

Intra-metropolitan migration and the expansion of spontaneous settlements on the Tehran Metropolitan Fringe

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Abstract

During the past three decades the urban population of the developing countries has increased tremendously. Most of this urban population growth has taken place on the metropolitan fringe.

This article, which is based on the findings of a research project funded by the University of Tehran, considering the demographic processes in the Tehran Metropolitan Region (TMR), attempts to answer the following questions: How is the demographic process of metropolitan expansion in TMR best characterized? And to what income groups do the households in these settlements belong?

Three spontaneous settlements in the vicinity of the Tehran's three major transport routes were chosen as the case studies for the purposes of the study. It is found that, contrary to general perceptions, direct rural to peri-urban migration was very low and instead intra-metropolitan migration was found to be the dominant migration pattern in all three spontaneous settlements surveyed, and that the vast majority of the households surveyed in these settlements belong to the low-income group.

1 Introduction

During the past three decades the urban population of the developing countries has increased tremendously. Most of this urban population growth has taken place on the metropolitan fringe. "About 42 per cent of the developing countries urban population live in informal settlements, many located on the urban fringe" [1].

The demographic processes in the Tehran Metropolitan Region (TMR) during the past three decades of 1966-1996 reveal that the population of the TMR has grown from 3.13 million in 1966 to about 10.34 million in 1996. During this period, the share of the Tehran City population has decreased from 87% in 1966 to about 65.5% in 1996 while the population of the rest of the TMR has grown from 14.2 % in 1966 to about 34.67% in 1996 (Table1). Also, about 40 per cent of the five million-population increase of the TMR, has resided in informal settlements.

Table 1. Population evolution in Tehran Metropolitan Region, 1966-1996

Population centers	1966		1976		1986		1996	
	Population	%	population	%	population	%	population	%
Tehran city	2719730	86.6	4530223	86.4	6042584	67.2	6758845	65.5
The rest of TMR	417829	14.4	715368	13.6	1885375	23.8	3584941	34.5
Total	3137559	100	5245591	100	7927959	100	10343786	100

The figures in this table also show that during the said period the population of the Tehran City has grown 2.3 times, while the population of the rest of the TMR has grown by 7.8 times. In other words, most of the population increase in the TMR has taken place outside of the Tehran City and on its periphery.

Surveys also indicate that, "during the twenty-year period between 1976-1996, about 40 per cent of the five million-population increase of the TMR, has resided in informal settlements. The largest cities of the TMR, except the cities of Tehran and Karaj, namely Eslamshahr, Ghods and Gharachak are former informal settlements that have been transformed into formal city status. Four out of the nine newly established towns during the 1991-1996 period, and eight out of nine newly established towns in 1997 were former informal settlements". Currently there are 17 informal settlements with a population of 10,000 or more that are on the waiting list to be elevated to the city status [2]. The unprecedented growth of informal settlements in the TMR has brought about many socio-economic, cultural, environmental and political problems. This article attempts to survey some socio-economic characteristics of the households residing in some of the spontaneous settlements on the Tehran Metropolitan Fringe (TMF), specifically trying to answer the following questions:

1. How is the demographic process of metropolitan expansion best characterized? Is this expansion mainly due to rural-to-urban migration? Or does this growth indicate a process of intra-metropolitan migration?

2. To what income groups do the households in these settlements belong?

2 Background

2.1 General views on informal settlements

The problems of the Third World cities after decades of attempts by the governments and development organizations to regulate urban growth and expansion, remain as massive and ill managed as ever.

In the 1950s and 1960s the literature on the problems of the Third World cities concentrated on the cultural aspect of informal settlements and “ argued that such problems were caused by pathological cultural trends, which they characterized as a ‘culture of marginality’. This view which explained the perpetuation of poverty in terms of the cultural apathy of the poor, served as a nexus of controversy for at least two decades”[3].

In the late 1960s and in 1970s two different views emerged on the issue of illegal and informal settlements. The proponents of the dependencia school of thought focused their attention on the analysis of the political economy of the Third World cities’ uncontrolled expansion. They emphasized the structural aspects of the urban problem and argued that squatter and informal settlements are the result of dependent capitalism in their respective societies [4].

In this period John Turner came forward with his ideas on housing the poor. In his philosophy, the poor’s right to housing as well as their potential for extensive participation in solving their own problems is stressed. His emphasis was based on the much better results obtained in autonomous settlements as compared with governments’ attempts to provide shelter for the urban poor through traditional public housing programs. He therefore proposed that instead of condemning and threatening the existing illegal and informal settlements, governments should respect, support and guide them where necessary [5].

The implications of the Turner’s ideas in practice was to offer public provision of minimally serviced land on which people are allowed and encouraged to manage their own housing (sites-and services) as an alternative to squatting. In the case of existing squatter settlements, legislation and improvements were to replace earlier policies of eradication.

From the 1970s onwards, these policies were promoted by many international development agencies. It was assumed that legislation and infrastructure provision in informal settlements will stimulate the inhabitants to invest their savings in improvements of their housing [6]. The 1970s, therefore, saw an increasing investment in slum and squatter upgrading programs.

Despite some impressive results, the slum and squatter upgrading programs, which were largely funded by the World Bank, had major shortcomings. Capitalizing on the shortcomings of the sites-and-services or slum and squatter upgrading programs, planners and policy makers helped shape the emergence of the “Enabling Approach” of the late 1980s [7].

One important point with the enabling strategy is that it did not discard some of the earlier approaches of the 1970s, especially the slum and squatter upgrading approach; rather the strategy seeks to remove the obstacles for the successful implementation of the upgrading programs.

In 1996 the Habitat Agenda, adopted by 171 governments at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, emphasized partnership and participatory approaches as important elements of the “enabling approach”. Governments were seen as ‘enabling partners’ to create and strengthen effective partnerships with all stakeholders, including local authorities, NGOs, CBOs and the private sector.

2.2 Specific views on the informal settlements in Iran

In this section reference will be made to only those studies on the informal settlements that are directly related to the specific objectives of this study.

According to Habibi [8] it is in the early 1960s that for the first time we are confronted with the phenomenon of informal settlements in Iran. A phenomenon that was unknown by then and as an urban and even political problem was adversely affecting the future of the Tehran City. In his study of Eslamshahr he finds that spontaneous settlements such as Eslamshahr are attracting not only the rural migrants but also the urban migrants, as well as migrants from the Tehran City. He further notes that in Eslamshahr different social groups exist: in inner and central areas middle-income households and in its outskirts low-income families.

Rafiei and Athari [9] studying the informal settlements in ten different cities in Iran conclude that in all the ten cities, after the preparation and implementation of urban development plans, these cities have experienced accelerated peri-urban population growth, mainly engaged in non-agricultural activities, and the informal settlements phenomenon has spread all over their urban fringe.

They also argue that the informal settlements phenomenon, prior to the implementation of the Tehran Master Plan (1967), did not exist in the Tehran City.

Piran [10] also has studied several informal settlements in Iran. He concludes that informal settlements are not only housing the rural migrants but also a percent of long time urban residents who could not afford to be housed in the formal segments of the cities.

3 Research methodology

Spontaneous settlements in this study refer to those settlements in the TMF that have grown and expanded in vacant lands or in the vicinity of a rural settlement, without any formal development plan; and have had an accelerated population growth [11]. The Tehran Metropolitan Plan [11], being prepared by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD) through Urban Planning and Architecture Research Center (UPARC) has identified spontaneous settlements in the TMR. Using these identified spontaneous settlements as the target population

for this study, the spontaneous settlements located in the vicinity of the Tehran's three major transport routes (corridors) were stratified. Three spontaneous settlements were chosen (one from each stratum) using stratified random sampling technique. The selected settlements are as follows:

1. Bagher Abad, in the Varamin Road corridor.
2. Saleh Abas, in the Saveh Road corridor.
3. Khatoon Abad, in the Khorasan Road corridor.

The demographic characteristics of these settlements are presented in Table 2. This table shows that two out of three settlements (Bagher Abad and Khatoon Abad) had no population at all in 1966 and the third settlement (Saleh Abad) had a population of about 460 people in that year. All the three settlements had a very high population growth rate in the 1976-1986 period: 29.09% for Bagher Abad, 32.86% for Saleh Abad, and 25.07% for Khatoon Abad. Saleh Abad has continued to have high population growth rate (28.76%) in the period 1986-1996, while the population growth rates of the other two settlements have declined considerably, yet much higher than the average national population growth rate (2.9%).

Table 2. Population and growth rates of settlements surveyed, 1966-1996

Population centers	1966	1976	1986	1996	growth rate (%)	
	population	population	population	population	1976-86	1986-96
Bagher Abad	0	1520	27882	40886	29.09	3.83
Saleh Abad	460	42	1123	19422	32.86	28.76
Khatoon Abad	0	599	7351	16223	25.07	7.92

A total of 206 households from these settlements were selected for the purposes of this study using systematic sampling technique (Table 3). A questionnaire was designed and the needed data was collected from the selected households from these settlements. Taking into consideration that usually data reduction occurs in the use of questionnaires, complementary data was gathered through observation and field surveys.

Table 3. Number of households surveyed

Settlements	Bagher Abad	Saleh Abad	Khatoon Abad	total
No. of HHs	97	51	58	206
Percent	47.09	24.76	28.15	100

4 The findings of the study

The results of the survey from the three spontaneous settlements are summarized under the following separate topics: (1) the demographic process of peri-urbanization; and (2) the income level of the households surveyed. Cross-tabulation, percentages and statistical tests for significant differences between settlements are used when necessary. However, it is very difficult to generalize the findings of the study since we have only sampled three settlements. Therefore, the findings of this study should be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive.

4.1 The demographic process of peri-urbanization

Three basic migratory flows comprise the demographic expansion of the fringe areas: direct rural to peri-urban migration; stepwise interurban migration; and intra-metropolitan migration, usually from the central city to the metropolitan fringe [1]. It was not our intension to study the migration histories of the sampled households, but rather to study their last place of residence and its duration. Intra-metropolitan migration is found to be the dominant migration pattern in all three spontaneous settlements (Table 4). In two settlements of Bagher Abad and Saleh Abad the majority of households, 58.7% and 62.7%, respectively, and 42.1% of the households in Khatoon Abad, reported their last residence in the TMR. Even then, important differences appear among the three settlements. While 44.3% of households in Bagher Abad reported Tehran City as their last residence, this figure was 23.5% in Saleh Abad and 24.6% in Khatoon Abad. About 39.2% of households surveyed in Saleh Abad, 14.3% in Bagher Abad, and 17.5% in Khatoon Abad had moved from other settlements in the TMR.

Table 4. Last place of residence of households surveyed

last place of residence	Bagher Abad	Saleh Abad	Khatoon Abad	mean
TMR:	58.7	62.7	42.1	54.5
Tehran city	44.3	23.5	24.6	33.7
other fringe settlement	14.3	39.2	17.5	21.5
other urban areas	22.7	35.5	28.1	27.3
rural areas	10.3	2	19.3	10.7
other countries	8.2	0	10.5	6.8
Total	100	100	100	100

In all three spontaneous settlements the majority of households surveyed were long-term urban residents who had moved either from the Tehran City or from

other cities to these settlements: 67% in Bagher Abad; 58.8% in Saleh Abad; and 52.7% in Khatoon Abad.

Direct rural to peri-urban migration was very low in these settlements: 2% in Saleh Abad; 10.3% in Bgher Abad; and 19.3% in Khatoon Abad.

A survey of the main reasons for choosing these settlements by the households surveyed reveal that in Saleh Abad 74.5% and in Bagher Abad 51% of the households considered "affordable housing units", and in Khatoon Abad 61.4% of households considered "proximity to place of work" as the most important reasons for their migration to these settlements (Table 5).

Table 5. Main reasons for choosing these settlements by the households surveyed (per cent)

main reasons	Bagher Abad	Saleh Abad	Khatoon Abad
affordable housing units	51	74.5	28.1
proximity to place of work	31.3	17.6	61.4
proximity to relatives	7.3	5.9	0
Other	10.4	2	10.5
Total	100	100	100

4.2 The income level of households

Average household expenditure was used as a proxy for household income in this study. The average household expenditure of the households surveyed is tabulated in two different frequencies: one to match the national expenditure classification of the households in urban areas; and the other to match the national expenditure classification of the households in rural areas (Table 6). These frequency tables are compared with the average household expenditures classification for the low, middle, and high expenditure households in both urban and rural (Table7) areas of the country. This comparison yields the following results:

That the average household expenditure of the households surveyed in these spontaneous settlements is totally different from those of the urban households at the national level (statistically significant at least at 0.05 level using the chi-square test), and that the average household expenditure of the households surveyed in these spontaneous settlements well matches those of the rural households at the national level (statistically significant at least at 0.05 level using the chi-square test); and that the vast majority of the households surveyed (72.77%) in these settlements belong to the low-income group.

Therefore it could be seen that the fringe communities surveyed around the Tehran City appear to be composed of predominantly low-income households.

Therefore the findings of this study could be summarized as:

Intra-metropolitan migration is the dominant migration pattern in all three spontaneous settlements surveyed; in all three spontaneous settlements the

Table 6. Average annual household expenditure of households surveyed (per cent) based on national rural household classification.

settlements	4,800,000 Rials and less	4,800,001 – 8.400,000 Rials	8,400,001 Rials and more	total
Bagher Abad	31.8	41	27.3	100
Saleh Abad	34	34	32	100
Khatoon Abad	36.7	40.8	22.5	100
mean	34.17	38.60	27.27	100

Table 7. Average annual household expenditure of rural households in the country (per cent) by low, middle and high expenditure classification.

year	4,000,000 Rials and less	4,000,001- 9,000,000 Rials	9,000,001 Rials and more	total
1997	27.1	40.2	32.7	100

majority of households surveyed were long-term urban residents who had moved either from the Tehran City or from other cities to these fringe settlements; direct rural to peri-urban migration was very low in all the three settlements surveyed; the main reasons for moving to these settlements by the households surveyed indicate that in two settlements possibility of acquiring "affordable housing units", and in the other settlement "proximity to place of work" were the most important reasons for their migration to these settlements; that the average household expenditure of the households surveyed in these spontaneous settlements well matches those of the rural households at the national level; that the vast majority of the households surveyed in these settlements belong to the low-income group; and most of the households surveyed had only one income earner.

Although the expansion of the residential settlements in the Tehran Metropolitan Fringe appears to be spontaneous, it evidently is related to government policies. The Tehran Comprehensive Plan of 1967 and the subsequent urban development plans did not take into account the needs of the urban poor and therefore set forward criteria and standards which were completely out of reach of the City's poor population. Therefore the urban poor who was neglected and left out in the formal development plans, planned for themselves. The result in mid-1970s was the formation of the first spontaneous settlement in the Tehran Metropolitan Fringe, namely Eslamshahr. After the preparation and implementation of the urban development plan for Eslamshahr, the same phenomenon happened: City's poor population was forced to move to the urban fringe to create two spontaneous, informal settlements; Akbar Abad and Sultan Abad (currently called Nasim Shahr and Golestan, respectively).

Some of the important factors that have contributed to the formation and expansion of the spontaneous and informal settlements on the Tehran Metropolitan Fringe include: non-consideration of the financial capacities of the urban poor in urban development plans, especially in projections for the housing and other basic needs; non-consideration of the housing needs of the urban poor in housing sector policies; lack of coordination between the housing sector policies and policies of the urban development plans; high land use standards, criteria and norms set in the urban development plans.

The majority of the residents of the spontaneous settlements, therefore, are former urban citizens who could not acquire land and housing within the formal land and housing market and are forced to move towards informal settlements to have access to affordable land and housing.

5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following general recommendations are made:

- Acceptance of informal settlements as a solution and not as a problem; recognizing the existing settlements of the urban poor and moving towards their regularization and incorporation into the legal city.
- The participation of the urban poor is central to any proposed solution. It is necessary, therefore to facilitate the formation of civil society organizations, NGOs and CBOs to capitalize on the capacities of the urban poor to help themselves. Policies should be geared towards enabling the residents of the informal settlements to improve their living environment.
- Urban planning processes and practices should be reviewed and adjusted so as to facilitate the development of land and housing for low-income settlements.
- There is a need to reassess our housing sector policies and specifically address the housing needs of the urban poor.
- There should be an effective coordination between housing sector policies and urban development planning processes.
- Successful experiences of other countries on the subject matter should be explored and adopted to the local conditions.

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