"Challenges of Establishing a 'Welfare Municipality' in Tehran"

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Abstract

Tehran city incorporates more than 15% of the total country's inhabitants (about 80 millions) and increasing social problems has led local authorities to adopt a new approach in the past decade to turn the municipality into a 'social institution' instead of mere emphasis on physical development. Several welfare initiatives have been launched by the municipal administration in various policy domains to tackle the shortcomings of the centralised welfare system through social innovation.

However, welfare delivery in the city suffers from several key challenges which needs to be addressed if an integrated 'welfare municipality' is to be established, namely: lack of integration and coordination between the municipal bodies on the one hand and various national ministries and administrative bodies on the other; insensitivity to the diversity of welfare needs among different groups of people; significant gap between 'welfare access' and 'welfare take-up' in various policy domains; and limited citizen participation which is mainly characterised by an elitist domination.

Reviewing the current welfare initiatives as well as related challenges based on empirical findings, the paper attempts to recommend strategies and measures which could be applied to overcome those challenges and facilitate the way toward more inclusive entitlement to advantages of the localisation of welfare.

Keywords: welfare municipality; Iran; Tehran; localization of welfare; social innovation.

Introduction

With a population of over eight million people, Tehran city incorporates more than 15% of the total country's inhabitants. Huge immigration to the city due to uneven national development patterns, north-south as well as centre-periphery cleavages within the city, and increasing social problems has led local authorities to adopt a new approach in the past decade to turn the municipality into a 'social institution' instead of mere emphasis on physical development.

As an important part of this 'social' approach, several welfare initiatives have been launched by the municipal administration including in the fields of health, employment, leisure, regeneration, empowerment, and supporting marginalised groups to tackle the shortcomings of the centralised welfare system through social innovation. However, welfare delivery in the city suffers from several key challenges which need to be addressed if an integrated 'welfare municipality' is to be established. Explaining these main challenges through a brief review of the existing local social policy map in Tehran municipality as well as the current welfare needs and problems of the city, this paper attempts to provide a conclusion about the possibility of establishing a welfare municipality within the existing social, economic, political and legal contexts as well as presenting some general recommendations in this regard.

City and welfare: role of municipalities

The role of municipalities in providing welfare services is on the one hand a function of the types of the welfare system in place within a given country. Although being criticized and modified on several grounds, Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare states (1999) could be applied in this field. In each of the welfare states one could logically consider various levels of intervention by municipalities in welfare domains from a minimalist to a maximalist role which is determined by types of local governance and devolution of obligations and jurisdictions to local authorities and municipalities. Therefore, a matrix could be devised as portrayed in figure 1. As the figure shows 'welfare municipality' is logically seen in those universal or social democratic welfare states of the Scandinavia which are run within a decentralized political system and 'residual municipality' could be found in those liberal welfare states which have a centralized political system. Inspired by the right-based, universal and comprehensive welfare discourse, the first model is characterized by an extensive role by

local authorities and municipalities in providing welfare services in various policy domains. The second model is influenced by the market-oriented and minimalist ideology of liberalism which considers a limited role for the state including local governments and municipalities in the field of social welfare.

Figure 1. A Typology of Various Models for Social Welfare Roles of Municipalities according to the Countries' Welfare System

Welfare System Types

Residual	Corporate	Universal	
(3)	*(2)*	*(1) Welfare Municipality*	**Maximalist**
(6)	*(5)*	*(4)*	**Moderate**
(9) Residual Municipality	*(8)*	*(7)*	**Minimalist**

(Right vertical label: Social Welfare Roles of Municipalities)

This typology is also compatible with the typology provided by Sellers and Lidstrom (2007) which classifies countries with regard to the role of local governments based on two criteria: first political, administrative and fiscal dimensions of local capacity and second the supervision from the central government over local authorities, both of which are inter-related. The two kind of municipalities could be compared and contrasted in several dimensions. Welfare municipality intervenes and provide services in nearly all policy domains including education, health, housing, income maintenance, employment, etc. and these interventions are preemptive in a sense that they are provided before any problem occurs to meet the needs of all citizens and fulfill their capabilities while simultaneously interventions are also provided to remedy any social problem in the above mentioned fields. At the other side, residual municipalities usually provide welfare services on a remedial basis for at risk and marginalized groups who have faced problems in various filed like the homeless, the poor, severe addicts, people with disabilities, refugees, and child laborers. By result, welfare municipalities are expect to have a strong tax revenue and spend a high amount of budget on social welfare while exercising a considerable level of autonomy from the central government (see table 1).

Table 1. Comparing the features of 'welfare municipality' and 'residual municipality'

Models / Features	Welfare municipality	Residual municipality
Welfare domain covered	Nearly all domains	Mainly social problems
Target groups	All citizens	Specific and at risk groups
Welfare approach	Combined (preventive/ pre-emptive and remedial)	Mainly remedial
Welfare indicators	Capability-based	Risk-based
Welfare expenditure	High expenditure	Minimal expenditure
Relation with central government	High capacity and independence with limited governmental control	Limited capacity and independence with high governmental control

Iranian welfare system is portrayed in theory by the country's Constitution as a relatively universalistic and comprehensive welfare system with the primary aim of eradicating poverty, deprivation, inequality, and injustice, especially in Article 3 (Paragraphs 3, 9, and 12), Article 21 (Paragraphs 2 and 4), and Articles 28, 29, 30, 31 as well as Article 43 (Paragraphs 1 and 2) (ICS, 2009). Several frequently used terms such as 'free [services]', 'for all', 'universal', 'universal right', 'state responsibility', 'full employment' indicate that the Constitution consider a key role and responsibility for the public sector in providing welfare services for all citizens. However, as explained by Tajmazinani (2010), the desired welfare system is far from full realization in practice due to a number of external and internal factors including the long war of Iraq against Iran (8 years), foreign sanctions, counter development practices and mismanagement of the economic and welfare system. Moreover, one can trace an increasing neoliberal trend in the country following the post-war structural adjustment inspired by IMF and WB agenda while certain social policies (e.g. in the field of health, income maintenance or housing) may contradict this trend at some points.

The model of local governance in Iranian legislations is the 'council-manager model' (Julianne, 1999). This model can provide the ground for councils to act as city parliaments and set the regulations through a democratic process for comprehensive welfare roles of municipalities. However, within the centralized political and economic system of the country, there is a long way ahead to reach the full realization of this model and the gap between theory and practice exists in this field like the gap regarding the welfare system. These two

gaps are reflected in the welfare functioning of Tehran municipality and will be elaborated below in more details.

Research method

This paper is based on the results of a research and planning project undertaken by the author ("Formulating the 10-Year Strategic and Action Plan on Social Welfare for Tehran Municipality", 2014) which involved several research components. Firstly it included the content analysis of all legislations and policies regarding the roles, functions and jurisdictions of municipalities in general and Tehran municipality in especial. Secondly, field research were undertaken for any of the seven target groups of the Plan (namely children, young people, the middle aged, the elderly, people with disabilities, female headed families, at risk and marginalized groups) which included deep individual interviews as well as focus group interviews with members of these groups, focus group interviews with NGOs working with and for those groups, surveys with a sample of each target groups. The other component of the research was an international benchmarking of the best practices of welfare provision by municipalities in various welfare systems. Finally, it included a Delphi with key informants (including related managers and staff as well as street level practitioners in Tehran municipality and academic figures working in the field of city and welfare). Alongside the specific analysis of data for each research component, the results were analyzed and synthesized applying various strategic and operational planning techniques including SWOT, PESTEL, and organizational capacity analysis. The finding presented in this papers is a very short synthesis of the main challenges faced by Tehran municipalities which draws on the overall findings of the research.

Existing local policy context

Following the new social approach adopted by Tehran Municipality in the past decade, various welfare related structures have been established and numerous welfare initiatives have been launched by these bodies as well as other parts of the municipal administration. These initiatives span different policy domains such as health, employment, leisure, education, housing, regeneration, empowerment, and supporting marginalised groups. The overall aim of these social policies has been to tackle the shortcomings of the centralised welfare system through local structures and mechanisms with more emphasis on citizens' participation and social innovation at the grass root level.

The main lines of local social policy includes inter alia the following measures:

- Establishing a specialised body for welfare services ('Welfare, Social Services and Participation Organisation'). Welfare initiative by various deputies of this organization include: providing shelter for the homeless; social work for at risk groups; employment and entrepreneurship services for needy groups such as female heads of households and people with disabilities; organising and supporting seasonal/casual workers; collecting groups such as beggars, street and working children, the homeless and rough sleepers, street addicts and transferring them to responsible governmental bodies after providing them with temporary and emergency aids; promotion of local cooperatives and local markets; collecting unneeded second hand home furniture and accessories and distributing it among the needy people (Gift or *Hebeh* plan); promotion of tourism within Tehran city; supporting NGOs working with various welfare clients.

- Launch of Neighbourhood Houses (*Sara-ye Mahalleh*): local buildings in all 374 neighbourhoods which house several centres and clubs which are supposed to be run by local volunteers. Some of these centers and clubs are more directly related to welfare issues including: Social Welfare Centre (Children Club, Recovering Addicts Club, Marriage Club, Benefactors Club, Leisure Club); Health Centre (Child and Mother Club, Youth Club, Disabled People's Club, Old People's Club, Mosque Health Servants Club, Smoking Prevention Club, Obesity Club, Blood Donors Club, Diabetes Club); Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Centre (Entrepreneurs Club; Local Cooperatives and Home-based Jobs Club). There are also other centres and clubs which are of cultural and social nature but are specifically related to social welfare such as Science Centre, Child Centre, IT Centre, Sport Centre, Book Centre, all of which have their own clubs;

- Launch of various welfare initiatives by different subsidiary agencies and bodies of the municipality, including: City Flower Buds (baby care information and follow-up package for parents of the new-borns); Free or discounted bus and metro pass for certain groups (like students, the poor, disabled and old people); providing different types of counselling; providing short time educational courses on social and life skills; development of female exclusive parks and recreational complexes; Specific Transportation System for Disabled People; Risky Behaviours Reduction Plan; Improvement of Unprotected Urban Spaces; Fruits, Vegetables and Grocery Markets

(direct and cheaper distribution of food items).

The above policy map, although not very complete and detailed, could illustrate the tendency and approach of Tehran municipality towards a stronger role in the field of social welfare. However, despite these widespread attempts, huge welfare needs are still unmet in Tehran city and serious challenges impede the realization of a welfare municipality in this city.

Key Challenges

A weak social approach

A prominent rhetoric has been promoted in recent years with regard to transforming Tehran municipality from a merely urban service providing organization to a socio-cultural institution. A plethora of structures and subsidiary bodies have been established and a variety of programs and projects have been launched in line with this new approach. However, and despite some improvements, a closer look at these measures and more importantly at the overall approach of the municipality indicates that 'the social' aspect of urban policy and planning still is very week and far from the required situation to enable the establishment of a welfare municipality. For example, developing car-oriented infrastructures like highways, underground tunnels, bridges etc. are very notable in the development agenda of the city. It is at a time that public transport system is very weak and it is more compatible with the goal of social justice and equality to shift towards a more expanded, inclusive and reliable public transport system. Even the goal of facilitating traffic flow in the city will be met more efficiently and effectively by this shift in emphasis.

As shown in table 2, with the budget allocated to building of Toheed undergroun tunel which connects the two highways of Nawwab and Chamran, the whole bus transport system of Tehran could be renwed within a limited time span because the total number of buses in tehran in 2013 was 6548, nearly non of which are compatible with the needs of people with disabilities and old people. Moreover, it was possible to nearly double the total length of Tehran Metro (underground city railway) with the budget of just three high scale care related projects within just five years, while it is north worthy that the existing 86 kilometers of Metro railways have been constructed from 1978 to 2013. Again, a main problem with the current Metro facilities is their incompatibility with the needs of the above mentioned groups which could be resolved to a great extent by a limited budget allocated for instance to setting up elevators, ramps and special seats.

Table 2. Car-oriented or People-centred city? Opportunity-cost analysis of three main infrastructure projects in Tehran

Projects	Year	Costs (Billion Tomans)	Cost of 1kelometer underground with complete equipment (Billion Tomans)	Possibility of constructing kilometers of underground using the same amount (kelometer)	Cost of buying a city bus (Million Tomans)	Possibility of buying buses using the same amount (number)
Toheed Tunnel	2009	600	40	15	100	6000
Imam Ali Highway	2013	1200	70	17	200	6000
Sadr-Neyayesh	2013	3200	70	45	200	16000
Total	-	5000	-	77	-	28000

Source: Fazeli, 2014.

It is also very informing to compare the annual budget allocated to the establishment and maintenance of car-oriented infrastructures with allocation for social welfare purpose. For example, the annual budget for maintenance of shelters for homeless people is about two billion Tomans (compared to 16000 billion Tomans of Sadr-Neyayesh project). This occurs at a time that nearly 15000 homeless people are living in Tehran city and existing facilities only can provide services for 3000 clients.

Legal ambiguity

The national and legal framework within which Tehran municipality is ought to provide its welfare services suffers from several shortcoming and ambiguities. Firstly, while some welfare policy domains such as leisure, public health and public transportation are addressed in existing legislations, other areas such as social care, social housing, family welfare, social safety, and poverty alleviation are not mentioned or poorly addressed. Secondly, some groups like refugees and migrants, children, young people, female headed families, and the elderly are not clearly defined as target groups for planning and service providing. Thirdly, the model of providing welfare services is more closed to the residual or 'remedial model' with little references for pre-emptive approach.

These issues have led Tehran City Council and Tehran Municipality to adopt regulations and undertake measures to cover more policy areas and more target groups. However, the approval of these interventions have not entered national legislations adopted by the national Parliament (*Majles*) and has caused a third ambiguity. Since the administrative and economic

system of the country is mostly centralized, the kind of interactions between the municipality and governmental bodies and ministries in many aspects is prone to administrative problems which will be addressed below.

Fragmentation and disintegration

Urban planning and management literature points to multiple types of fragmentation including spatial, social, economic, institutional, environmental, political and administrative (see for example: Holt, 2014; OECD, 2013; Kazemian and Mirabedini, 2012). Fragmentation and lack of coordination between municipal bodies on the one hand and various national ministries and administrative bodies on the other is one of the most important challenges impeding optimum welfare delivery. While this is caused by the absence of a systematic and clearly defined statutory relationship between national and local levels of administration, it is also heightened by their different political affiliation and the resulting competition for resources, patronage, and prestige.

More than 20 ministries and governmental as well as other public bodies are active in the field of social welfare in Tehran city. However, due to lack of an integrated urban management system several types of administrative and institutional fragmentation could be identified. This lead to instances of responsibility overlap and the risk of undermining accountability in various welfare domains. The root cause of these fragmentations may be traced in the legal ambiguity with regard to urban legal framework explained before.

Policy making and planning fragmentation is observed in the second level whereby each organization is making policies and plans for its own area of work without proper involvement of all stakeholders and without the presence of an overall system to coordinate all these instruments.

Territorial fragmentation is also a significant problem whereby various welfare organizations like Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, Behzisti (State Welfare) organization and Tehran Municipality are applying different zoning systems for Tehran city. This hinders coordination and cooperation as well as causing territorial overlap or vacuity.

Functional fragmentation also stems from the above mentioned problems. There is not a clear division of labour among governmental and public stakeholders with regard to providing welfare services at the local level. Therefore, it is not clear who should take the responsibility of child labourers, homeless people, street addicts, etc.

Insensitivity to the diversity of welfare needs

Insensitivity to the diversity of welfare needs among different groups of people is a significant barrier to their proper use of welfare services. Tehran is still a city which is designed for the ordinary middle-aged, able-bodied man with little attention to the specific needs of such groups as the elderly, children, women, and people with disabilities. Despite existing legislation and regulations as well as innovative measures, it is far from being a child-friendly, age-friendly, women-friendly and disability-friendly city (see table 3). For example, required standards for buildings and public facilities have been set and defined as mandatory in existing national and local instruments about the rights of people with disabilities but either they have not been fulfilled or the implementation of those standards has not been completely compatible with the instruments.

Table 3. Diversity of welfare needs: sample unmet needs of specific target groups

Target groups	Sample unmet welfare needs
Children	Safety of home-school journey; enough safe playgrounds/parks; trustable formal and informal child care facilities and mechanisms
Young people	Enough sport and recreation facilities; puberty and sexual health advice and services; affordable temporary accommodation; affordable marriage assistance; affordable housing;
The elderly	Information and assistance for self-care and tele-care; independent indoor and outdoor living assistance; housing adaptation; accessible public amenities; accessible public transportation
Women	Female exclusive sport and recreation facilities/ time shares; changing/ feeding rooms in public amenities; work/family and education/family balance support
People with disabilities	Adapted and accessible sidewalks, bridges, public transportations, sport and recreation facilities, public buildings, workplace, etc.; appropriate rental housing; city information in proper formats for different disabilities
At risk groups	Enough shelter for the homeless and addicts; social work for reintegration of at risk groups; proper health and education services for street and working children; minimum nutrition guarantee; sexual health protection

Inequality of entitlement

A significant gap between 'welfare access' and 'welfare take-up' is evident in various policy domains. Although the municipal administration has been relatively successful in the distribution of welfare facilities among various districts and neighbourhoods, this has not ended up in equal use of welfare services by low SES and marginalised groups which sharply points to an error in targeting the relevant beneficiaries. Tajmazinani (2014) points to the fact that welfare facilities are used by low SES youth and young people with disabilities at rates which are equal to one third or half of their counterparts in other privileged groups.

It seems that 'equal opportunity' principle is more practiced in Tehran municipality and no or little attention is paid to the 'equality of outcomes' principle in urban policy and planning. While both universality and selectivity methods are compatible with the goals of equality (Fitzpatrick, 2011) it is vital for a welfare municipality to ensure that its welfare services are not only accessible but also used equally and properly by all groups of citizens. Moreover, it should pay attention to the impacts and outcomes of those services for specific groups and apply more selective methods (alongside universal access) for better and more accurate targeting of services.

Low welfare take-up may result from several factors. Firstly, some groups especially the excluded and the illiterate may not be properly informed about the programs. This was the case with regard to many groups being surveyed in Tehran city who were not aware of many welfare programs of the municipality. Secondly, people may be informed but do not understand the rational or key elements of the program so withdraw from it. Thirdly it may be the case that the target population is poorly defined and therefore it is not clear who is going to benefit the program, thus resulting in program use by groups who have more influence and access. Fourthly, the same problem may occur when program delivery is poorly controlled by the system.

For example, Tehran municipality distributes discounted, half price or free vouchers to promote a culture of physical fitness through the use of leisure and sport facilities run by the municipality. However, evidence shows that these facilities are used mainly by members of the middle class of whom many are employees of the municipality and governmental bodies. It is also the case for Tehran Tourism Program which is run at low cost to be used by the same groups. More targeted programs like Social Tourism which provide facilities for low SES, marginalized or excluded groups who cannot afford leisure and tourism activities otherwise are needed to overcome this situation.

Limited citizen participation

Citizen's participation is both an essential and procedural right. It is essential since it is an integral component of human rights and a key to self-determination. It is also a procedural one due to its role in the realization of other rights as well as in improving the whole policy and planning cycle. Beresford (2008) identifies five key areas for the involvement and participation of welfare users, namely: user involvement in improving quality, developing user-controlled services and support, user involvement in occupational and professional practice, user involvement in research, and user involvement in education and training. Welfare municipality is impossible to be realized without full and effective participation of welfare users, apart from any tokenism and manipulation as outlined by Arnstein's Ladder of participation model (1969).

Several initiatives have been launched in Tehran by the municipality to engage people in city affairs, including:

- Shorayari (Local Councils): voluntary neighbourhood councils in all 374 neighbourhoods elected by local inhabitants to decide on local issues and refer important local needs and issues to the Municipality and the City Council;
- Sara-ye Mahalleh (Neighbourhood Houses) in all 374 neighbourhoods (see above);
- Supporting Non-governmental organizations working in Tehran.

Despite these initiatives Tehran enjoys limited citizen participation and is characterised by some shortcomings. The first point is that existing structures and mechanisms are mainly elitist in their approach and attract groups of citizens who are already privileged and involved in other areas and venues. Secondly, citizen participation usually do not cover all phases or components of the urban policy cycle especially the evaluation element. For example, while NGOs related to people with disabilities are engaged in various activities and joint initiatives with the municipality, they are not involved in the monitoring and evaluation of projects related to their beneficiaries. Because of this many adaptation projects aimed at making public facilities and amenities like parks, buildings and streets receive budgets from the municipality and receive final approval by related engineers but are not completely compatible with the needs of the disabled.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Tehran Municipality has witnessed significant developments in recent years towards undertaking more social roles including in the field of social welfare. However, there is long way ahead of it to become a genuine 'welfare municipality'. The main obstacle against this could be found in the highly centralized administrative, political, legal and economic system of the country. Although Iranian Constitution portrays its desired welfare system as a comprehensive and universalistic system, minimum welfare roles and resources are defined for local governance in subsidiary national legislations. Despite the willingness of Tehran Municipality to overcome this situation, the legal framework as well as the 'institutional path dependency' results in administrative fragmentations and legal ambiguity which impede realization of its ambitions.

Internal factors are also affect this issue negatively. Weak social approach within the municipality stems from a 'cultural path dependency' within the administration which prioritize physical development over social development. Related to this weakness one can recognize a need for more focus on social justice in terms of equality of outcomes alongside trying to provide grounds for equal opportunities. Inequality of outcomes including in terms of welfare take-up could also be attributed to insensitivity and irresponsiveness to diversity of welfare needs. These internal shortcomings could also be traced back partially to limited participation of citizens and their representative civil bodies which are able to reflect 'unheard voices' and mobilize more resources from the society in line with welfare objectives.

General recommendations are provided below corresponding to the above mentioned challenges in order to overcome this situation:

Enhancement of the integrity and efficiency of the welfare delivery and management system in Tehran city through:

- Revision, reform and completion of existing legislations and regulations about the status and roles of municipalities in providing social welfare through the National Parliament (*Majlis*) to become compatible with the requirements of a genuine local governance system needed for a welfare municipality;

- Establishment of an interagency body with high level jurisdiction with representatives of all public organisations to reduce overlaps and gaps in welfare provision;

- Designing and launching a comprehensive system of evaluation with effective participation of independent civil society NGOs representing various target groups.

Strengthening the 'social approach' of Tehran municipality through:
- Revision of all major development plans and projects in terms of their impact on the overall welfare of citizens including specific target groups;
- Increasing the diversity and sustainability of fiscal resources of the municipality for welfare programs and its share from the overall budget of the municipality;
- Promoting social entrepreneurship, social innovation and social responsibility, especially among all organizations, agencies and administrative divisions of the municipality.

Eliminating unjust inequalities in entitlement of welfare facilities and services through:
- Promotion of spatial justice in distribution of welfare services by allocating welfare resources according to the levels of needs among neighbourhoods and target groups;
- Positive discrimination in welfare delivery to less privileged and at risk of exclusion groups;
- Ensuring equal welfare take-up among various target groups through effective and constant monitoring and evaluation.

Increasing the sensitivity and responsiveness of urban policy, planning and service delivery to the diversity of welfare needs through:
- Revision of existing policies and programs to suit the needs of various target groups;
- Increasing the coverage of neglected and emergent welfare needs in various policy domains.

Promotion and enrichment of full and effective citizen participation through:
- Involving welfare users and their representative bodies in all stages of urban policy from agenda setting and formulation to delivery and evaluation;
- Diversification of participatory mechanisms to suit the conditions of all groups of citizens, especially those with no voice and influence;
- Renewing and redirecting traditional and religious participatory and philanthropic mechanisms and practices towards new and emergent welfare needs.

Resources

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