research instruments, and interpretive structural modelling (ISM) are described. ISM and MICMAC analyse applied in this study is not a new technique (Attri et al., 2013) nor an purpose of this research but a tool to investigate the chain of power in two distinguished cases. Then, two cases from Tehran with relevance to the research objectives are outlined, and documents related to each case are given as initial data and used for modelling. The first case study is the construction of a commercial-cultural project (Negin

Alborz) by the Tehran Municipality, with up to 500 commercial units presold to citizens. The investors protested the municipality due to the failure of the project's completion within the agreed upon timetable. And, in addition to street movements, they also followed up their demands through an official complaint to the judiciary. The second case is the construction of a religious site (Dar al-Qur'an) by a religious institution on land with green space use that provoked local resident opposition. Protesters, in addition to street demonstrations, tried to gain their rights through a judicial organisation. Finally, the outcomes of interpretive structural modelling are presented in the results.

## 2. Background

Protests against urban projects drive from dissatisfaction of citizens about an action of public or private sector developing plan. It's a formation of exercising of power by citizens where or when their voice not been heard. The first question is what is power? The meaning of power could be found in two distinct views. The first definition purports that power is a matter of one person (group) exercising sovereign control over another (Table 1) (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 2014). The second view defines it as a, 'general matrix of force relations at a given time, in a given society (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). The traditional view of power (first definition) determines the existence of two parties, one of which gives orders and one which based on the threat that the first will impose its will on the second. From a Foucauldian view (second definition) power could be determined from certain modifications by a series of clashes which constitute the social body (Willis, 2004). In the other words, Power is the most significant operating notion that governs [planning] discourses and social reality. Planning in this prospect is not an expression of power, but is the power itself incrementally applied. However, through surveillance, examination and normalisation, Planning becomes an instrument to control space, people and future developments (Richardson, 1996; Willis, 2004). Through traditional view of power urban protests should be silenced and neglected by the authorities cause

**Table 1.** Description of power.

| Aspect of view | Description of power |
|---|---|
| Traditional view | • Power is a matter of one person (group) exercising sovereign control over another |
| | • Where some give orders and others obey |
| | • Where some impose their will on others |
| Foucauldian View | • General matrix of force at a given time, in a given society |
| | • A certain modification of a series of clashes which constitute the social body |
| | • Something like the stratification, the institutionalisation and the definition of tactics |

(H. L. Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983)

of centered power. Gaventa (1982) developed his theory of power based on quiescence and showed the social elite/government tries to prevent the social movements in its domain by use of its power and attains social quiescence. On the other hand, by accepting Foucauldian view of power, it's inevitable to neglect citizens' protests which could be seen as an exercising of power by deprived actors whom left outside of planning decisions. In this point of view collaborative planning (Healey, 1997), communicative planning (Innes, 1998) and advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) came up in planning theory sky which tried to be voice of minorities or hearing/ including the citizens opinions in decision making process. However, planning itself as an instrument of power can be a manipulating tool to prevent urban movements? The answer lies in the dark side of planning thought argued by Bent Flyvbjerg.

The dark side of planning is used in ways that are contrary to the master signifiers of Planning (including residential amenity, social equity and environmental sustainability), and instead involves 'social repression, economic retardation or environmental degradation' through manipulation (Fig. 1) (Flyvbjerg, 1996). To tackle this issue, the political view of planning determines importance of plural contributors in the planning and decision-making process. Instead of instrumental rationality, they insist on using communicative rationality through a democratic approach to transform specified power into multiple power (Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002). Accepting the plurality of power makes a room for citizens to influence in decision making process and consensus between official and unofficial parties could avoid
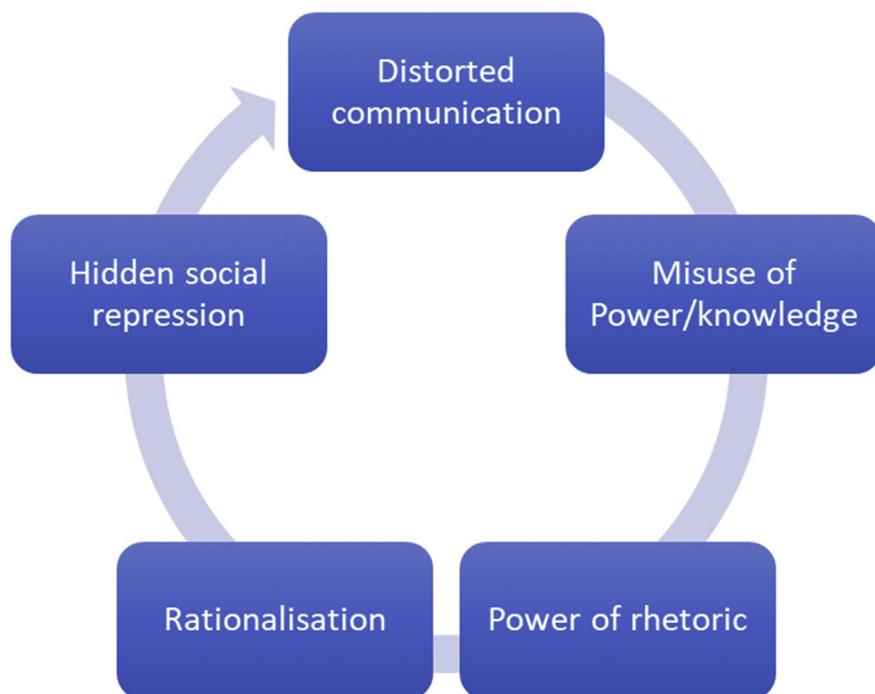


**Fig. 1.** The dark side of planning (Flyvbjerg, 1996).

future protests, but it's necessary to be cautious about the dark side of planning. Having a belief in plurality of power in planning theories is based on Habermas communicative action idea.

A plurality of power is the concept behind Habermassian communicative action, which argues that repressive power must turn into emancipatory communication (Forester, 1988). To achieve plural power in scene of urban planning, two distinguished parties, including official and unofficial, should be able to interact with each other. Official parties include the national government, regional/state government, local government, public sectors and planning committees; unofficial parties encompass private sectors, local communities, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and citizens. Moving from traditional power to plurality of power is a long way that western countries went in planning theories which makes todays citizens protests against urban projects barely occur in their cities. By describing meaning of power this paper tried to clarify each respond of city authorities to two view of power which in one of them they omit citizen movement and try to silence it (traditional view) by using dark side of planning or instrumental rationality and in contrary they attempt to cooperate with citizens demands (plurality of power) through new planning theories based on communicative rationality. However, these are not total logics of facing citizens' protests and cities managers could have more reasons to ignore such a formation of demands (movements).

When citizens launch a collective movement to alter the policies of city managers, their efforts do not necessarily result in achievement of their goals. The logic of this claim makes it interesting to investigate what causes citizens not to achieve their initial goals. One major reason is the concern of city authorities regarding citizens making their demands through protests (Pruijt, 2002). Acknowledging the demands of citizens after protests may imply that henceforth, citizens can present their demands, whether logical and purposive or in favour of a certain local group, through street protests (Hager, 2007). City managers may also feel that they have lost their authority in developing and deciding on urban plans.

To prevent such protests, city authorities can encourage citizens to become engaged in the development and decision-making process for urban plans before implementation (Lebuhn, 2015). For example Mayer (2010), mentions that many of the participatory mechanisms now witnessed in Berlin were developed during the 1990s and 2000s despite being rooted in the urban struggles of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s. In Hamburg and Tel Aviv, the first steps towards democratic city planning and public involvement were taken in the context of neighbourhood protests against top-down modernist planning, following the large-scale demolition of local communities in the 1960s and 1970s (Kemp et al., 2015; Rinn, 2016). Although, at first glance, it seems that participatory instruments have been developed to prevent the expression of public demands through urban protests, they are not simply a top-

down strategy to co-opt social movements, but rather, are a win-win for both citizens and the authorities (für Stadtentwicklung and Berlin, 2011). In other words, citizens are not simply being co-opted and city authorities retreating in the face of all demands of social movements (Lebuhn, 2015). Instead, participatory structures allow both sides of the struggle to mutually interact and to achieve their goals in an optimal way.

Nevertheless, there are also some successful cases of achieving successful results through protest. Hall (2014) points to a well-known successful protest in the 1960s led by Jane Jacobs against the demolition of the Western Greenwich Village in Manhattan. Hall also discusses another successful movement against the building of a highway in San Francisco in 1964 and similar cases dealing with highway development plans in Toronto and London. Consistent with Hall, Roegholt (1979) suggests that other protests against the construction of large-scale buildings and urban highways have been successful.

Castells (1983) identified three distinguished types of urban social movements: i) those related to matters of collective consumption such as provision of or access to collectively managed services financed by the state; ii) those defending the cultural and social identity of a particular place; iii) and finally movements for taking control of local spaces. There is an important feature which should be considered in searching about citizen protest/movements. As Pickvance (2003) argued the political context is a fundamental key to explain nature of protests. He believed urban movements form under certain social and political conditions. Therefor describing the features of urban planning and official actors in Iran is important, but before reviewing that the following table (Table 2) represents four types of citizen and city manager relationships relating to the mechanisms of power. This category will use to describe each player role in the urban protests.

The most important document of Tehran's urban development is the 'strategic-structural plan of Tehran city and its sphere'. This plan is similar to a comprehensive plan based on instrumental rationality. The trustee preparing the plan is the Tehran Municipality, and approved by the Supreme Council of Architecture and Urban Planning of Iran (comprised of 20 ministers) (Vatan Khah and Aghvami Moghaddam, 2014). Citizens were not involved in any part of preparing or approving the Tehran plan. This is a difference between planning in Iran and developed countries where participation is a fundamental key in the planning process.

Another twisted feature is City administration in Iran is governed by the city council and the city municipality legalized by the law of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, but effective actors in Tehran's urban development come from a wide range of areas, such as municipal sub-companies, the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province, the Environmental Protection Organisation, Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the Cultural Heritage Organisation and Guilds (Arefi, 2013).

**Table 2.** A typology of citizen/city managers relationship based on driving power or depending power.

| Types of citizens/city managers | Mechanism of relationship between players | Protest or participation | Planning/power |
|---|---|---|---|
| Driving power | Powerful city managers, autonomous from citizens, approve urban development plans without citizen involvement and before analysing the effects of their decisions on local residents. | Protests are staged on the streets. Citizens who have never had a voice are those most influenced by decisions made by city managers and tend to protest in the streets to obtain their rights. | Traditional power/hegemonic planning |
| Autonomous | Players are indifferent to each other; none uses power over the others, and there is no dependence between them. | No participation or protest takes place, citizens are neutral to urban plans, and urban authorities do not pay attention to citizens' opinions. | Comprehensive planning /Expert-oriented |
| Dependent | Players are placed in a power hierarchy, in which those at lower levels have no influence on those placed higher yet are vitally dependent on their decisions. | No real participation; it is limited to an inquiry into the opinions of those at the lower levels, laying the groundwork for citizens to protest. | Top-down planning/rigged participation |
| Linkage | Players with equal power of different types depend on each other. | Participation and interaction of different players (citizens, city managers, NGOs, etc.) are formed under these conditions. | Habermassian communicative action/democratic planning/ Foucauldian power |

(Source: Authors)

The ranking of power in the Iranian urban management system is the same as the political system: hierarchical and top down (Fig. 2) (Zamani and Arefi, 2013). For example, the municipality cannot monitor the performance of the Environmental Protection Organization, but the Environmental Protection Agency monitors the performance of the Tehran Municipality in environmental matters. This relationship is not problematic in of itself, but the amount of power that each of these actors can afford can be more complicated. For example, the Tehran Municipality is not a custodian of cultural affairs, that is the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran. But the 2018 budget shows that the Ministry of Culture and Guidance's budget for all of its cultural activities across the entire country is approximately $ 312 million, whereas the Tehran Municipality for 2018 was allocated $ 4285 million to the Tehran city (MehrNews, 2018). Thus, Tehran Municipality's financial strength is 13 times that of the Ministry of Culture and Guidance. Therefore, although cultural responsibility is not one of the responsibilities of the municipality of Tehran, with its own funds the Municipality tries to build cultural spaces, theatres, and cinemas, and consequently has great bargaining power over the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

The mayor of Tehran is elected by the City Council for a four-year term and City Council members are elected by the people for a four-year term (Vatan Khah and Aghvami Moghaddam, 2014). Naturally, the mayor of Tehran is accountable to the City Council and the City Council oversees the performance of urban management. But monitoring the City Council's performance is not done by the people;
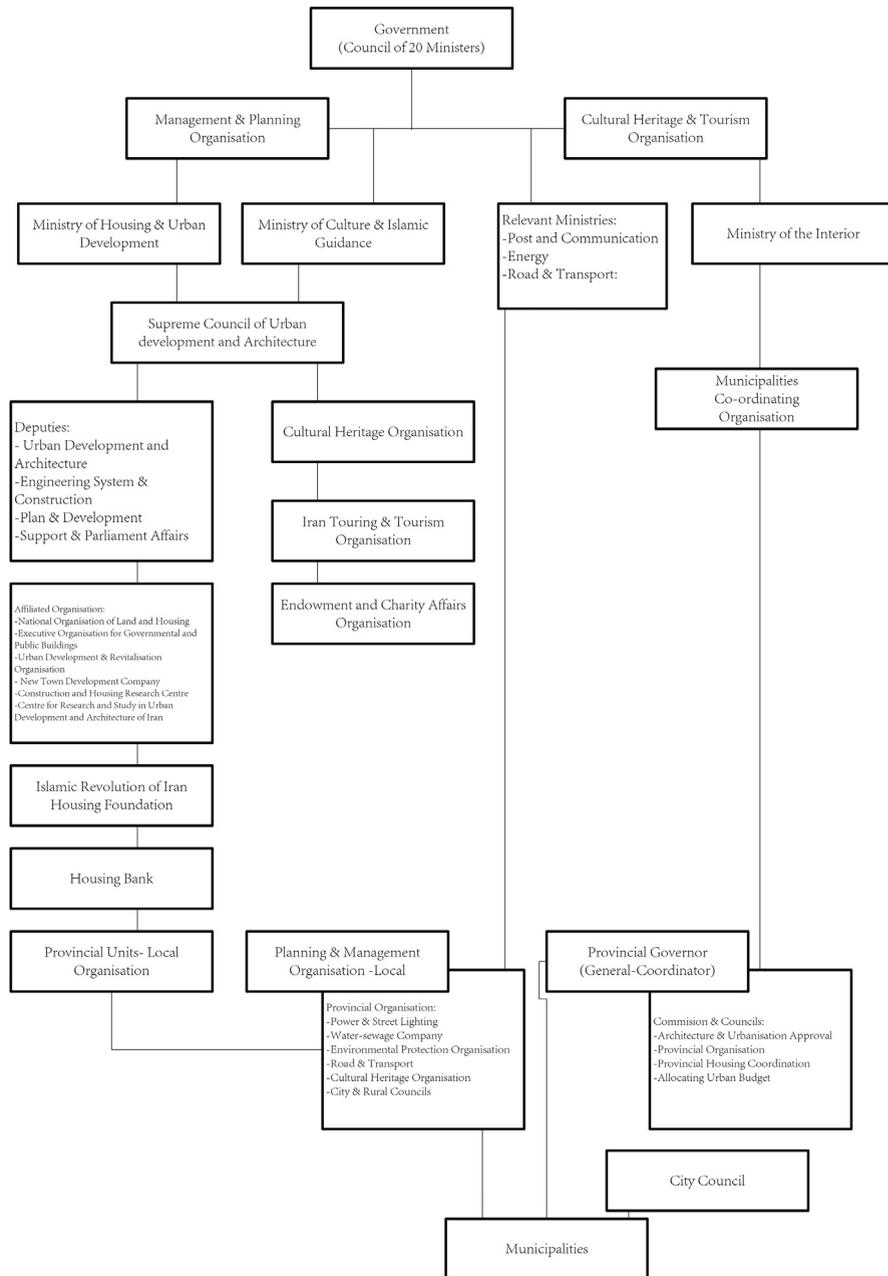
**Fig. 2.** Top-down organisation of Urban Development Agencies in Iran and Key actors (Zamani and Arefi, 2013).

rather, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior (LACICA, 2013). Accordingly, the City Council can hold non-public meetings, and some of its decisions and reviews will not be made public. Yet, the Inspection Organization of Iran and its subsidiaries, such as the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province, can assess the performance of Tehran's municipality and, if necessary, stop Tehran's municipality's actions, such as issuing permits for any construction like for highways or

buildings. The entire Inspection Organization of Iran operates under the authority of the Judicial System of Iran, which is independent of the government and the people. With these interpretations, although the urban management system in Iran (Mayor-City Council) is like that of some Western countries, Iran's two primary urban institutions are not accountable to citizens and the people do not monitor their performance, an important difference in the power structures.

## 3. Methodology

This study was categorised within the critical paradigm, which originated from the works of Marx and Freud and was later extended by the Frankfurt School thinkers, specifically Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse (Blaikie, 2007). The contemporary prominent figures of this paradigm are Habermas and Bourdieu. The research methodology within the critical paradigm is quantitative and somewhat qualitative (Blaikie, 2009). In the qualitative methodology, the initial data consists of sentences and texts. In this study, the focus point is based on Theory of Communicative Action introduced by Habermas.

In the current study, the aim was to discover and interpret the relationships between different urban government in dealing (in the form of street protests) with urban protests. To this end, the interpretive-structural model (ISM) was used to encode the players' actions/reactions as sentences in each case study and quantitatively assign values to them based on the codes. Then the relationships between the players were interpreted. The MICMAC (*Matrice d'Impacts croises-multipication appliqué' and classement, i.e. cross-impact matrix*) analysis was employed to explain different types of communication (driving power, autonomous, dependent and linkage) between the players in the case of the study. According to Saxena and Vrat (1990) and Ravi and Shankar (2005) these four variables are common variables used in MICMAC analysis.

The input data in this study is facts and interviews which published in newspaper articles declaring the situation of each urban protest. According to the nature of raw data and the goal of this study (explaining the hierarchy of power among urban players in respond to urban protest in Tehran), models such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or DEMATEL technique cannot be applied to determine the relationships because those methods use questionnaires as the raw data. As Jharkharia and Shankar (2005) used ISM to understand barriers in supply chains in Information Technology Enablement and they argued that ISM is a well-established technique in order to identifying relationships among different objects. Although there is a concern about limitation of ISM which is by increasing the number of variables the complexity of the ISM will be increase. However it is not a new method and it has been employed in analysing barriers to development

in landfill communities (Chandramowli et al., 2011) and the influencing factors of public transportation passenger flow (Sun et al, 2010) and also applied in many different fields such as management barriers (Kuo et al., 2010; Luthra et al., 2011; Singh and Kant, 2008) and structure of enablers positions (Bhattacharya and Momaya, 2009; Nishat Faisal, Banwet and Shankar, 2006; Thakkar et al., 2008) which show its capability of exploring relationships. The two restrictions of choosing a method in this paper, nature of input data and goal of study, covered by the ISM and additionally this method firstly considers all possible pair wise relations of system elements either direct influence or transitive inference and secondly contrary to SEM and DEMATEL technique, no knowledge of underlying process or previous assumption of function are needed; thus, this method has advantages for applying in this paper.

Warfield introduced the ISM model in 1974 to analyse complex socioeconomic systems in order to establish and understand the relationships between their elements (Warfield, 1974). In other words, ISM is an interactive process, in which a set of different relevant elements are structured in a systematic model, contributing to the maintenance of order in the complex relationships between the elements of a system (Raj et al., 2008). ISM, as an appropriate analytical technique, is also helpful in identifying internal relationships between different variables. It can also be used in prioritising and analysing the effect of one factor on other factors (Attri et al., 2013; Dewangan et al., 2015). MICMAC analysis completes the interpretive-structural model by calculating the drive and dependent power of players (Dewangan et al., 2015). In this study, the modelling stages were as follows.

- First step: Players were listed to assess the power system among them.
- Second step: A structural self-interaction matrix (SSIM) was created whose indices were:
  - whether player i affects player j (V);
  - whether player j affects player i (A);
  - the mutual effects of players i and j on each other (X) and
  - whether there is no relationship between players i and j (O).
- Third step: The SSIM matrix was used to calculate the access matrix. Based on a one-to-one comparison of players in the SSIM matrix, letter notations in the matrix were converted into binary numbers (0 or 1) according to the following rules.
  - If the (i, j) entry in SSIM is V, then in the initial reachability matrix, the (i, j) entry = 1 and the (j, i) entry = 0.
  - If the (i, j) entry in SSIM is A, then in the initial reachability matrix, the (i, j) entry = 0, and the (j, i) entry = 1.
  - If the (i, j) entry in SSIM is X, then in the initial reachability matrix, the (i, j) entry = 1, and the (j, i) entry = 1.

- • If the (i, j) entry in SSIM is O, then in the initial reachability matrix, the (i, j) entry = 0, and the (j, i) entry = 0.

- • Fourth Step: The reachability matrix obtained in Step 4 was partitioned into different levels.

- • Fifth Step: Based on the relationships given above in the reachability matrix, a directed graph was drawn, and the transitive links were removed.

- • The final step was calculating the MICMAC analysis to categorise the players into four types, including driving power, autonomous, dependent and linkage (for more information of implementing ISM see Attri et al. (2013)).

## 4. Study area

In 2008, the government donated land on Oushan Boulevard to the Tehran municipality to create a cultural space. The municipality established the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company (TMCDC), which was to be in charge of the construction of a cultural-commercial complex with facilities, such as a cinema hall, gym, and concert hall, to cover the cost of the building along with business the units (ISNA, 2015).

According to Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company's existing documents, in 2008 the municipality committed to building several commercial units in the commercial, artistic, and the Negin Alborz sports complex by concluding contracts for the sale of business units to more than 500 citizens. Therefore, it finally pledged to be in operation stage in 2010 (TMCDC, 2010).

The Negin Alborz Complex is a mega-mall in Tehran that covers a 60,000m$^2$ area in District 1 of the Tehran Municipality. This project, a complex process of construction initiated in 2009, included commercial and cultural land use with 12,800m$^2$ for sport usage (volleyball court, pool, etc.), a cinema and one amphitheatre with a total area of 3000m$^2$; and 25,000 m$^2$ was dedicated to shopping and spaces for children (indoor playground, recreational spaces, etc.). Initially, the Tehran Municipality (public sector) owned the project. But in 2009, it was sold to over 500 citizens as stockholders in return for 230 billion Rials (approximately 15 million USD) (ISNA, 2015).

The Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company did not fulfil its obligations in due time and the funds deposited into the above-mentioned commercial complex were assigned to two other projects in 2010 (Paytakht Press, 2016). After the buyers' protest over non-fulfilment of obligations, and illegal and non-legal acts of the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company, the contract was approved in 2010 and the Supplementary Agreement approved and amended to the first contract (Fars News Agency, 2016). The new agreement forced the Tehran

Municipality Cultural Development Company to a maximum time of the construction and completion of the project by 31 September 2011, and stipulated in Clause 5 of the Extension Agreement that in the case of non-fulfilment of the contract's obligations, the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company should pay a delay fee to the stockholders (IRNA, 2016).

According to the buyers, business units suffer huge and irreparable losses each day, irrespective of the cost of $ 14 million. Within seven years from one of the credit portfolios, the Tehran Municipality (Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company) has achieved nothing but disregard for investors (IRNA, 2016).

This Company should have completed the Negin Alborz Complex at the end of 2012, but the project was not completed on time. The TMCDC organised another bond wherein they agreed to complete the project by the end of 2014 (ISNA, 2015). Two years past the last deadline, the TMCDC refused to fulfil the project, and citizens shareholders protested against the Tehran Municipality for TMCDC's failure to complete the Negin Alborz Complex (Paytakht Press, 2016). Parallel to protests, shareholders also complained to the Guilds against TMCDC and the guilds filed the complaints to the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province. In responding to the shareholders' protest and their complaint, the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province ordered TMCDC to give the construction rights to the District One Municipality of Tehran, making the municipality a contractor for the project (Khabar Online, 2016). In 2016, another protest was executed by the same citizens demanding the resignation of Tehran Mayor Dr Ghalibaf for the municipality's refusal to build the Negin Alborz Complex. A member of city council joined the citizens' protest and promised to follow up on their demands, but not the call for resignation (Fars News Agency, 2016). Based on this authors' observations, as of the end of 2017, this project has yet to enter the operational phase.

There are six players with multiple power and influence in play on Negin Alborz Project. These groups and organisations are represented in Table 3.

The second case study is on the Tehran Mega-Mall located in on the city's west side in an area called Shahrake Ekbatan (Ekbatan Town). A wet land with 19 hectares between two phases of Ekbatan Town, in 1996 it was given over to the Tehran Municipality as a trustee on the condition that it construct a green and recreational space for citizens living on both sides of the land (YekShahr, 2015). However, in 2008 the municipality changed the area from green land use to commercial, cultural, and recreational use (YekShahr, 2015). In the proposed plan, about 4.5 hectares of the land was dedicated to commercial use, and the other 14.5 hectares divided into green space, cultural use, gas station and carwash, and mosque. However, one year later, 7.7 of the 14.5 hectares left to green space and services changed to commercial use (Tabnak, 2015). The Tehran Mega-mall was the commercial part of the proposed plan constructed in late 2015 by the Tehran Municipality (YekShahr, 2015). In

**Table 3.** Identifying players in case study of Negin Alborz Complex.

| Letter for players | Name of Players | Position |
|---|---|---|
| Pa | Stockholders | Beneficiaries |
| Pb | Tehran Municipality | Influential |
| Pc | Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company | Influential |
| Pd | Tehran City Council | Influential |
| Pe | Guilds | Influential |
| Pf | Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province | Influential |

(Source: Authors)

the same year, the leftover land (Fig. 3, 6.3 hectares), which was meant to be recreational and green space, was given over to a religious institution, Dar'o al-Quran, to construct a new building for the management of religious facilities (IQNA, 2015). Protesters gathered in front of the Tehran City Council building with a petition signed by 25,000 individuals, including 60% of Ekbatan Town residents, to demand construction on the building be stopped (Puyesh, 2015).

A resident of the region who spoke on behalf of other residents, stated that the Dar'o al-Quran was supposed to be built in Mofid town, but its residents disagreed and are now planning to build it in Ekbatan. The resident also pointed out: 'At some point the project stopped, but they resumed work on vacation and unfortunately, they are supposed to commercialize Dar'o al-Quran. We have protested to the city council and the municipality, but so far, no result have been reached and we have repeatedly requested
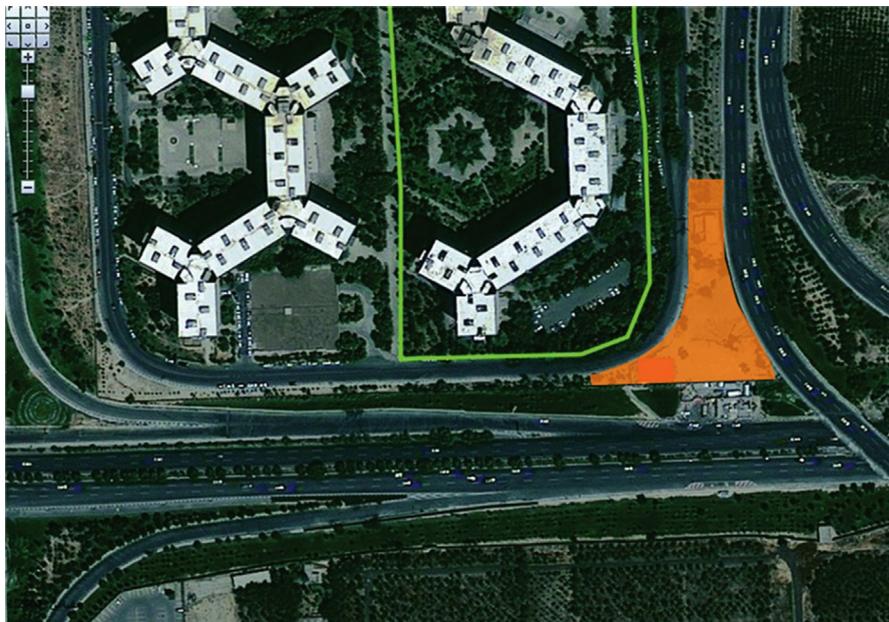


**Fig. 3.** The location of Dar'o al-Quran (Orange) in Ekbatan Town (Google Map).

Tehran's municipality to reduce the amount of pollution caused by the construction in our region through the development of the green space in the town, but unfortunately they destroyed the remaining amount of green space in Ekbatan' (IQNA, 2015).

The location planned for the construction of the Dar'o al-Quran is inappropriate because the gas and sewage pipes passing through it may pose a danger to inhabitants. All members of the Ekbatan town executive committee objected to invading the city and signed a petition aimed at the municipality and the council. When Ekbatan protests were covered by the media, Pejman Pashmchizadeh, Tehran's mayor's deputy city planner, told reporters and in the side-lines of the city council news meeting about the protest by a crowd of residents about the Ekbatan town building Dar'o al-Quran, that the entire building belongs to the Darulqaran and has no commercial use (IQNA, 2015). The protests continued, however. The people believed that the municipality was trying to commercialize on the pretext of creating its own dormitory, and on this basis, they took their protests to the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province. Eventually, the resident of Ekbatan's protest led the Inspection Organisation to order that the construction phase come to halt. But in the wake of negotiations by the Religious Institution, it was decided to continue the Dar'o al-Quran establishment along with the planting of 600 seedlings around the project area (SNN, 2017). Table 4 shows the identified players in case study of Tehran Mega Mall.

The initial data of the present research are the following facts in relation to each case:

First Case Study (Negin Alborz):

Fact 1: The municipality presells business units of the project to citizens.

Fact 2: The Tehran Municipality ordered Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company to construct Negin Alborz project.

Fact 3: The Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company did not complete the project on time.

**Table 4.** Identifying players in case study of Tehran Mega-Mall.

| Letter for players | Name of Players | Position |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Pb | Tehran Municipality | Influential/Beneficiaries |
| Pc | Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company | Influential/Beneficiaries |
| Pd | Tehran City Council | Influential |
| Pi | Religious Institution | Influential |
| Pf | Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province | Influential |
| Pg | Environmental Protection Organisation | Influential |
| Ph | Citizens | Influential/Beneficiaries |

(Source: Authors)

Fact 4: Investor citizens first protest the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company.

Fact 5: The Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company extends the contract deadline for project delivery.

Item 6: The project will not be completed by the new deadline.

Fact 7: Investors protest again.

Fact 8: In response to the request of stockholders the city councillor's representative instructs the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company to expedite construction.

Fact 9: The City Council monitors the performance of the municipality of Tehran, and, the city council costs are provided by the municipality of Tehran.

Fact 10: Investors complained to the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province through a petition arranged by the guilds. Guilds in the hierarchy of power in Iran fall below the municipality.

Fact 11: The Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province issues the order to change trustee for project construction from the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company to the municipality of District 1 of Tehran. Therefore, Municipality of District 1 was set as builder.

Fact 12: The Tehran Municipality redefines the project from municipality of District 1 and gives it to the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company.

Fact 13: The Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province operates under the authority of the judicial system of Iran, which is independent of the government and the people.

Second Case Study (Dar al-Quran):

Item 14: The religious institution took land with green space uses from the Tehran municipality.

Fact 15: The municipality changed the use of the land from green space to culture.

Fact 16: The custodian of building the cultural space on the municipality's land is the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company. Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company is a subsidiary of the Tehran Municipality.

Fact 17: The religious institution made itself the only contractor of cultural space. (The role of the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company in building of this land is eliminated)

Fact 18: Citizens protest at the project site. The municipality of Tehran ignores the protests.

Fact 19: The Environmental Protection Organisation, in keeping with its intrinsic duty, must stop changing green-to-cultural use of the land.

**Table 5.** Structural self-interaction matrix for Negin Alborz Complex.

| Players | Pa | Pb | Pc | Pd | Pe | Pf |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pa | X | A (fact1) | A (fact 4&5) | X (fact 8) | X (fact 10) | A (fact 10) |
| Pb | - | X | V (fact2) | X (fact 9) | V (fact 10) | A (fact 11) |
| Pc | - | - | X | A (fact 8) | O (no fact) | A (fact 11) |
| Pd | - | - | - | X | V (fact 10) | A (fact 13) |
| Pe | - | - | - | - | X | A (fact 13) |
| Pf | - | - | - | - | - | X |

(Source: Authors)

Fact 20: Citizens complain to the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province.

Fact 21: The Inspection Organisation issues the order to stop construction on the project.

Fact 22: The religious institution convinces the Inspection Organisation and pledges to plant 600 trees within the scope of the project.

Fact 23: The project runs again.

## 5. Results

The first stage to calculating ISM is obtaining a Structural Self-interaction Matrix (SSIM). After incorporating the transitivity, as mentioned in Step 3 in the ISM methodology, the final reachability matrix for the players in both case studies is obtained as shown in Tables below (Tables 5 and 6).

The next stage is to convert SSIM to an Initial Reachability Matrix. Based on the rules for each code, the Initial Reachability Matrix for the identified players in each case study is shown in Tables below. Note that a player affects itself.

In this paper, eight players (the total players of case study 1 and 2), along with their reachability set, intersection set and levels, are presented in Tables 7 and 8. From

**Table 6.** Structural self-interaction matrix for Tehran Mega-Mall.

| Players | Pb | Pc | Pd | Pi | Pf | Pg | Ph |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pb | X | V (fact 16) | X (fact 9) | A (fact 14) | A (fact 21) | X (fact 19) | V (fact 18) |
| Pc | - | X | O (none) | A (fact 17) | O (none) | O (none) | O (none) |
| Pd | - | - | X | O (none) | O (none) | O (none) | O (none) |
| Pi | - | - | - | X | X (fact 22) | V (fact 19) | V (fact 18) |
| Pf | - | - | - | - | X | V (fact 13) | V (fact 20) |
| Pg | - | - | - | - | - | X | O (none) |
| Ph | - | - | - | - | - | - | X |

(Source: Authors)

**Table 7.** Initial reachability matrix for Negin Alborz Complex.

| Players | Pa | Pb | Pc | Pd | Pe | Pf | Driving Variables |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pa | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Pb | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Pc | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Pd | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 5 |
| Pe | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Pf | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Dependent Variable | 6 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 1 | - |

(Source: Authors)

Tables 7 and 8, it can be seen that the level of the identification process of these players is completed in five and four iterations, and the failure players are found at level 1. Thus, weak players would be placed at the end of the ISM model. So, the iteration of ISM is continued until the variable obtains proper levels in the ISM model. Tables 9 and 10 illustrated final iteration and the level of power for each player regarding to both case studies. After each iteration, every variable must be placed in the exact position and identification level support in building the diagraph and final model (Figs. 4 and 5).

The final stage is MICMAC analysis. MICMAC is used to examine the Driving Power and Dependence Power of the players. The players have been classified into four categories: Autonomous, Linkage, Dependent and Driving. The following is the results of MICMAC analysis for both case studies:

First quadrant (Autonomous): This is an autonomous quadrant. The players placed in this quadrant have less driving power and dependents, and because of this, they do not have much influence on the system. After the analysis, one of the players (Pc) in first case study appears in this quadrant. In the present study, the lack of players in the first quadrant shows that all considered players are significant.

**Table 8.** Initial reachability matrix for Tehran Mega-Mall.

| Players | Pb | Pc | Pd | Pi | Pf | Pg | Ph | Driving Variables |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pb | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Pc | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Pd | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Pi | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Pf | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Pg | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Ph | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Dependent Variable | 5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | - |

(Source: Authors)

**Table 9.** Driving power and dependence calculation using indicate transitivity matrix for Negin Alborz Complex.

| Players | Reachability Set(RS) | Antecedent Set (AS) | $RS \cap AS$ | $RS - RS \cap AS$ | Level of Power |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Pa | Pa,Pd,Pe | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd,Pe,Pf | Pa,Pa,Pe | 0 | 1 |
| Pb | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd,Pe | Pb,Pd,Pf | Pb,Pd | Pa,Pc,Pe | 4 |
| Pc | Pa,Pc,Pd | Pb,Pd,Pe,Pf | Pd | Pa,Pc | 3 |
| Pd | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd,Pe | Pa,Pb,Pd,Pd,Pf | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd | Pe | 2 |
| Pe | Pa,Pe | Pa,Pb,Pd,Pe,Pf | Pa,Pe | 0 | 1 |
| Pf | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd,Pe,Pf | Pf | Pf | Pa,Pb,Pc,Pd,Pe | 5 |

(Source: Authors)

Second quadrant (Dependent Players): This is a dependent quadrant with low driving power and high dependence. According to the present study, four enablers appear in this quadrant.

In first case study, Stockholders (Pa) are players with weak driving power but strong dependency. The results show interaction between stockholders and other players has some influence over changing the process or decision-making in construction of Negin Alborz Complex, but consequently, they are more beneficiaries or victims from decisions made by those who possesses power and influence.

In Tehran Mega-Mall project, there are three players ategorized in dependent quadrant, including Guilds (Pe), the Environmental Protection Organisation (Pg) and Citizens (Ph). Between these three players, Guilds have less driving power than the other two, but have the same dependency as citizens. Citizens have more dependency than the Environmental Protection Organisation; however, they have the same driving power.

Third quadrant (Linkage Players): This quadrant is known as linkage. Players with high driving power and high dependence fall into this quadrant. In this study, none of

**Table 10.** Driving power and dependence calculation using indicate transitivity matrix for Tehran Mega-Mall.

| Players | Reachability Set (RS) | Antecedent Set (AS) | $RS \cap AS$ | $RS - RS \cap AS$ | Level of Power |
|---------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Pb | Pb,Pc,Pd,Pg,Ph | Pb,Pd,Pi,Pf,Pg | Pb,Pd,Pg | Pc,Ph | 2 |
| Pc | Pc, | Pb,Pc,Pi | Pc | 0 | 1 |
| Pd | Pb,Pd | Pb,Pd | Pb,Pd | 0 | 1 |
| Pi | Pb,Pc,Pi,Pf,Pg,Ph | Pi,Pf | Pi,Pf | Pb,Pc,Pg,Ph | 4 |
| Pf | Pb,Pi,Pf,Pg,Ph | Pi,Pf | Pi,Pf | Pb,Pg,Ph | 3 |
| Pg | Pb,Pg | Pb,Pi,Pf,Pg,Ph | Pb,Pg | 0 | 1 |
| Ph | Ph | Pb,Pi,Ph | Ph | 0 | 1 |

(Source: Authors)
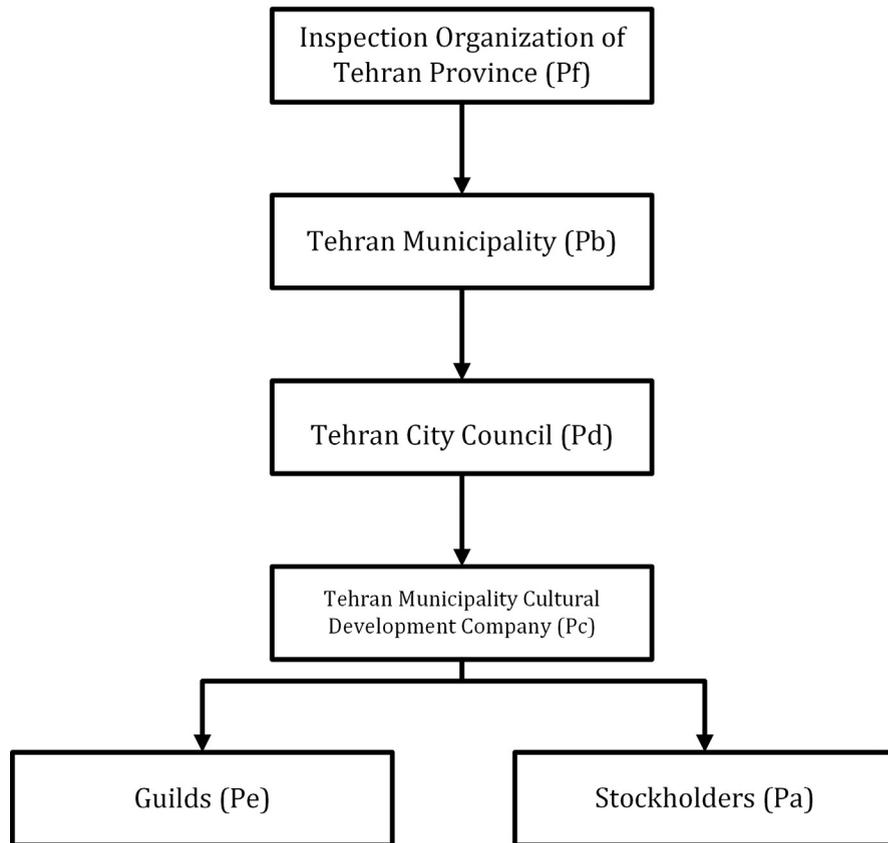
**Fig. 4.** ISM based model for players in first case study (Authors).

the players classified under linkage category precisely, however one player appeared in the middle of the driving power chart in first case study. Tehran City Council (Pd) is in the middle of all four quadrants which means it has a medium driving power and medium dependency. It would affect and be affected in the chain of power and could be seen as an intermediate player. It should also be noted that, in second case study, Tehran City Council has slightly less dependency power compared to the first one but has the same driving power which could confirm the role of this player in the urban development arena.
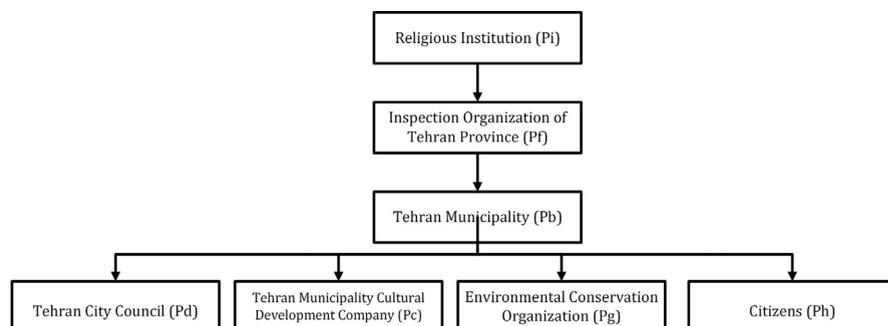


**Fig. 5.** ISM based model for players in second case study (Authors).
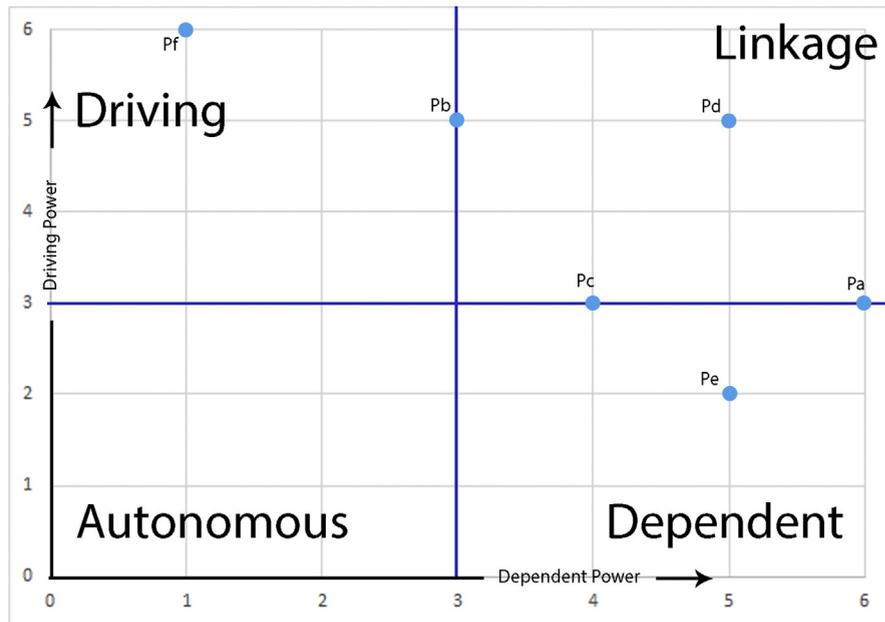
**Fig. 6.** Driving Power and Dependence Power Diagram for first case study (Negin Alborz Complex) (Authors).

Fourth quadrant (Powerful Players): This is an independent quadrant which has strong driving power but weak dependence. According to this study, four players appear in this quadrant. The enablers are as follows:

In the first and second study, as can be seen in Figs. 6 and 7, Tehran Municipality and Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province are classified in driving power, mutually. Driving power for both players is bigger in second case study than in the first. Furthermore, Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company and Tehran City Council are on the edge of the driving power quadrant, meaning they have a medium driving power along with a little dependency. Those ategorized in
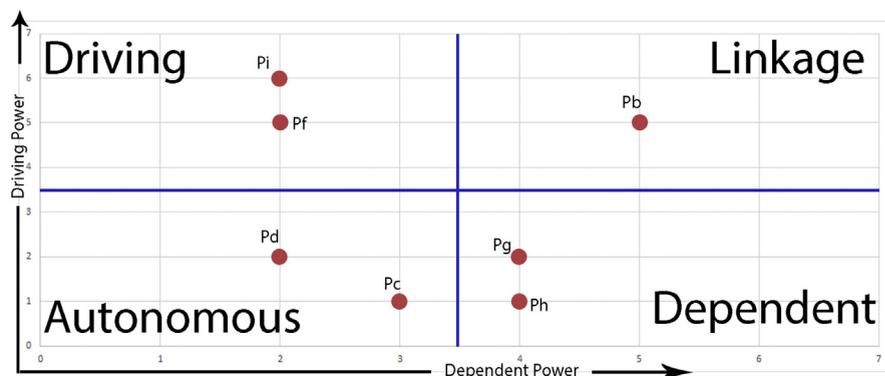


**Fig. 7.** Driving Power and Dependence Power Diagram for second case study (Tehran Mega-Mall) (Authors).

this quadrant have the most power to influence decisions and actions but are less affected by the consequences of those decisions and actions.

## 6. Discussion

The discussion of the research findings concentrates on three key points. First, the model used to respond to the main research question. According to the results from the interpretive structural modelling, citizens' demands in both cases had a marginal effect on the governance trend of city authorities. According to Figs. 4 and 5, Tehran Municipality has only been responsive to the political entity 'Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province', an affiliate of the Judicial system of Iran. The modelling outcome indicates a top-down hierarchy of power distribution among the parties involving in urban protests. Moreover, the MICMAC analysis showed that citizens and non-governmental entities were not autonomous and influential, but dependent and affected. In this study, interpretive structural modelling to analysed fact-based qualitative data. Conversion of this qualitative data into '1' and '0' may form a matrix where results can be presented in a simple and understandable diagram. The presentation of power in the top-down hierarchy in these cases is due to the centralised power structure evident in the two case studies; whereas, when power is not centralised, the outcome is cyclical or rotational, indicating that there is an interaction among several actors. The MICMAC analysis that followed the interpretive structural modelling generated the results in a way (i.e. two-dimensional diagram) that helps researchers explain the independent/autonomous and influential/influenced position of parties. As a result, the use of interpretive structural modelling and MICMAC analysis can well explain power decentralisation in the process of urban development planning and implementation within a scientific framework.

The second key point is the interpretation of the results of the ISM and MICMAC research. Figs. 6 and 7 of the MICMAC ′s analysis are in fact an attempt to correctly join the puzzle pieces of the power structure in Iran based on existing facts. The results of this research show that the power structure in face of urban protests in Tehran is quite complicated and wicked. As the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province has the highest authority in the first case study, it can independently issue orders to continue or stop a project's operation, but the organization in the second instance is downgraded in terms of power. Where the religious institution has superior power, and is not affected by any group, such as citizens, the Tehran Municipality, and the city council. Perhaps the root of power of the religious institution can be sought in the superiority of religious belief in Iranian culture and politics. This religious institution easily came to an agreement with the inspection organization and continues its project despite residents' opposition. The complexity of the power structure is not limited to reducing the power level from the first to the second case, but the Tehran

Municipality Cultural Development Company, which in the first case is the custodian of the project, has a level of power among the actors in the first case study; but in the second it becomes an ineffective actor away from the seat of power.

The company is actually the executive arm of the Tehran Municipality in the construction and development of cultural spaces, but since the religious institution had more power, it easily eliminates the legal role of the Tehran Municipality Cultural Development Company in building a cultural site. Similarly, the City Council of Tehran, in the first case, is a mediator with the power and influence of other actors. The city council is in fact influenced by public opinion and tries to strike a balance between stockholders' demands and the company's limitations in building the project in Tehran. However, in practice it only calmed the protesters and ultimately could not meet the needs of the public sector with certainty. In the second case, the situation worsens, although the City Council appears to be on the side of the citizens, in practice there is little power to change the situation in favour of the public demand, and in the puzzle of the power structure becomes an impotent actor.

Instead, the Tehran Municipality in the second case is an intermediary, while the municipality is under the pressure of hidden hands to change the land use from green space to cultural space. There is no reason or logic in the municipal documents for this decision. However, some citizens believe that the municipality is trying to change green to cultural and then to commercialize the land for the benefit of the religious institution. However, the citizens' argument is not supported by any valid document. But what is clear is that the municipality is struggling to balance the desire of citizens and the religious institution. Two points must be noted, however: the mayor of Tehran is not elected by the people, but elected by the city council; and the political and cultural backing of the religious institution is what gives this institution its power. Therefore, citizens are trying to follow through the Inspection Organisation of Tehran Province. At first, the Inspection Organisation issued a decree to suspend the project to calm street protests, but over time, an agreement with the religious institution was made: the institution would plant 600 seedlings around the project to keep the people's green land and then continue their project.

The complexity of the power chain in Iran occurs when the actors in each case and context have different levels of power that may be the same or different from what is defined in the constitution of the country. For example, according to the law, the Environmental Protection Organisation under the authority of the Presidential Administration, has the high power on its playing field (environment), so it can and should prevent any construction where it is thought the construction may damage the environment. However, in the second case, due to the presence of both a powerful institution and organization with political and ideological support, the Environmental Protection Organisation was placed at the end of the power chain.

It could not prevent the destruction of the green space by the Religious Institution and protect the environment. In the first case, the beneficiaries are most likely to be affected, which means that any high-power institution can decide on their circumstances, and these stakeholders, apart from street protests, can follow their demands by filing an indictment through guilds that are not so powerful in bargaining and influencing decisions. In fact, the beneficiaries gain more power than the guilds simply because of the street protests. However, whether the beneficiaries or the citizens achieve their goals it depends on how the government and their mercenaries respond to public thought and based on this study cases city authorities try to made many obstacles in path of citizens' movements so they easily give up their demands, also making a deviation in public opinion is the main strategy of city authorities instead of taking responsibility for their failure. Imagine a bowling ball thrown with its initial acceleration to the target. If there are obstacles along the way, each obstacle absorbs part of the acceleration, but the ball never hits the target. This brings us to the third point.

Third, the answer to the main research question shows that citizens are on the bottom of power hierarchy regarding fulfilling their demands. Although they could slightly affect the direction of city authorities' plans, citizens' activities in the two case studies resembled Pahl's zero-sum game: their attempts to secure their rights against the interests of local government would fail and the other side of table (city authorities and beneficiaries) faced obstacles to pursue their goals (Pahl, 1970). The lack of citizen involvement in decision-making for urban development plans as well as neglecting their needs and demands are among the causes of social movements. It should be noted, what happens in Tehran differs from cities in advanced countries dealing with similar cases. Distribution of power and giving a voice to citizens in decision-making are normal practices in the world's most successful cities. Although they might have adopted the same strategy as Tehran in the past, the collaborative paradigm in urban planning is now widely popular; yet, development plans in Tehran, at least in the given cases, completely contrast with the collaborative approach. Adoption of a collaborative approach in Tehran is a slippery slope in which the persistence of contentious confrontation with the decisions of city authorities to realise collaborative planning has the chance of either positive or adverse effects.

## 7. Conclusion

The result showed that the positive communicative action (Habermas's Theory) didn't happened in both cases and some players left the battle with a successful smile and citizens or stockholders stayed to their demands hopelessly. Distribution of power in urban planning decision making stage, is exceedingly important in Iran; Although citizen participation is largely settled in advanced countries, the power

structure and equations applied in in Iran (as a developing country) are largely different from those in advanced countries. There are two facets of power distribution. In the first, the involvement of citizens in urban decision-making and development planning is considered. In this way, (a) the plans are made and approved under citizen supervision, ensuring their demands and needs are considered, and (b) the people's voice is heard in cases of protests provoked by conflict between development plans and their demands. The second facet is indeed the outcome of not keeping up with the first approach. In other words, the lack of citizen involvement in the development plans of municipalities may make them seek to secure their rights and press their demands through on-street demonstration. Nevertheless, identification of relationship between these two approaches, consequences of the lack of power distribution among urban actors/players, and future of adherence to centralised power in the planning decision making are recommended questions to be addressed in future studies.

This study has two different cases, which one of them is about protesting to failure of city officials to complete the project and the other is the land use change of green space to cultural one in favor of a particular religious group. In both cases citizens' protests are ineffectual and authorities tried to manipulate or mislead the movements. Above that the structure of power in influencing on urban plans/projects is not crystal clear in Iran; involved actors may have different power from a subject to another, thus, understanding apparatus of power is relating to cognition of each player nature i.e. a religious (Islamic) character of an organization could change the hierarchy of power. Nevertheless, citizens failed to achieve their demands through the urban protest and neither their voice have been heard nor they influenced on the officials' decisions which show the traditional definition of power (centralised power) can explain status of power structure in urban protests in Iran.

## Declarations

### Author contribution statement

Seyed Navid Mashhadi Moghaddam: Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Mojtaba Rafieian: Conceived and designed the experiments; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

### Funding statement

## Competing interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

## Acknowledgements

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