

Informal Settlement in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Informal settlement is the most problematic kind of urban community in the world. These settlements are the spatial illustration of poverty in the cities and the dwellers in these kinds of settlements are those who could not find the economic opportunities within the cities. Cities claimed to be a "land of wishes" to attract rural residents. But the promise of the "land of wishes" remains undelivered and the informal settlement appears as a way to alleviate the problems of the homeless. Iran is one of the developing countries in the Middle East where its cities have had to deal with informal and squatter settlements. These settlements, common in most of the big cities in Iran, grew up in 1944 when economic policies were adopted from developed countries. Economic policies and imported industry had a deep effect in Iranian cities. The producer cities changed to consumer ones. Rural residents migrated to cities to find a better job and life because of economic problems. The villages became vacant and the cities could not meet the requirements of the growing population. So the emigrants had to settle in suburbs or the vacant land within the cities. Due to the poverty, informal settlers tend to corrupt and illegal ways of earning money. The residents of these settlements had no citizen's rights. They had to live in deteriorating, unstable homes which were erected over night.

The aim of this article is to introduce the reasons for the appearance of informal settlements in Iran, a survey of their geographical locations, and spatial situation of their house and lands. Economical and social information of the residents will be explained. The government's response of destroying the settlements will be described. Finally the dangerous effects of destroying these settlements and the right alternatives will be surveyed.

KEYWORDS: Government Response, Informal/Squatter Settlement, Spatial Situation.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Informal settlements are a significant problem especially in third world countries. Historically, after the Industrial Revolution and when capitalistic powers gained authority, Europe was transformed from the feudalism system to a new capitalism and bourgeoisie one. This great leap had many consequences in different aspects. Economical structure changed which led to the transformation in spatial system of the cities, alternation in cultural and social structure, governmental structures transformation, etc. These great changes caused industry to come into power and small workshops transformed to big factories. The need for a labour force was felt in this new path. Political changes, transformation of feudalism to capitalism, the inefficiency of old systems and the transformation of agricultural products into industrial products caused the labour force come to cities from their villages to work in the factories. And after work, tired and exhausted, return to their villages to rest. Rural labour forces could not buy a house in the cities due to the high prices; therefore, in order to prevent exhaustive commuting, they built some huts using flimsy basic materials in the suburbs and thenceforth the first informal settlements were produced.

In third world countries, the informal settlement phenomenon appeared by economical policies of the developed countries under the title of the third world growth and development programs. Active industrial areas attracted the labour force from different regions of the country and the excess labour force settled in suburbs and inappropriate and deteriorated buildings. New colonial programs in the third world countries were performed in order to break the social-economical structure of these countries. These events promoted the informal settlements phenomenon greatly, so that today 30% of inhabitants in big cities of the third world live in some huts. (Shakuei, 1976).

In Iran, intense growth of informal settlements has commenced since 1951. Before that year, there were some informal settlements in the south of Tehran; but after 1951 they were intensified due to new policies of the government. There were lots of immigrations from villages to the cities so that the proportion of immigrants was increased from 11% in 1956 to 22.6% in 1977. This great immigration which will be discussed in later sections in more detail, established the primary base of informal settlements in Iran. In the next part, we will consider the

condition and reasons of informal settlements in Iran, features of informal settlements and how the government should treat informal settlements.

1.2 CONCEPT OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Huts and slum areas are the most regrettable form of chaotic and unshaped development in cities (Farid, 1989). In the big cities of the developing countries, due to the shortage or lack of the land, poor and low-paid people are forced to build their humble houses in slanting foothills of the valleys and torrential fields or the lands beside the polluter and dangerous industries.



Figure 1.1 Informal settlement in Iran (Morad Aab hill, Karaj, Tehran).

There are lots of definition intermixtures and different opinions about informal settlements. Some of them are as follows:

1. *Shanties* can be scattered in different parts of the city, while *informal settlements* generally are evolved in the lands of the suburb where there is no legal supervision.
2. Charles Abrams - housing expert - believes that a building or a part of the city in which there is destruction, deficiency of preparing medicinal services, population density in houses, cultural and educational poverty, lack of the necessary tranquillity and dangers of natural disasters such as flood, can be regarded as hut or shanty neighbourhood." (Shakuei, 1976)
3. The concept of squatter literally refers to the dwellers who build a settlement in a very short time (night-long) in another person's land without any permission. (Hatami Nezhad, 2003)

To include all the opinions in this paper, we consider any settlements with the following characteristics as an informal settlement:

- Self-constructed, spontaneous houses without having the ownership of the land.
- Spatially located in the geographically dangerous and improper regions.
- Lack of the necessary urban services and facilities in the region like water, electricity, school, medical clinic, public transportation, etc.
- Settlers are those who could not be fit in the urban economy.

1.3 REVIEW OF THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN IRAN

In Iran, we have two kinds of informal settlements: Inner-city and outer-city. Both of them sited in deteriorated lands but as economical situation inner-city informal settlements have better situation than the outer-city one.

In general, suburbanite is referred to a person who is settled in the cities but due to different reasons he or she has not been able to be harmonized with the social and economical system of the city and therefore they can not use the urban services. It should be mentioned that not all the suburbanites are those immigrants from villages to cities, some of them are permanent dwellers of the cities, yet due to the economic poverty, they live in the houses which are not standard. (Abedin Darkush , 1993)

1.3.1 Suburbanite's Houses

Suburbanite's houses are in the steep and narrow alleys. Architectural forms are derived mostly from the special culture of the dwellers in the region. The houses are constructed by nondurable materials.

1.3.2 Population Structure of the Suburbanite Region

Population structure of these regions is mostly youth. The population of men is higher than women. The residents marry when they're very young and endogamy is very common in such societies.

1.3.3 Health and Welfare Services for Suburbanites

The level of health condition is too low; pollution and disease is noticeable in such regions. Carelessness of the officials to health issues of the residents, high population, evacuating the sewage in the alleys are some of the reasons of the pollution and diseases in these regions.

1.3.4 Suburbanite's Culture

Due to the common problems that the residents have, they depend on each other and they benefit from their strong relationships. They have created a very strong mental boundary around themselves and it is difficult for strangers entering their regions. Although suburbanites are capable of causing damages, but usually they have healthy and respectable life and they don't accept sinful people in their community. (Mashhadizade, 1995)

1.3.5 Occupation and Income of the Suburbanites

Due to the incapability in being absorbed in urban economy, Suburbanites don't have a permanent job. Because of having no specialization, generally they are occupied in low level jobs such as construction labour jobs, selling cigarettes and balloons, garbage collecting, carwash, etc.

1.4 REASONS OF ESTABLISHING INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN IRAN

The most significant issue in establishing informal settlements in Iran can be found in the reasons of immigration. Following the changes in the economical activities of urban, rural and tribal societies, their state have transformed from productive to consumptive. When modernist thoughts were appeared in Iran, the country was not a producer any longer but it changed to a consumer country that should import most of its requirements. Thenceforth villages were not brisk anymore and the cities flowered. The repulsive factors of the villages and attractive factors in the cities are as follows:

1. living problems in the villages and having not enough land, water, and income
2. unavailability of doctors and medicine
3. having no religious, cultural and technical centre
4. natural damages and drought
5. having not enough security on some villages (Hosseinzade Dalir, 1982)

Villagers immigrated to the cities. On the other hand, settlement of the tribes doubled their problems and they were forced to find a new kind of living. As the result of all these events, villages remained without any resident and villagers having no skill but traditional agriculture, rushed to the cities. There was not a proper house or a suitable job for this great population in the cities. Therefore villagers built shanties in the lands which were not belong to anyone and then they dwelled there. A chart is provided in figure 2 for studying the reasons of informal settlements:

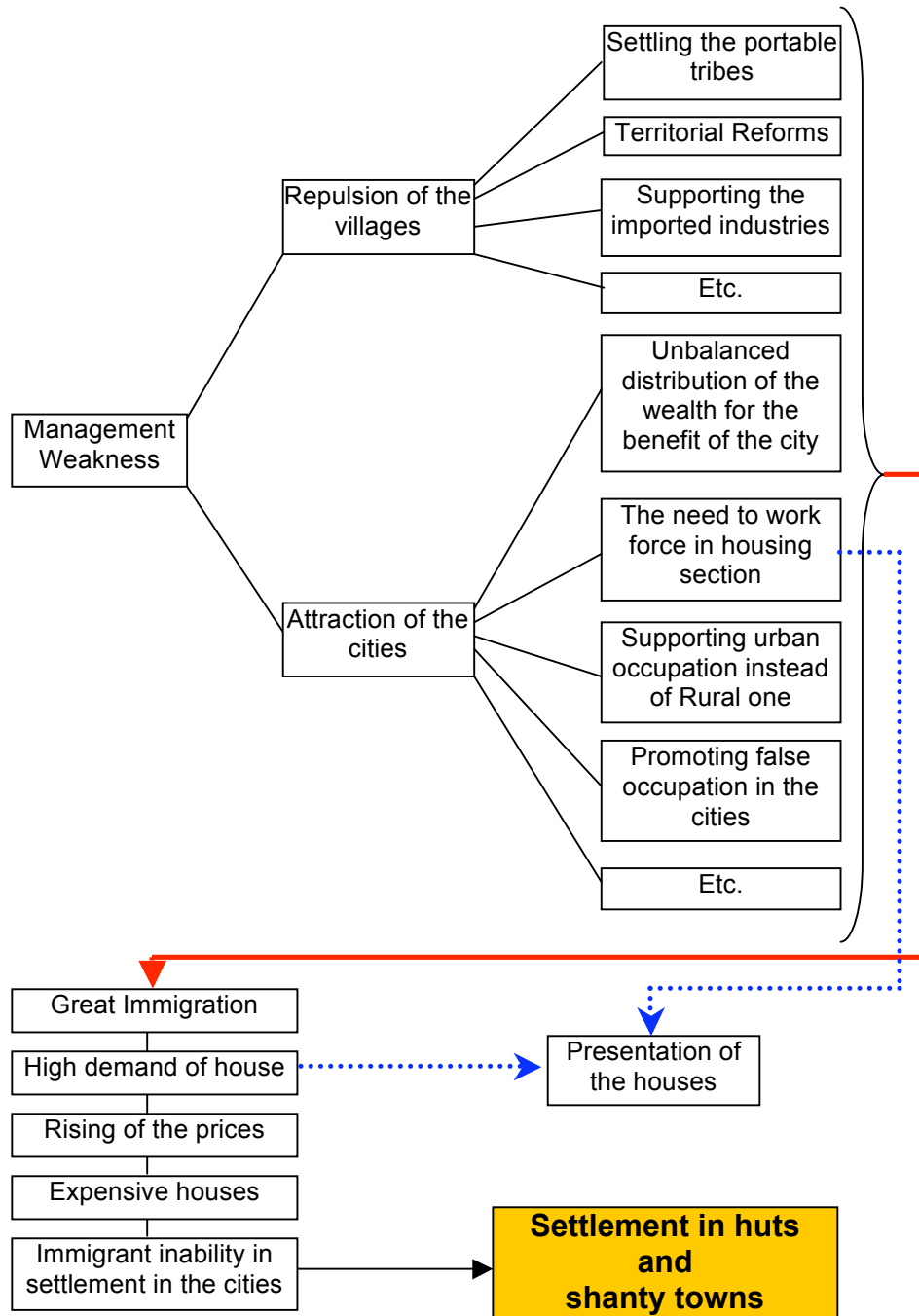


Figure 1.2 The Reasons of Informal Settlement in Iran.

1.5 PROBLEMS OF SUBURBANITES IN IRAN

Suburbanite housing is still the big problem in every decision making level in Iran. Governmental organizations have proposed many programs to solve this problem but due to the following reasons, they did not succeed.



Figure 1.3 Informal settlement in Iran (Morad aab hill, Karaj, Tehran)

1.5.1 Not Identifying the Target Groups

One of the issues causing those programs fail is that there is no proper and clear definition for the groups that the programs intend to provide settlement for them. In the first development program report delivered to the parliament has been mentioned that the government should provide welfare for all the citizens. Basically it is not clear that housing program has aimed at which groups. By these kinds of general programs, the cooperative associations can not prepare policies about land, loan, credit, etc to be useful for suburbanite housing problem.

1.5.2 Loan and Credit Policies for Providing Houses

Loan policies are among the strategic factors in providing settlement. Equipping the financial resources, decreasing loan application fees, improving the efficiency of the financial mediators and predicting the security systems to guarantee its return were considered the actions in housing section of the government. But the most important factor has been ignored: providing loans for needy people. For example those families, who do not have enough income even for their every day requirements, how can they afford the down payment of the loans? There should be some policies in the banks to support these families.

Since 1938 when only 25% of the country population were living in the cities, to make the cities more attractive, loans were available to those who wanted to live in the cities. Paying these loans has increased cash in the society which causes the increase of inflation. Consequently the price of land, construction material, machinery and the final products which are the houses is increased. So we see that these kinds of loans could not solve the housing problem of suburbanites.

Recently Iranian banks have tried to facilitate to give the loans to the builders instead of buyers. This can be a good strategy if the banks supervise the usage of the loans.

1.5.3 Land Allocation

Land is the first principal component of housing. In the past, because of the superfluity of the land, this issue was not significant; but, nowadays due to the rising of demands and population, the price of the land has increased. Three different governmental policies made the informal settlements worse.

Firstly, in the third development program of Iran (1962-1967), providing comprehensive and detailed designs were approved in the parliament. This means that any projects were supposed to determine the boundaries of the cities. In other words, just people within the cities receive different urban services. So the desirability of the outside lands and consequently the price of these lands decreased. Therefore poor people who could not afford settling in the cities chose these regions.

Secondly, in the guidance of providing comprehensive plan, there was a rule that all the housing layouts in the cities have to be designed over 300 square meters. This caused poor people could not afford to buy a house within the cities.

Finally, the approval of “urban lands” enactment had an impact on the informal settlements. This enactment approved the dedication of the derelict lands exclusively to the government. After preparing these lands to be proper for construction, government were selling them to those who could guarantee to pay back the available loans on them. Therefore unemployed people or people with less or irregular income were not eligible to buy these lands in the cities.

All these mentioned policies worsened the situation of the poor people and made progress in the informal settlements.

1.5.4 Centralized Government and a Lack of Coordination among Governmental Organizations

Iran’s political system is too centralized and decisions are made top-down without paying attention to specific domains. Specifically the suburbanite housing problem cannot be solved by taking this type of decision-making.

Also it should be mentioned that the governmental organizations in Iran are not well coordinated. The ministry of urbanism and housing is not able to solve the housing problem alone and all the governmental organizations in all levels from national to local should be coordinated to solve this problem.

1.5.5 Destructive Actions

One of the most current reactions of the government to informal settlements in Iran is to destroy such regions. According to principle 43 of the Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution, having a house is the right of every Iranian and based on the principle 31 providing a proper house for Iranians is the government’s responsibility; but, without paying attention to these principles, the destruction takes place. These destructive reactions just increase the problem of informal settlements. Because after destroying these ghettos, their dwellers are divided into two groups. One group choose other places in the suburb, which are geographically worse than their previous regions, and build their unofficial houses again over night. And the other group come to the deteriorated parts of the cities. By increasing the demands for these shanties within the cities, their prices increase accordingly. Suburbanites who can not afford to rent even these shanties are forced to live with several families in a single house. Health condition and economic difficulties has worsened the problems of these new dwellers and also make the appearance of the city painful and terrifying.

Reviewing the mentioned cases, you can notice that in Iran, the decisions regarding the suburb fabrics are made without attention to time, place, and inner characteristics of such fabrics and its consequences directly affect the suburbanites and the city and it’s residents are affected indirectly.

1.6 CONCLUSION

Since the 1950’s up to now, Iranian cities have had problems with informal settlements. Basically, financial policies of western governments in Iran caused villagers from different cultures to immigrate to the suburbs and establish these settlements. These communities have not only created socio-economical problems within their settlements but also for the cities.

Iran's government has not yet been able to solve the problems associated with these settlements even by using different policies. Improper policies have worsened the case and informal settlements have become a cancerous tumor inside and outside of the cities.

Based on the reasons of failing governmental programs, which described in this paper (like weak recognition of target groups, wrong loan policies, centralized political decisions, destructive actions and etc.), we can say that the very first step of dealing with this problem in Iran is to study the situation professionally and then taking proper actions by using the bottom-up decision-making approach.

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