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A Detailed Study of Research Role and Utilization in the Urban Management Case study: Tehran Urban Management System

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Abstract

Statement of the problem: One of the major challenges in the field of urban research is the lack of trust between policymakers and researchers. As a result of this challenge, while preventing researchers from the key decision-making and policy-making processes, inadequate resources are being allocated to the research sector. The main policymakers and manager's argument is that the work of the researchers is far from the realities of the implementation and practice. By creating a vicious cycle, this issue has led to the weakened and underdeveloped infrastructure and research capacities in faculties, and the theoretical and practical weaknesses of the applied research in various areas of urban management studies. The current study aims to analyze and study strategies for promoting the use of research in decisions made by Tehran urban management system.

Purpose: This study aims at investigating and analyzing the current process of defining, implementing and leadership of urban research projects in the urban management system of the country. The main approach for this purpose is evidence-based policy-making which provide some solutions for improvement.

Method: The research method in this study is "case study" and its type is "single instrumental case study". Having analyzed a wide range of research studies on the field of research utilization, this paper develops an analytical framework based on the "supply and demand" model. Then, using this analytical framework, the mechanism for defining, implementing, leading and extracting the results of research projects at the Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center is analyzed and eventually, it has become evident that the current mechanism needs specific strengthening interventions for demand sectors.

Conclusion: This paper provides two main results. Firstly, an analytical framework for investigating and analyzing research organizations mechanism in the public sector. Secondly, a proposal to establish a structure entitled "Office for the Empowerment of Urban Management Research" in the current mechanism for managing applied research in Tehran Urban Management System. The specific mission of this structure is developing "policy capacity" and "institutional capacity".

Keywords: Research, Researchers and policy-makers, Evidence-based policy-making, Supply and demand, Urban management.

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Introduction and statement of the problem

Over the past decades in Iran, the rapid urbanization trend has led to the emergence of numerous metropolitan areas, which required specific organizations and specialized agencies for planning and directing the city affairs. The research and urban planning centers are considered as one of these organizations, which at first were founded initially to focus on public urban management issues at the national level. After a while, the same center was founded specially for the capital city of Tehran, with the aim of using scientific methods and international experiences in planning and directing the city. This center has been working for Tehran management system for 5 decades. Along with the formation of the Islamic councils of the city and village in 1999 and the passage of over 4 periods of the formation of such councils, a new requirement is felt in the metropolises of the country. This can be observed in the attempts made by these councils to establish affiliated sectors or research centers. The main purpose of this research centers was conducting applied research and studies to support decision-making and policy-making processes of city council members. Since the city council members do not necessarily have essential expertise in all the sciences needed to administer the city (they are just trusted citizens due to the structure of the election in the country), they need supporting mechanisms. In the meanwhile, what has been tangible is the lack of theoretical and applied studies on the quality and key processes of such research centers which are expected to have at least two main capacity. Firstly, the capacity for conducting common urban planning research. Secondly, ability to carry out research and applied studies in a short time on proposed bills to inform city council members. There is another simultaneous old challenge: distrust of executive managers and policy-makers to the urban planners and researchers community. Having claimed that the results of the studies and the programs of the researchers are not operational, managers do not even involve them in key decision-making and

policy-making processes. Allocation of a shoestring budget to the specialized study and urban planning centers by managers and policy-makers also reveals another aspect of such distrust. Furthermore, insufficient budget leads to a series of consequences: the underdeveloped infrastructure of research centers, unsupported urban planning faculties, weakened urban management and affiliated sciences in the country, as well as the lack of equipped urban planning and research centers in the private sector. This, in turn, leads to the weakening of the research and research organizations and deepens the distrust and distance between the research community and policy-makers and urban manager's community, i.e. a defective cycle summarized in Fig. 1.

This study reviews experiences and literature concerning research utilization in different academic disciplines. Then carries out analysis and pathology of current processes for leading urban planning and management research centers, focusing on a case study of Tehran. Finally, it provides corrective solutions for enhancing and empowering current research management mechanisms via supporting the demand side of research utilization.

Method

The present study uses a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research designs are sets of procedures for collecting, analyzing, and reporting text and image data to answer research questions by exploring participants' views (Clark & Creswell, 2015: 286). Different research designs are used in the qualitative approach employed considering their differences in the purpose and the procedure of different research. Although there are many qualitative research designs in textbooks, five research design are frequently reported in the literature.

Table 1 compares five qualitative research designs often used by researchers in terms of central concept, intent, and key procedures.

The research design was selected as a "case study", regarding the fact that the main purpose of this study is to provide lessons for increasing the effectiveness

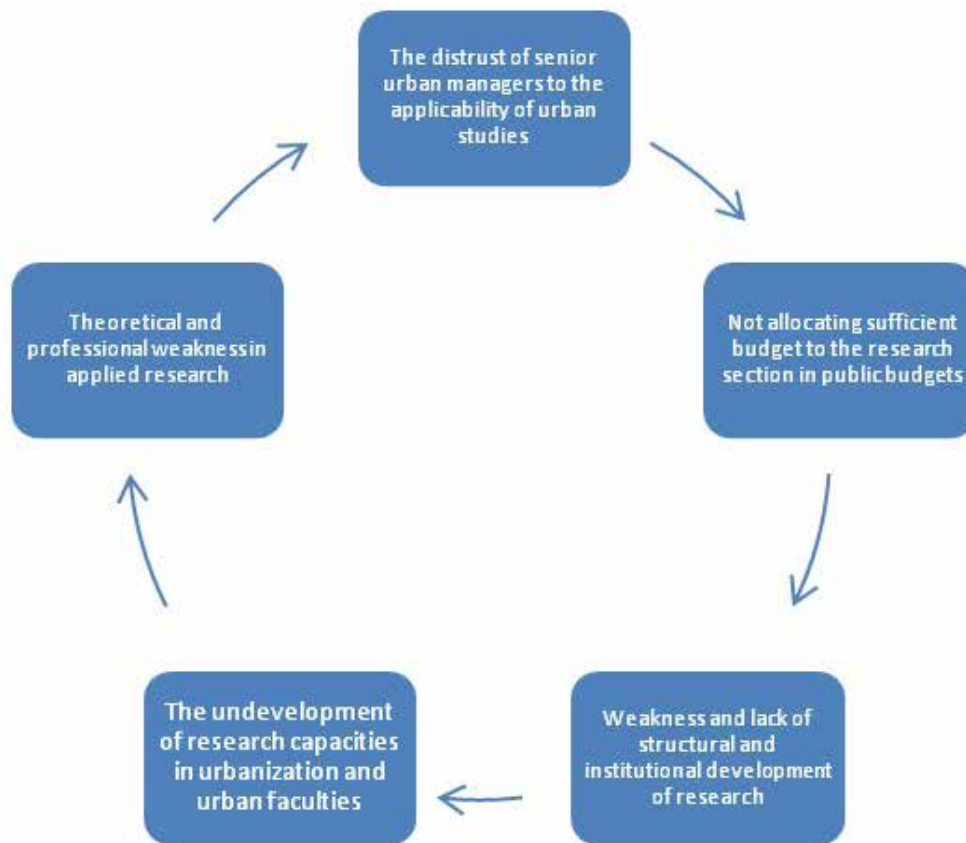


Fig. 1. The defective cycle of research utilization results in the urban management system. Source: authors, 2018.

Table 1. Overview of the Central Phenomenon, Intent, and Key Procedures for five common Qualitative Research Designs. Source: Clark & Creswell, 2015: 289.

Design name	Central Phenomenon	Intent	Key procedure
Basic qualitative research method	A topic	To explore multiple perspectives	Collecting qualitative data, analyzing the data to develop themes, and discussing general conclusions about the themes
Case Study	A system of people a case (bounded by) space and time	To describe and interpret what is happening	Collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data for description, themes, and lessons learned
Ethnography	The language, behaviors, and beliefs (i.e., the culture) of a group of people	To describe cultural patterns	Collecting data primarily through observations and analyzing the data to describe cultural patterns in the everyday language, behaviors, and attitudes of the group
Grounded Theory	A process, action, or interaction	To generate a theory	Collecting data, identifying and relating categories in the data, developing a figure that depicts the theory, and stating predictions that follow from the theory
Narrative Study	The experiences of one or more individuals	To describe the meaning of experiences through stories	Collecting data as field texts in the individual's own words, analyzing the data to organize the story, and retelling the story and identifying the context and themes of the story

of urban research in the urban management system of the country, because “a system consisting of individuals” and to understand and interpret what is happening in this system is investigated in the present research.

Also, Table 2 presents a variety of case studies used in research projects. Each of these cases varies depending on the type of information processing, subject analysis and how they are treated. Addressing current processes in urban studies and research in the area of a city (Tehran Research and Planning Center in this study) will be the basis for analyzing the present article and the method of this study.

The type of case study in this study is “single instrumental case study” considering the purpose of the analysis. In this method, the researcher focuses on a controversial issue or problem and then selects a single or limited case to illustrate this controversial issue.

Research literature

● Research utilization and “evidence-based policy”

The term “research utilization” emerged in the 1970s, in response to the attention of researchers to investigate the effects of academic research on the policy-making process in the public sector. For those early scholars, research—not policy—was the primary point of interest. Fundamental questions focused on the “impact” of policy research, the “steps that social scientists can take to improve the probability that their work will be utilized by policymakers”, and how social scientists can “become more responsive to social needs” (Newman & Head, 2015: 384).

Attention to the research utilization re-emerged and expanded in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In this period, the main focus was on policy, and both the academic community and decision-makers in the public sector focused on “how can governments, through utilizing information and evidence, conduct stronger and less defective policies?”. A better policy analysis seeks the main purpose of increasing

their success by improving the amount and type of information that is utilized in decision-making related to public sector policymaking. This discourse is now recognized as the evidence-based policy-making (Ibid: 384). Researchers often employ the terms “evidence” and “research” interchangeably, defining them as empirical findings derived from scientific methods (Tseng, 2012: 6). The reason lies beyond the “quality” of evidence-based research. This is because due to the process of documenting methods, professional judgment and external supervision, designing and implementing the research, makes the results of the research to have characteristics such as solidity, validity and relative independence due to enjoying a systematic nature (Breckon & Roberts, 2016: 8). In the present study, the word evidence implies the term “evidence taken from research”.

Supply and demand model

Evidence-based policy-making has led to the expansion of decision-makers access to evidence and their required analysis in recent decades (Head, 2015: 281). This has made the utilization of evidence taken from research in policy-making processes as one of the focal points in the discourse of development approaches. The result of such an orientation can be observed in the increasing emphasis on international development organizations and financial providers of research projects on establishing a link between research evidence and policy-makers (Newman, Capillo, Famurewa, Nath & Siyanbola, 2013: 2). Establishing an “International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications” or INASP is among the practical steps to advance the idea. INASP is an international development organization that by creating a global network aims at access improvement, production and use of knowledge and information taken from scientific research to equip countries for addressing the challenges they face in the development path.

This organization held a three-day scientific conference in 2012 with 50 delegates from 18 developing countries in Nigeria. The purpose of

Table 2. Types of case studies as a qualitative research design type. Source: Creswell, 2015.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Type of Case Study</i>	<i>Features</i>
1	Single instrumental case study	The researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue.
2	Collective case study	One issue or concern is selected, but the enquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue. The researcher might select for study several programs from several research sites or multiple programs within a single site.
3	Intrinsic case study	The focus is on the case itself because the case presents an unusual or unique situation (e.g. evaluating a program, or studying a student having difficulty).

the Conference was to go beyond anecdote and assumptions and to focus on the actual evidence on evidence-informed policymaking (Newman, et al., 2013: 1). During the conference, researchers discussed various aspects of conducting applied research from different stakeholders' perspective. These stakeholders are 1. researchers who were experienced in the evidence-based policy-making process, and 2. decision-makers and policymakers. Then, based on the available theories, the scientific content and operational experience presented at this three-day conference, the organizer published an analytical report entitled "What is the evidence on evidence-informed policymaking?; Lessons from the International Conference on Evidence-Informed Policy Making" in 2013. In this report, based on one of the analytical approaches, this idea was presented in the policy-making entitled "supply and demand", in the form of a conceptual model depicted in Fig. 2, to investigate and analyze the issues in this area.

This model presents the "supply" of information extracted from the research to policy-makers and its effective components, as well as the "demand" of decision-makers and policymakers, and what has an effect on it. The number and content of factors affecting the "demand" side, reflects the main idea behind this model. As seen, only one dimension affects the "supply" of research and research evidence, while the research "demand" comprises two dimensions, followed by dependent components. The demand in this model includes

the "motivation" and "capacity" of decision-makers and policy-makers and the supply affected by the communication between researchers with policy-makers and research with decision-makers and policymakers.

Investigating the results of other researchers' studies reflects the complementary components of the supply-demand model of evidence-based policy-making. For this reason, a complete set of recent researches in this area have been studied and investigated. The result as dimensions and components of both concepts of supply and demand is reflected in Table 3.

Promoting policy capacity through facilitative intervention

In regard to the promotion of individual and organizational capacities, the researchers refer to an approach called "facilitative intervention", representing a specific type of purposeful education. The facilitative intervention aims at creating a space to facilitate the receiving and using research, and in fact, using the development of professional capabilities strengthens skills and expertise for the use of research and utilization of evidence-based methods. While focusing on individual skills and motivation for accessing, interpreting, and utilizing research results, this approach affects the organizational and structural conditions that provide support for the research utilization or on the contrary, impedes the use of research results (Fisher & Pujar, 2011: 18). This approach is a type of operational

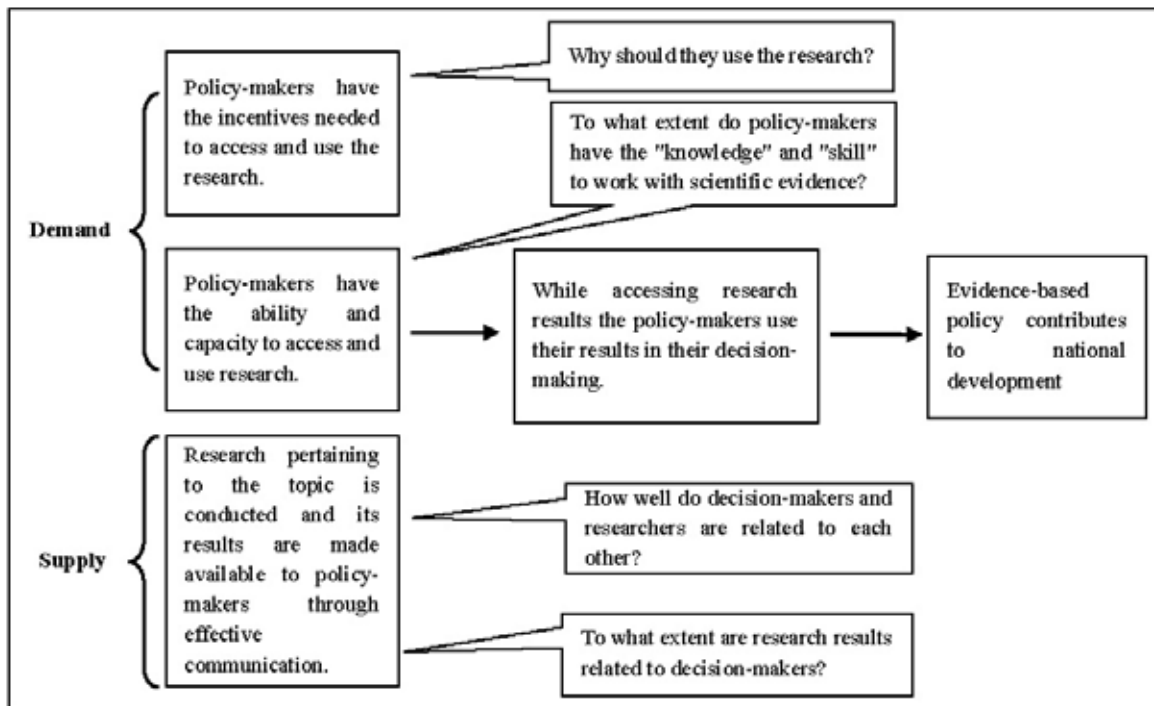


Fig. 2. Supply and demand model. Source: authors based on Newman, et al., 2013: 2.

assistance to individuals and groups to change their behavior. In the policy-making space, this approach means “developing the capacity to understand the research results and utilize its results for policy-makers and decision-makers,” even though they were not interested in doing so before. Capacity-building programs implemented through working groups or training courses, lead to the tangible provoke of demand for research by changing behavior in an organization (Ibid).

Although researchers recognize that these courses can provide information to individuals, their ability to use this information depends on the broader organizational, social, and political atmosphere, which is often in flux. One way to address this is to develop tailored training courses. These courses should be tailored to the audience separately and designed and implemented according to the needs of policy-makers and managers of specific organizations (Baker, Brownson, Dreisinger, McIntosh & Karamelic-Muratovic, 2009: 347). In fact, the management of these training programs should be conducted by professionals who, considering the

political environment of each organization, are able to identify what programs should be designed for capacity building in each organization and how it should be implemented (please refer to Weyrauch, Echt & Suliman, 2016: 38-40). This is the point that distinguishes these training programs from traditional organizational training in organizations. Formal research process in Tehran urban management system

In a comparative study of the current model of urban management system in the Tehran, with the models presented in the literature of the local governments, researchers identified it as the model of the city council-mayor (as the city manager) (please refer to Akhondi, Barakpour, Asadi, Basirat, Taherkhani & Habib, 2008: 152). This model can be generalized to all Iranian cities because the national law for managing municipalities do not differentiate between cities and local communities. For the first time, based on the Note of Article 19 of 2008 Tehran municipal budget, city council tried to prevent scattered urban research in different municipal department and agencies. The result was “Tehran Municipality

Table 3. Dimensions and components pertaining to the two concepts of supply and demand. Source: authors, taken from Newman, Cherney & Head, et al., 2017: 4 ; Hawkes, et al., 2016: 168 ; Newman, et al., 2013: 3-7; Newman, et al., 2012: 19-20 & DFID, 2010: 3

Concept	Dimension	Component
Demand	Motivation for accessing and utilizing the research results by decision-makers and policy-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission to manipulate the political process using the results of the managers of relevant organizations • Making sure of the importance of using evidence-based research by the head of the relevant organization • Existence of personal and professional purposes and interest to the managers of operating organizations with the research subject • Receiving the costs for participating in the research process • Policy Capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <i>Individual capacities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having knowledge on the nature of the research and how it can be used • Searching skills, evaluating information derived from the research • Critical thinking skills to understand, criticize and combine information • The existence of a positive approach to the utilization of evidence-based research (especially among experienced decision-makers of the organization) ◦ <i>Organizational capacities</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure capacity: the number of computers and available Internet bandwidth • Political capacity: a clear demand from public sector organizations (to overcome disinterest and opposition), the organizational culture accepting the challenge and critical thinking, the presence of organizational processes accepting scientific evidence (e.g. planning processes and strategy development, policy evaluation, and especially budgeting, the presence of an accountability system (to make sure that decisions are made using the extracted evidence). • Institutional Capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalization of receiving and utilizing evidence in decision-making and policy-making processes (e.g. the presence of procedures or rules and regulations that makes managers and policy-makers to use evidence-based research in the decision-making processes).
	Capacity to access and use research results by decision-makers and policy-makers (having evidence-literacy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presence of effective communication among researchers - decision-makers and policy-makers - key groups that are affected by the decision results. These communications fall into two groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person communications • Virtual communication
Supply	Effective communication among researchers, policy-makers, and stakeholders: Communications and networks (communication among individuals and groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of strategic thinking and scheduling to communicate for research and information • Participation of decision-makers and policy-makers in the early stages of research project planning • Research and extracted knowledge - by researchers and intermediary organizations – properly generated, packed and transferred.
	Effective communication among research, with decision-makers and policy-makers(the relationship between research, individuals, and groups)	

Research Regulation” which passed and came into action in 2009. Tehran Municipality Research Regulation built a framework for the centralized leadership of urban research activities, leading by Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center. Then

based on the Tehran Municipality Research Budget Regulation, passing annually in Note 20 of the municipal budget by Tehran City Council, there have been specified specialized 11 research committees (each cooperating with the corresponding specialized

Deputy in the Tehran municipality), led by the Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center (Tehran Municipality, 2009: 6). Since then, this framework has been the only formal mechanism for defining and implementing urban research projects in Tehran municipality.

The above center is considered as one of the oldest research centers in the urban management area in Iran, the history of which dates back to the approval of the "Supervision on the Development of Tehran" in August, 1973 and the formation of the Supervisory Council for the Development of Tehran as "the decision-making organization and determining the general policy for the development of Tehran" (Secretariat for the Supervisory Council for the Development of Tehran, 2: 1984). The council was formed by the prime minister and associated ministers and members of the economic council of the country, with the subject of capital development. Simultaneous with the legal existence of this council, the relevant secretariat was also established as one of the Deputies of urban and housing construction management in the Planning and Budget Organization and then under the supervision of the Tehran Municipality (Secretariat of the Supervisory Council for the Tehran Development, 5: 1978). To date, the Office for the Studies and Planning of the Council of the Secretariat has continued to operate independently in the next years, as the Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center.

Supply or demand?

By referring to a wide range of recent research resources, determining the factors affecting each level of the supply and demand model yields the concept that evidence-based policy-making is more dependent on the quantitative and qualitative enhancement of the "demand" than on the evidence-based approach.

To date, few studies have been conducted in the country on research-based policy-making, though recent Iranian studies indicate the significance of "demand" sector in this area. For instance, in the

study of extracting factors affecting policy research in the country, "users of research" and "demand side" was components with the highest frequency (Gholipour & Hamidzadeh, 2014: 799). In addition, Table 3 which was derived from the development and expansion of the INASP Supply and Demand Model, while providing a conceptual framework for analyzing evidence-based policy-making in related organizations and processes, suggests that research by researchers in this field focuses on the demand dimension.

Interviews, documents, and executive instructions, the definition process, implementing and transferring research results in Tehran municipality were extracted using the observation tool shown in Fig. 3. The investigation and analysis of this process indicate that the accumulated experience of the past half-century in the research organization in Tehran's municipality has been manifested a mechanism that focuses on the "supply" of scientific evidence. However, solving the fundamental issues associated with the research supply sector is directly related to the research demand sector (Porter & Hewitt, 2015: 404) and cannot be independently analyzed.

A large part of the organizational resources in the current process is allocated to designing sub-processes, selecting project executives, monitoring, obtaining results and submitting it to the research applicant organization in Tehran Urban Management System. The presence of an interconnected network of all stakeholders and relevant processes led to the acceptable coverage of the components related to the supply of research. Major stakeholders are researchers, research applicant organization and Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center (as the leader and supervisor of the whole system). The key processes are planning and supervising procedures and in-person meetings of supervision committee on research projects. However, processes pertaining to the "demand" sector are limited to refining and selecting research titles received from research applicant sectors in the relevant research committee and the Tehran Municipality Research Policy

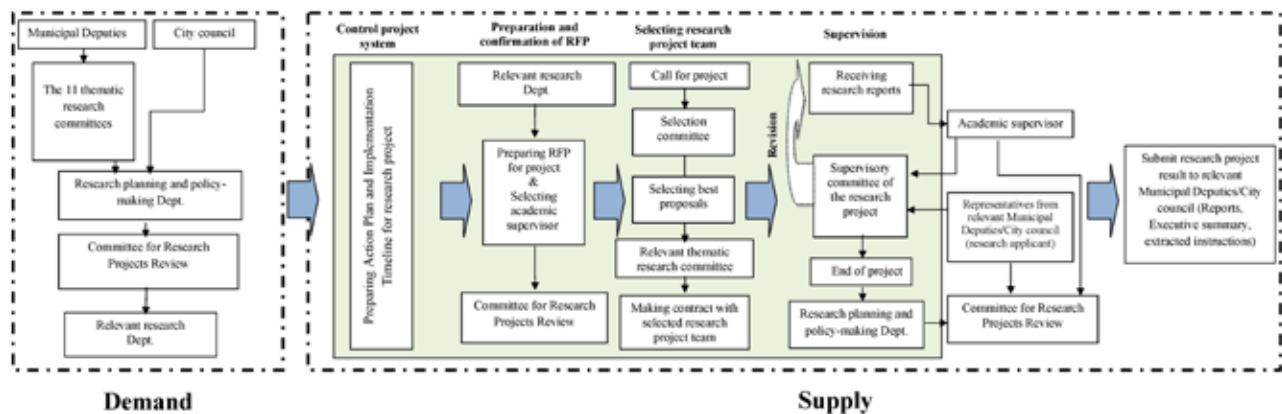


Fig. 3. The process for research project conduction at the Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center. Source: authors, 2018.

Council, and no specific mechanism is observed for the effective management of the demand sector. Investigation of global experiences reflects the fact that the weakness in developing demand-sector processes for the research is a global phenomenon. Researchers have now realized that the theoretical literature in the field of research utilization to date have focused on “supply” improvement models and, by understanding this issue, and believe that the current need is to provide solutions to improve the demand sector (Shaxson, 2010: 13). This issue can be observed in the process of research projects conduction in the Tehran municipality.

Recently, the shift of the focus to the demand sector in the area of using scientific evidence in the decision making and policy making system has led to the development of a new concept called “Policy Capacity”. Policy capacity refers to the ability of the government (and the public sector) to receive and process research evidence for use in the policy-making process or evidence-based policy-making (Newman, Cherney & Head, 2017: 4). Policy capacity is affected by factors at the individual and organizational levels that lay the groundwork for receiving and using a certain type of research evidence to those active in the policy-making area (Ibid: 4-5). Using the concept of knowledge intermediaries has been emphasized in recent years,

in the field of decision making and policy-making on capacity building for use in research evidence.

Through case approvals in certain cases, the Tehran City Council obligated the Tehran Municipality to conduct research, however, there is no comprehensive approval to mandate a permanent mechanism for research and study in decision making. For instance, the approval of “Tehran Municipality’s mandate to conduct complementary studies and feasibility studies for the installation of Platform Screen Door (PSD) at subway stations” by which, Tehran municipality is obligated to conduct research on the use of PSD technology at subway stations. This is while comprehensive laws have been recently passed to establish a legal requirement for research in decision making and policy-making issues in developed countries. For instance, the Michigan state in an Act in 2012 limited the assigned liquidity to state agencies in the health, social services and education sectors to programs that are “based on research and relevant scientific knowledge” (Michigan Legislature, House Bill, 2012: 163). In fact, only those programs, the effectiveness of which can be proved by evidence will be fitted for assigning liquidity (Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative, 2015: 4).

According to what has been discussed, it is of high necessity to revise the existing processes of conducting

research projects in the Tehran municipality with proper strengthening interventions. This can be achieved by a professional unit for designing and implementing tailored training programs for current managers and policy-makers of Tehran’s urban management system.

Moreover, the significance of the concept of “facilitative intervention” was mentioned in the theoretical literature sector as a kind of purposeful education that is effective on individual and organizational capacities. This is while, investigations on the current processes of defining, implementing and serving the research results in the Tehran municipality (Fig. 3) suggests a lack of unit (or a certain process) to play an educational role. A unit which, in addition to building capacity and empowering the demand sector among municipal managers or policy-makers in the city council, provides an institutional and structural basis for research result utilization in decision making. This is the point, emphasizing the revision of the existing processes in defining and implementing the research projects of the Tehran municipality and dedicating a professional unit for designing and implementing training courses tailored to the needs of current managers and policy-makers of Tehran urban management.

Conclusion

The separation of the two communities of urban science researchers, and managers or policy-makers has led senior executive managers to both ignore the results of research in their decisions and allocation of sufficient budget to the research sector. This issue itself in a vicious circle has caused the underdevelopment of research infrastructures (e.g. powerful research centers and sufficient and skilled researchers) and as a result, lack of effective research in solving real problems in the urban management system of the country. Evidence-based policy-making is a response to this challenge and an approach to bridge the two separated communities. This approach attempts to enhance the effectiveness

of decision-makers and policy-makers by supporting the decisions of public sector policy-makers and managers through scientific research results. In this research, focusing on the supply and demand model in evidence-based policymaking, the INASP conference model was considered as the main framework, and through the recent research results of various theorists, this model was developed to provide a basis for analyzing the research system in the urban management of the capital. Tehran Urban Planning & Research Center is a formal organization for defining and leading research projects in Tehran municipality. Using the developed model of supply and demand, The internal processes of this center was analyzed and investigated. According to the findings, despite the existence of suitable processes

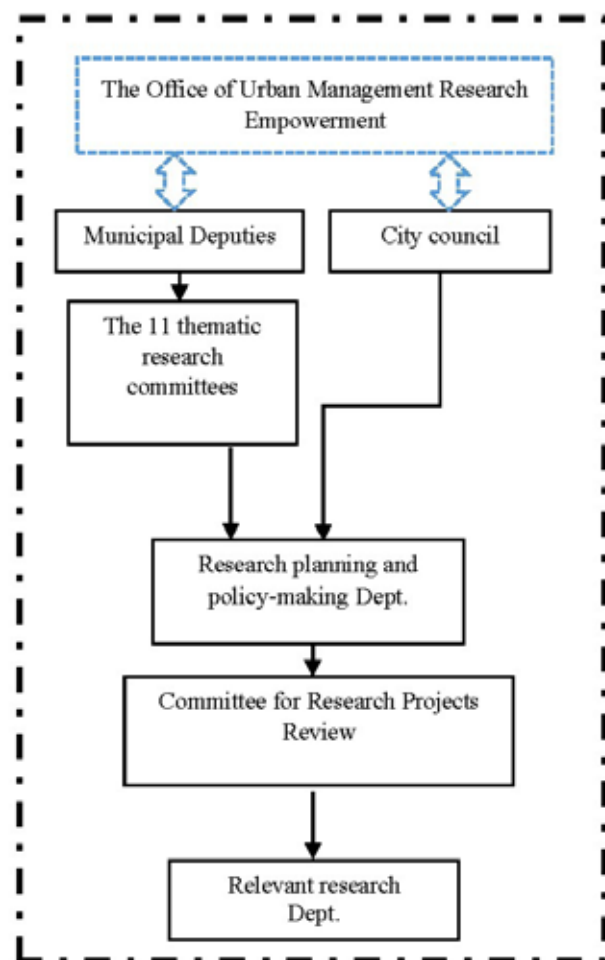


Fig. 4. Revision and development of the demand sector in the mechanism for defining, implementing and leading research projects in the Tehran municipality. Source: authors, 2018.

and procedures for research supply, the demand side requires empowering interventions. As shown in this study, the solution to modify the demand sector can be summarized in strengthening policy capacity and institutional capacity. Considering the interagency role played and the division of labor structure in the current system of definition, implementation and leadership of research projects, the establishment of an organizational unit entitled “The Office of Urban Management Research Empowerment” (Fig. 4) is recommended to strengthen the demand sector.

- Using the findings of the present study, the main missions of this unit can be summarized as follows: Need assessment, designing and implementing special course and workshop programs for two specific groups. First, City council members. Second, Tehran municipality senior managers. These programs should be properly tailored to the needs of each audience group and should develop policy capacity for Tehran urban management system
 - Designing and monitoring standard procedures and guidelines in regard to the obligatory expert reports. These expert reports provide technical and scientific justifications for two objectives. Firstly, the Tehran municipal senior managers’ major decisions. Secondly, proposals submitted to the Tehran City Council for decision making in the form of Acts, aiming at developing institutional capacity
- What matters in here is the existence of a dynamic and mutual relationship between this unit and the body of senior management in the municipality and members of the city council for the maximum research utilization in the urban management system.

Endnote

1. Policy and politics are translated as politics in some scientific circles of the country and instead of using “policy-making”, the term “policy” is used. However, considering the semantic contradictions and serious ambiguities in the scientific literature in this area, where sometimes these terms are interchangeably used it is better to translate politics as “Siasat”, policy as “Khate-mash”, and policy-making as “Khate-mash gozari” in Persian language (see, Smith & Larimer, 2013: 37, for more details).

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