

Drawing Alternative Scenarios of Tehran Identity Transformation by Using Layered Causal Analysis Method

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Abstract

Purpose: Damages caused by globalization, rapid urbanization and technological changes have shown the importance of identity, especially in big cities. For this reason, preserving urban identity is an important issue in the field of sustainable development. The purpose of the present study is to change the identity of the city of Tehran with the qualitative method of prospective research (causal layer analysis) in order to break the structure of the city's identity problem and formulate alternative scenarios.

Method: The statistical population of this research includes 14 experts in architecture, urban planning and urban sociologist, selected by purposeful sampling method and semi-structured interview tool was used. In order to be reliable and valid, by relying on the subject literature and comparing the findings, the design of interview guidelines and theoretical sampling was considered and by presenting the findings to 2 experts. Then, by analyzing the themes of the interviews, their opinions were presented in the form of 4 tables with the titles of litany, systematic causes, discourse and worldview, metaphor and myth.

Findings: The findings of the study show that in the litany layer, the obvious problem is the identity crisis of the city of Tehran, which is in four categories: "confused, famous, fluid and plural identity, meaningless and soulless", in the layer of systematic causes, "short-term society, speculative spaces, unrestrained spinning, flaming", in the layer of discourse and world view, "modernism of underdevelopment, urban neoliberalism, global development of the city, individualism and diversity" and in the fourth layer, "everything that is hard and stable will smoke and go into the air" "The nakedness of poverty and wealth, in the whirlwind of the global city, is the forgotten city".


Conclusion: Finally, two drivers of underdevelopment modernism and urban neoliberalism were selected based on importance and uncertainty, and based on that, 4 scenarios were represented in the form of a diagram that can be considered in urban management decision making.

Keywords: Future studies, causal layer analysis, urban identity, Identity of Tehran, urban neoliberalism

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Introduction

The city is the arena where we identify ourselves and interact with others and our environment. Urban identity can be defined as the influence exerted by environmental, historical, socio-cultural and spatial values on its residents (Kandemir, 2017). Identity includes an important dimension of social and cultural life that goes beyond the physical appearance of a place (Kaymaz, 2013). In fact, the physical structure of the urban space is consistent with the socio-cultural characteristics, political processes and the current economic structure in it (Baris, Uckac & Uslu, 2009 & Nientied, 2018). Urban identity is a concept that has recently become more important in the field of urban planning, because the trend of urban development under the forces of globalization leads to the creation of integrated cities. Just like a person, a city must have an identity to be recognized as an entity distinct from other places (Hartanti, 2014). Cities strongly need to have a unique and distinct identity. Relph, as one of the pioneers in the field of urban identity research, has described the need for places to have a distinct identity (Lugt, 2013). City identity can be defined as the soul of a city, which plays an important role in increasing urban competitiveness (Gao, 2010). The concept of place identity allows cities to remain competitive while maintaining their uniqueness and social heritage (Moreno, Allam, Chabaud, Gall & Pralong, 2021). It should be noted that the loss of the city's identity may be caused by the interruption of historical traditions and the rapid dominance of urbanization (Akkar Ercan, 2016). Investigating urban identity is important in understanding the formation and transformation of cities. Among the cities that have undergone changes in their urban identity, we can mention Rotterdam and Tehran (Mehan, 2017). The questions of this research are: Is it possible to preserve the tradition and identity of the place under the conditions of globalization? Do efforts to save the identity of places have a chance of success or are they unattainable goals? What is the role of urban governance, architects, planners and residents in this process?

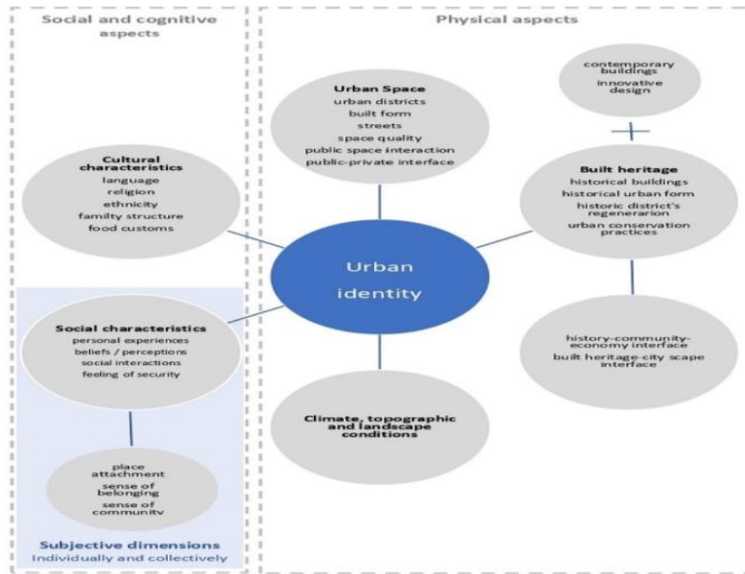


Fig. 1. Factors shaping urban identity (Anastasiou et al., 2022)

Methodology

This research is a type of qualitative research that seeks to achieve research goals in an exploratory and inductive approach. In this research, causal layered analysis combined with scenario writing has been used. Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a method that integrates various modes of research to provide a nuanced and in-depth approach to understanding a problem or situation. It identifies four levels of causality: the litany (superficial description of reality), social and structural causes, worldviews, and myths/metaphors. CLA is used as a group sense-making technique to explore the underlying causes and worldviews contributing to a situation (Mäntymäki, 2020 & Pawolocki, 2021 & Yrjölä, 2022). While studying the literature on the subject to design the initial interview questions, using targeted sampling, subject experts were approached and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with them. The interview protocol was added to the richness of the interviews by using the classified PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal) technique and continued by using the 5-question (what, who, where, when, how and why) technique. The statistical population of this research is 14 people from experts in architecture, urban planning and urban sociologists selected by purposeful sampling method.

Results and Discussion

1- Based on the analysis in the litany layer, "Identity crisis of the city of Tehran" became the main issue of this research. Current Tehran is a product of unhealthy financial relations and mismanagement, and a concept like identity has no place in it.

2- The analysis in the second layer (systematic causes) have led to four categories:

- A- short-term society.
- B- Spaces conquered by capitalism.
- C- Juggernaut.
- D- Blasé.

3- The analysis in the third layer (worldview, discourse, ideology) also leads to 4 categories:

- A- Underdevelopment modernism
- B- Urban neoliberalism and rentier capitalism
- C- Global development of the city
- D- Individualism

4- The analysis at the fourth level; The layer of metaphor and myth: all that is solid melts into air, The nakedness of poverty and wealth (the city is like a capitalist exhibition), in the whirlwind of the global metropolis (ever evolving), The forgotten city.

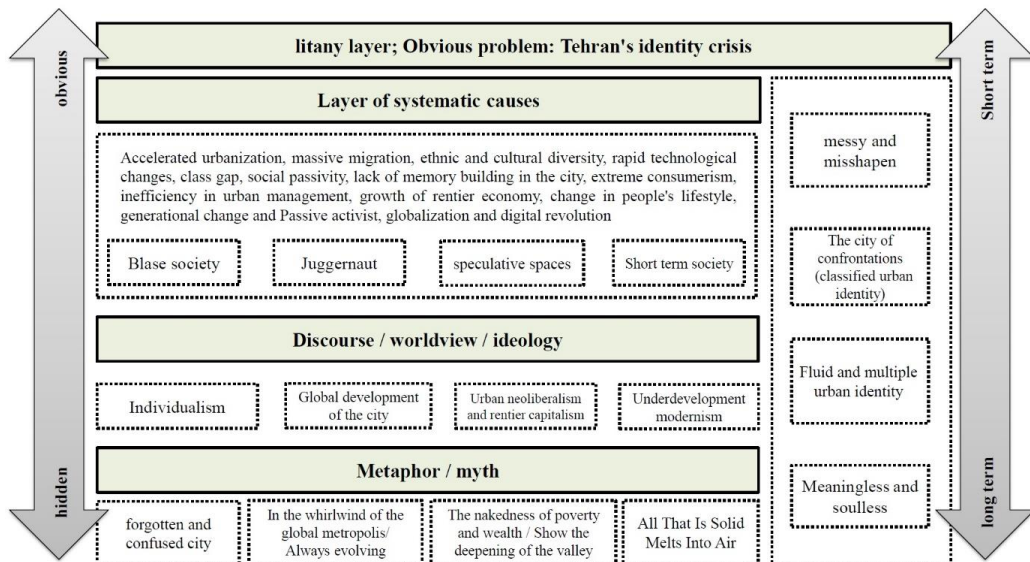


Fig. 2. Analysis model of the causal layers of Tehran's urban identity

Conclusions

Tehran is a multicultural city; Therefore, it is necessary to consider the issue of ethnicity in shaping the city's identity. The perception of Tehran's identity in the minds of the citizens has tended to be closer to the concept of "kinship" than to the concept of "identity". Although this trend has led to the weakening of the concept of Tehran's identity, we are facing it in the current situation. Therefore, urban planners can use these conditions as an opportunity and in creating new urban spaces, while looking at endogenous identity components (originating from Tehran's background and past), use components and examples that are among the desirable mental images of "modern man" It is located in Tehran. This approach can lead to the revival of Tehran's identity. Based on the studies on the identity of the city of Tehran, four scenarios of the ideal future (the utopia of Tehran), the optimistic future (the identity of Tehran, a means of branding the city), the middle future (fluid identity) and the pessimistic future (the destruction of the city - the decline of the identity) have been presented; The continuation of the current situation is an indication of the absolute dominance of neoliberal approaches and urban inequality and the deepening of the dimensions of "underdevelopment modernism" in the lives of citizens, and it can turn the pessimistic future (the third scenario) into an ongoing thing. Therefore, it is necessary for urban managers, by changing the current centralizing and power-oriented attitudes, to turn towards participation-oriented models and through the revival of social capital and the application of communication rationality, through the realization of urban justice and moving in the path of endogenous and sustainable development, the fields of reviving Tehran's identity and move towards an optimistic future (second scenario).

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