



Ghaffary, Gh., & Jafari Moghadam, M. (2019). Humanities, discourse transformations and development planning in Iran 1979-2013. *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, 11(3), 75-107. doi: 10.22035/isih.2019.2880.3222

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22035/isih.2019.2880.3222> URL: http://www.isih.ir/article_320.html

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Humanities, Discourse Transformations and Development Planning in Iran 1979-2013

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Received: Feb. 11, 2018; Accepted: Sep. 18, 2019

Extended Abstract

Underdevelopment is the main problem in developing countries including Iran. This problem always has been concerned of thinker and policy makers after the Islamic Revolution that has created multiple discourses and has made different relations with development planning in different periods. The Period after the Islamic Revolution until 2013 within five social situations was studied based on situational analysis method (logic of the situation) for describing obstacles of development planning. It has been tried to analyze situation of development planning, especially oriented to critical humanities in each period. Actors, institutions and main streams that effect process of planning and making decision have been evaluated. Results show that development planning and modernization processes in Iran face to fundamental challenges in two theoretical (critical rationalism) and practical (social engineering) levels. Success in development planning in terms of epistemology requires realistic understanding of problems, progress humanities and critic thoughts and also it needs gradual reforms, critic of performances and expanding social participation in policy processes in social aspect.

Keywords: development planning, critical rationalism, humanities, social engineering

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INTRODUCTION

Underdevelopment is the main issue in developing countries such as Iran. Since becoming aware of developments of western countries during Qajar period, Iranian society has struggled to release itself from being underdeveloped. During Pahlavi dynasty, mandatory modernization was promoted, and then the Islamic Republic implemented development projects.

It is important to note that the government has become a significant actor in development and renovation. In Iran, regimens have long been the center of important evolutions and have greatly influenced political, economic, cultural, and social structures (Abrahamian 1, 2010). After the Islamic Revolution, both ideological and religious occasions affected the epistemological, academic, and executive conditions. However, thinkers and policy makers have been consistently concerned with the issue of underdevelopment for which they have offered plans during different periods and various meetings.

Some thinkers believe that in spite of serious concerns about development in Iran, there is no real perception of it yet- especially among policy makers. In fact, despite planning for a long time, we are at a basic stage and our essential need is conceptualization (Azimi, 2012). The question is, why is our country still considered as a developing one with no significant improvement in development rate in spite of all those attempts and plans?

PURPOSE

This research aims to provide an epistemological and discourse explanation of the problems of planning in post-revolutionary Iran, emphasizing the role of human sciences.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the goal by using contextual logic based on Popper's methodology for studying social sciences; we investigated the process of planning in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Based on this methodology, the time span under investigation - from the start of the Islamic government in 1979 till 2013 - is divided into 5 periods or contexts. This division is based on the period of each president, which causes political, managerial, and discourse evolutions in the country. Factors and variables such as scientific and academic conditions, civil society and critics, the country's level of development, planning and decision making, perception of development, and important disputes over ideological and political issues have been described in each of the contexts.

RESULT

The first context -1979 till 1982- includes early years of the revolution, in which, due to the conflicts between different political groups, physical tensions and even armed battles, the main concern was to guard the revolution and maintain order and safety in the country. Thus, planning and development was the last priority in that era.

The second context -1982 till 1990- was the era of settling the Islamic Republic. The country also struggled with the imposed war; So all the events, decisions and implementations were concerned with war. A military condition has its own issues, for the lack of safety prevents planning on development, investment, and enhancing welfare.

The third context -1990 till 1998- is the era of development which can be referred to as the beginning of planning for development after the Islamic Revolution. Universities grew in number, and basic and technical sciences were of great concern. However, restrictions still annoyed thinkers and human sciences.

The fourth context -1998 till 2006- is the era of modification, which was concerned with political and cultural development alongside economic development. Some of the most important characteristics of this era include evolution in the planning system, increased attention to middle class people, increased political and social freedom, growing of civil organizations, growing of human sciences, and increased freedom in universities.

The fifth context -2006 till 2014- is the era of principilists, which can be regarded as a rebirth for ideological and fundamentalist discourse. Economic policies of the government were in a disordered condition, leading to letters of protest from the country's economists. Once again, universities were treated improperly and many human sciences lecturers were dismissed.

DISCUSSION

Investigation of the 5 abovementioned contexts indicates that Iranian development planners and policy makers have often failed to have an integrated perception of economy and society. They have also failed to employ a certain method for development and planning for future, simply denying western models and relying on some Islamic concepts for administration of the country.

CONCLUSION

Discourse chaos and the lack of proper scientific and epistemological resources are among the most important factors of unsuccessful development plans in Iran.



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Iranians have approached modern science with an empirical point of view; on the other hand, traditional science stems from intuition, logic, and analogy. Both empirical and rationalist approaches lead to authoritarianism. But critical human sciences, as a product of thinking and reasoning in which hypotheses and theories are critically investigated and original new hypotheses are offered based on consistent criticizing, has not had enough opportunities to shine in our country. It seems that this scientific method is the only way to achieve discourse integration and consistent development. For most of the post-revolutionary time span, a fundamentalist and ideological approach has dominated executive fields and social engineering. This approach is similar to "Utopian Social Engineering" and prioritizes ideas such as Building an Islamic Utopia and Social Integration. But the method based on Piecemeal Social Engineering which has a reformist point of view and never seeks revolutionary and radical changes can be seen only in the fourth context, although with lacks and shortcomings. Achievements on social and political development such as democratic decision making, public collaboration, and the emphasis on the rights for criticizing and social control are resulted from the abovementioned method.

The results reveal that planning for development and innovation in Iran is facing serious challenges at theoretical (Critical Rationalism) and practical (Social Engineering) levels. Epistemologies suggest that a successful development plan requires realistic perception of problems, growth in human sciences, and critical thinking, while the social point of view suggests piecemeal modifications, performance criticism, and increased social collaboration in policy making process.

NOVELTY

The present study has investigated Iran's underdevelopment from the viewpoint of human sciences, epistemologies and discourse. This interdisciplinary approach can guide thinkers, academic society, and policy makers to achieve consistent development.

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