

A Study of the Challenges of Informal Settlements and Strategies to Empower Them (Case Study: Eslamshahr)

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ABSTRACT

Today, the urbanization phenomenon is very common in the Earth. Following the accelerated and unbalanced growth of cities, this phenomenon has led to adverse economic, social and physical consequences. One of its adverse effects is marginalization and informal settlement. This article has investigated informal settlements as a challenge for urban sustainable development in Eslamshahr and addressed the causes, mechanisms and consequences of this phenomenon in this region. Using the techniques of interview, observation and librarian studies, the researchers have collected the required data. The results of this research suggest that a major part of marginalization in this region, which results from migration from villages to cities, arise from a low sense of citizenship belonging and the most important priority of these immigrants is improvement of this region's physical infrastructures.

KEYWORDS: Informal Settlements, Empowerment, Eslamshahr

1- INTRODUCTION

Over the last hundred years, cities have attracted a large percentage of the world's population. For the first time in the history of the world, cities have become as populated as non-urban areas. The UN has predicted that over 60 percent of the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2030. Despite the fact that cities have occupied only about 2 percent of the Earth's surface, they contain more than half of the world's population, which is increasing with a growth rate about 55 million people per year. They consume three quarters of the resources in the world and are indeed the main waste producers in the world. Due to their need for food and energy, they have become the large parasitic structures emptying and degenerating the world, cruel consumers and unkind and hard polluters (Eger, 2005:2). The urbanization rate and problems arising from it show that it has global consequences at present. For example, cities are attracting resources and materials from all over the world. Emaciation and destruction of Ozone layer substantiates the threat posed by cities and their developmental mechanisms (Hall, 2005:153). Therefore, the main point on the topic of sustainability should be an increase in cities' dominance and expansion of their influence scope. Economic poverty and unequal distribution and geographical concentration of wealth in developing countries have led to a massive immigration of people from the margins of poverty toward the centers of affluence in order to enjoy the opportunities of further employment, income and hope for a better future. In this process, the immigrants to cities are settled in the margins of cities due to their economic poverty and inability to live in the internal spaces of cities (Sheikhi, 2006:29). Following the accelerated growth of the world's population and their concentration in cities, the concept of urban sustainable development was set forth as an essential component that affects the long-term prospect of human societies (Auclair, 1997:12). The rapid and unbalanced physical development of cities has had adverse economic, social and physical consequences. One of the effects of the unbalanced physical development of cities is informal settlement, which is regarded as a challenge for urban sustainable development (Naghdi and Sadeghi, 2006:218).

2- PROBLEM STATEMENT

Informal settlement is one of the major features of industrial societies. In pre-industrial societies, the productive activities were mainly done in rural areas. In these societies, farming was the chief activity and farmers formed the major part of the workforce. However, the urban population was very low and many of those living in cities had no careers. With the advent of Industrial Revolution, all these conditions were changed and new industries added to the need for workforce in cities, which led to an extensive immigration to cities (Mohseni, 1997:27). Among these immigrants, those with more income could cross the Golden Gate of cities and adapt themselves with the cities, whereas others could not and had no choice but to stay behind the gates in suburban areas (Zahedani, 1990:17). The formation of this phenomenon is associated with several problems which are not limited merely to marginal areas; they may influence even a city by bringing about different types of abnormalities in urbanization. Employment of those living in marginal areas in informal and false jobs, existence of unauthorized constructions, municipalities' inability to provide proper services in these regions, environmental pollution, the adverse cultural, economic, social and political effects of

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these regions on the whole urban system, the increased crime and deviances and corruptions are all among the destructive and damaging effects of marginalization on both these regions' inhabitants and on the other people living in large cities. Therefore, it seems necessary to address the issue of marginalization and focus on the reasons for its formation as well as its adverse effects, because identifying the causes of this phenomenon and offering strategies to improve it will lead to equality in the urban context, which is an indicator of sustainable development. Therefore, this study attempts to address Eslamshahr's informal settlements and its increasing trend as deeply as possible, hoping to bring about a change in the abnormal landscape of the marginal regions and providing all people of the society, whether rich or well- to- do with a beautiful space and a favorable place for living.

3- RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We have used not only librarian studies, but also a survey as the research method in this study, interviewing 35 household heads in the marginal regions of Eslamshahr using random sampling methods (due to problems with interview in the region). Moreover, we have used qualitative techniques such as card observation, free interview with municipality officials, observation and interview with the people living in marginal areas as well as the local officials such as school administrators, police officers and officials of health centers.

4- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Today, the urbanization phenomenon has dominated the Earth (Fialkolf, 2004:13). Following the accelerated and unbalanced growth of cities, this phenomenon has led to adverse economic, social and physical consequences. One of its adverse effects is marginalization and informal settlement. Nowadays, all cities of the world are facing the phenomenon of informal settlement. England talked of the existence of slums a hundred years ago and considered it the result of Industrial Revolution (Mumtaz and Bahar, 2001:15). However, cities are not only physically threatened, but the people living in such places are also threatened by the function of such settlements. Urban sustainable development is one in which cities have a balanced growth from different aspects. In general, the dimensions of urban sustainable development, as shown in Figure one, consist of community, skills and resources, each one having its own dimensions. In modern cities, several factors disrupt and threaten this type of development, the most important one of which may be informal settlement. According to the official figures and statistics, 8 million people of Iran's population are living in the margins of cities with this type of settlement (Sarafi and Mohammadi, 2005:39).

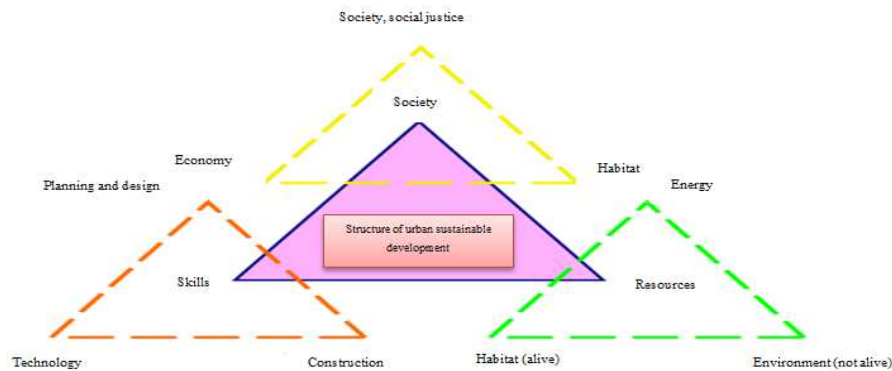


Figure (1): Dimensions of Urban Sustainable Development

Marginalization occurs as a complex phenomenon in the context of interactions of various compo's and it is sometimes difficult to identify the priority and order of components, which causes us to make mistakes in seeking appropriate solutions for this problem (Amkchi, 2002:57). Posing the cultural and ethnic conflicts arising from immigration, Park regards this phenomenon as one of the causes of marginalization. According to him, one of the psychological and social consequences of immigration is that the immigrant keeps finding himself or herself in struggle in between the expectations and values of the two existing cultural systems and this vague and confusing situation causes some kind of "duality of character" in the immigrant, which distinguishes marginal people from others (Park, 1928:881). Although the formation of such areas can be regarded as a criticism against the strategy of urban development and growth management, it is an irrefutable, existing and ongoing reality. These settlements have been described differently. The following definitions describe the phenomenon in different ways:

- Residential areas between certain prepared urban hearts (Prioul, 1997).

- Concentrated areas of poverty (Piel, 1975)
- The villages among cities (Vander)
- Poverty belt (Granotier, 1980)
- Slums of despair (Stokaz, 1962)
- Abnormal houses (Piran, 1994)
- Regions other than cities and villages (Habibi, 1992)
- Unplanned residential centers (Athari and Rafiei, 1993)

We offer the following model in order to show the factors affecting the formation of marginalization in a better way:

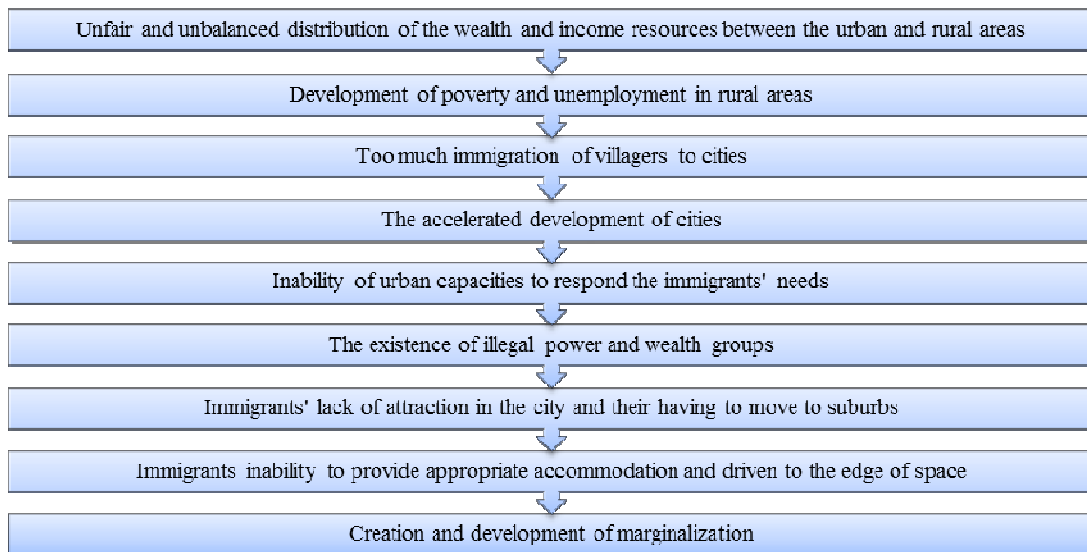


Figure (2): The Factors Affecting the Formation of Marginalization
(Source: Rabani Et Al., 2006:96)

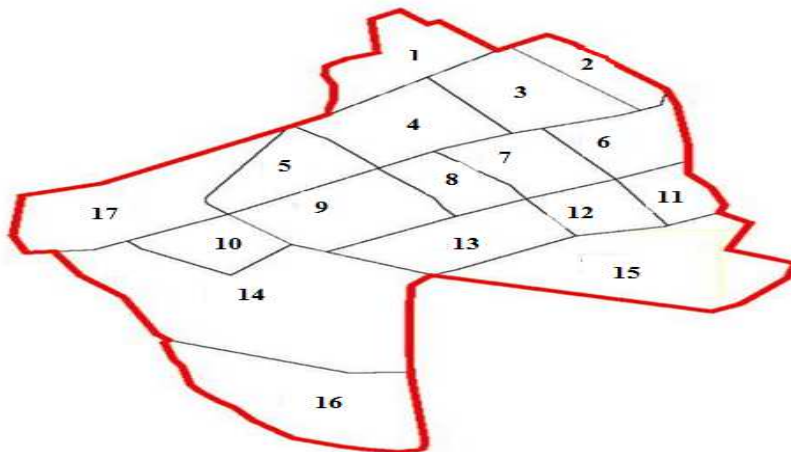
5- The scope of the study and the process of emergence of informal districts in Eslamshahr

Eslamshahr, which was originally a village named "Ghasemabad Shahi" and later "Shadshahr", had a population larger than 2769 people in 1966. Its population rose to 53809 people in 1976 with a population growth of 34.5 percent. In 1987, the population of Eslamshahr city had a considerable increase and factors including establish-Saveh Road caused a massive wave of immigration to Eslamshahr and this trend of rapid growth continued till 1986, especially after the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the imposed war, which caused the population of the city to reach 236749 people with a growth rate of 16 percent. In 1996, after Eslamshahr Comprehensive Plan was developed in 1989 and its rules were applied and executed relatively, the city's growth fell sharply and became balanced with a population of 265450 people and a growth rate of 1.15 percent. The population of this city reached 357389 people in 2006. The most important factors of the population growth in this year were immigration and settlement from different parts of Tehran Province as well as from other cities of Iran and its being in the vicinity of a metropolitan city like Tehran. In closer examination, in cities like Eslamshahr which grow as a part of metropolitan Tehran, the issue of immigration and immigrant groups is especially important, because informal settlement basically has a direct relation with the issue of immigration and immigrant groups. It has been shown in this study that immigrants select unemployment in large cities when faced with the dilemma of choosing unemployment between cities and villages, because they imagine a clearer prospect in the future of large cities than in smaller places like villages. Most importantly, from the perspective of anthropology, the study of immigrants to cities and particularly those immigrating to the margins of cities show that there is a sequence-like relation between immigrant groups such as tribal and relative immigrants. This is why relative or tribal groups of people are sometimes settled in districts of the margins of large cities or in certain alleys of these areas. Eslamshahr is a special city as far as zoning the districts is concerned, and it is different in this respect from many other similar cities. It should be noted in the first place that the housing units in Eslamshahr have been built almost irregularly in the vicinity of the main and peripheral networks of the city and this is a big challenge for determining the limits of districts and their accordance with the criteria of recognizing districts among citizens. More importantly, in order to gain access to basic and needed information, (especially statistical information), it is inevitable to refer to and rely on the figures and statistics of urban blocks and areas (The Plan for Organizing Informal Settlements of Eslamshahr, 2007). Based on this and under the influence of all factors, Eslamshahr was classified into 17 separate districts. For harmony and balance among the districts,

the classification was done in such a way that there was no major difference between the space and population of the city. The location of each one of the districts of this city have been shown in Table 1 and Map 1.

Table (1): Zoning-Encoding and the Location of Eslamshahr Districts

Row	Name of District / Districts	Code of Districts	Location of the District in the City
1	Mosaabad, Anbia, Elahieh, Allahoakbar	1	Northern Railway
2	Mosaabad	2	North – the beginning of the entrance way to the city and north of the main street of the city
3	15 meters to municipality (Mohammad Bagher)	3	North-west of District 2
4	Kashani	4	North-west of District 3
5	Haj Mahmood	5	North-west of District 4
6	Bagh e Feiz	6	Center- the beginning of the entrance way of the city and south of the main street of the city
7	Zarafshan	7	Center-west of district 6
8	Mohammadih (Ghasemabad)	8	Center-west of district 7
9	Mahdieh	9	Center-west of district 8
10	Saeidieh	10	West-south of the main street of the city
11	Zarandian	11	South of district 6 and north of beltway
12	Mozafarieh	12	South of district 7 and north of beltway
13	Ziaabad	13	South of districts 8 and 9 and north of beltway
14	Ghaemieh	14	West of the city – north and west of beltway
15	Mianabad	15	South of the city and south of the beltway
16	Vavan	16	South of the city and south of the beltway
17	Salvar	17	West of the city – north of the main street of the city



Map (1): Zoning and Location of Eslamshahr Districts

6- Marginalization, its challenges and problems in Eslamshahr

Eslamshahr is widely faced with the problem of marginalization and the fungal-like growth of these regions have been so fast that it has brought about intense abnormality and disharmony for the physical geography of the city. Marginalization life can threaten the urban system on the one hand, and can cause a plethora of problems for the residents of these regions on the other. Due to the importance of this subject, we deal here with the problematic dimensions of this phenomenon in this region.

6-1- Social Isolation and Economic and Social Inequality

Special isolation of poverty is associated with social isolation. Special and social isolation or lack of social capital can lead to the poverty cycle. In other words, the children of poor parents lack any opportunity to get rid of poverty

(Wilson, 1987). Ethnic and cultural diversity in Eslamshahr has caused social isolation in the region and this isolation which feeds from ethnic social capital can block economic growth and efficiency of municipal rules in areas where various ethnic groups are present.

6-2- Lack of Appropriate Housing

The increasing growth of urbanization has brought about certain new problems in humans' lives and relations. One of these problems is the issue of housing (Taleghani, 1990:1). This criterion is certainly true for most of the developing countries and their marginalized people who live in low-quality houses. However, it should be noted that housing is something more than mere physical shelter; it consists of all public services and facilities needed for human well-being and should guarantee for its user the right to live there for long and with certainty (Figure 3) (Pourmohammadi, 82).

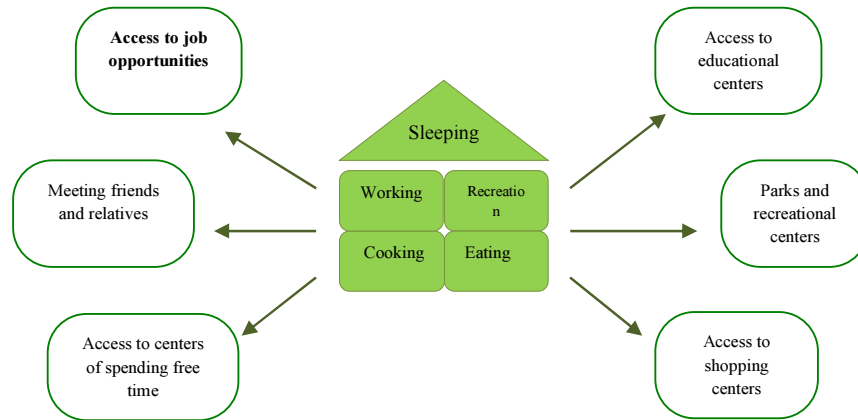


Figure (3): The Components of Housing

All of the houses of the suburban areas and informal region of Eslamshahr, especially a half of them, are non-standard and low-quality in terms of the materials used in them. They are mostly built overnight from simple materials and without observing any standards due to their fear that the municipality officials destroy them. Therefore, the main danger which threatens these houses and the residents of this region are natural disasters such as flood and earthquake, which may easily lead to the destruction of all of them.



Picture (3): Pictures Taken From the Status of Housing in the Region under Study (Source: Negarandegan)

6-3- Lack of attraction in the economy of the city

The hidden and informal activities of the marginalized do not reflect the economic accounts of the city and there is no information about the volume and extent of these individuals' activities and informal income. Investigating the men's occupational structure shows that they are mostly workers and they work in buildings or agriculture in different seasons of the year depending on the demand of the time. Other than working, they have free jobs, or may earn their living by driving or may work as salespeople. Therefore, most of the marginalized men of this region have service jobs and are simple workers, street cleaners and vendors. They are also found having false jobs such as selling coupons, selling

cigarettes, brokerage and vendors. The household heads' monthly income shows that three quarters of these households have an income below 150 thousand tomans a month despite the largeness of the family. Considering the poverty line criterion, over 80 percent of these households can thus be said to be under the poverty line.

6-4- Center of Deviations and Social Deficiencies

The marginalized people's poverty and disability or reluctance of the city's market to absorb these people drives them toward informal activities and make them turn to a market some products of which are prohibited and criminal ones such as drugs, theft and prostitution. Lack of centers of security services and police stations in the region has turned that place into a secure place for individuals and groups who live and earn their living offensively and criminally. Severe social isolation has prevented from the formation of participative behavior among the residents of this area and the possibility of using the collaborative tools of social control. A number of the citizens have talked about the existence of stray people, shortage of security, the low culture of the people and overpopulation in the region, and a half of the citizens have pointed to quarrels that occur abundantly in that region.

6-5- Lack of access to urban services

Basically, marginal districts are formed automatically in lands without plans. This is why these districts lack infrastructural installations and municipalities and officials of the city think that they are not required to provide their installations (until the residents of the region change into social and political forces). On the other hand, it is costly and difficult to provide the infrastructural installations of this region as it is so scattered and disorganized. However, the residents of Eslamshahr region have access to services such as water, electricity and telephone and the electricity of the houses is provided through stealing from the main power supply. The streets are equipped with modern telephones used by people. The main reason for this is governmental bodies' lack of adherence to the rules and the single management.

6-6- The high birth rate in the region

Dr. Zanjani says about fertility rate index that the number of children a woman gives birth to is a quantitative index. However, education is a qualitative index, which is added to a woman's attitudes and influences that quantitative index. He adds that fertility is different in different regions due to difference in indicators. The level of education, the type of employment, level of self-awareness and the like are some of the factors that are effective in biological properties and play an important role in fertility rate (Zanjani, 2001). It must therefore be confessed that a society which is far from urban services and facilities becomes overpopulated. Giving birth is so common among the marginalized people in Eslamshahr and it is observed that families are very large (i.e have many children) despite abundant housing problem and shortage of space.

6-7- Low social participation and lack of citizenship spirit belonging

The social participation rate, according to the findings of this research, is very poor in the form of organized parties among the residents of marginal areas and their participation is mostly done traditionally and discontinuously, that is, it is tribe- or family-based. This means that the participating groups are either ethnic groups or those who are neighbors. We found via the interviews with the people of the region and the council members that the people there have active presence for their collective benefits and they do their best to receive urban facilities. Opinion assessment for selection of council members is done inside the district, showing the importance that they give to their own interests. On the other hand, as the illiteracy rate is very high in the region and the literacy level is very low, they have little professional skills and their enthusiasm for rural culture prevents them from participating in urban life space. In other words, they have nothing to supply to the city. The immigrants' background and rural customs also brings about their isolation in the city and makes it impossible for them to participate in the socio-economic life of the city (Javaheripour, 2001:104). The marginalized people are not thoroughly merged in the social system of the city and are not thus accepted as formal citizens in the society, or at least they themselves feel so. Their separation from the urban society and their lack of citizenship belonging along with other features of marginalization such as low level of literacy and occupational skills blocks the developmental participation of the people of these regions. The findings of this study reveal that the citizens of this region mostly have no sense of citizenship belonging. The marginalized feel that the city is not their home, although his home is physically located in the city. They feel that there is discrimination between them and higher social classes of the society and this sense of discrimination leads to an increased spirit of lack of citizenship belonging.

7- CONCLUSION

The result of rapid urbanization in Iran is emergence of large cities and creation of marginal districts with disorganized structure and abnormal housing. The residents of such areas are usually rural immigrants or low-income urban people with false and marginal jobs. Informal settlement and its special manifestation bring about economic and spacial marginalization of the people living in these districts. This part of population almost lack social participation and citizenship belonging. Inattention to informal settlement due to worries about encouragement for its development

will have higher costs and threaten urban sustainable development from environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects. Officials are required to take serious measures to solve these problems and address the wants and needs of the residents of these regions, because cultural poverty and financial problems of the residents of these regions and their living in marginal areas on the one hand and seeing the life of those citizens who enjoy the facilities of modern life on the other hand bring about deep dissatisfaction among this part of society and this can lead to social riot. Therefore, the following suggestions are made on how to organize Eslamshahr region and how to deal with this region:

- Tenure of the land of the region is considered a crime and the legislative officials can do nothing against it and many profit-seeking agents gain a lot of interests through this. Therefore, it is suggested that the legal officials take decisive measures and determine their position regarding this subject and prevent from profitable exploitations.
- Assigning the duty of protecting the territory of the city and preventing from unbalanced development of cities to a team consisting of municipalities under the auspices of the Interior ministry, attended by experts of urban issues from different organizations and different specialties including construction police.
- Realization of Urban Unit Management, which has been posed in Act 136 of the Third Program of Development.
- Creating local councils in the urban districts and paying more attention to the low-income groups of the city for the sake of prosperity of the economic and social growth and development.
- It seems necessary to reform and modify the rules and formulate special regulations related to this issue.
- Solving the problems of the marginalized people is unattainable without identifying different dimensions of their problems and making use of their participation in finding social solutions.
- Prediction of and attention to the spots where this problem will occur in future.

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