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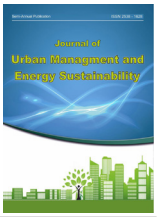

CASE STUDY RESEARCH PAPER

Investigating the components affecting the role of local government in decongesting metropolises (Case study: Tehran City)

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ABSTRACT

Local governments play a central and pivotal role in human spatial and geographical planning in urban structuring, and according to long-term plans, the amount of space occupied by humans as city residents is explained based on the type of government policies for a given area. Urban density, as an important issue, is always of interest to politicians and urban planners, and its lack of proper control leads to the accumulation of space and activity in an asymmetrical context up to the urban density. The purpose of this thesis is to explain and examine the role of urban decongestion components with regard to the pivotal role of local government in the metropolis of Tehran city. The research is analytical and has an applied purpose, but its developmental nature can be noted based on the study of concepts and the development of a multi-layered set of foundations. The method of collecting information is documentary and library, the basic concepts are first examined and then the layers of foundations are produced using the content analysis method and inductive reasoning. Subsequently, each component is explained in terms of effective indicators and is analyzed separately based on the theoretical framework of the research, and finally a structural model of the final indicators is present. The results show the impact of the indicators on the subject in the form of 54 factors, which are presented in six tables. In future studies, it is possible to examine the internal relationships of the indicators using evaluation methods.

Running Title: The components affecting the role of local government in decongesting metropolises

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, which is rapidly moving towards globalization, the importance of local space cannot be ignored. Apart from globalization, there are also factors such as decentralization that have received much attention from societies and have been able to influence the way local governments are perceived. Iran is one of the countries that is governed based on a centralized system, and for this reason, the government plays a broad role in managing the country's affairs at various levels. In this system, political, administrative, economic and social components play the most important role in the spatial planning and development system of the country, and since these components do not appear homogeneously and harmoniously in different parts of the country, the resources and facilities needed by the people are not distributed equally in all geographical areas, and as a result, regional inequalities increase, causing the formation of centers and poles of growth and development in a number of centers and an unbalanced distribution of the population throughout the country. This is what we are currently witnessing in Tehran (the capital); The long-term establishment of a centralized authoritarian government in Tehran has created a centralized political and administrative structure in the city. The concentration of population and resources in a metropolis like Tehran has become one of the fundamental challenges of this phenomenon, which may lead to social segregation, increased economic disparity, and social instability. Also, migration due to better facilities and services in Tehran exacerbates social and economic problems in other regions. It seems that the initial condition for deconcentrating of population, infrastructure and economy is the decentralization of management and governance in cities. In fact, the initial condition for reducing the process of concentration and density in metropolises and decentralization is the reduction of management and planning hierarchies at the micro and local levels (Teller & et al, 2022). In today's modern governments, with the increasing complexity of the administration of political units, the changing nature and functioning of governments, and the participation of people in political processes, the administrative and managerial structure and duties of governments have shifted from the traditional form (maintaining order, public security and tax collection) to planning and responsibility to accelerate the process of development and progress. In fact, based on these developments, the administrative structure of the government has undergone a fundamental transformation and its duties have also become complex and numerous. In this process, factors such as the lack of facilitating, comprehensive, and sufficient laws for inclusive public participation; The unclear status of popular organizations and their legal role, disregard for the implementation of enacted laws (such as the implementation of the law on reducing the size of the government), the expansion of the non-participatory bureaucratic system, the extensive domination of the government over the system of production and distribution of wealth, high concentration in decision-making, failure to delegate authority to other non-governmental sectors, implementation of a command and quasi-consultative system in decision-making, inflexible and closed communications, centralized planning, unequal distribution of authority and power, and high formality of the government, traditional bureaucracy and inefficiency in the possibility of realization and accountability, imbalance of power and authority of the government, hierarchical accountability and accountability to the center of power, lack of transparency in the behavior and performance of the government and unilateral behavior of the government and the nation, inappropriate allocation and distribution of wealth resources, and lack of transparency of economic and trade regulations (Lerner, 2019). 108) are among the reasons that necessitate the necessity and sense of need for good and competent local gover-

nance. (Li, 2020) The aim of this research is to answer a main question. What kind of unique characteristics does local government have that can affect management structures in cities? And through what policies can local governance accelerate the process of decongestion in metropolitan areas? Participation, decentralization, equality, convergence, accountability, responsibility towards the civil society, efficiency in service delivery, sustainability, security, etc. (Taylor, 2000: 89) are among the characteristics of good local governance. On the other hand, characteristics such as being democratic, planning and decision-making from below, being local and locally based, citizen-centered, participatory, responsible, accountable, financial independence and independence in self-government, etc., introduce the local government into a cooperative government with good local governance conditions that, in a horizontal relationship with the levels of power of the national government, seeks assistance and cooperation and, in general, decentralization (as the main and final goal) from the national government. The goal of the local government is to interact with the public and private sectors in order to seek synergy, capacity building and empowerment for desirable decision-making (Liebman, 2016); this is exactly the desire and goal of good local governance. In fact, local government is a method of good local governance that seeks complete decentralization of all elements (political, economic, administrative, technical, geographical, social, etc.) of the national government. From this perspective, decentralization is the best possible method for achieving good local governance, which is possible by implementing local government. The present study attempts to identify the dimensions of local governance and the strategies for strengthening it, and to identify the capacities and capabilities of this management method in dividing management in the metropolis of Tehran, and as a result, decongesting this metropolis through the application of the policies of this management method.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

History and evolution of governance The World Bank stated in 1989 that "the crisis of governance underlies Africa's development problems" (Robson, 2021). The commitment to national ownership in the 2005 Paris Declaration has focused aid agencies' attention on good governance. For example, as Hayden (2008: 267) points out, by channeling budget support directly to governments, development partners are forced to think about governance as an integral part of their way of working. Proponents of the good governance agenda see it not only in its own right but also as a means to influence other types of outcomes, particularly economic growth and development, as is the case in countries with poor governance. It is argued that corrupt bureaucrats and politicians hinder development efforts by stealing aid or misdirecting it towards unproductive activities. Less obvious but equally destructive are governments that are unaccountable to their citizens, with ineffective bureaucracies and weak institutions, unwilling or unable to formulate and implement policies that support growth and protect the poor. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, aptly noted in a quote that good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development (Roy et al., 2020). Proponents therefore argue that good governance should be at the center of development policy. Donors should not only positively support governance reforms in recipient countries but also take governance quality into account in decisions about the distribution of foreign aid. A large body of relevant literature focuses on measures and assessments of governance quality in specific countries and across borders, and another important body of work examines the relationship between governance and key outcomes such as economic growth. Since the early 1990s, Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space has been widely used by English-speaking academics to understand contemporary urban processes in

the Western world. Lefebvre's central idea is that there are different ways of producing space: natural space and social space. As a Marxist thinker, Lefebvre views space and its production through a tripartite dialectic between practices and perceptions, everyday representations and the spatial imagination of time. He argues that space is a social product based on social value and production (meanings that influence social actions and perceptions). In short, there are three levels of analysis for each social space: real (physical), discursive (representational) and lived space (through human experience) (Rumbach,2016).

Methodology

The research is analytical and has an applied purpose, but its developmental nature can be noted based on the study of concepts and the development of a multi-layered set of foundations. The method of collecting information is documentary and library. Given the purpose of the current study, which is to study the effective components in urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government, the basic concepts are first examined and then the layers of foundations are produced using the content analysis method and inductive reasoning. Subsequently, each component is explained in terms of effective indicators and is analyzed separately based on the theoretical framework of the research, and finally a structural model of the final indicators is presented.

Government

Government is the structure by which a country or society is governed. Throughout history, there have been various forms of government. Plato listed types of government in Book VIII of the Republic and stated the positive and negative characteristics of each (Shah, 2006). The New Webster's International Dictionary defines governance in much the same way as the New York Times or The Economist journalists: "the practice, manner, power, or authority of governing, state", "the state of being governed" or "the method of government or regulation". As Morten Boas has shown, before studying at the level of Global governance was used more generally in academic discourse. For example, it was widely used in relation to the business literature on micro-behavior. Göran Hayden has argued that it refers primarily to state governments or other public-private governments. In contrast, international relations analysts and international civil servants now use the term almost exclusively to describe phenomena that go beyond the synonym "state" and the legal authority that such policies are granted. For example, the Commission on Global Governance defines global governance as "the set of multiple ways in which individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. This ongoing process is one through which conflicting or diverse interests may be involved and through which actions may be taken."5 James Rosenau is the US academic most closely associated with the term, and for him it encompasses the activities of states, both at the grassroots and global levels, but also many others. The channels through which 'commands' are 'given' in the form of objectives set, directives issued and policies pursued. Over the past two decades something of a cottage industry of thought has emerged around the term. Since the early 1980s, 'governance' and 'good governance' have increasingly permeated development discourse, and in particular research programmers and other activities financed by public and private banks and bilateral donors. In addition, publications by prominent scholars and commissions have made extensive use of the term to address contemporary global problems.7 The emergence of governance can be traced at the national level to dissatisfaction with the state-dominated models of economic and social development prevalent throughout the socialist bloc and most third world countries. The world in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. At the international level, 'global governance' can be traced to the growing dissatisfaction among students of international relations with theories of realist and liberal-institutionalist approaches that dominated the study of international organizations in the 1970s and 1980s.

In particular, these failed to adequately capture the vast increase, both in number and in impact, of non-state actors and software applications in the management of globalization (Shin, 2020). Aristotle begins his Politics by saying: "Every state is a society of some kind, and every society is founded with a view to the good. Man, always strives to achieve what he thinks is good.

Most scholars agree that it was the World Bank in 1989 that introduced the concept into the modern discourse, making good governance a specific requirement for developing countries seeking to borrow money (Ul haque, 2012), which interprets governance as "the customs and traditions" of the institutions by which authority is exercised in a country. The aim of good governance here is to promote economic development; development and good governance are closely linked. Perhaps too precisely: as argued in The Economist, defining "good governance" as "conducive to economic development" may give rise to the following infinite regress: "What is needed for growth? Good governance. And what counts as good governance? That makes growth. and what is needed for growth (Uzun et al., 2024). In (2002) Derchesler argues that "good governance is a serious contender for the prize for the best example of Orwellian bilingualism." Good governance is a purely normative concept: in general, the term "governance" has now become a more or less neutral concept that focuses on the mechanisms of governance within a particular political unit and emphasizes the interaction of government (first), business (second), and society (third). "Good governance," on the other hand, is not neutral at all. Instead, it is a normative concept that once again embodies a strong value judgment in favor of the adjustment of government, which is supposed to be in accordance with standards, business principles, and – not least – interests. In this sense, "good governance" privileges the latter over the former (Vanhaelen, 2018). The concept used by the World Bank is clearly an ideological use of a concept (Warner, 2010). As Rhodes puts it: "In short, 'good governance' combines new public management with support for liberal democracy." Typically, organizations that use the concept of good governance do so by creating a wish list of laws, processes, and behavior of governments. It is easier to argue about what constitutes bad governance than what good governance is (Perry et al., 2014). (Zhang, 2016)

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Local governance

Local governance is the foundational pillar for decentralization in Tehran, shaping how authority, resources, and decision-making are distributed across districts. The strength and legitimacy of local government determine the pace and depth of administrative autonomy, enabling municipalities to tailor development priorities to diverse neighborhood needs rather than applying a uniform top-down approach. In Tehran, where socio-spatial disparities are pronounced, empowered local institutions can drive responsive urban policies, improve service delivery, and foster participatory planning processes that reflect residents' lived experiences. (Perry et al., 2014) The effectiveness of decentralization hinges on the clarity of competencies, adequate fiscal autonomy, and robust oversight mechanisms that prevent capture by central interests while maintaining alignment with national urban policies. When local governments possess sufficient capacity, they can experiment with zoning adjustments, land-use incentives, and local infrastructure investments that promote dispersion of growth away from hyper-concentrated cores. However, in practice, Tehran's local governance faces constraints that impede genuine devolution of authority. Fiscal dependence on central transfers and limited revenue-raising powers restricts municipalities' ability to finance autonomous projects that target densification relief. Administrative fragmentation across districts can lead to inconsistent policy implementation and duplicated efforts, undermining efficiency and equity. (Olowu, 1988) Moreover, political centralization tendencies often dilute local voices, making it

challenging for communities to influence decisions that directly affect their neighborhoods. Strengthening local governance requires not only formal devolution of powers but also capacity-building initiatives, transparent budget processes, and participatory mechanisms that ensure resident input translates into actionable urban projects. Without these institutional enhancements, decentralization risks becoming a symbolic reform rather than a substantive shift in governance. Participatory governance is a crucial mechanism through which decentralization materializes in Tehran. When residents, civil society organizations, and local businesses engage in planning processes, policies tend to better reflect ground realities and mitigate unintended consequences such as displacement or service gaps. Deliberative forums, community mapping, and neighborhood councils can democratize decision-making, enabling more nuanced responses to housing pressures, informal settlement upgrading, and the provision of basic services. The challenge lies in sustaining engagement beyond episodic consultations and ensuring representation from marginalized groups who are often absent from formal channels. Effective participation also requires access to timely information, translation of technical planning language into accessible terms, and continuous feedback loops that demonstrate how input shapes outcomes. Institutional fragmentation poses a significant barrier to effective decentralization in Tehran. The coexistence of municipal authorities, provincial bodies, and national agencies creates jurisdictional ambiguities, leading to overlaps, gaps, and inefficiencies. Coordination mechanisms, inter-governmental councils, and joint planning protocols are essential to harmonize objectives across scales, align funding streams, and streamline approvals. Inter-district collaboration can facilitate regional strategies for housing, transportation, and environmental management that diffuse pressure from central districts to peripheral areas. Yet, bureaucratic inertia and misaligned incentives often hinder cross-cutting collaboration, making it harder to implement coherent and equitable decentralization. Streamlining administrative processes and clarifying authority boundaries are critical steps toward a more unified approach. (Matejicek et al., 2006)

Environmental management and resilience are increasingly relevant in the decentralization discourse. Local governments can implement district-level climate adaptation measures, flood management, green spaces expansion, and energy efficiency programs that reduce susceptibility to urban stressors. Decentralized environmental governance empowers communities to participate in watershed protection, urban forestry, and heat mitigation strategies tailored to specific neighborhoods. Coordination with national environmental policies ensures consistency with broader sustainability goals while allowing local laboratories of innovation to test context-specific solutions. Investment in local environmental capacity also strengthens legitimacy for decentralization by delivering tangible improvements to residents. Capacity-building and governance legitimacy underpin the success of decentralization in Tehran. Municipal staff need specialized training in urban economics, participatory planning, GIS analytics, and project management to translate decentralization into effective outcomes. Transparent budgeting, performance reporting, and open data platforms build trust among residents and civil society, increasing the legitimacy of local authorities. (Lefevre, 2010) When communities perceive that local governments are responsive, accountable, and capable, the acceptance of dispersed governance grows, reducing resistance to decentralization and enhancing collaboration across sectors. Building this legitimacy requires sustained political will, adequate resources, and ongoing evaluation of decentralization reforms. Finally, social equity and inclusive development should be central to any decentralization agenda in Tehran. Dispersing growth must explicitly address disparities in access to housing, jobs, education, healthcare, and safe public spaces. Local governance offers a valuable vantage

point to monitor and remediate spatially uneven outcomes, ensuring that the benefits of decentralization reach historically marginalized neighborhoods. Equity-centric policies, targeted investments, and participatory budgeting processes can help align decentralization with social justice goals. Without deliberate attention to equity, decentralization risks reproducing existing divides or creating new forms of unequal urbanity, undermining its legitimacy and effectiveness. (Tab. 1)

Urban density

Urban density acts as a defining context for decentralization efforts in Tehran. High concentrations in central areas intensify demand for housing, services, and mobility, while peripheral zones often struggle with under-provision and lagging investments. Managing density effectively requires policy tools that distribute growth, reduce pressure on core neighborhoods, and ensure livability across the city. When density is addressed through coordinated land-use planning, transportation integration, and affordable housing strategies, local governments can steer development toward more equitable and sustainable patterns rather than allowing unchecked clustering in limited pockets. Urban density shapes where people live, work, and access essential services, influencing the scale and pace of municipal reforms. The spatial distribution of density informs decisions about

Table 1: Explaining the components of the concept of local government in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Local governance	Organizational decentralization	Level of competencies, local budget dependence, procurement capacity	The foundation of power and resource distribution at the local level, determining the speed and depth of administrative autonomy.
	Citizen participation	Attendance at consultative meetings, participation rate, representational diversity	Targeted link between residents and decision-makers to reflect neighborhood experiences and reduce service gaps.
	Inter-institutional coherence	Existence of intermediate committees, maps of task misalignment	Harmonizing policy objectives across scales (city/districts/province/nation) to prevent duplication and rework.
	Local investment	Local tax base, neighborhood development expenditures, budget transparency	Fair distribution of resources and financial capacity for housing, transportation, and neighborhood infrastructure projects.
	Local housing policies	Housing schemes, renewal of worn fabric, land use	Local ability to design and implement housing strategies tailored to neighborhood needs and prevent unwanted displacement.
	Local transportation planning	Access to stations, pedestrian and cycling spaces, prioritization of local fleets	Ability to separate concentration pressures by improving local networks and encouraging public transport use.
	Zoning and land-use configurations	Height restrictions, permissible areas, density incentives	Incentives or disincentives to disperse activities to non-central areas.
	Public-private investment	PPP participation, local investment incentives	Role of local government in attracting investment and directing development projects with density-reduction implications.
	Distribution of space and services	Concentration across neighborhoods, access to services	Reducing spatial inequality and ensuring fair distribution of infrastructure and opportunities.
	Urban sustainability	Resource management, energy, green spaces, risk reduction	Strengthening urban resilience through neighborhood-scale environmentally friendly design.

where to invest in infrastructure, schools, clinics, and parks, as well as where to prioritize public transit and pedestrian-friendly streets. Central districts often bear the burden of high prices and crowding, while outer neighborhoods may suffer from service gaps and slower capital investment. (Deng et al., 2021) A clear understanding of density gradients is therefore foundational for equitable decentralization. Effective density management requires breaking the link between location and privilege, ensuring that housing supply, employment opportunities, and amenities are more evenly spread across districts. This entails tools like density bonuses, zoning flexibility, and strategic redevelopment that channels growth into underserved areas without triggering displacement. Local authorities must balance incentives for investment with protections for residents who are at risk of being priced out. Equitable density strategies also demand transparent resource allocation so that peripheral areas receive complementary improvements in transit, green space, and public services. Transportation intersects strongly with density, creating a feedback loop that can either reinforce centralization or promote dispersion. High-density cores attract more trips and can become congested, while well-distributed density paired with high-quality transit enables shorter, faster commutes across the city. Tehran's decentralization agenda hinges on integrating land-use planning with transportation planning to reduce dependence on central corridors and to improve accessibility district by district. Coordinated parking policies, feeder buses, and walkable neighborhoods can help diffuse traffic pressure and promote balanced growth.

Housing policy is another critical lever in shaping density outcomes. Local housing strategies that focus on mixed-income developments, preservation of affordable units, and resilience in informal settlements can prevent extreme clustering around wealthier cores. By aligning housing production with transit accessibility and school admission patterns, Tehran can create more evenly distributed neighborhoods that still retain identity and character. Safeguards against speculative pricing are essential to ensure that density gains translate into genuine improvements for current residents rather than market-driven displacement. (Da Cruz et al., 2019) Land use policies influence density by determining where higher-intensity development is permitted and how land is assembled for redevelopment. Flexible zoning, adequate buffers, and clear guidelines for mid-rise and high-rise projects can help spread growth without sacrificing neighborhood quality. Local authorities should publish clear criteria for density approvals and monitor outcomes to prevent unintended concentration in merely a few districts. Integrating green infrastructure and public spaces into dense developments enhances livability and resilience in multiple districts. Infrastructure capacity underpins every density strategy. Utilities, drainage, water supply, and waste management must be scaled to meet the needs of denser areas. Without reliable services, higher density can degrade quality of life and undermine public trust in decentralization efforts. Investment planning should prioritize inter-district coordination to ensure peripheral neighborhoods receive essential upgrades in tandem with core areas. Data-driven capacity planning and maintenance schedules are crucial for sustaining dense urban forms over time.

Public space and livability are closely tied to density outcomes. Adequate parks, plazas, and pedestrian zones create nodes of social interaction within dense fabric, improving health, safety, and community cohesion. Tehran can leverage neighborhood-scale public realm improvements to make dense neighborhoods more attractive and resilient. Equitable access to green spaces, regardless of density level, strengthens social inclusion and supports diverse community activities. Social equity considerations must be at the core of density policy. Dense neighborhoods risk concentrating disadvantage if investment is uneven or if displacement pressures are not mitigated. Monitoring service access, education, healthcare, and safety across

density gradients helps identify gaps and guide corrective action. Public participation should be included in density planning to ensure that marginalized groups have a voice in decisions about where and how growth occurs. (Broto, 2017) Governance and data are the backbone of successful density decentralization. Reliable density measurements, up-to-date land-use information, and transparent reporting enable continuous learning and adjustment of policies. Cross-sector coordination, regular dashboards, and clear accountability mechanisms help maintain public confidence in decentralized density management. Tehran's reform agenda can be strengthened by investing in data infrastructures that support scenario analysis and evidence-based decisions. In sum, urban density is not merely a demographic statistic but a dynamic policy arena that shapes the trajectory of decentralization in Tehran. By aligning land use, transportation, housing, and infrastructure with density-aware planning, local authorities can diffuse growth, reduce central pressures, and promote inclusive, sustainable urban development across all districts. (Tab. 2)

Improvement of residents' lives

This third component centers on how decentralization and urban governance translate into tangible improvements in the daily lives of Tehran's residents. It focuses on outcomes such as access to essential services, safety, health, education, and overall well-being. When local authorities prioritize resident well-being, policies can be designed to reduce gaps between districts, enhance service reliability, and foster inclusive participation. The ultimate aim is to align gov-

Table 2: Explaining the components of the concept of urban density in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Urban density	Density distribution management	Population/housing density by district, floor area ratio (FAR), vacancy rates, vacancy turnover	The spatial distribution of people and activity that shapes demand, services, and infrastructure.
	Density drivers	Housing supply, land-value gradients, redevelopment activity, market pressure	Factors that push growth toward or away from central areas and influence where density concentrates.
	Transportation interaction	Transit accessibility, travel-time variability, commute patterns	How density interacts with mobility networks to affect accessibility and centralization pressures.
	Housing mix and affordability	Housing stock by type, price-to-income ratios, rental vacancy, inclusionary housing presence	Determines who can live where and how density affects housing affordability and social composition.
	Land-use policy tools	Zoning flexibility, density bonuses, development restrictions	Instruments to encourage dispersal or concentration and shape the urban form.
	Public space and livability	Green space per capita, sidewalk width, public realm quality	Density outcomes tied to the quality of the environment and residents' well-being.
	Economic activity distribution	Employment location patterns, clustering of services, business opportunities by district	Density interacts with where jobs are located, influencing commuting and neighborhood vitality.
	Infrastructure capacity	Utilities capacity, drainage, water supply reliability, waste management load	Ensuring density growth does not outpace essential services, preserving resilience.
	Social equity considerations	Access to services by density cluster, displacement risk, demographic diversity	Addressing how high density impacts different groups and avoiding exacerbation of inequality.
	Governance and data	Data availability on density, monitoring dashboards, cross-sector coordination	The governance infrastructure needed to track, plan, and adjust density-related policies.

ernance processes with the lived experiences of communities, ensuring that decentralization yields concrete quality-of-life benefits rather than merely reorganizing authority. A key aspect is service delivery efficiency. Local governance should streamline administrative procedures, shorten response times for repairs and public works, and improve maintenance of streets, parks, and public facilities. Efficient, predictable service delivery builds trust and reduces daily inconveniences that disproportionately affect lower-income neighborhoods. Accountability mechanisms such as performance dashboards, citizen feedback channels, and transparent reporting are essential to ensure that improvements reach the intended residents and are sustained over time. Equity in access to services is another central pillar. (Bahl, 2013) decentralization can enable targeted investments in underserved districts, bringing health clinics, schools, childcare centers, and safety programs closer to where people live. Equitable planning also means mitigating spatial disparities in sanitation, water, electricity, and digital connectivity. By embedding equity considerations into budget allocation and project prioritization, local authorities can shorten the distance between policy aims and on-the-ground outcomes for vulnerable groups. Public safety and social cohesion are closely tied to residents' life quality. Local governance can enhance safety through better street lighting, active policing partnerships, community-oriented programs, and inclusive youth services. Programs that promote social cohesion—cultural activities, neighborhood watch schemes, and participatory budgeting for community projects—help build trust among residents and reduce the risk of marginalization or conflict. A sense of belonging and security strengthens the legitimacy of decentralization and encourages civic participation. Health and environmental quality are integral to well-being. Local authorities can support districts by ensuring clean air, safe walking areas, accessible healthcare, and neighborhood-based health campaigns. Environmental health measures, such as reducing heat islands with urban greening and improving wastewater management, contribute to healthier living conditions. Integrating health impact assessments into planning processes helps anticipate and mitigate negative consequences of new developments on resident health.

Education and lifelong learning opportunities form a foundation for improved life outcomes. Decentralized education planning can tailor programs to local needs, expand after-school activities, and ensure equitable access to quality schools across districts. Investing in digital literacy and Vocational/technical training at the neighborhood level supports employment opportunities and economic mobility, aligning educational offerings with local labor market demand. Economic well-being and housing security are critical to life quality. Local governments can foster local employment opportunities through support for small businesses, vocational training, and micro-financing. Housing stability—through affordable units, tenant protections, and efficient land-use regulations—reduces displacement risk and enhances neighborhood stability. Coordinated with transit access, these initiatives improve daily life by decreasing commute burdens and expanding opportunities for residents. Participation and empowerment are the social dimensions of improved life quality. When residents actively engage in decision-making, they gain influence over local priorities and feel a sense of ownership over their environment. (Akaateba et al., 2024) Transparent processes, inclusive outreach, and feedback mechanisms ensure that diverse voices—especially from marginalized groups—are heard and reflected in policy choices. This empowerment reinforces legitimacy and fosters a healthier civic culture. Resilience and adaptability are indispensable in a rapidly changing urban context. Local administrations need capable institutions to respond to emergencies, climate-related risks, and economic

shocks. Building resilient neighborhoods involves diversified service delivery, redundancy in critical infrastructure, and proactive planning for risk mitigation. Decentralization that builds local capacity to anticipate and manage crises contributes to sustained improvements in residents' lives. Finally, the overall narrative of this component centers on turning decentralization into measurable well-being gains. This requires a robust framework for monitoring and evaluation, including clear indicators, data sharing across agencies, and regular public reporting. By tracking improvements in health, safety, education, housing stability, and access to services, Tehran can demonstrate that dispersed governance yields meaningful enhancements in everyday living for its diverse urban population. (Tab. 3)

Local Community

This component focuses on the role, capacity, and influence of neighborhood-level social actors, associations, and networks in Tehran. It examines how local communities organize, collaborate with formal institutions, and participate in the design and delivery of services. The aim is to assess how empowering local communities can improve governance legitimacy, service responsiveness, and spatial equity across

Table 3: Explaining the components of the concept of Improvement of residents' lives in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Improvement of residents' lives	Service delivery efficiency	Response time for repairs, street and park maintenance frequency, public facility uptime	Measuring how quickly and reliably services reach residents, particularly in underserved areas.
	Equity in access to services	Availability of clinics and schools by district, wait times, digital connectivity access	Ensuring fair distribution of essential services across all districts, reducing disparities.
	Public safety and social cohesion	Crime rates by district, street lighting coverage, participation in community programs	Linking perceived safety and social fabric to quality of life and trust in local governance.
	Health and environmental quality	Air quality, walkability scores, access to healthcare facilities, green space per capita	Connecting health outcomes and environmental conditions to neighborhood design and policy choices.
	Education and lifelong learning	School enrollment rates, after-school program availability, digital literacy participation	Aligning educational offerings with local needs and opportunities for skill development.
	Economic well-being and housing security	Local unemployment rates, housing affordability, number of affordable housing units, tenant protections	Measuring economic stability and housing security as core life quality drivers.
	Participation and empowerment	Voter or citizen council participation, frequency of public consultations, diversity of participants	Assessing the degree to which residents influence decisions and feel ownership over outcomes.
	Resilience and adaptability	Emergency response times, disaster drills conducted, diversification of service delivery during shocks	Evaluating how well neighborhoods can withstand and recover from crises, preserving life quality.
	Monitoring and accountability	Availability of performance dashboards, transparency of reporting, cross-agency data sharing	Ensuring ongoing oversight and public visibility of progress toward well-being goals.
	Data-driven decision-making	Data quality, availability of neighborhood-level indicators, usage of dashboards in planning	Embedding evidence-based approaches in policy design and implementation.

Tehran's districts. Strong local communities can enhance safety, trust, and social cohesion, while weak or fragmented communities may hinder participatory governance and equitable access to resources. Strengthening neighborhood networks through formal and informal groups, shop owners, youth clubs, and cultural organizations can mobilize local resources, facilitate co-production of services, and support resilience amid rapid urban change. Key components and their links to urban complexity: Social capacity refers to the ability of neighborhood groups to organize, coordinate, and activate resources for local initiatives. Social networks and trust capture the fabric of relationships, mutual aid, and trust that enable effective collaboration with authorities and among residents. Participatory governance encompasses mechanisms for resident input, representation in local decision-making, and inclusion in budget processes. (Hartanto et al., 2021) Access to local services and spaces covers the availability and quality of community centers, libraries, clinics, cultural venues, and pedestrian-friendly public spaces within districts. Resilience and adaptability describe the capacity of local communities to respond to shocks (economic, climate, health) and to adapt to changing urban conditions. Inclusion and equity address how diverse groups—women, youth, migrants, low-income residents—are represented and served within neighborhood initiatives.

Proposed indicators (illustrative, adaptable to Tehran's data environment) include the number of active neighborhood associations and their formal roles in district planning processes, participation rates in neighborhood councils or participatory budgeting events by district, and measures of trust and social cohesion at the neighborhood level, including the density of mutual-aid activities. Also relevant are access to local social infrastructure count and proximity of community centers, libraries, clinics, and cultural facilities per district and the presence and use

Table 4: Explaining the components of the concept of Local community in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Local community	Social capacity	Number of active neighborhood associations; participation rate in local decision-making	Capacity of neighborhoods to organize and mobilize resources for local initiatives.
	Social trust and networks	Trust levels among residents; density of mutual-aid networks; informal support activities	Social fabric enabling collaboration with authorities and resilience in crises.
	Participatory governance	Participation in neighborhood councils; involvement in budget processes	Degree of resident influence on local decisions and budgeting transparency.
	Access to local services and spaces	Availability and proximity of community centers, libraries, clinics, cultural venues	Local access to social infrastructure that supports quality of life.
	Social cohesion and safety	Community events; crime safety perceptions; community policing initiatives	The sense of belonging and safety within districts.
	Resilience and adaptability	Neighborhood risk-reduction plans; drills; mutual-aid networks	Capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover from shocks.
	Civic engagement channels	Use of digital platforms for community input; feedback channels; public forums	Mechanisms for resident voice and timely institutional responsiveness.
	Inclusion and equity	Representation of diverse groups in activities; targeted outreach	Ensuring diverse residents are engaged and served equitably.
	Data and learning	Availability of neighborhood data; dashboards; documentation of lessons learned	Using local data to inform decisions and continuous improvement.

of neighborhood-based digital and offline mutual-aid networks. Responsiveness to residents' local requests can be tracked by the average time to address issues raised through municipal channels. Additional indicators cover safety and social cohesion through community events, crime safety perceptions, and community policing initiatives; inclusion through representation of diverse groups in local committees and activities; resilience via neighborhood risk-reduction plans, drills, and mutual-aid networks; and data and learning through the availability of dashboards, locally produced policy notes, and repositories of lessons learned. (Tab. 4)

Local Government Departments and Decentralization & Sustainable Development

This component focuses on the roles, capacities, and interrelationships of city-level and district-level government departments that deliver public services. It examines governance structures, institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms across departments, and the alignment of departmental actions with neighborhood needs in Tehran's decentralization context. The aim is to assess how well line agencies (for example planning, housing, health, transportation, and environmental services) implement policies at the local level, coordinate with communities, and maintain accountability to residents. Administrative capacity encompasses staffing, workload, and performance management within departments. Interdepartmental coordination refers to procedures for cross-cutting projects, information sharing, and joint service delivery. Service delivery alignment measures how well department actions reflect neighborhood needs and priorities. Accountability and transparency involve reporting, dashboards, and public access to performance information. Resource allocation and financial stewardship cover budgeting processes, capital investments, and expenditure transparency. (Thomas, 2012) Stakeholder engagement includes formal channels for resident input and collaboration with local associations and businesses. Proposed indicators (illustrative, adaptable to Tehran's data environment) include the number of formal interdepartmental coordination mechanisms and joint service programs per district; the timeliness of permits and approvals by department; the availability and usefulness of department dashboards and public reports at the district level; stakeholder satisfaction with cross-department service delivery; budget transparency, including consistency between approved budgets and actual expenditures at the district level; staff capacity indicators such as vacancies, workload metrics, and training completion rates; responsiveness to local requests measured by average response time from relevant department channels; and compliance with accessibility and inclusivity standards in services. (Tab. 5)

Another component examines the decentralization process as a pathway toward sustainable urban development in Tehran. It assesses the distribution of authority, resources, and decision-making power to sub municipal levels while promoting long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability. The focus is on how decentralization supports climate resilience, equitable access to resources, and participatory planning that integrates sustainability goals into neighborhood-level governance. Authority diffusion concerns the transfer of powers to districts and neighborhoods, and the legal-institutional framework enabling local autonomy. Spatial equity and efficiency look at how decentralization reduces disparities and improves service delivery efficiency. Sustainability integration evaluates the alignment of local policies with environmental protection, climate adaptation, and sustainable mobility. Participatory planning and budgeting involve residents in setting sustainability priorities and funding green initiatives. Monitoring and accountability for sustainability outcomes require indicators, data systems, and transparency. Proposed indicators (illustrative, adaptable to Tehran's data environment) include the degree of power and budgetary authority devolved to

district levels; the number and share of district plans that explicitly include sustainability goals; local implementation of climate adaptation measures; access to sustainable mobility options within districts; equity indicators for sustainability benefits; public participation in sustainability-focused budgeting and planning; data infrastructure for sustainability such as neighborhood-level environmental dashboards and dashboards across agencies; and compliance with sustainability standards in public works. (Tab. 6)

Table 5: Explaining the components of the concept of Local Government Departments in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Local Government Departments	Interdepartmental coordination	Number of formal coordination mechanisms; joint programs by district	How effectively departments collaborate to deliver integrated services.
	Administrative capacity	Staffing levels; workload; training completion rates	Capacity of departments to implement policies and sustain service delivery.
	Service delivery alignment	District-level alignment scores; time-to-respond to service requests	Extent to which departmental actions reflect neighborhood needs.
	Accountability and transparency	Availability of dashboards; public reporting quality; audit findings	Public visibility into performance and governance processes.
	Resource allocation and finance	Budget transparency; variance between approved vs. actual expenditures	Financial stewardship and alignment with district priorities.
	Public engagement	Participation in public consultations; feedback mechanisms; inclusion of diverse groups	Extent of resident influence on departmental decisions.
	Compliance and accessibility	Accessibility audits; language accessibility; physical accessibility of services	Ensuring equitable access and inclusion in service delivery.

Table 6: Explaining the components of the concept of Decentralization & Sustainable Development in the issue of urban decongestion with regard to the role of local government in the city of Tehran

Concept	Component	Indicators involved in the concept	Explanations
Decentralization & Sustainable Development	Degree of decentralization authority	Devolution of policy and budgetary authority to districts; number of autonomous functions	Tracks the extent to which local levels can govern and finance local programs.
	Sustainable planning integration	District plans with explicit sustainability goals; cross-sector alignment	Ensures local planning embeds environmental, social, and economic sustainability.
	Climate adaptation and resilience	Local adaptation measures; green infrastructure implementation; emergency planning	Local capacity to reduce climate risk and increase resilience at the neighborhood level.
	Sustainable mobility and urban form	Access to cycling/walking infrastructure; transit connectivity; land-use efficiency	Measures how decentralization supports low-carbon, accessible urban mobility.
	Equity in sustainability benefits	Distribution of green spaces; air quality improvements by district; access to resources	Ensures that sustainability outcomes benefit all residents fairly.
	Public participation in sustainability	Involvement in budgeting and planning for sustainability; representation of diverse groups	Encourages democratic engagement in sustainability decisions.
	Data and monitoring	Availability of neighborhood environmental dashboards; data sharing across agencies	Supports evidence-based decisions and accountability for sustainability outcomes.
	Compliance and standards	Public works compliance with sustainability standards; materials and energy efficiency	Ensures that implementation aligns with environmental and resilience goals.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION

Decentralization in Tehran, viewed through the lens of local government, reveals a nuanced path toward more responsive and equitable urban governance that hinges on six interconnected components.

- First, the Local Community dimension highlights how empowered neighborhood networks, social trust, and inclusive participation can constrict or expand the levers of influence available to distant, centralized authorities. When residents organize effectively, they provide tacit governance intelligence that helps align public services with actual on-the-ground needs, creating a feedback loop that legitimizes local decision-making and reduces the gap between policy and practice.
- Second, the Local Government Departments dimension underscores that coordination across departments is not a mere administrative nicety but a foundational prerequisite for reliable public service delivery. Strong interdepartmental coordination mechanisms enable joint programs that cut across silos, ensuring that planning, housing, health, transportation, and environmental services move in concert rather than at cross purposes. This, in turn, reduces redundancy, accelerates project timelines, and improves the coherence of municipal action in a sprawling metropolis where differing departmental priorities can otherwise fragment service delivery.
- Third, administrative capacity within these departments determines whether decentralization translates into tangible benefits. Adequate staffing, manageable workloads, and robust training programs are essential to sustain the pace of service delivery at the district level. Without robust capacity, even well-intentioned decentralization risks devolving into fragmented responses, inconsistent quality, and delayed approvals that frustrate residents and undermine faith in local governance.
- Fourth, the dimension of service delivery alignment acts as a barometer for the effectiveness of decentralization. When department actions reflect neighborhood needs and priorities, residents experience faster, more relevant services, and improved problem-solving at the local scale. Conversely, misalignment can erode legitimacy, signaling that formal authority has shifted without entailing real accountability or improved outcomes for the public it is meant to serve.
- Fifth, accountability and transparency emerge as critical hinges in Tehran's decentralization journey. Open dashboards, public reporting, and accessible performance information not only deter malfeasance but also facilitate citizen oversight and constructive critique. When residents can see how funds are spent and how outcomes are measured, governance becomes more participatory and trustworthy, thereby strengthening the social contract between residents and the city government.
- Sixth, resource allocation and financial stewardship translate political promises into concrete material conditions. Transparent budgeting, clear linkages between approved plans and actual expenditures, and disciplined capital investment practices ensure that decentralization delivers durable improvements rather than transient reforms. Financial clarity supports district-level planning that is coherent with broader metropolitan goals, fostering a more equitable distribution of resources across Tehran's diverse districts.
- Seventh, stakeholder engagement functions as an essential bridge between residents and the machinery of government. Formal channels for input, coupled with active collaboration with local associations and businesses, ensure that diverse voices inform policy design and service delivery. This inclusivity reduces the risk of elite capture and promotes policies that reflect the multiplicity of needs

across different communities within Tehran's urban mosaic.

- Eighth, the decentralization process must be evaluated not only by its authority diffusion but by its sustainability footprint. Integrating climate resilience, sustainable mobility, and equitable access to resources reinforces the city's long-term viability. A decentralization that advances environmental goals while distributing social and economic benefits more evenly among districts supports a resilient urban fabric capable of withstanding shocks.
- Ninth, the concept of spatial equity within decentralization emphasizes that proximity to decision-makers should coincide with accessible, quality services. By empowering district-level agencies and ensuring they have the authority and tools to tailor solutions, Tehran can reduce disparities in service levels, infrastructure quality, and environmental benefits between affluent and underserved districts, contributing to a more cohesive metropolitan identity.
- Tenth, the overall narrative of Tehran's municipal decentralization, seen through these six components, is one of potential balanced by implementation challenges. When Local Communities are strong, Departments are well-coordinated and capacitated, and decentralization is guided by sustainable planning and transparent governance, the city can realize more responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking urban governance. The success of this approach depends on deliberate design—ensuring that empowerment is accompanied by accountability, capacity-building, and continuous learning across all six dimensions—and on sustained political will to align micro-level outcomes with macro-level metropolitan objectives.

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