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## Original Research Article

# Exploring the Theoretical Perspective of “Urbanization” Concept in Iran Based on the CLA Method\*

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** Over the last decades, “urbanization” has always been identified as one of the key driving forces of socio-spatial transformations across the world. However, various interpretations of mutations about this concept are not seriously discussed in accordance with its contextual and temporal characteristics. Literary equivalents such as city growth, urban becoming, city building, civilization, and urbanism have been used to cover its complex concepts in Iran. It is obvious that equivalence in any literature is a conventional and formal issue, however, it is worthwhile to separate the formal issues of words from their conceptual issues. Currently “urbanization” is rapidly evolving and becoming more dynamic.

**Research objective:** This research tries to use the method of causal layer analysis (CLA) in four layers: (1) level of obvious and accepted, (2) level of macro-related causes, (3) level of discourse/worldview, and (4) level of metaphor/myth. In addition to identifying possible interpretations based on existing discourses and metaphors, this study seeks to provide various theoretical perspectives on the concept of “urbanization” in Iran.

**Research method:** The causal layered analysis (CLA) method is based on in-depth-semi-structured interviews and has been used to identify the main themes of the analysis layers at the level of elites and experts in the field of urban studies.

**Conclusion:** The research findings indicate that the concept of “urbanization” in Iran has four levels of analysis. The first level, as the rate of urban growth, arises from an objective and empirical reality. The second level is consistent with the concept of processes of urban becoming. The third level is based on the concept of “urbanization” as a collective action with the focus on opening the horizon in the politic of space. At the fourth level, as a differential subjective matter, it is associated with the metaphor of liberation.

**Keywords:** *Urbanization, Urban Theory, Spatial Phenomenon, CLA.*

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## Introduction and problem statement

The concept of “urbanization”<sup>1</sup> is being constantly transformed, and new interpretations of urbanization are evolving. This concept has always been considered as one of the key drivers of socio-spatial transformation in recent centuries. However, various perceptions of the path of its content changes in accordance with its contextual and temporal characteristics have not been seriously analyzed and discussed. The concept of “urbanization” is sometimes degraded as the rate of urban population growth (equivalent to the classical concept of urbanization rate), and sometimes the term has evolved in the theoretical frameworks beyond discourses and worldviews and metanarratives such as modernization, industrialization, globalization, and neoliberalism. It is possible to identify subtle differences and perspectives among various concepts of “urbanization”, but they all point to the same thing: the general and universal form of emerging socio-spatial processes that have different cognitive and analytical levels. In fact, depending on the condition of the discourse and the context in which the word is used, it may range from very simple modes such as a particular type of settlement and arrangement patterns to the supporting and the transforming processes. The first interpretation mostly considers products and quantities that indicates a transition from one state to another. In the second interpretation, a set of dynamics, actions, and processes is considered that occurs from the inherited to the new state through the transformation of processes. Thus, “urbanization” has become an evolving concept in the recent context. There are still various and even contradictory perceptions about this concept. Of course, this does not seem to be a new event and has been raised by thinkers in the field of urban studies since the 1960s. The nature of choosing dynamic-static logic over the concept of “urbanization” is still debatable. So that in recent decades, this issue has been emphasized more strongly by experts in the field of urban studies.

From the late 1960s and early 1970s, “urbanization” was raised as an urban issue in Iran. Especially after the land reform period, there were discussions about the nature of urban transformation (Mojtahedi, 1970; Adibi,

1974; Ashraf, 1974; Etesam, 1975). Equivalences such as urbanism (Sahebzamani, 1968), urban becoming (Winer, 1972), civilization (Keynes, 1972), city-dwelling (Shokouei, 1973), and urban development have also been used to cover the corresponding concepts in Persian writing. Later, the quantitative studies of the Planning and Budget Organization on the changes in the population of the cities<sup>2</sup> (Planning & Budget Organization, 1984) somehow led to the relative acceptance of the city-dwelling for two decades. However, in the following decades, some writings preferred to use the equivalent of urban becoming (Sarraf, 2000; Mohammadzadeh Titkanlu, 2001; Harvey, 2008). In fact, equating the concept of “urbanization” still faces challenges. Because the concept of “urbanization” is constantly changing and turning into more complex concepts in the form of various descriptions and discourses. In this way, “urbanization” will not be more enclosed. On the other hand, in Iran, only one word has been used for the concept of SHAHR<sup>3</sup>, but in the world, the process of turning TOWN into CITY, URBAN and various phenomena are discussed. Although the Ministry of the Interior has defined various degrees of the city, they often do not have specific theoretical support. This has added to the ambiguity and confusion surrounding the equivalence of “urbanization”. Fig. 1 presents the problem emphasized by the research with respect to its causes and consequences so that the central problem of the present study has been traced in the presence of various interpretations and readings of “urbanization” in different discourses and levels of analysis. The reason for this is in two cases (1) various assumptions about the nature of “urbanization” in the approaches of urban theory and (2) reduction of all concepts related to TOWN, CITY, and URBAN in Persian writing to the city. Continuation of this trend has led to the emergence and intensification of consequences such as inheriting the classic concept of quantitative urbanization rate (city-dwelling), neglecting the procedural concepts and qualitative changes, and confusion in equivalences such as

urban becoming, civilization, urbanism, and urban development (Fig. 1).

Today, the analysis and explanation of the “urbanization” concept is not a subject that can be reduced to the boundaries of a specific territory, nor can it be addressed from the point of view of thinkers in a specific geographical area. For this reason, the present study has used the international literature on the theoretical foundations and concept of “urbanization” and tries to provide a framework for explaining the various related concepts. This research generally includes four main sections. First, the present study, based on an open and layered approach, seeks to examine the question: What meanings and perceptions of “urbanization” can be traced in the current context of Iran in comparison with worldviews? Furthermore, this research, using a poststructuralist approach and especially causal layered analysis, provides the opportunity to analyze “urbanization” as a problem outside the inherited and conventional frameworks, in a layered way. Then a systematic interpretation of the descriptions, discourses, and concepts related to each layer of urbanization should be presented. Finally the theoretical framework resulting from the explored

concepts around “urbanization” in Iran should be explained.

### Literature review

In Iran, research on “urbanization” has often been consistent with the focus on analyzing the correlations between population change and urbanization rates. The study entitled “Population and urbanization in Iran” (Zanjani, 1991), in which by examining the available statistics, the urban population of the country in the years 1956 to 1976 in terms of age, sex, and type of occupation has been shown. Another study entitled “Population distribution and density in new towns” (Rismanchian, 1993), has studied the case of two new towns by emphasizing the importance of urban population changes over time in line with urbanization rates. In another study entitled “Demographic movements and the pattern of urban hierarchy” (Alizadeh Ahi, 1993), has emphasized the study of the role of activity and employment patterns in changing the demographic patterns of regions. A study entitled “Internal migration and urban management issues with an emphasis on Iran” (Sarraf, 2002) has proved the continuity of rural-urban migration in macro, meso,

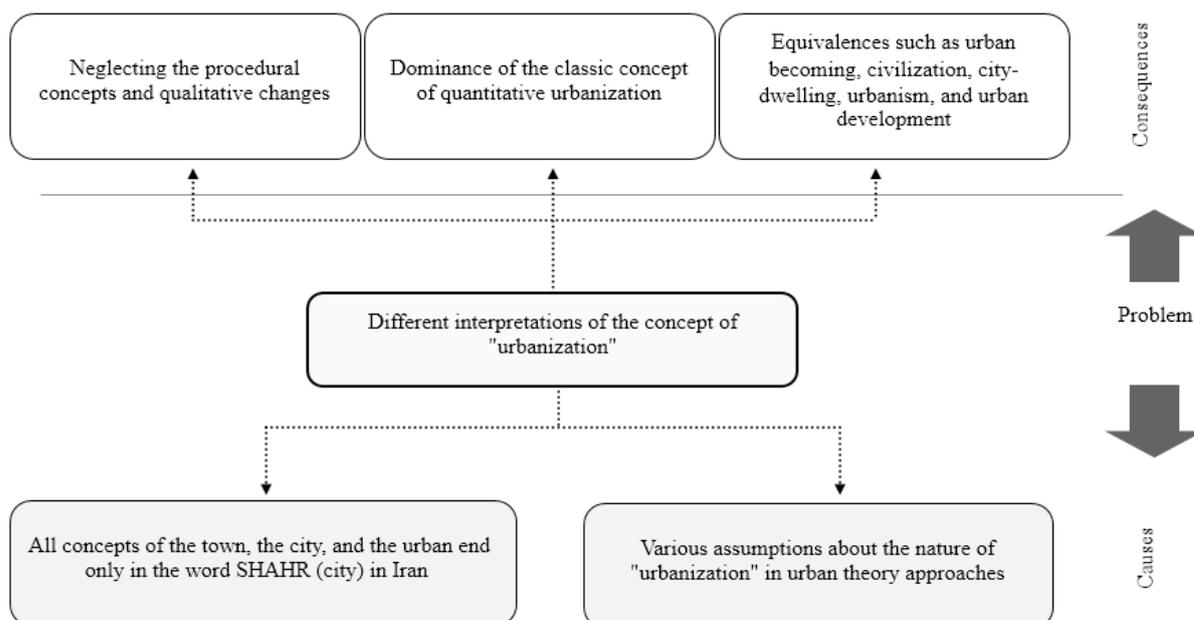


Fig. 1. Analysis of the research problem. Source: authors.

and micro dimensions, and has emphasized that urban management should choose the new management approaches. It will enable the inclusive participation of local communities and civic institutions and will empower immigrants and integrate them with the city and urban culture. In another study entitled “Urban development and its consequences” (Poorafkari, Kalantari & Nagdi, 2002), the issue of urbanization in Iran is examined and points to the dominance of the mono-centric pattern and prime urban model. Another study entitled “Analysis of urbanization and the status of new towns in Iran” (Ebrahimzadeh & Negahban, 2004), has addressed the role of population growth in the development of urbanization. The other study, entitled “Investigating the interaction between population growth and urbanization in Iran” (Iranmahbob & Mirfardi, 2005), has investigated the interaction between population and urbanization growth. Another study entitled “Government and urbanization in Iran” (Rahnamaei, 2009), referred to the key role of government in the development of cities in recent decades and considers urbanization as a result of the government’s will to expand its influence in society.

Researchers in the study entitled “Processes and Patterns of Urbanization in Iran” (Darvishzadeh, Poorahmad, Mansourian & Seifolddini, 2014) concluded that the process of urbanization and urban growth in Iran, like many parts of the world, includes two main phases of centralization and decentralization. Until the early 1980s, the urbanization process has taken a step in the direction of centralism and the resulting model has been the prime urban system. Through the weakening of the centralist forces from the early 1980s under the influence of the costs of congestion in the country’s top cities, the urbanization process enters the phase of decentralization in Iran. However, this decentralization often occurs in the form of centralized distribution and the resulting spatial pattern is the formation of metropolitan regions such as Tehran. The study entitled “Evolution and reliability of the city and its meaning” (Habibi, 2015), has studied the

evolution of the concept of the city in time periods and has explained how it evolved in the present period. Emphasizing that in all human and urban civilizations, the historical knowledge of terrestrial biology in harmony with the surrounding nature, technical knowledge, and technology of the time, is always full of innovation. The tradition of making and producing space and place is a reflection of the three fold culture (biological knowledge), technical knowledge of the time, and nature. Another study entitled “Analysis of the spatial planning and urban development pattern in Iran” by Bardi Anamoradnezhad, (2016) has tried to consider the concept of urbanization rate and its relationship with spatial planning. In a study entitled “Spatial Pattern and Related Factors Affecting the Contemporary Growing Urbanism in Iran” (Mirabadi, Besharatifar & Karimi, 2018), the spatial pattern of urbanization between 1996- 2012 has been examined and industrial development has been introduced as a driver of urban development. In another case entitled “Urbanization” (Yarmohamadian, 2020) has introduced a few definitions of the concept of urbanization or city-building in the form of an encyclopedia. Table 1 shows the key concepts of “urbanization”.

Based on a brief review of the extant literature, it is obvious that the concept of “urbanization” has undergone a dramatic change in semantics over recent decades. Most studies on “urbanization” have had an empirical and objectivist reading of the phenomenon, emphasizing its demographic and geographical evolution. The present study believes that “urbanization” can no longer be explored at just one level of analysis. It is necessary to introduce deeper layers of this word to understand it more deeply and to explore it gradually. This indicates the clear difference between the open and layered approach of this research and previous studies.

## Theoretical foundations

### • The classical concept of “urbanization” in the field of urban theory

The field of planning theory is like an empty signifier (empty glass) whose content can be filled with

Table 1. Investigation of key concepts in the literature review. Source: authors.

Researcher	Year	Concept
Zanjani	1991	Reading "Urbanization" based on the urban population of the country in the years 1956 to 1976
Rismanchian	1993	Emphasis on the importance of urban population developments in line with "urbanization" developments
Alizadeh Ahi	1993	Changing the patterns of "urbanization" in the country taken from the patterns of activity and employment
Sarrafi	2002	The need to orient urban management to the new ways of administer
Poorafkari et al	2002	Dominance of the monocentric and prime urban model in the perception of "urbanization" of Iran
Ebrahimzadeh & Negahban	2004	The importance of population growth in the development of "urbanization" of the country
Iranmahbob & Mirfardi	2005	Interaction between population growth and the expansion of "urbanization"
Rahnemaei	2009	The government as a major role in the expansion of "urbanization" in Iran
Darvishzadeh et al	2014	The emergence of "urbanization" and urban growth in Iran from the main global trends
Habibi	2015	The need to rethink the concept of the city due to the challenging new relevant concepts
Bardi Anamoradnezhad	2016	"Urbanization" derived from the country's spatial planning at various scales
Mirabadi et al	2018	Reduction of the country's spatial balance due to the depletion of villages and the expansion of urbanization
Yarmohamadian	2020	Urbanization means increasing the population living in the cities and the process of transferring the rural population to the city

a series of words and concepts. In fact, a number of theorists have filled the empty glass with milk, wine, oil, blood, water, sand, and so on (Gunder & Hillier, 2009, 4). Every discussion of "urbanization" emphasizes assumptions about these two issues: What are cities? , and what is the nature of "urbanization"? (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Similarly, the various approaches of urban theory (from the Chicago School to Los Angeles, from the postcolonial to the planetary approach) offer specific and different definitions of the concept of "urbanization" based on their own ontology, epistemology, and methodology. An examination of the historical origins of the concept of "urbanization" shows that the inherited genealogy in its current analysis as a quantitative rate of urbanization is rooted in twentieth-century analysis. American sociologist Kingsley Davis, based on the teachings of the Chicago School of Urban Ecology, gave the classical definition of urbanization as the expansion of a city-based population relative to the total population of the country. Thus, Davis used population thresholds of 20,000 to 100,000 to identify settlement types. He also introduced the formula  $U = P_c / P_t$  to understand his experiences. ( $U$  = Urbanization Rate,  $P_c$  = City Population, and  $P_t$  = Total Country Population). Although most maps of the world's urbanization trend

are visually different, they are methodologically based on "Kingsley Davis" data analysis (Davis, 1955). The most obvious example of this belief is the statement of the United Nations' Housing Program based on the "urban era", which has historically crossed the major urban threshold since the early 2000s due to the increase in the world's urban population (United Nations, 2007). In general, "urbanization" is considered a new process that is related to a new way of spatial settlement pattern and its characteristics are different from the past. The concepts and interpretations of "urbanization", apart from different contexts (with different theoretical interpretations), have tried to show and explain a phenomenon that is basically a model of spatial expansion that has occurred in the particular condition. This spatial expansion was initially a structure of quantity, number, and size along with a type of arrangement and establishment and has gradually caused the creation and transformation of behaviors, patterns, and norms. Although quantitative analysis of "urbanization" have gradually faded, qualitative analysis of this concept have gained strength.

#### • Evolution of the concept of "urbanization"

In one particularly vivid formulation, Lefebvre likens the superimposed dimensions of social space to the intricate, asymmetrical layers within a mille-feuille

pastry \_ a powdery French dessert that means, literally, “a thousand leaves” or “a thousand layers” (Lefebvre, 1990, 88). Therefore, any kind of reductionism about the concept of a thousand layers of socio-spatial relations in a single form, with its inherited geographical priorities, is not acceptable. In fact, “urbanization” cannot be reduced to the mere physical extension of the cities. Because “urbanization” is a process, and the city is a location and one and not the only outcome of this process. Thus, “urbanization” as a set of key processes cannot be reduced to cities (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014). What is also taking place: the non-city<sup>4</sup> and the anti-city<sup>5</sup> would conquer the city, penetrate it, break it apart, and in so doing transform it (Lefebvre, 2003, 113). On the one hand, the major contemporary discourses on global urbanism are strikingly city-centric, because they regard the city as the defining endpoint and causal engine of urbanization (Cairns, 2019, 119). Today, with the emergence of concepts such as “the death of distances”, “the end of geography”, and “the weightless economy”, thinking about the concept of the city is facing serious challenges at various scales (Rodriguez-Pose, 2008). Concepts such as “core and periphery”, “interior and exterior” and “heartland and hinterland” have also gradually changed. It can be argued that the inherited conceptualization of twentieth-century urban theories of the city is ineffective for the urban<sup>6</sup> in the present century. In fact, its ontological, epistemological, and methodological tools are changing in the present century.

#### • Emergence of new concepts of “urbanization”

Most of the conceptual frameworks for “urbanization” so far are based on two key components, one is the geographical distribution of the population and the other is the spatial arena as spatial phenomena in the forms of agglomerations and settlements. In recent decades, spatial analysis of urban expansion has posed challenges in how to determine the spatial boundary of the core city in relation to its peripheral areas. Continuous explosion and metamorphism of scales have been challenging issues in the diverse typology of spatial phenomena of nominal nature from polycentric urban region to city-centric, metropolitan region, and mega-

region. These are relatively new spatial patterns that are temporarily stabilized by the successive crystallizations of “urbanization” processes (Roy, 2009). Under the condition, in which such city-centric conceptions appear to have attained an unprecedented influence in global public discourse, the inherited configurations of the urban fabric are being transformed in ways that are seriously problematizing the inherited definitional equation of urbanization with city growth. So that spatial phenomena are emerging on the larger scale and in more complex types of residential, functional, and ecological landscapes that are not limited to specific geography, bordered and not just residential (Schmid, et al. 2017). The current issue, then, is how to decipher the processes of “urbanization” that form and transform the emerging patterns and uneven geographies of landscapes and conditions at different scales. The planetary approach to urban theory, by eliminating the inherited hypotheses about morphologies, territorialities, and socio-spatial dynamics around urban conditions, attempts to explore the concept of “urbanization” in both concentrated and extended moments (Brenner, 2019, 387). While the concentrated moment of “urbanization” refers to the agglomeration of population and investments in spatial crystals with a habitat nature (city, metropolis, metropolitan area), the extended moment of “urbanization” refers to processes of socio-spatial transformation outside residential areas (wilderness, pastures, communication networks, and mines). The urban theory has so far focused more on the concentrated moment of “urbanization” in the form of various spatial phenomena with a nominal nature, accordingly, it is time to focus on transformative socio-spatial processes and logistic geographies resulting from extended “urbanization” with a constitutive nature. According to the discussions, Table 2 presents the characteristics and components of “urbanization” in both classical and new interpretations.

A brief review of the theoretical foundations of the concept of “urbanization” suggests that the current urban condition has changed dramatically. Accordingly, the processes of urban restructuring have been going faster and new urban spaces are crystallizing along

with new forms of “urbanization”. Similarly, various interpretations of the concept of “urbanization” can be traced, the analytical layers of each of which have been based in some way on specific objects, mentalities, discourses, and worldviews. Because any reading of the concept of “urbanization” is temporarily established and gradually evolves; so that today “urbanization” has been transformed into a multidimensional concept. Each dimension can be described and explored in some way. In fact, before any analysis of the concept of “urbanization”, it is worthwhile to introduce and explain the mental-cognitive model in order to introduce each of the dimensions and semantic components. However, it seems very difficult to perceive this concept with only one discourse and one layer of cognition and analysis.

### Research method

Given the question, objective, and theoretical foundations discussed in the research, an attempt is made to consider a dynamic logic for interpreting the concept of “urbanization”. Because this study does not seek to reduce or eliminate any of the theoretical approaches discussed in “urbanization”; rather it seeks to maintain and promote key factors in the emergence and evolution of the concept of “urbanization” through the use of a more coherent and dynamic intellectual apparatus. In poststructuralist logic, there is an approach of thought and research in which phenomena are explored from objective, superficial, general, and quantitative dimensions to mental, deep, qualitative, and specific discourse dimensions. The application of this logic in the present study can bring together all the distinct or even contradictory factors and dimensions traced in the concept of “urbanization” and explore the dynamics of these developments. This kind of view causes the concept of “urbanization” to go beyond the conventional framework of the problem description and to be analyzed in deeper layers. As proposed in the theoretical foundations, “Urbanization” is a multidimensional phenomenon. Depending on the level of emphasis, different epistemologies are possible. It is necessary to introduce semantic levels to deal with these phenomena. Depending on the discourse and the

intended context, there are different debates about “urbanization” that are inevitable.

This research has been conducted by the causal layer analysis (CLA) method in the framework of the poststructuralist approach to urban theory. The research method was qualitative and the research approach was exploratory. As a theory, the method of causal layer analysis seeks to integrate empiricist, interpretive, critical, and action learning modes of knowing (Inayatullah & Milojevich, 2016). The causal layer analysis is conceived in four realms or main layers. The litany layer is the most superficial layer and represents the formal and accepted view of reality. At this level, quantitative trends and problems are often exaggerated. The second level of the system-related layer includes social, economic, cultural, political, and historical factors. At this level, litany-level data is explained and questioned. The third deeper level relates to the structures and discourse/worldview that underpinned it. At this level, the foundations of the litany surface are critiqued and questioned. The fourth level is a metaphor/myth analysis. This level consists of deep stories and narratives, subconscious dimensions of the problem (Inayatullah, 2004, 4-12). The statistical population of this study includes elites and experts in the field of urban studies in Iran presented in Table 3.

In-depth/semi-structured interviews were also conducted to access theoretical data and codes. The theoretical sampling method was based on the snowball method.<sup>7</sup> The causal layer analysis (CLA) has been used through in-depth/semi-structured interviews up to the stage of theoretical saturation and identification of the main themes of the layers. In fact, theoretical saturation has been the determining criterion for sample size. In this study, the data of mental analysis of the interviewees were provided using in-depth/semi-structured interviews. After performing the pre-coding steps (data collection and implementation), the data were analyzed and in the next step, initial coding<sup>8</sup>, focused coding<sup>9</sup>, and theoretical coding<sup>10</sup> were performed. Fig. 2 shows this process.

Table 2. The two classic and novel concepts of “urbanization”. Source: authors.

Components / Concept	Based on the city	Based on the urban
The nature of definition	Quantitative view based on the population threshold (for example, 5,000 people) with nominal nature	A completely qualitative view based on logistic processes with a constitutive nature
Unit of analysis	Restricted to the bounded spatial crystals (residential type)	Processes of continuous, multi-scalar and diverse socio-spatial transformations
Territorial organization	Residential areas in contradiction to the others (village, nature, countryside, wilderness)	Residential areas in interaction with constantly evolving functional/ ecological landscapes
Urban theories	Chicago school of urban ecology (Mosaic View)	Planetary approach to urban theory (network view)
Spatial patterns	Concentrated urbanization	Concentrated and extended urbanization

### Research findings and discussion

Four levels of analysis on the concept of “urbanization” are examined in this study. Based on the evolution of the concept of “urbanization” which is mentioned in the theoretical foundations, and based on the method of causal layer analysis (CLA), which is based on a survey of experts and experts in the field of urban studies. So that after collection of the interviews, the initial coding has been done for each of them. Then the key concepts in focused coding were explored and finally, the theoretical codes of each category in relation to this topic are introduced and gradually discussed. Out of 300 primary propositions, 90 initial codes have been extracted, and 4 macro-categories (layers) have been traced. An example of the process of obtaining concepts from the explored data is provided in Table 4.

The four traced layers of the concept of “urbanization” based on the causal layer analysis (CLA) are presented as follows.

-The first layer (obvious and accepted reality):

In the first layer, in relation to objective issues, the classical concept of urbanization rate is introduced and accompanied. The rate of urbanization is limited to a number of spatial crystals as objective reality that is becoming a definite threshold (the population threshold of the city in Iran is 5,000 people) through which the prefix of the city is added to them. Also, the size of geographical settlements called the city has gradually expanded and the population living in them is increasing compared to the population living outside of the city (such as villages). The pre-given assumption of defining the city in this layer is as a residential type of territory with a defined and demarcated boundary in contrast to

the countryside. At this level of analysis, urbanization manifests itself in some way in contrast to ruralization. The concept of “urbanization” is emphasized only in the concentrated category. Statements were made in the first decade of the 21st century that referred to the life of more than half of the world’s population in cities. The same trend was observed in Iran in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Of course, addressing why such a change has taken place and what factors have contributed to it, requires a second level of analysis.

- The second layer (system-related causes):

The second layer traces a range of consequences and factors regarding the emergence, transformation, and evolution of the concept of “urbanization” in recent decades. Patterns, laws, behaviors, norms, and social beliefs are emphasized as key influential elements in the emergence of objective realities of urbanization and the development of the concept of “urbanization”. At this level, the equivalent of city-dwelling has gradually faded, and urban becoming is often discussed. The tracing of different types of the objective reality of urbanization rates is emphasized by examining system-related causes such as cultural (promoting a kind of spatial demand for urban becoming in the Iranian villages), economic-political (government as a major role in defining the population threshold of the city, the city in Iran born bureaucratically, urban becoming as an agenda and a major government project, government-centered urban development projects, placing 80% of the country’s banking resources in the housing sector, housing sector interest rates 2. 7 times as much as other sectors), technological (removal of environmental constraints, transfer of strategic industries from the coast

Table 3. Introduction of the statistical population of the research. Source: authors.

Field of specialization	Urban planning & design	Sociology	Political economy	Demography
Number	6	4	3	2

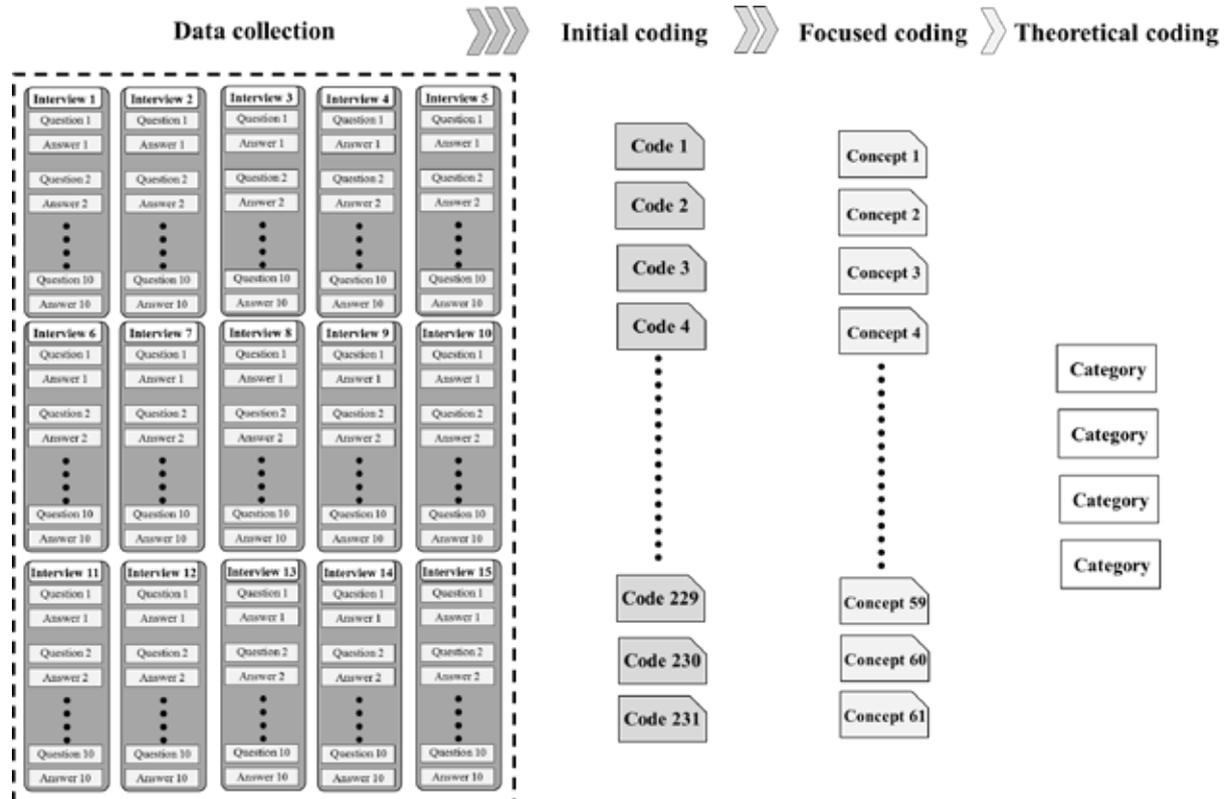


Fig. 2. Coding stages of interviews. Source: authors.

Table 4. An example of tracking concepts. Source: authors.

Source	Sample quote (initial statement)	Initial code	Descriptive code	Basic concepts	Layer tracking
P2	Over the past two decades, governments have removed political and environmental barriers to urban development and created the necessary (not sufficient) capacity for urbanization.	T17	Facilitating the expansion of cities	Leading role of the state	The second layer

to the center of the country, diverse communication networks), and ecological (destruction of wilderness spaces, water transfer projects in support of the vicious cycle of urbanization in the center of the country, the creation of an artificial lake in Tehran) in relation to strengthening and weakening related processes. This level of analysis emphasizes the importance of

the concept of “urbanization” as a set of convergent/divergent processes that are in tension with each other. - Third layer (structures and discourse / worldview): The intellectual foundations of the concept of “urbanization” are traced, and interpreted in the light of the discourses of modernization (the society that has been modernized and it’s spatial rights are greater

than before), industrialization (regional modes of production changed in new eras), globalization (the emergence of global economic networks for the global movement of capital), and neoliberalism (the promotion of identical spatial strategies across the countries). All these metanarratives are complexly presented together. It is very difficult to separate them. In addition, “urbanization” is conceptually inherent in all four of these concepts with degrees of intensity/weakness. “Urbanization” in this layer is not exactly equivalent to any word. Because any translation of this word reduces the particular level of its discourse meaning. In fact, the different problematic of epistemology and philosophy of space-time is also considered in this layer. The transformation of the objective reality into a system of structures in the expression of a particular discourse can also be examined. The degree of subjectivity and the process of transforming objects into subjects are somehow emphasized in this layer.

-The fourth layer (metaphor/myth):

The fourth layer emphasizes the tracing of unconscious structures and narratives that have been problematized in the collective subconscious. In this layer, the meanings of the first level of the concept of “urbanization” as the rate of urbanization have changed completely. There is a kind of dynamism and change in macro relations and even in the pattern of production and consumption in space. The following metaphors are presented in this layer. “Urbanization” spreads as a symbol of liberation or mediation. Moreover, society has not been able to experience true “urbanization”. Accordingly, an alternative “urbanization” should be proposed to revive the atmosphere of hope in everyday life. In this layer, socio-spatial transformations become important with an emphasis on simultaneous evolution.

Thus, the levels explored in [Table 5](#) are presented along with the key components of each level, based on the causal layer analysis (CLA) taken from the perspective of experts in this field.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussions, it can be argued that according to the new approaches to urban theory, “urbanization”

can no longer be reduced to the physical growth of urban phenomena, but a set of processes and fields of global/national/regional/local forces that they cause socio-spatial transformations on a variety of scales. The present study explores the transformed theoretical perspective resulting from the concept of “urbanization” in Iran in order to achieve a dynamic and coherent approach. The method of causal layer analysis to deepen the understanding of the complex levels of “urbanization” introduced and examined a range of the most objective and general interpretations to the relationship of this concept with discourses and metaphors. In this way, the current causes, contradictions, and consistencies in the mental narratives of experts were presented and analyzed in relation to the theoretical foundations of the research. As it turned out, the concept of “urbanization” in Iran cannot be analyzed merely at a general level, because in terms of space/time, various perspectives on its origin, transformations, and evolution are discussed. It is worthwhile to assess the views of domestic experts with what is happening in the global context of “urbanization”.

In the first level, which represents the inherited and accepted view of “urbanization” in Iran, its ontology is discussed as a phenomenon of urban-dwelling rate resulting from an objective and empirical reality. The epistemology of “urbanization” in this level was naturally derived from the city which the urban describes merely as an adjective. The static logic used at this level is consistent with the global view of classical genealogy about the rate of city-dwelling. Perhaps the only difference is in determining the population threshold for the city in different countries (from 2, 000 to 20,000). This level is further analyzed by objective components such as population percentages, city-dwelling rates, and spatial crystals. For example, the statement that the world is today urbanized and more than 50% of its inhabitants live in cities; or that 70% of Iran’s population is now urbanized; Represents this level of cognition and analysis. According to the new interpretations, this level is consistent with the concentrated moment of the concept of “urbanization”. At the second level, systemic macro-causes were traced.

Table 5. Four layers of the concept of “urbanization” based on the causal layer analysis (CLA). Source: authors.

Layers	Characteristics of the concept of “urbanization”
The litany layer- obvious and accepted reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reducing the concept of “urbanization” to the rate of urbanization (as opposed to ruralization) in Iran Now 70 percent of the population are urbanized</li> <li>- Emphasis on objective reality in the predominant form of quantities and percentages (concentrated urbanization) in Iran</li> <li>- Changing properties of spatial codes centered on spatial crystals (village, city, metropolis, and metropolis)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- without emphasizing their evolutionary process</li> <li>- The city prevails, and the urban is merely an adjective</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
The layer of system-related causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top-down, government-centered political will (removal of political-administrative barriers)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manipulation and regulation of space through state spatial strategies</li> </ul> </li> <li>- 80% of the country’s banking resources are in the housing sector, the interest rate of the housing sector is 2.7 times that of other sectors</li> <li>- Comparing the mechanism of urbanization of the country to the automobile industry of the country (state monopoly)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water transfer projects in support of the vicious circle of urbanization</li> <li>- Transferring the strategic industries from the coast to the center of the country (such as steel)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The village in Iran means less service</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Government confronts archipelagos crossing demographic thresholds (spatial demand)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ideas about the capital transfer plan</li> <li>- The city gradually fades / the urban changes from adjective to noun</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
The layer of discourse / worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The transition from “duty” to “right” in urban and rural areas through the discourse of modernization</li> <li>- Awareness of rights, civil liberties, and the promotion of democracy is the result of urbanization                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The larger the city, the greater the capabilities of democracy and civil liberties</li> </ul> </li> <li>- The discourse of globalization has also been in line with urbanization in recent decades because capital needs a global movement                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The urban transforms from adjective to name and utopia</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
The layer of metaphor / myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The urban acts as a heterotopia at the moment of its creation (inconsistency with its surroundings)</li> <li>- Tracing urbanization in the transformation of social relations during the Constitutional Revolution</li> <li>- The greatest achievement of the Constitutional Revolution was located in the social relations of the cities                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A symbol of the liberation and mediation of the urban in today’s world</li> </ul> </li> <li>- The importance of socio-spatial changes (the need for simultaneous attention to evolution and transformation)</li> <li>- The urban is being consolidated from adjective to terms such as noun, utopia, and heterotopia</li> </ul>

In this layer of analysis, the ontology of “urbanization” in Iran is presented as a process of urban becoming in which the rate of urbanization is a moment of this process but not the only moment/outcome. In Iran, this level of cognition begins with the city and then improves and lasts with the urban. At this level, the urban evolves from the adjective (first layer) to the noun. This level can be further explored with components that represent processes that are in constant interaction/tension with each other. The statement that government strategies have been to strengthen urban development processes and projects, represents this level of cognition and analysis. From a global perspective, this level is discussed by criticizing the concept of “urbanization” as a quantitative rate, and the ultra-city view dominates the city. At this level, new perspectives can be put forward on the extended moment of the concept of “urbanization”.

The structures, discourses, and worldviews that support Iran’s “urbanization” are explored at the third level. The

concept of “urbanization” is analyzed with ontologies derived from metanarratives such as modernization, industrialization, globalization, and neoliberalism at this level. The epistemology of this level is related to the urban (as a utopia). At this level, “urbanization” is the capacity for collective actions to open the social/political horizon. Roots of this level can be followed in the movement of the Constitutional Revolution and its urban achievements.

Metaphors related to “urbanization” in Iran are emphasized at the fourth level. The ontology emphasized at this level has a mental nature. It’s epistemology is also derived from the urban (utopia/heterotopia). Spatial codes and quantitative rates cannot be discussed at this level. This level is equated with the concept of differential space in terms of the space of hope in everyday life in critical approaches. By accepting the ever-changing nature of “urbanization,” the metaphor of emancipation can be traced in propositions. For example, “urbanization” has spread as

a symbol of liberation, of being different or mediating, or being alternative. Because with the increasing expansion and consolidation of “urbanization”, some civil rights will be accepted.

Fig. 3 presents a schematic of the theoretical perspective of “urbanization” in the CLA layers.

Today’s urban condition has completely changed in Iran and the world. Accordingly, urban reconstructions and metamorphoses have been going on more rapidly, and new urban spaces are crystallizing along with new forms of “urbanization”. Following the concept of “urbanization” indicates that phenomena have different epistemological possibilities depending on the level of analysis emphasized. It is necessary to determine the semantic levels in the intellectual system before interpreting these phenomena. While it’s epistemological, ontological and philosophical

dimension is comprehensible in a way, it’s symbolic and evolutionary dimension is understood differently. There are different and even contradictory arguments that are inevitable depending on the discourse and context in which they are studied. In recent decades, this word has gradually spread from the objective to the subjective in Iran. It can be written that the procedural importance (field of forces) of this word is today much stronger than it’s static importance (rate and number). However, it is very difficult to interpret this concept through a single discourse. The temporal and spatial discourses reinforce “urbanization” and enrich it. Therefore, it is impossible to fence “urbanization” in the Iranian context and introduce a definite Persian equivalent for it. Because “urbanization” is rapidly evolving. It is important to identify a situation and introduce the

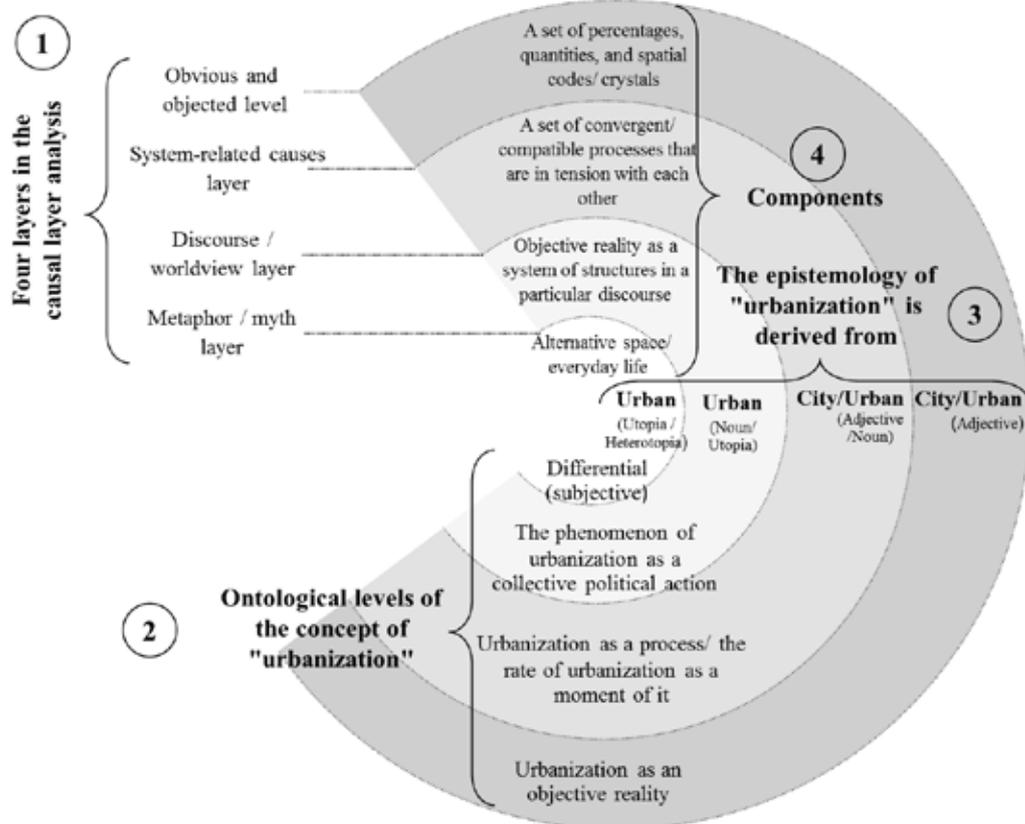


Fig. 3. Theoretical perspective of the concept of “urbanization” in Iran based on CLA layers. Source: authors.

necessary discourse to express that situation. If that word creates the power of conceptualization for the intended discourse, it can be argued that the word can be used to express that state.

## Endnote

1. Various equivalents have been used in Persian writing for this concept. Equivalents such as city-dwelling, urban becoming, city-building, civilization and even urbanism each have a specific meaning in a particular context. "Urbanization" is used in the present study in order to avoid confusion and to preserve the nature of the term.
2. This collection of reports was presented by Mohammad Alizadeh and Kazem Kazeruni in periods of 5 to 10 years.
3. This research is careful on how to use the word "Shahr". And this research makes a sensitive distinction between the terminologies of "Town", "City", and "Urban". Because these concepts have certain characteristics in certain political economy. The concept of "Shahr" in the common equivalence of Persian text is not aligned with any of the words "Town", "City", and "Urban".
4. Refers to functional landscapes (dams, mines, villages, roads, etc.), and ecological landscapes (wilderness, pastures, etc.) that are located outside the city limits.
5. When the city (residential boundary area) overcomes and expands beyond the non-city (functional and ecological landscapes outside the city), it emerges from the state of being-city and, in a way, the city disappears. At this moment, anti-city appears. In this way, its growth is stopped and it is temporarily stabilized.
6. Raymond Williams (1976) says that 'culture' is one of the two or three most difficult words in the English language, but I would add that 'urban' must surely also rank close to the top (Scott, 2008). There has been three-pronged conceptualization of the urban (i) as an adjective; (ii) as a noun; and (iii) as a utopia (Castriota & Tonucci, 2018). The urban, whatever it is defined as, constitutes a force field that can be subdivided into more specific constituent forces such as complex economic, political, and cultural variables (Brenner, 2013). The urban refers to a continuous scale of socio-spatial transformation that extends from the local to the global and even planetary levels, rather than to a distinctly demarcated territory with a purely residential type.
7. Interviews were conducted by researchers from 2019/11/11 to 2020/07/11 by researchers. The minimum interview time was 40 minutes and the maximum was 7 hours (several sessions).
8. It is a technique for identifying words or a set of important words in data analysis. This step is the basis of the first conceptualization. These words are used as labels to categorize concepts (Charmaz, 2006, 46). When analyzing new data, categories gradually expand and reach theoretical saturation. So that no new category is identified for analyzing new data.
9. It is a technique for expanding separate categories as well as linking categories together. In this step, the codes are combined and a framework is organized to explain the concepts in the context of data and analysis (Saldaña, 2016, 13).
10. Theoretical coding identifies the central phenomenon the analysis of categories.

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