

Research Paper

A Relational Framework to Explain the Town's Local Actors Decision-Making Mechanism

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Abstract

The life of Towns has become more critical and much emphasized in recent years, and this heralds the arrival of a new era when this type of settlements is introduced as primary living and investment capacities. Therefore, it is necessary to study the different aspects of towns in order to plan and manage their development and answer the question about different decision-making mechanisms. In the present study, after explaining the place and role of towns in the development transition period, the local governance mechanism is introduced as the central issue of such cities through a qualitative radial model literature review. By examining several recent studies on towns, it is found that the type of relations between individuals and actors on the one hand, and the impact of their activities and functions on the decisions made on national and regional scales, on the other hand, create a different form of local governance mechanism in these cities than in large cities. Accordingly, the existing recognition and analysis processes and tools, that are primarily designed to assess the conditions of large cities, cannot be used. According to the present study. The decision-making mechanism can be an appropriate structure for expressing the complex relationships between actors in towns. As a result, a relational framework can be introduced to explain the decision-making mechanism in the local governance process of towns. This framework is designed based on the general international literature and experiences it can serve as a primary tool used for the identification and examination of the administrative mechanisms in towns and be modified and improved in various fields through future researches.

Keywords: Town, Local governance, Relational approach, Complexity, Local actors, Decision making mechanism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers' disregard for the life and dynamics of towns in recent decades is remarkable and notable (Bell & Jayne, 2006; Fanni, 2015; Lorentzen & van Heur, 2012; Mayer & Knox, 2010; Meili & Mayer, 2017; P. Schneidewind, 2006; Zebardast, 2004). During this period, experts and decision-makers have emphasized metropolitan areas, metropolises, megacities, and their surrounding areas (for example, see (Anderson, 2000; Hall & Pain, 2006; North & Smallbone, 1996; Terluin, 2003; Thierstein, Lüthi, Kruse, Gabi, & Glanzmann, 2008)). The multiplicity and

vast body of existing literature of issues related to large cities and national and international decision-makers' interest in them is largely justified considering the advantages of cumulative economics and the profit-oriented approaches in the hands of the world's largest economies. Under such circumstances, most of towns not in the metropolitan areas, were ignored despite holding a considerable population of countries (Abdelillah Hamdouch, Demaziere, & Banovac, 2017; Mayer & Knox, 2010).

However, in recent years, there have been studies of small and medium-sized cities that can draw the attention of decision-makers and power wielders around the world; for example, the EU has begun the TOWN Project in 2013, through which the status and performance of small and medium-sized European cities are analyzed (Atkinson,

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2017; A Hamdouch & Banovac, 2014; Servillo et al., 2014; L. Servillo, Atkinson, & Hamdouch, 2017; L. Servillo & Paolo Russo, 2017). Some studies on the development trend of small and medium-sized cities have also been published, they emphasize that the analysis of these types of cities cannot be elucidated by focusing only on agglomeration economies approaches and similar profit-oriented issues (Burger, Meijers, Hoogerbrugge, & Tresserra, 2015; Camagni, Capello, & Caragliu, 2015; Parkinson, Meegan, & Karecha, 2015). These studies have shown that while large-scale multipolar developments are of major issues raised in different countries, towns are good resources for future urban development (P. T. Schneidewind, g.; Schuh, B.; Beiglböck, S.; Cornaro, a.; Damsgaard, o.; Dubois, a.; Gløersen, e. Benin, R., 2006) and also, their diverse local economies are seen as an opportunity (Servillo et al., 2014). Recent studies (e.g. (Gatzweiler et al., 2012; Abdelillah Hamdouch et al., 2017; Hildreth, 2006)) have provided an opportunity for the development of research on this type of cities by examining general aspects of small and medium-sized cities, such as functional typology (e.g. (Meili & Mayer, 2017)) and/or some specific topics, such as internal relationships between population and employment, the function of towns in metropolitan areas, the position of towns in national and international networks, and the relationships between scientific and cultural institutions of towns on an international scale (Camagni et al., 2015; Meijers, Burger, & Hoogerbrugge, 2016; Servillo et al., 2014; Sýkora & Muliček, 2017). Most of them have identified and explained the key position of towns in the hierarchy of the national and higher urban system. They found it important and effective to identify their interrelationships and explain their local administration process. Moreover, clarifying the relationships between the administrative agencies of towns may be considered as a key factor in understanding and explaining the position (and role) of towns in urban network (and hierarchy), their vital assets and effective linkage to the surrounding areas and beyond (Cox & Longlands, 2016).

1.1. Diagnosis: Town or Small City?

Defining identical dimensions and specifications (for all places and all times, i.e. universal) for small city on an international scale seems to be useless. The concept of small city, in each country or region, have new dimensions, according to different cognitive approaches. Territorial analysis procedures, based on quantitative and qualitative criteria and thresholds, are commonly known as a way to conceptualize the typology of cities and various settlements (Servillo et al., 2014). Size or population is one of the main criteria used for categorizing cities, which is usually used because of difficult access to other economic and social criteria, as well as ease of its use (Fanni, 2015; Meili & Mayer, 2017; Servillo et al., 2014; Zebardast, 2004).

However, it has often attempted to provide a population range to separate small, medium and large cities in order to determine service levels or budget

allocation. Numbers such as population of less than 20,000, 25,000, and 50,000 have been reported for towns and populations of less than 50,000, 200,000, or 250,000 for medium-sized cities. Some have other indicators, such as the total population of the region and the number of people employed in the economic sectors, to categorize the cities (Fanni, 2015).

Accepting the relationship of the concept of town with nature, history, inhabitants as well as the political and administrative structures of territory management (P. Schneidewind, 2006; Servillo et al., 2014), it is possible to conceptualize the type of urban settlements based on various approaches, including tree morphological, administrative, and functional approaches from the spatial-regional perspective (Brenner & Schmid, 2014).

By accepting the differentiation between levelization and characterization of towns, one can find some commonalities, such as limited financial resources and human resources (less economic, social and infrastructure development), limited job opportunities, and the activity of a substantial part of population in agriculture and livestock, service levels limited to basic services and provision of services to rural areas or smaller (nearby) cities, playing a minor role in regional and national production, serving as a point connecting regional and national services and access to rural or urban suburbs, domination of face-to-face social relationships, and existence of an opportunity for social cohesion and stronger family relationships than large cities, informal social surveillance, low pollutant production and energy consumption, and greater access to the natural environment in daily life (Fanni, 2015; Kedogo, Sandholz, & Hamhaber, 2010; Meili & Mayer, 2017; Zebardast, 2004) as propositions used to describe this category of cities in various studies.

2. TOWNS; NECESSITY TO EXAMINE INTERNAL MECHANISMS

The expansion process of large cities and metropolitan areas attracting population and capital can be accepted as a legacy of the "First Modernity" era (Beck & Wynne, 1992), which was the outcome of the activities of large industries, service and financial institutions, macro profit-oriented and centralization policies on a state scale. At that time, towns also lost their mental accessibility and position in the settlement hierarchy of countries by due to being stayed away from various infrastructure networks and reduced accessibility, resulting in quick immigration to larger urban centers and evacuation of small and rural settlements. If the first modernity is considered to be planned and directed with top-down approach and under the domination of capitalisms (Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003; Beck & Lau, 2005; Mayer & Knox, 2010), today towns are in the era of "Second Modernity" and move to connect to various networks (from local to international) (Mayer & Knox, 2010). The main features of the two modernity eras are briefly shown in the following figure.

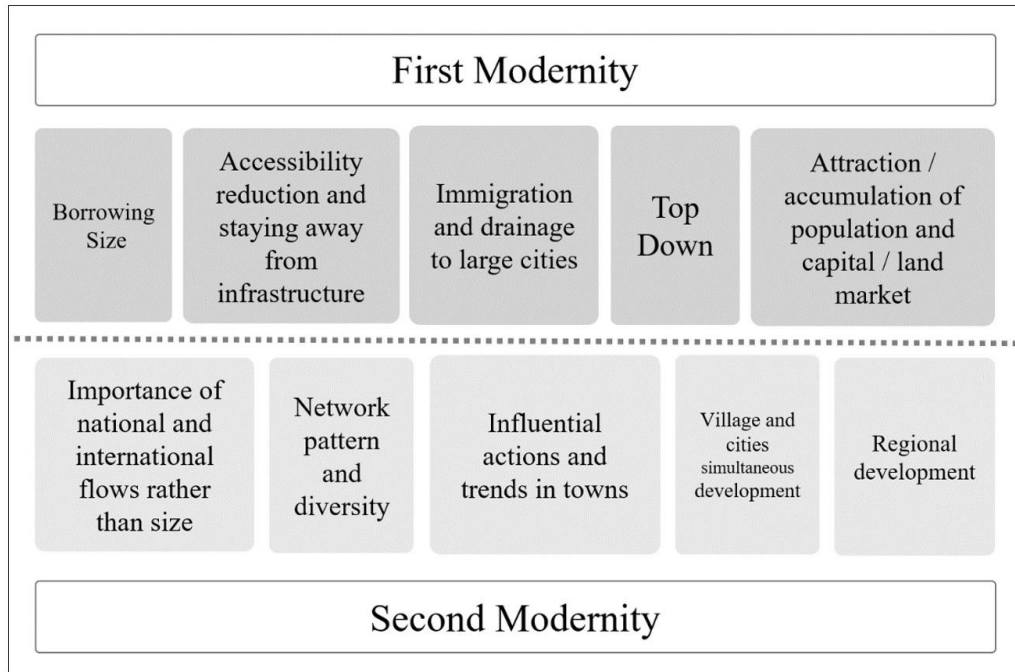


Fig 1. The main features of the first and second modernity eras *

*According to (Beck et al. 2003; Beck and Lau, 2005; Mayer and Knox, 2010)

The seclusion trend of towns (and being stayed away from the urban development) and collaboration network in the UK (relative to regional conditions) have also attracted the attention of researchers and decision-makers. According to the report by the “Institute for Public Policy Research”, UK, in 2016, economic dependency, low levels of residents’ public and private skills, outmigration and aging, diminished mental image of potential audiences, reduced accessibility and spatial connectivity, as well as poor institutional leadership in small towns have been cited as the most important reasons for the seclusion and/or overshadowing of these cities versus the growth of larger urban centers (Cox & Longlands, 2016). Pike et al¹ (2016) see uneven growth as the product of the seclusion of British towns. Also, they called the migration of skilled and educated citizens from small to large cities as a kind of brain drain in the country. In addition to the internal conditions of towns, the role of the media and the mental image of people are of great importance in comparing the life style in small and large cities (Cox & Longlands, 2016). In fact, part of people's willingness to work and live in large cities and the unattractiveness of towns for investment and housing reflect their perception of settlement categorization and their judgment based on information received from the media or official and unofficial advertising in the community, so that, the comparison between large and small cities in different issues indicates the public’s perceptions of dualities such as less and great, low and high, desirable and undesirable, or strong and weak.

Despite different planning and management approaches and procedures used for towns in different

countries, there are many similarities between them in conditions. Migration of young and skilled workforce from small to large cities for looking for diverse job opportunities and being on social and activity networks can be identified as a key feature of towns’ life in recent years, which results in the depletion of towns’ resources, and thereby their reduced power in decision-making as well as their reduced autonomy. On the other hand, this is considered the weakness of the decision-making bodies of these cities. In such circumstances, the city administration procedure will be disrupted, leading to an increasing reduction of quality of life². The lives of towns depend on their uniqueness and their structural and functional diversities. This highlights the need for new and different approaches to identification, planning and local administration of them to be prepared for the period of prosperity (Beck & Lau, 2005; Keiner & Kim, 2007; Mayer & Knox, 2010).

2.1. Local governance, Achilles heel of development in towns

The different scales and relationships in the administration of towns, compared to large ones, result in differences between their problems. In the relationships between institutions administering cities, local-national

² Decreased quality of life in small settlements is one of the causes of declined viability of environment that can be enhanced and improved, considering the scale, with local and not too extensive investment based on right and robust decisions. For example, the general concept of Rejuvenate can be defined as an example of efforts and actions that can facilitate the process of returning small towns to the cycle of attraction and calling for resources and residents through limited investment in the city center and improvement of environmental quality.

¹ link: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uneven-growth-tackling-city-decline>

duality is used in the expression of concepts such as autonomy, power, dependency, decision-making or centralization. In most cases, some conflicts are identified between the roles of the local administrative body and national ones and their representatives in the local domain, which can lead to executive weaknesses and deficiencies. On the one hand, various local actors' activities in overlapped environments, leads to interdependencies and tendency to or inevitable movement towards intergovernmental exchanges (Blair, 2013). However, the simultaneous engagement of all actors is often cited in administrative documents and texts, and their involvement is realized based on personal relations and initiative (Boschet, 2017). In some countries governed with a large and powerful centralized government, and a high degree of involvement, single-product-based economy (such as oil) and broad statism result in decisions made by the central government. In such circumstances, incoordination between state, private, and public institutions, emerges at the key decision-making stages, even at local scale, and in the case of poor structure regulating relationships between them, defective and unknown (latent) processes become a typical decision-making process in the administration of cities. However, it is not possible to determine the precise and direct relationship between the national governance system and the centralization level of local intergovernmental relations horizontally or vertically throughout the world (Phillimore, 2013).

Who governs the towns? Why and how? These are vital questions in the domain of towns that have been specifically addressed by Daniel Bliss¹ in his book "Economic Development and Governance in Small Towns America" (2018)². With an in-depth analysis of the city administration process and the economic development trend in small towns in America, he shows that public and elected actors of small towns can effectively interact with appointed state actors, and make the right decisions in proportion to contextual conditions to overcome the general weaknesses of small towns, such as capital flight, shortage of specialized and skilled people and emigration of influential people, as well as to make cities stable against international economic pressure.

The distribution of power among multiple actors affects the outcomes of urban development and Devas et al. (2004) know local, regional, and national representatives, civil society (including institutions such as NGOs, community-based local organizations, social movements, guilds and unions, political parties, and religious groups), informal and private sectors, as the key categories of these actors. Urban actors, with known or unknown intentions and the thought of the product of decision and action, are involved in the actions taken in the city. Different categories of them have been presented; for example, they can be divided into national and local state, financial and economic, technical and scientific actors, the private sector and the public. The intergovernmental relations are established in formal and informal ways. In

fact, besides the formal and legal structures of relations between actors, there are informal unwritten rules and procedures that may not be less important than legal ones, and considered the main cause for the stability of vertical and horizontal systems at different levels of governance, especially the local level (Phillimore, 2013). Thus, explaining the aspects of such a mechanism can be a prelude to solving the problems of towns resulting from the weakness of the governance system.

3. RELATIONAL APPROACH; A FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXPLANATION OF TOWN ADMINISTRATION

At a time when local governments are testing and enhancing the executive practices resulting from the recognition of relational actions and planning in the field of action, city administration practices such as meritorious governance can be considered the translation of researchers and decision-makers' efforts to direct, execute, and monitor programs with maximum effective action and fair regulation of a transparent and efficient relations network. Healey (1997) regards relational planning as an interpretation of urban planning that brings stakeholders together and engages them in the decision-making process in a way that all of them are respected (Healey, 2006). In "Urban complexity and spatial strategies: Towards a Relational Planning for Our Times", the term "governance" is used in such situations that he states that changes and decisions examined in the case studies may have taken place without regarding such a concept; according to him, the reason behind the use of this "term", is to define a diagnosis framework for the inclusion of multiple actors and networks in order to explain complex urban relations.

Applying relational interactions at different urban planning and management stages; and even primary activities such as mechanism identification and analysis, regardless of product type and main outcomes, can result in secondary outcomes. The formation of new networks of collaboration between actors, the formation and improvement of capital, and the actors' increased willingness to participate in other collective activities are of the outcomes called "relational rewards" by Rader Olsson (2009). In other words, the implementation of operational practices that involve greater number of and more diverse actors (bottom-up) can lead to new relations that will increase actors' willingness to cooperate in the on-going and future process by reducing the cost of establishing relations (such as the cost of joining to a collaboration network (Olsson, 2009). When there is a division of autonomy and responsibilities between stakeholders, reduced exchange costs due to the expansion of collaboration between stakeholders is considered to be one of the benefits of relational procedures (Feiock, 2009, 2013; Song, 2018). Feiock divides the forms of collaboration into three categories to determine the authoritativeness of mechanisms leading to the integration of decisions: informal agreements, formal contractual agreements and imposed authority (Feiock, 2013; Song,

¹ Bliss, D (2018) *Economic Development and Governance in Small Town America: Paths to Growth*, New York: Routledge.

² As in a study entitled "TOWN" by EU, in 2014

2018; Yi, 2017). Also, collaboration between formal and informal actors in managing smaller cities and in the face of financial and resource constraints can lead to cost savings at different stages, from decision-making to implementation of plans (Artsen, 2018; BEL & WARNER, 2015; Blaeschke, 2014). Healey identifies actors, as one of the important aspects of local governance, with specific roles, strategies, and interests, who play a role in making decisions based on the formed (and being formed) city administration procedure (and in formal and informal decision-making structure) in the institutional arena, with different networks, and mechanisms for selection of influencers (Healey, 2006). Although the transformation from administration to management and then to governance in the space of action (considering the experiences of different countries) is proceeding slowly and facing many obstacles, its capacities cannot be ignored in the process of scientific identification and analysis.

Recognizing relations between actors, especially at the local and national scales, along with the examination of qualities such as concentration and local autonomy, have been of the most frequent debates in recent years (Agranoff, 2004; Carmichael, 2002; Fleurke, 2006; Peters, 2001; Wagenaar, 2004). Most research on the relations between local actors, has been conducted using a top-down approach, and usually discussed the type and extent of power sharing, the assessment of local governments' autonomy and the delegation of authority from national to local levels. Existing research, with emphasis on the concept of decentralization /centralization, has examined the hierarchical structure of relations between decision-makers at different national and local levels and measured such qualities as the influence of upper levels on local governments. Based on the documents and laws adopted, and with the planning and implementation processes at various scales, these assessments sought to establish a relationship between the degree of centralization of power and authority in central government and the local governments' freedom of action (Fleurke, 2006). The results show the inverse relationship between the degree of centralization of central government and the success of local governments (especially in decision-making for their own affairs). These results have been accepted as a general finding and relative evidence, although they vary and differ across countries, depending on the hierarchy of government. For example, in the legal or economic aspects, there are several legal and economic criteria used to deductively measure the relation between actors. To analyze the aforementioned aspects, among others, the following criteria have been used: the type of formal division of responsibilities between local, regional and national sectors, the significance of city administration pillars in the constitution, the conditions and mechanisms for monitoring and inspection, the legal basis for the local sector to play a part in decisions made by central institutions, the type and extent of dependency on budget allocation and decision making for local revenue (Gustafsson, 1991; Joumard & Kongsrud, 2003; Lijphart, 1984, 2012; Loughlin, 2001; Norton, 1991; OECD, 1997; Page, 1991; Regions, 2001). Using these criteria would be

useful in the examination of data such as documents and laws related to the process of city administration and the relationship between state and public official institutions. However, these results are obtained based on acts written as guidelines, but in action environment, they may be otherwise. In such circumstances, referring to the context of action (Fleurke, 2006) and directly facing the conditions found in the city administration process can be complementary to top-down deductive analysis.

At the city scale, this context can be attributed to the decisions made in the decision space at national to local scales. Decisions based on which the city is administered can be a daily commodity or have a product such as evolution. Faludi (1985¹) considers decisions important in terms of two aspects of environmental impact and accountability to other actors, and believes that any environmental planning or actions such as land management are better followed by accepting the concept of "decision-centered". Healey (2007) also describes city planning and management as an interactive, interpretive process focused on decision-making and action.

4. DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS: MANIFESTATION OF ACTORS' COMPLEX ACTIONS IN TOWN ADMINISTRATION

The framework for explaining actors' decision-making mechanism can be used as a tool for identifying and analyzing the process of urban governance in towns. Simply put, urban governance is closely linked to how government (local, regional, and national) and stakeholders make decisions on planning, budgeting, and managing urban limits. This concept involves the continuous process of negotiation and mediation between the allocation of social and material resources and political power. Various economic and social, institutional and relational forces such as the labor market, products and services, residents, kinship and social relations, basic infrastructures, land, and public security also affect urban governance (Devas, 2014). In other words, it is the relationship between the actors and institutions influencing urban governance that determines what is going on in the city (UN-HABITAT, 2010, 2015). In fact, as governance is considered the stage of implementation (and follow-up of decisions and strategies) (Healey, 2006), the decisions made for the life of a city will be the place of intersection and manifestation of decision environment's structure and components. In other words, the decision can be a superposition point for the factors such as law, power, program, formal and informal structures and public demand. Whereas in different countries with different governance systems, it can crystallize a different share of each environmental factors in itself. In recent years, some research has been conducted on the structure of power, the relations between actors, the effects of legal approvals, or the way citizens interact with planning and decision-making bodies. Each of these factors has some equivalents at the international, national, regional and local scales. They will

¹ Faludi, A., (1985). A decision-centred view of environmental planning. *Landscape Planning*, 12:239-256.

become propositions at local level and, will change the natural and built environments once implemented after passing through the decision-making mechanism. Therefore, decision making is a common concept across any kind of action or intervention in the city.

The decisions are not made in vacuity. Obvious and latent factors influencing the initiation, follow-up, and making of decisions can be applied by several structures and actors. Criticizing one-dimensional procedures with classical approach to decision theory has abolished the abstract examination of comprehensive rationality patterns (without rational flexibility) in the social decision-making process, a normative model that was inefficient in the face of the real environment (Friedmann, 1967). According to Friedman (1967), making decisions about political activities and planning is influenced by an environment with a variety of rational (from finite to infinite) and meta-rational (expressing thoughts such as wisdom, tradition, and knowledge) thoughts called "decision environment", that identification of its components and their effects can clarify the uncertainty quality of decision-making. He briefly outlines some of the key aspects of the decision environment: the abundance and variety of influential groups and the extent to which they influence decision; the level of official reference approving or disapproving decisions; the scale and type of private sector involved in decision-making; the yield of the information system based on access, capacity, reliability, agility and secrecy of its origin, the bureaucratic performance and structure of the institutions involved and the actors' level of awareness and general and specialized training of them (Friedmann, 1967). However, according to Bolan (1969), two main criteria affecting the outcomes of decision-making are: the pillars (main role) of decision, and the characteristics of the decision field. Specific relationships between actors and the attributes of each actor, such as motivation, opportunity, and skill, are known as pillars. The decision field is based on a dynamic and cognitive approach to the decision-making mechanism and achievement of optimal selection (Busemeyer & Diederich, 2002). This field encompasses the decision environment that is simultaneously examined at the community level and within the decision-making body. The socio-political decision environment encompasses the formal structure (in the legal decision-making hierarchy), the informal mechanism (such as powerful private parties and actors) and the general characteristics of society. Also, after introducing the concept of planning culture under the influence of community's decision-making behavior (Bolan, 1969), further modified and completed definitions were presented. In these definitions, in addition to the condition of national community (values and tangible and intangible mental structures) and formal institutional and legal structures, tangible as well as uncertain characteristics of personal lives and development of decision-makers are emphasized (Daneshpour, Behzadfar, Barakpour, & Sharafi, 2017). In these attitudes, in addition to the general culture of the peripheral society, the characteristics of the decision-making group, as the decision-makers' "persona", also influence the outcomes. The persona is understood in the rules of decision-making. These rules appear to be regulated

by law, but in practice, take another form under the influence of formal and informal structures. Small decision-making groups with a general and organizational persona formed in advance and forming in the present group (which may change over time due to the internal structuring relationships of the group or the influence of external factors), may have different perceptions of even their groups' outputs, this persona can lead to outcomes such as power of majority or public consensus (Sager & Gastil, 2006).

The social environment (influencing decisions about the city), including the community's thoughts, feelings, perceptions and fundamental beliefs and unconsciousness, encompasses the decision and planning environment, based on the assumptions, values, and common cognitive frameworks of the decision-making body and will have outputs in the form of a project, structure or endorsement. In such a hierarchy, fully understanding of the field is essential for better identification of the pillars and field of decision (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2015; Othengrafen, 2016). At the same time, the multifaceted socio-political effects and cultural frameworks make the structured understanding and examination of decision-making mechanism and spatial planning very complex and multifaceted (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2015). Explaining pillars (multiple and varied) and (elements) of decision field in the context of the city (to identify different aspects of current processes, the effects of interventions, planning practice and development) requires a clear understanding of the city as a complex organism. The components of the decision field for administrating small towns can be illustrated as follows.

Acceptance of the concept of complexity paves the way to use interdisciplinary concepts and to explore their multiple relationships (in the areas related to population, climate, economics, environment, culture, law, society and other developments of urban complex sets) to manage complex urban affairs (Gurr & Walloth, 2014). Exploration of complexity allows paying attention to the tangible and intangible consequences of decision making and the varying dimensions of achieving public consensus in small and large social groups in an unpredictable, changing and learning environment (Inness & Booher, 1999). According to Gurr (2014)¹ despite repeated interpretations such as the "multi, intra or inter" disciplinary in research on urban complexities (especially in presenting models for simplification), the absence of culture is prominent. For example, in the analysis of actors' behavior as a spiritual (non-institutional) dimension of culture (by social researchers and in various studies, even in the proceedings of "Understanding Understanding Complex Systems"), intermediary and symbolic patterns of representation, perception and interpretation of human environment (the more intangible elements of the city) have rarely appeared. The main aspects of complexity associated with the decision-making mechanism are summarized below.

¹ Gurr, J. M. (2014) 'Urban Complexity' from a Literary and Cultural Studies Perspective: Key Cultural Dimensions and the Challenges of 'Modeling'; in Walloth, C; Gurr, J.M and Alexander Schmidt (2014) Understanding Complex Urban Systems: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Modeling. (eBook) DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02996-2 Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London.

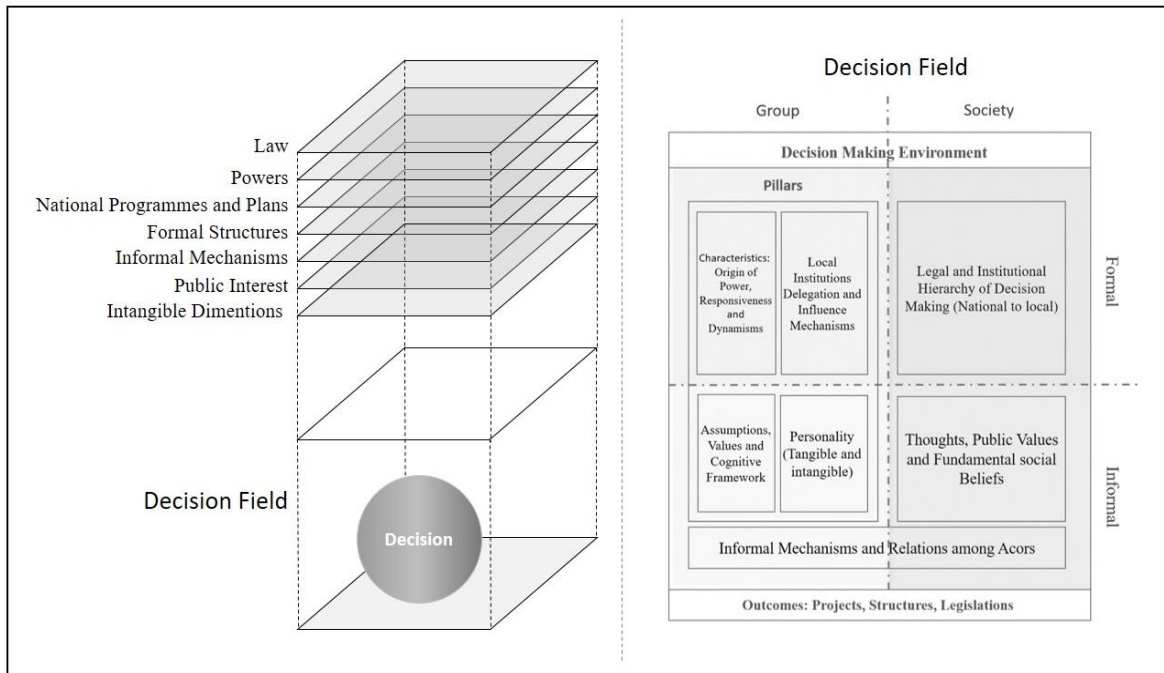


Fig 2. The decision field for Town administration

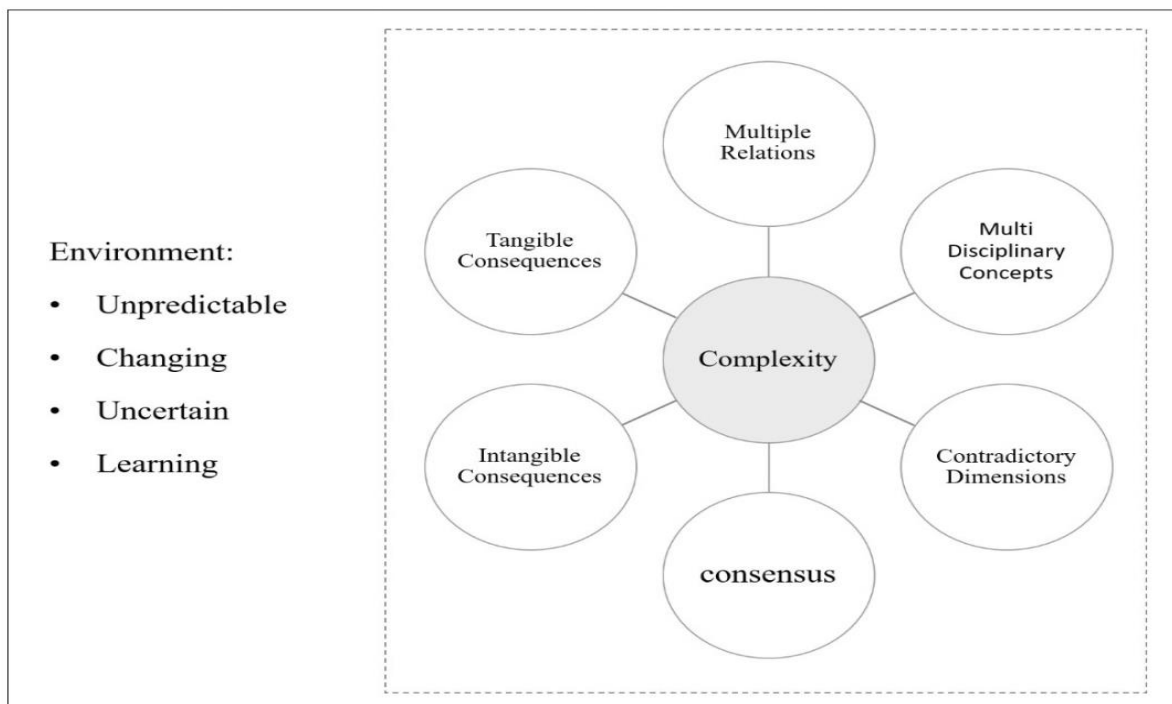


Fig 3. Aspects of decision-making complexity¹

¹ According to (Gurr and Walloth, 2014), (Innes and Booher, 1999: 416-417) and (Gurr, 2014: 134-135)

5. CONCLUSION; PROPOSING A FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLAINING THE RELATIONAL MECHANISM OF DECISION MAKING IN TOWNS

Given the aspects outlined in the previous sections, a preliminary framework can be provided to determine different aspects of decision-making mechanisms in towns based on the nature, pillars and field of decision-making in relation to a variety of actors. Correct identification of key decision-makers is one of the key components of such a framework. One way to identify stakeholders among the people, groups and institutions is to refer to the services they each provide about local governance. In such circumstances, it is possible to study them layer by layer to estimate the type and extent of the impact of each on the decisions (reflection of stakeholders' services and environmental impacts) made by the local governance body (Gomes, 2005). The internal layers of such an identification, along with the definition of decision-making mechanism and the effect of actors, are also considered as a way to address the issues related to institutions' social responsibilities (Qian, 2011; Shieh, Martouzet, & Piroozi, 2020). The nature of decisions can have different levels of complexity, inclusion and influence (in the future) depending on the origin and the subject (Rezaeian, 2013). Based on the components of decision environment and the extent of the influence of different actors on each decision on a local scale, the decision-making mechanism will be examined, and then the critical decisions can be categorized based on the subject and qualities such as transparency and autonomy as follows.

Fleurke and Willemse (2006: 75) examined the autonomy of a decision at the local level in three aspects; the determination of the agenda by the public entity of local government, the degree of freedom granted by the central government to the local government for decision-

making, and the degree of local government's dependence on other state sectors in the decision-making process. They believe that general and top-down criteria can explain the context and likelihood of a decision under the best conditions, while direct analysis of decisions can also explain their context and spatial characteristics. Each decision has its own characteristics by which one can read and review the process of making important decisions and their outcomes. Among others, the three dimensions of initiative, freedom of choice and dependency can be cited (Fleurke, 2006). In other words, decisions are formed in the space between autonomy and dependency (Friedmann, 1967). To determine the type and impact of each decision at the local level, the actor with initiative is identified as the primary origin of the decision. This may be a law, rule, obligation, demand, and request that it is possible to return it by referring to existing documents. The actor issuing the endorsement, the requester or the like that has been the trigger for the decision is identified as the agent of the initiative. If no external actor is found to start the decision, the public decision-making body itself can be considered an initiative. In cases where a decision has been initiated at the national level, the origin of the decisions may be approved development and construction programs, or in some other way, incentives or deterrent sentences that stimulate the local entity to enter the decision-making process. In the decision-making process, freedom of choice arises when the decision-maker has at least two alternative paths, each of which leads to different outcomes. The dependency of the decision-maker on other actors is characterized by his/her need for information, financial support, labor, land, licenses, or other resources. Of course, decisions made only by informing and reporting to other actors can be considered independent. Accordingly, the components of the nature of decision can be summarized as follows.

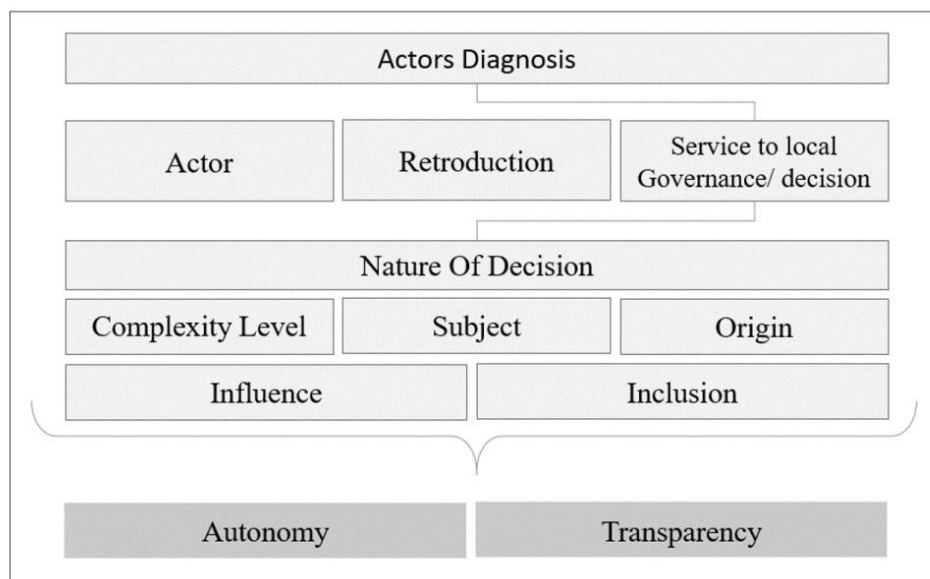


Fig 4. Identifiable components of actors and decision¹

¹ According to (Corrêa Gomes, 2004: 49), (Rezaeian and Ashouri, 2013: 16) and (Qian, 2011)

Accordingly, in the case of towns, the topic can be examined in two stages: top-down macro deduction, and the micro bottom-up retroduction of complex organisms. At a macro stage, the study of the town administration structure, from the national to the local scale, will determine the legal position, role and contribution of official actors. Then, by introducing the selected decisions

made at the local level in the town studied, the decision-making mechanism used by the appointed and elected national and local actors, the private sector, and civil society's representatives to administer the city is explained. To implement such a process, the following radial model is presented based on the outputs of the present article.

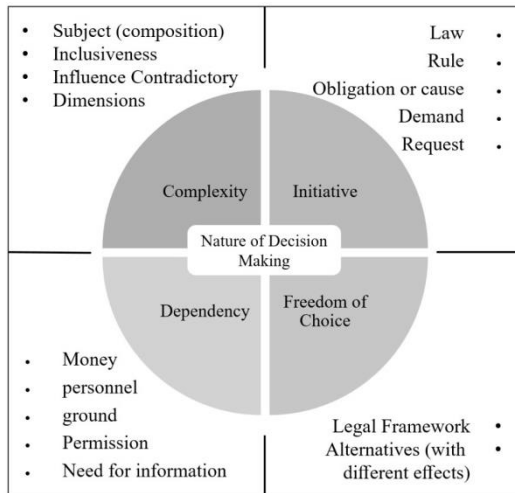


Fig 5. Components of the nature of decision for the Town governance

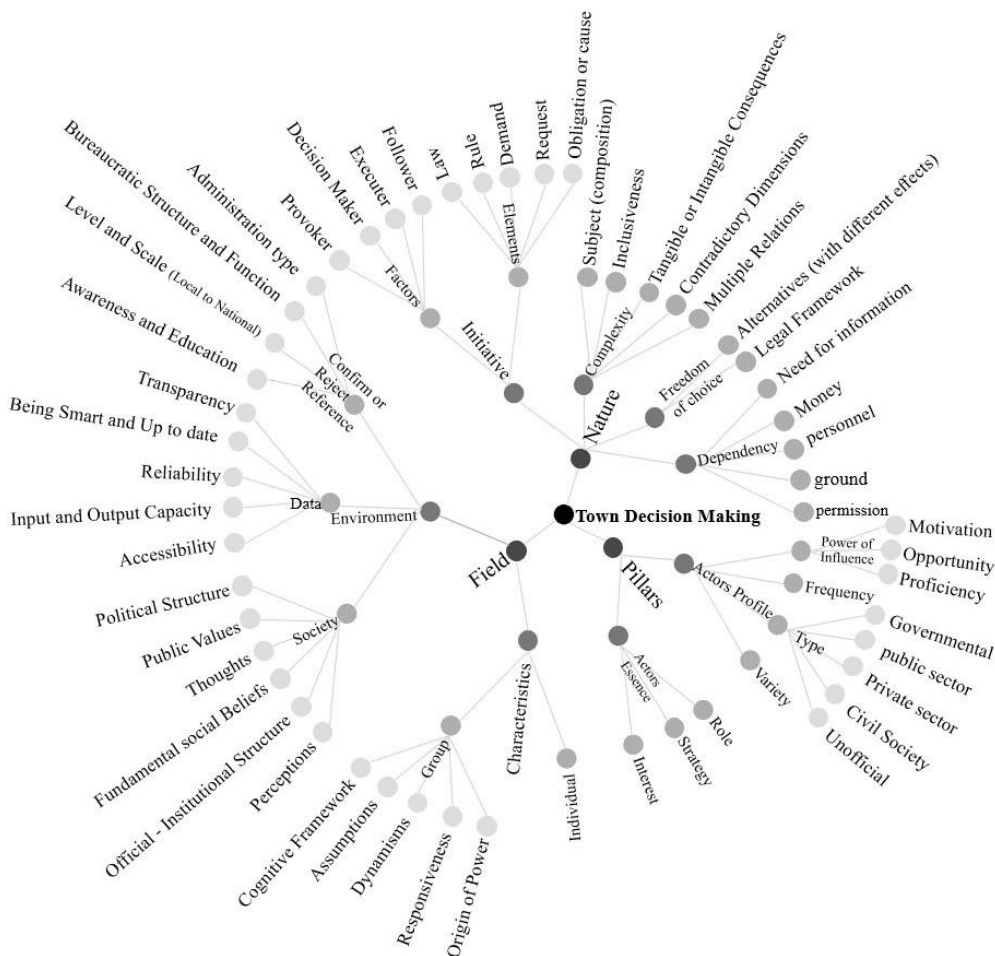


Fig 6. The proposed radial framework for explaining the relational decision-making mechanism in Towns

The above diagram has been developed as a framework for examining the decision tree used for the town administration, considering the inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of different domains of governance in different countries and regions. However, such a tool will be localized and rewritten depending on the local characteristics and conditions of towns studied. In fact, each of the criteria proposed for the study or the elements and pillars identified in this framework, will be matched with the context in the new case study, and take a new form according to the peripheral environment's information. The extraction of this model from numerous and leading studies from different parts of the world, and bringing disseminated subjects together for the first time, is some of the unique features of the present model. Based on its suitability for a variety of formal structures (and about informal and invisible structures in the governance of towns), this model is ready to be used as a practical and flexible tool. Applying and testing this framework in future studies and modifying it based on the experiences gained will be the next steps of modifying and completing of it.

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