

Foundations and Consequences of Spatial Injustice in Iran

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Abstract

This paper with use descriptive-analytic method intends to explain spatial injustice in Iran. Spatial injustice refers to the imbalanced distribution of valuable political, social and economic power, wealth, infrastructures and opportunity resources. From political geography point of view, spatial injustice can be a threat to the national integrity, national & domestic security and creation of critical areas in the state. Spatial injustice is an important feature of spatial organization in Iran, which is formulated on a core-periphery structure from the local to national scale. This paper seek to address the following questions: *what are the effective factors in spatial injustice in Iran? What are the consequences of spatial injustice on Iran?* The results show that the most important foundations of spatial injustice in Iran are inequality in the distribution of power, wealth and opportunity resources, weakness of the budgeting system, weakness of management of regional and local systems, the absence of spatial justice as a general demand and institutionalized centralization. Spatial injustice, on one hand, endangers peace and stability of the country and threatens legitimacy of the political system on the other hand. Issues such as divergence, armed conflict, drugs, terrorism are the main reflections of spatial injustice that Iran is involved on the national scale.

Keywords: Spatial justice, Spatial injustice, Policy-making, Spatial planning.

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INTRODUCTION

Space is a fundamental concept in geography [1] that can be considered from different facets. One such facet is spatial justice. Spatial justice is not an alternative to other forms of justice; rather it shows particular emphasis and an interpretive perspective [2]. Space is ideological, socially produced, disputed, and constantly changing among social, political, economic, and geographic territories [3,2]. This results in an ongoing contestation to engage in the struggles over geography [4]. Spatial injustice, then, in its simplest form is the connection between space and social justice and the way those intersections are made visible (or sometimes invisible) in society [5].

Spatial justice investigates justice from the viewpoint of geography [6]. A comprehensive perception of spatial justice requires understanding of the mutual relation between politics and space and their dynamic mechanisms, which pave the way for proposals of spatial justice in political geography. Spatial justice finds objectivity in political geography; in other words, it finds an operational facet [7]. In political geography, the concept of justice has moved

away from the objective level and has reached a subjective level [8].

The philosophy of addressing spatial justice is rooted in state revival because spatial imbalance results from unequal accessibility to power, wealth and resources on different scales. Unequal distribution of civil and revenue allotments may increase the inequality and gap between political units in different contexts. In this situation, politicians could prevent disintegration by codifying strategies to reduce poverty and promote spatial justice to promote national security [9].

A democratic approach to spatial justice provides equality for all residents of a geographic space to enjoy the resources, opportunities and infrastructures through their participation in the decision-making processes. Spatial justice is realized when power, wealth and opportunities are distributed proportionally with the potentialities of the micro- and macro-spaces and places. Equal access of all residents of a geographic space to the main factors like power, opportunity and wealth at micro- and macro-levels form the axis of spatial justice in political geography. Model 1 illustrates this issue.

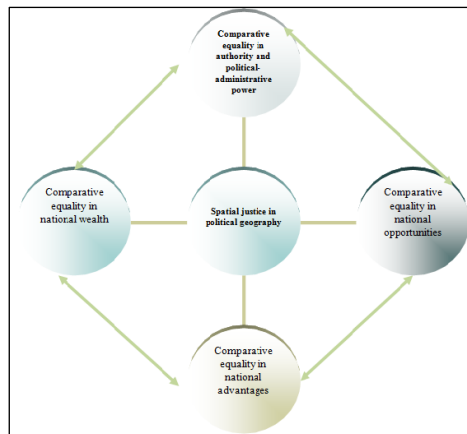


Fig-1: Spatial justice in political geography

Source: (by authors)

Due to the importance of spatial justice in national solidarity and integration, characterizing the root factors in spatial injustice is an important aspect of the domain of political geography. This article aims to characterize the factors effecting spatial injustice in Iran. For this purpose, a theoretical framework is proposed and the factors effecting spatial injustice in Iran are explained.

METHOD & MATERIALS

This research uses descriptive-analytic methods based on a literature review and field findings to Explaining spatial injustice in Iran. The literature review was used to determine effective factors in spatial injustice in Iran. In the field findings, the facets and indices of spatial justice are categorized and standardized to measure the Iranian situation. The Fundamentals of spatial injustice are characterized and categorized from the perspective of the statistical population based on the average score to codify methods.

Theoretical framework

This section addresses the concepts and model related to the subject, as under:

Spatial justice

Spatial or geographic justice is a relative balance in the comprehensive indicators of development (educational, economic, structural, political, cultural, social, security and sanitary) in geographic spaces and places (micro- and macro-levels) with development indicators at the national level [8]. Spatial injustice establishes unequal distribution of opportunities, wealth, advantages and political and administrative power in a geographical space.

Spatial injustice

Spatial injustice establishes unequal distribution of opportunities, wealth, advantages and political and administrative power in a geographical space. Spatial (in) justice is situated and contextualized in three overlapping and interactive levels of

geographical resolution. The first results from the external creation of unjust geographies through boundary making and the political organization of space. Examples range from South African apartheid and other forms of colonial control to more subtle efforts at spatial manipulation such as electoral district gerrymandering and the privileging of private property rights under the law. At a more local scale, unjust geographies arise endogenously or internally from the distributional inequalities created through discriminatory decision making by individuals, firms, and institutions. In such cases as exclusionary zoning, the siting of toxic facilities, and restrictive forms of racial segregation, discriminatory geographies have been challenged in the courts and become the focus for a rich literature on law and space.

How race, space, and the law interact is discussed, along with a brief look at the environmental justice movement. The third scale of geographical resolution is more regional, or mesogeographical, and is rooted in the injustices associated with geographically uneven development and what is described as the globalization of injustice. Geographically uneven development is given particular attention as a general process underlying the formation of spatial injustice at the meso, or “middle,” scale, between the urban and the global. Seeking spatial justice is expanded here to include regional coalition building, the search for regional democracy, and the development of new action strategies such as community-based regionalism [2].

Spatial injustice refers to unequal situations among citizens, which can have political, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The most important foundation of spatial injustice is the inequality of participation in power, which leads to inequality in access to opportunities. Inequality in power emerges when social control is at the disposal of a limited number of citizens. This provides the basis for the formation of dual social structures and the pattern of relations in society is formed in two forms of winners and losers. Ultimately, this polarization will cause seclusion. The socio-spatial gap is the consequence of the lack of adequate attention to the real capabilities of individuals and geographic spaces. In addition, when ordinary efforts do not make the necessary changes to improve conditions, the losers of the community will organize in the form of protest movements and geographic space will be tense (See figures 2).

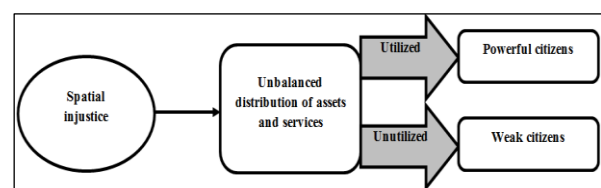


Fig-2: Spatial injustice and social gap

Source: (by authors)

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Explaining the spatial injustice in Iran

According documentary and field results, spatial justice Situation in Iran is heterogeneous, that shows in fallow.

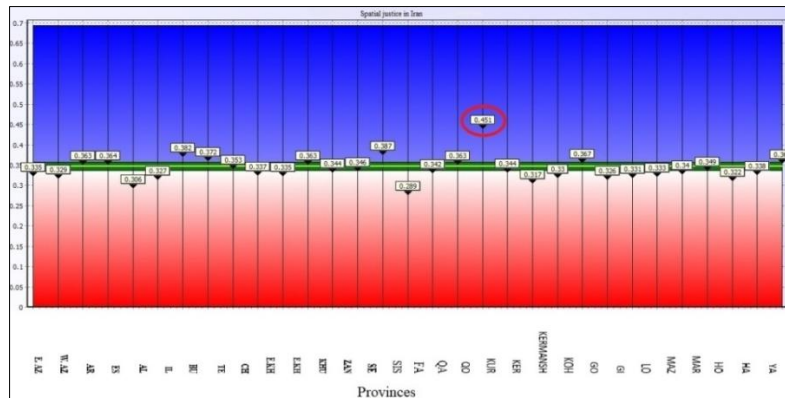
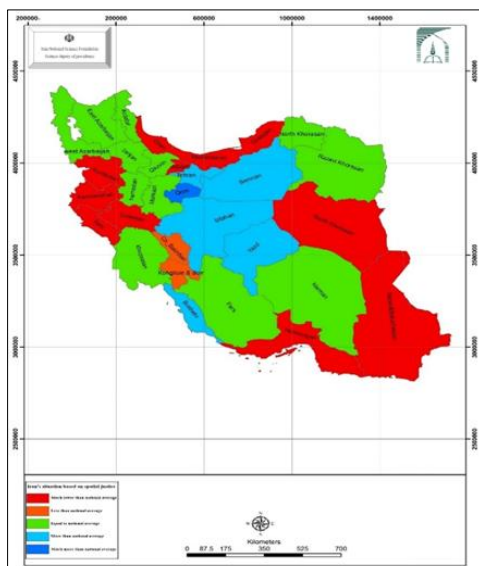


Fig-3: Iran's spatial justice Situation

Source: (by authors)

Table-1: Classify of provinces by spatial justice index

Levels	Provinces
Much more than national average	Qom
More than national average	Tehran, Isfahan, Bushehr, Semnan, Yazd.
Equal to national average	Azerbaijan (East), Azerbaijan (West), Ardabil, Khorasan (Razavi), Khorasan (North), Zanjan, Kerman, Khuzestan, Fars, Gazvin, Markazi, Hamadan.
Less than national average	, Chahar Mahaal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad
Much lower than national average	Alborz, Khorasan (South), Ilam, Sistan and Baluchestan, Kordestan, Kermanshah, Golestan, Mazandaran, Guilan, Lorestan, Hormozgan.



Map-1: Iran's situation based on spatial justice

Source: (by authors)

Fundamental of Spatial Injustice in Iran

The most Causes of Spatial Injustice in Iran are as under:

Living foundations

These are related to situation of physical geography of Iran and unequal distribution of vital resources. Vital resources include the factors that affect the formation, development, evolution and survival of human social life and supply the needs of economic life. These factors are space, climate and the geometric form of the state.

Space of Iran

Despite the coherent and integrated totality of Iranian plateau, the space of Iran has different physical features and its western and eastern regions are asymmetrical. Mountains comprise 21% of the territory (350 thousand km²) and plains and coastal plains comprise 66% of the territory (1098 thousand km²). The physical characteristics of Iranian space which affect spatial injustice are as follows:

- Topographic disconnection and incongruous spaces that impose high costs on structural and infrastructural activity, and useful space for development is inadequate.
- Physical insecurity of the space: The geographic characteristics and location of Iran expose it to physical disasters like earthquakes, floods, droughts and landslides.

- Decrease in per capita space and place: Iran has witnessed a high rate of population growth in recent decades which has increased the density of the population from 11.5 persons/km² in 1956, to 49.1 persons/km² in 2016.
- Lack of comprehensive land-use plans: Land use and allocation of land to activities at micro- and macro-geographic scales have not been subjected to comprehensive planning of the country. This has caused anarchical and unplanned occupation of space, resulting in environmental degradation, spatially abnormal structures, imbalanced distribution of the population and activities in the state [10].
- Regional divisions of Iran in relation to relief show impressive distinctions in the establishment of settlements [11].

Climate of Iran

Climate can affect the abilities and concentration of the population. Iran is a vast territory that occupies tropical and moderate regions and its climate is affected by different geographic factors. The climate varies by region, which has consequences such as: water scarcity, different forms of livelihood, distribution of ecological activities and dispersed spatial distribution of the population. The climate of Iran has directly affected its social, economic and political structures.

Area and geometrical form of Iran

Iran has an area of 1,648,195 km², which ranks as 16th globally. Although area is an important factor in the national power and strategy, it has negative effects on the development and complementary functions of different regions of the country as follows:

- Long borders and their consequent problems (high cost of monitoring the border, smuggling, etc.)
- Communication problems and negative effects.
- Geometrically, Iran has an asymmetrical shape and features. This geometrical shape causes the

asymmetrical distances to the border regions and the capital of the state [12].

This factor along with other factors like climate and topography has caused unequal development in Iran.

Human geography of Iran

The human geography of Iran is important from two perspectives in relation to spatial justice: the spatial/geographic structure of the nation, and the pattern of distribution of population and activities.

Spatial/geographic structure of nation

The spatial/geographic structure of the nation includes both central and peripheral sections. The central region covers the main territory of Iran and there is relative homogeneity between its religious, ethnic, language, cultural and spatial elements.

The peripheral sections located around of Iran, and include different ethnic and cultural groups. The peripheral regions differ from the central section, to some extent in the terms of language, ethnicity, religion and local sub-cultures. [10].

Pattern of distribution of population and activities

One important criterion of economic development from the geopolitical perspective is resources distribution in a territory [13]. There is a relative inequality and imbalance distribution of resources and population in Iran between the center and the some peripheries, because of the lack of a culture and practice of spatial planning in the country. This has created, on the one hand, large cities and developed regions and, on the other hand, a peripheral region that is deprived and underdeveloped. Spatial injustice in Iran has a long history during 20th century, and attempts to decrease it have not been successful.

The national Bureau of Statistics of Iran published a report with an emphasis on 15 indicators which depicts inequality in 31 provinces (Table 2).

Table-2: Perspective of provinces from regional accounts.

Sectors	Added value share of the provinces	
	Lowest	Highest
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, Qom, Ilam	Kerman, Fars, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khuzestan, East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Isfahan, Mazandaran
Mine	25 provinces, which share of low than 1% of added value of Mine section	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, Khuzestan, Ilam and Bushehr
Industry	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, Ilam	Tehran, Isfahan, Bushehr and Khuzestan
Water, natural gas and electricity	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, South Khorasan, Alborz	Tehran, Isfahan, Bushehr and Khuzestan
Building	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, South Khorasan, Chahar Mahal-e Bakhtiari	Tehran, Isfahan, Fars, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khuzestan
Transportation	North Khorasan, South Khorasan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	Tehran, Khuzestan, Isfahan, Khorasan-e Razavi
Financial broker	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer Ahmad, South Khorasan, Ilam	Tehran, Isfahan, Fars, Khorasan-e Razavi
Real estate	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Ilam, Chahar Mahal-e Bakhtiari	Alborz, Tehran, Khorasan-e Razavi
Administration of Public Affairs and City Services	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Ilam, Chahar Mahal-e Bakhtiari	Tehran, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khuzestan, Fars, Isfahan, Kermanshah
Education	South Khorasan, Semnan, Ilam	Tehran, Isfahan, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khuzestan, East Azerbaijan
Social hygiene	South Khorasan, North Khorasan and Ilam	Tehran, Khorasan-e Razavi, Khuzestan, Fars, Isfahan, Iran

Table No. 5, shows that Tehran has the rank first in different sectors, which promotes spatial injustice in the country and immigration and influx of population to Tehran province. Tehran province encompasses about 1.15% of the territory of Iran, but is occupied by 16% of the population. Large provinces like South Khorasan, Kerman and Sistan and Baluchistan share about 28% of the territory of Iran, but are occupied by only 8% of the population. Besides the imbalanced distribution of the population, imbalanced distribution of activity is another characteristic of the spatial structure of Iran. The Labor Ministry strategic reports indicate that six provinces shared more than 50% of the GDP in 2015 and 25 provinces shared 50% of GDP (<https://donya-e-eqtesad.com>). (Figure 2)

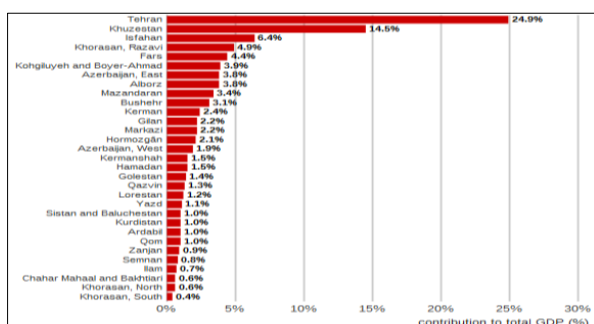
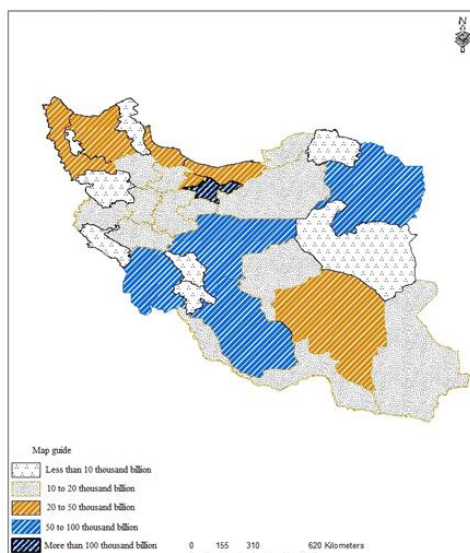


Fig-4: Iran's GDP contribution by province

The Iranian Central Bank reports that the total balance of bank accounts was about 16830 thousand billion rials in 2018, which Tehran province is ranked first with 9460 thousand billion rials.



Map-2: Spatial imbalance in the distribution of bank accounts

The increase of inequality and availability of economic opportunities in the central regions of Iran, have caused people to migrate from the peripheries to the center. This is seen as logical and constructive from

the perspective of capitalism. The consequence of capitalism toward space in the long term would be an accumulation of capital in a few spaces and its absence from the peripheries.

This in turn produces and deepens spatial development gaps. Ultimately, it can threaten the national integrity, weakening of economic relations among the regions and weaken regional potentials.

Political system and policymaking

The formation of unequal development spaces in state or regional scales is considerable and important from the perspective of geographic power and advantages. The influence of this factor (in particular, in non-democratic structures) is detrimental to underdeveloped regions at the national and local scales, because they are, generally, less powerful [14]. Centralism is the concentration and monopoly of power in different forms accompanied by geographic centralism [10].

Centralism and spatial injustice in Iran

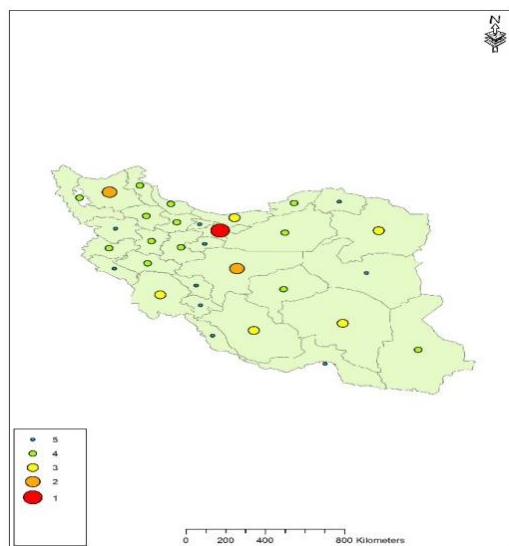
Centralism is political-administrative organization in which all decisions about public affairs (local and national) are made by a central political power [15].

The output of such a system is a power monopoly concentrated in the capital and limited centers. Political-administrative power of the state of Iran is concentrated in Tehran. This forms a power monopoly that statesmen, politicians and officials believe they have the right to political power, and do not recognize the power of decision-making for other citizens of the state. Concentration of political and financial power and the main banking and financial centers have created economic supremacy in Tehran, along with the concentration of the population and social services in this mega city [10].

Investigation of the spatial distribution of power in governments of Iran shows that the most cabinet ministers in the most recent administrations were from the central provinces of Iran, specially Tehran and Isfahan [14]. The high number of government ministers, along with the high number of parliament members from these two provinces, makes clear the reasons of the formation of an imbalanced pattern and spatial injustice. This is a major political force behind spatial injustice and can be interpreted as unequal access to spatial opportunities and power in proportion with geographic and spatial weights at different scale.

The heterogeneous distribution of political and executive power is one the most important foundations of spatial injustice in Iran. Such a way that provinces Tehran, Isfahan, Kerman, Yazd and Semnan with 29.1 percentage of area, 29.3 percentage of population, have

been allocated 37.95 percentage of political and executive power. Due to weakness of spatial approach among policy making and overcoming of place belonging, an effort to promote their hometown growth had great impact on spatial injustice in Iran. Spatial imbalances in the distribution of political power in Iran can be shown in map 3.



Map-3: Level of participation in power

Development plans

Economic development plans are effective factors in the formation and ordering of geographic space, as is manifested in a centralized political system. Comprehensive development plans are a synthesis of economic, social, cultural and spatial development plans that coordinate development in the state space through allocation of economic resources for projects with respect to their priorities at the time [16]. The government has a determinative role with the authority to produce and administer the development of plans [17]. In the centralized political-administrative system, the planning system is centralized. Accordingly, the lack of attention to regional needs and potentials is the most important challenge in the centralized planning system of the state. Ecological diversity, disregarding of regional differences, lack of attention to the experimental approach and codification of unified policies for all regions of the state have intensified spatial injustice.

Before the Islamic Revolution, planning was based on the development of regions, but resulted in spatial inequalities such that some regions benefited from the economic and social structures and others were deprived. The lack of a policy for decentralization in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, have not been successful for establishing spatial balance. So the centralized administrative system and the centralized planning system are the main causes of spatial injustice in Iran.

Global and regional geopolitical environment

One causal factor of imbalanced development in Iran is the anarchic nature of the geopolitical environment, which is costly and difficult to address. This contribution to spatial injustice relates to the geographic location of Iran, the high number of neighboring states, security approaches to the border regions, regional tensions and the pattern of international relations. These factors, along with the other structural and functional elements, have negatively affected the development of peripheral regions in Iran [18].

The buffer location of Iran among the great powers in the two last centuries has had disastrous consequences. From the political perspective, many states have incurred damage caused by the antagonism of major powers as it relates to the process of development and codification of national strategies [19]. From the geostrategic perspective, Iran is buffered, which paves the way for the influence and destructive intervention of the foreign powers in line with their own interests. This prevents policy-makers from making multilateral development plans.

The long borders with variety of ethnic groups settled along border regions, and geographic diversity of Iran means that more than half of the provinces which are located in border regions have problem. The high numbers of neighboring states of Iran which are mainly instable and unable to establish political and economic stability, challenge an optimal strategy for development of the border regions.

After the emergence of a modern state in Iran in the eve of 20th century, the spatial distribution of power have confronted with challenges resulting from the lack of harmony between political management of space and the geographic realities of Iran [20]. The distribution of ethnic-religious groups in the border regions and weakness of bilateral structures in these regions have promoted spatial injustice and created a sense of exclusion in the border regions. In spite of this, changing national looking and policy toward the border regions, can transform the nature of the relation between the central state and peripheral regions from a confrontational approach to an interactive one.

Iran's spatial injustice consequences

From viewpoint of political geography, the most important consequences of spatial injustice in Iran can be categorized as follows:

Divergence

From view point of political geography, three factors are important in the integrity of a state as follows: first, cultural integrity; second, the level that a state is affected from political regionalism; third, lack of entity and national identity factors which are accepted by all of the citizens [21]. Development aims

promotion of life and fair distribution of resources. Imbalanced development among different regions brings regional and spatial inequalities and challenges national development. Feeling of exclusion and marginalization in ethnic regions like Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, Sistan, and Khuzestan are the most important consequences of spatial injustice in Iran which act as one of the centrifugal factors that threaten national security.

Drug-related crimes

Deprivation in South and Southeast of Iran, lack of job opportunities and neighboring with drug producers regions have paved the way for drug smuggling. This has caused increase in the number of drug addicts and also increase in crimes and insecurity level. Baluchistan and Sistan with 200624 tones detected drug is ranked first in this domain. This issue shows deprivation and ignorance of development potentialities of Baluchistan and Sistan.

Terrorism

Undoubtedly, there is a close relation between violence and economic underdevelopment. Deprivation paves the way for violent activities which do not have only economic facet and include other facets like political, cultural and citizenship etc. In sum, it can be said that insecurity and armed activities in Western (PEJAK, KOMELE etc.) and Southeast (Jond-Allah) regions of Iran are to some extent resulted from low level of development and its consequences like poverty, feeling of discrimination, divergence from central state, distrust to government policies, public discontent, smuggling etc.

Smuggling

Spatial injustice and subjected imbalanced development in boundary regions have caused to develop poverty, increase in unemployment rate and feeling of deprivation in these regions and also criminal economic activities. Regarding that smuggling as a social delinquency is available in border regions, reactions to poverty and unemployment are manifested in active participation in smuggling. Smuggling is existed in Sistan and Baluchistan, Hormuzgan, Bushehr, Khuzestan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan provinces.

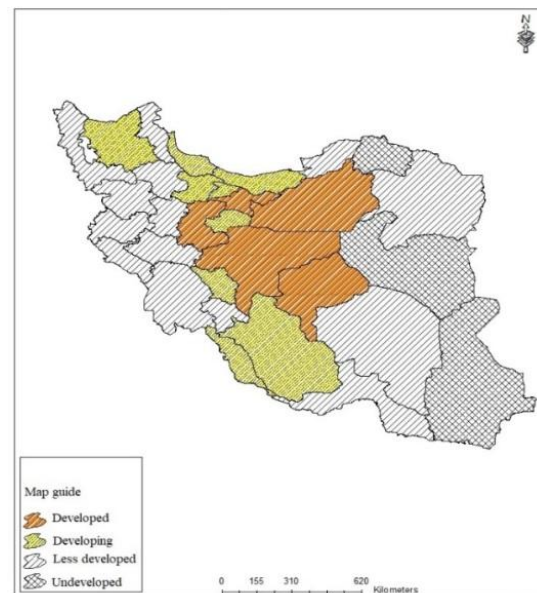
Slums and informal settlements

Slum settlement refers to the persons who are settled in economic realm of a city, but are not attracted in urban economy that form a type of life style which is not urban or rural, and in fact it is a new pole. This region is derived from services, facilities and welfare infrastructures and life style is challenging.

One of the results of imbalanced physical development in cities is slum settlement in its illegal form. Illegal settlement due to development of poverty and threatening environment and impose of vast costs to solve urban problems increases in the level of crimes and urban damages. Based on informal statistics, 26.4% of Iran are settled in slums which share of 20 millions (total urban population is about 60 millions) of urban population. Growth in marginalized regions is rooted in imbalanced distribution of national property and life quality of citizens which pave the way for immigration and its continuation.

CONCLUSION

Iran is faced with a core-periphery structure. Some spaces are highly populated, whereas other regions are unequally developed. Developed regions in the central section of Iran have surrounded by the underdeveloped regions. This model is shown in the map No. 4.



Map-4: Core-periphery pattern in of Iran

Source: Rasti & Rahimi [22]

Theoretical and experimental studies shows that spatial injustice in Iran has resulted from ignoring spatial planning as well as optimal political management of space. Hence, the decision-making system of the state in Iran is faced with opposing challenges in order to attain geographic/spatial justice.

The result of this mechanism is institutionalization of inequality in the flow of wealth, interests, opportunities and power throughout the country of Iran. Table 3 lists the field findings related to the foundations of spatial injustice in Iran.

Table-3: Foundations of spatial injustice in Iran

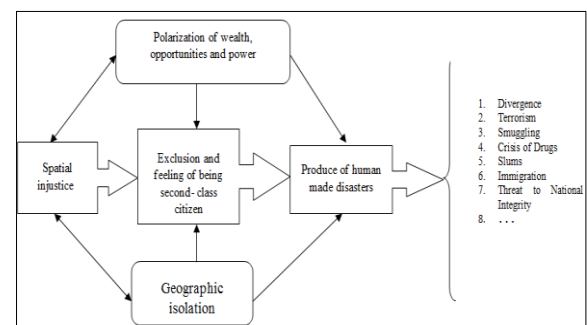
Issues
Inequality in the distribution of power, wealth and opportunities
Weakness in the planning and budgeting systems
Weakness in the regional and local management systems
Spatial justice is not get a public claim
Institutionalized centralism
Ambiguity in the place and importance of spatial justice in the administrative system of Iran
Lack of experience of administrative managers in deprived regions
Weak spatial perception of policy makers
Lack of attention to documents supporting balanced development and deprivation
State dependence on oil income and imbalanced development
Conceptual ambiguities in regional and local planning
Legal ambiguities in regional planning
Lack of discourse about balanced and just development
Weakness in public participation to further balance development plans
Emphasis on security in development in border regions
Regional and global geopolitical environment
Dominance of growth-based approach in previous states and lack of attention to spatial justice
Weakness in collection of comprehensive regional and national data
Theoretical weakness about spatial justice domain of knowledge
Imbalanced vital resources

Source: (by authors)

To conclude, spatial injustice pave the way for polarization of the space and isolation of some citizens, in a way that it causes disability in effective participation in economic, cultural and social life and exclusion from main stream of the society. This exclusion cause social deprivation sequence. Ignorance of knowledge or lack of attention to control of social exclusion bring segregation of deprived groups from social benefits and their exclusion from benefits, opportunities and power which is in opposition with freedom and justice.

Soft violence acted by political management of the space toward low-enjoyed groups cause creation and increase in social cleavage and spatial gaps in a part of the society that its definite consequence will be organization of losers and violent actions (hard violence) in social delinquencies and irritating delinquencies in the society. If spatial inequality is formed among different regions of a state and it is institutionalized as a dominant pattern, feeling of exclusion and deprivation is increased and divergent forces are activated. So, taking unjust policies in different scales ranging from local to global levels causes creation of spatial injustice. The formation of imbalanced pattern of power brings polarized development and progress, and dualism in the society is increased and spatial injustice is formed as its definite consequences. Institutionalization of spatial injustice makes social gaps bold, and subjective and objective distances among settlers of geographic space is increased which cause increase in discontents and the potentiality of protests against current situation and face the state with spatial disasters. Inequality in development causes discontents, insecurity and instability which cannot promote national integrity,

because localities are not benefited from delegation of authority to national loyalty. So, they accept national integrity, hardly. It can be claimed that spatial behavior of the regions and spaces is a normal reaction to state policies and planning and policymaking systems. The figure 3 shows the relation between spatial injustice and produce of human made disasters.

**Fig-5: The relation between spatial injustice and produce of human made disasters**

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