Research Paper: Analyzing the Effect of Village-to-city Conversion on the Quality of Life of the Residents (Case Study: Tolem City (Marjaghal) in Sowme'eh Sara County, Iran)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to evaluate the policy of village-to-city conversion and its effect on the quality of life of Tolem City's residents in terms of physical,environmental, infrastructural, service provision, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. Turning the village into a city or a town can lead to changes in the quality of life.

Methods: This study is applied in terms of purpose. Primary and secondary data collection methods were used in this study. The statistical population of the study was the rural households of Tolem City in Sowme'eh Sara ounty.

Results: The highest correlation coefficient among the components is for physical-environmental indicators (R=0.583, P<0.01), and the lowest correlation coefficient is for social-cultural indicators (R=0.144, P<0.01). Table 11 shows that this transformation had more effects on improving education and health services (5.22) and access to communication services and Post Bank (5.13).

Conclusion: This study found that the village-to-city conversion greatly affected physical, infrastructure and service provision, economic, social and cultural dimensions from the residents' viewpoint.

1. Introduction

Many countries, including Iran, have tried to create small towns by transforming villages into cities and providing welfare facilities to improve the quality of people's lives (Mehdibighi et al., 2012). Creating small cities is intended to provide an optimal level of economic development (Nikpour & Razghi, 2019) for a quality urban environment in terms of physical, economic and social characteristics (Alipour & Shahabian, 2019). The transformation of the village into a city is a policy for large villages to improve

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the quality of life in variables such as economic, social, physical and infrastructural indicators (Fellener, 2004).

The transformed small towns improve rural-urban relations. Rural-urban linkages are a hierarchy of human habitats which causes the appropriate distribution of facilities and services in the surrounding areas, organization of economic-social activities and minimizing the differences and gaps in the quality of life within the regions (Saraei & Eskandari, 2017).

Small cities play a role in national, regional and local development. Rural-urban links facilitate access to the market, increase the income and the demand for goods and services and, therefore, reduce the poverty (Owusu, 2005). In Iran, converting villages to small cities aims to improve the quality and standards of life and attract migrants to small towns. 817 villages in the country have converted to small cities from 1956 to 2006 (Ziyari & Ramazanzadeh, 2013). One thousand four hundred new small Islamic cities are planned to be created in the Comprehensive Plan of Iran 1400 (Kharameh, 2010). From 1966-2006, about 406 villages were converted into small towns, often with less than 5,000 inhabitants. The new small towns quickly accepted the changes, rapid urbanization, and quality lifestyle with economic growth (Bloh, 2008).

According to the 2016 census, the population of Gilan Province is 2,530,696 people. 63.3% are urban, and 36.7% are rural residents (Management and Planning Organization of Gilan Province, 2017). Turning villages into cities has intensified in this Province in the last few decades. In a way, the number of cities in this Province increased from 10 cities in 1335 to 52 cities in 1396. However, the population surveys in Gilan Province show that most cities have less than 25 thousand people in all census periods (Azizi et al., 2019).

Gilan Province is spatially diverse compared to other provinces. In Gilan province, the rural population has always been more than the urban population. As a result, the conversion of villages into small towns has become an accelerated process (Zia Tavana & Amirentekhabi, 2007). The western region of Sepidroud has rich water resources, humid climate, vast and flat plain, and many rural settlements. In terms of political divisions, this region is next to Rasht, Anzali, Shaft, Fuman, Masal, Someh Sara, Kiashahr District, and Astana Ashrafieh County (Azizi et al., 2019). Sowme'eh Sara County consists of 4 cities in the district's western part. Tolem City is a newly transformed city according to the fifth note of the fourth article of the Law of Country Divisions in 1996.

This study takes Tolem City as a case of village-to-city conversion and aims to evaluate the policy for this transformation. The main research question is how effective this process was in improving the residents' quality of life in terms of physical, environmental, infrastructural, service provision, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The following hypothesis is proposed to examine this question. The conversion of the village to the city in this study area has different effects on the dimensions.

2. Literature Review

For the first time in 1970, Janson investigated the role of small cities in regional development. He highlighted these places' effect on job creation and keeping the population (Tacoli, 2017). There are three perspectives related to the role of small cities in regional development: spatial function, political economy and meditation (Nasiri Hendehkhaleh et al., 2020). Each of these perspectives underscores the importance of small cities for peripheral areas (Shafiee et al., 2020). In the United States, small cities are crucial for the region's development and work as a medium for transporting the development effect (Jobartsch, 2020).

Small cities also cause the expansion of agricultural products, market effectiveness and re-marketing for public and social services (UN, 2021). In recent years, creating small cities by converting villages into small towns has been a primary strategy for urban management to improve the living condition of people (Rezvani et al., 2010). Urban policymakers and planners have emphasized small towns' capabilities to improve the quality of life (Kalinka & Kedziora, 2019). On the other hand, regional policymakers and planners have highlighted the role of small cities as service centres for regional development (Zebardast, 2004). Small cities can also influence the quality of life in the rural-urban linkage. They mediate between lower and upper settlements. These cities are like centres with various cultural and social functions and services affecting residents' economic and physical situation. Small village-like cities provide a condition for economic activities and services, in addition to the distribution of population, facilities and capital in the area (Eftekhari & Izadi, 2001). Strengthening small cities leads to economic efficiency, citizens' welfare, adjustment of agricultural markets and increasing job opportunities (UNCHS Habitat,1985). Also, small cities synthesize national development regarding physical-environmental, economic and social indica-

tors (UN, 2020). Transformed small cities can solve the unemployment of bigger cities and their high density (Ebrahimzahed et al., 2012). After providing infrastructure, the rural-urban model for population mobility will reduce place costs and migration to bigger cities (Bloh, 2008).

This movement and improvement of facilities will join the capabilities and abilities to mobilize the rural-urban network (Fani, 2003). Small cities organize rural and urban relations, which is the key to economic, social and physical development (Jomehpoor & Rashnoodi, 2012). They are the mediator for market position in a way that directly connects the production/service and consumption points, which is vital for rural livelihood (Zia Tavana & Shams-e-Dini, 2010). Moreover, as the central points, small cities have significant relations with peripheral villages. This relation forms the economic, transportation, infrastructure, service, and administrative connections (Nikseresht et al., 2012).

A summary of previous research is presented as follows:

Rahimian et al. (2019) found that the conversion of a village to a city had the most effect on the improvement of urban services, constructions, education, social participation, health, communication facilities, employment, and access to recreational fitness places. concluded that village annexation to cities would improve the life of residents through physical indicators and access to facilities and infrastructure. Mohajerani et al. (2016) investigated the strategies of village conversion to small cities. They resulted that the most important effects of this process are the creation of shopping centres, roads, transportation, and an increase in economic and social levels. In their study, Farahani et al. (2016) concluded that turning the village into a new city leads to quality of life in economic, social, and physical-environmental dimensions. Saber et al. (2015) found that in Hasanabad's residents, their village conversion positively affected social and economic indicators.

Sadeghi (2013) found that creating job opportunities is the highest impact on the process. Karimi et al. (2012) investigated the process of Deylaman urban transformation and concluded that this process did not have enough impact on improvement in economic, social-cultural indicators and physical conditions. On the other hand, Nasiri (2009) found that the Bomehen transformation successfully maintained the employment situation and facilities.

Zheng et al. (2021) analyzed China's regional development and concluded that annexing villages to the cities would promote their economic production. Identifying the development patterns of small cities in China, Tong and Liu (2021) stated that these cities are important for marketing and shopping centres and access citizens to better constructions. In Poland, Senata and Szark (2020) evaluated the small cities effect and concluded that they had made a dynamic relationship with peripheral places to offer better infrastructure, service and physical indicators to citizens. Buser (2011) pointed out that small cities can fill the spatial gap of service and infrastructure in the regions. Chattopadhyay (2008) assessed the new small cities and reiterated their positive effects on improving urban services, educational facilities, and health care. Epsterin and Jeseph (2001) stated that the main components of village conversion to small cities are refreshed infrastructure, new industries and job opportunities. Fedak (2000) asserted that small cities are influential for business survival and creating new jobs in India.

3. Methodology

This study is applied in terms of purpose. Primary and secondary data collection methods were used in this study. The statistical population of the study was the rural households of Tolem City in Sowme'eh Sara County. The sample size was determined to be 384 people and was selected by simple random sampling. Cochran's formula is as follows:

$$n=\frac{N(ts)^2}{Nd^2+(ts)^2}$$

SPSS software was used to analyze the data. A questionnaire was applied for data collection. Some professors evaluated the validity of the questionnaire and which is acceptable. Then, we extracted the components and indicators from the literature. According to Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, the indicators have a normal distribution with a significance level of 95%. The study indicators include Physical-environmental, infrastructure and service, and economic and social indicators.

Area of Study

Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan from the north, Ardabil from the west, Zanjan and Qazvin Province from the south and Mazandaran Province from the east are adjacent to Gilan Province. This Province has 16 Counties, and Sowme'eh Sara is one of them. The case of this study, Tolem City or Marjaghal, is in Sowme'eh Sara County. Tolem City had 7482 residents in 2016. The municipality of this city was established in 1993.

4. Findings

According to the questionnaire, respondents are 39 years old on average; 76% of the respondents are male, and 24% of them are female. The research findings are presented below.

As Table 1 shows, there is no significant difference (99% confidence) between respondents in the four components. In other words, in the respondent's opinion, the consequences of village-to-city conversion have been effective in all components.

As the table shows, all indicators in this component are in good condition. The highest averages belong to "im-

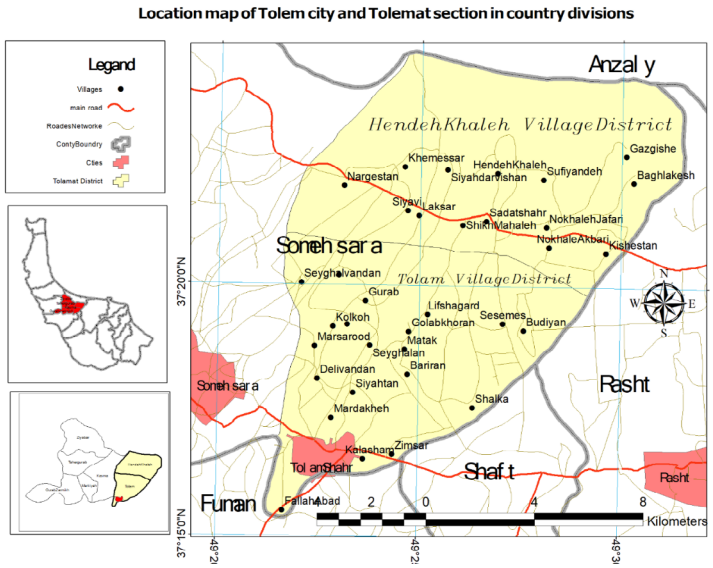

Figure 1. Area of study

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Table 1. The test result for evaluating the consequences of village-city conversion (Tolem City) in physical, infrastructure, economic, and social dimensions

Indicator	T value	Degree of freedom	Significance level	Mean	Test value
Physical-environmental	17.5	188	0.000	12.25	18
Infrastructure and service provision	15.2	188	0.000	10.83	17
Economical	11.3	188	0.000	9.52	15
Socio-cultural	8.4	188	0.000	7.42	12

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Table 2. The impact of the village-to-city conversion on physical-environmental indicators

Components	Per cent					Mean	Standard deviation
	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high		
Improving the facilities and infrastructure	0.3	1	2.5	13.1	83.1	3.1	1.190
Improving the building resistance	0.6	1.3	7.1	15.8	75.2	2.5	1.143
Technical standards in construction	0.5	8.2	15.3	20.9	55.1	1.3	0.563
Improvement of building materials	0.8	1.1	16.3	23.6	58.2	2.2	0.846
Laws and regulations	0.5	1.1	1.6	27.2	69.6	2.3	1.103

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proving the facilities and infrastructure" of Tolem City (3.1) and then "improving the building resistance" (2.5), with a standard deviation of 1.143. The minor average is for "technical standards in construction" (1.3), with a standard deviation of 0.563.

In the infrastructure and services component, "improving the education, health and sports services," with an average of 2.9 and standard deviation of 2.38 was the highest, and access to shopping services, with an average of 1.9, and standard deviation of 0.723 was the least affected indicators.

Economic indicators showed that "improving non-agricultural businesses", with an average of 3 and standard deviation of 1.89, and then "development of market and shopping centres", with an average of 2.68, were affected by the village-to-city conversion. On the other hand, the least effect was "better business perspective", with an average of 1.68.

In the opinion of Tolem residents, village-to-city conversion has improved "participation in local affairs" with an average of 2.2, and "social participation" with an average of 1.83.

Table 3. The impact of the village-to-city conversion on infrastructure and services indicators

Components	Per cent					Mean	Standard deviation
	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high		
Access to communication service and Post Bank	0.1	0.2	4.8	9.7	85.2	2.7	1.38
Access to shopping services	0.4	1.3	9.5	12.5	76.3	1.9	0.723
Improving transportation and roads	0.1	1.3	5.2	10.5	82.9	2.5	1.23
Improving the education, health and sports services	0.1	2.2	3.1	8.3	86.3	2.9	2.83
Access to administrative facilities	0.2	0.8	6.2	13.3	78.5	2.2	0.923

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Table 4. The impact of the village-to-city conversion on Economic indicators

Components	Per cent					Mean	Standard deviation
	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high		
Improving the livelihood	10.80	10.8	14.5	9.5	63.8	2.1	0.923
Development of market and shopping centres	2.4	10.2	8.6	10.6	68.2	2.7	1.63
Improving non-agricultural businesses	4.2	0.2	5.8	12.9	70.9	3	1.89
Better employment perspective	8.5	9.2	12.9	8.8	60.6	1.68	0.841
Improving economic transactions	3.4	8.3	12.9	10.3	65.1	2.5	1.17

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Table 5. The impact of the village-to-city conversion on social and cultural indicators

Components	Per cent					Mean	Standard deviation
	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high		
Participation in the city plans	2.2	5.6	13.2	15.2	63.8	2.2	0.852
Participation in charitable affairs	1.8	8.3	10.5	13.8	65.6	2.8	0.943
Social interactions	3.9	17.2	8.2	10	60.7	1.25	0.512
Social participation	4.4	5.7	10.6	16.8	62.5	1.83	0.653
Social satisfaction	14.5	11.9	9.8	2.6	61.2	1.62	0.523

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We used the Pearson test to evaluate the correlation between village-to-city conversion and the studied indicators. The relation was determined to be direct and statistically significant among all components.

As Table 6 shows, the highest correlation coefficient among the components is for physical-environmental indicators (R=0.583, P<0.01), and the lowest correlation coefficient is for social-cultural indicators (R=0.144, P<0.01). The study used multiple regression for the predictive variable (consequences of village-to-city conversion) and dependent variable (improvement of quality of life). As Table 7 shows, the relation between the variables is significant (Sig=0.01, R=0.538).

In the previous Table, R^2 (coefficient of determination), which can explain the variance of scores, confirms that 71.5 per cent of the improved quality of life in Tolem City is related to the environmental-physical component with its indicators, and 29.5 per cent of the improvement is related to other factors beyond the model. As Table 8 shows, environmental-physical indicators (sig=0.000, Beta=0.285), infrastructure and services indicators (sig=0.000, Beta=115), economic indicators (sig=0.000, Beta=0.108) improved the quality of life for residents of Tolem City.

In this study, the significance level is 0.000 and within alpha 0.05. Because the error is less than 0.01 with 99 per cent confidence, we can state that the consequences of village-to-city conversion in Tolem City and the improvement of quality of life have a significant relationship.

There is a direct relation between components of village-to-city conversion and environmental-physical indicators (sig=0.000, R=0.652). The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates that 41.8 per cent of the total variance of quality-of-life variables is related to physical-environmental indicators. Among the physical-environmental indicators, there is a direct relationship between improving the facilities and infrastructure (sig=0.000, Beta=0.382), improving the building resistance (sig=0.000, Beta=0.368), laws and regulations (sig=0.000, Beta=0.341).

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix for village-to-city conversion and the improvement of quality of life in Tolem City

Variable	Improvement of quality of life
Physical-environmental	0.583
Infrastructure and service provision	0.449
Economical	0.432
Socio-cultural	0.128

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Table 7. Multiple correlations for village-to-city conversion and the improvement of quality of life in Tolem City

Model	R	R2	Ad. Sq	std	sig	Durbin-Watson
Simultaneous multiple regression	0.538	21.8	20.3	0.512	0.000	1.456

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Table 8. Multiple regression between village-to-city conversion indicators and the improvement of quality of life indicators in Tolem City

Simultaneous multiple regression	Standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T value	Sig.
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Intercept	1.852	0.283	----------	7.423	0.000
Physical-environmental	0.196	0.023	0.285	5.461	0.000
Infrastructure and service provision	0.152	0.015	0.115	3.823	0.000
Economical	0.138	0.014	0.108	3.549	0.000
Socio and cultural	0.112	0.011	0.101	2.21	0.000

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Table 9. Multiple regression between the environmental-physical indicators and the improvement of quality of life indicators in Tolem City

Simultaneous multiple regression	Standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T value	Sig.
	B	std	Beta		
Intercept	352/2	112/0	----------		
Improving the facilities and infrastructure	0.119	0.024	0.382	5.283	0.000
Improving the building resistance	0.128	0.018	0.368	5.125	0.000
Technical standards in construction	0.152	0.011	0.311	3.852	0.000
Improvement of building materials	0.141	0.012	0.325	4.183	0.000
Laws and regulations	0.132	0.015	0.341	4.253	0.000

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Table 10. Multiple regression between the Infrastructure and service provision indicator and the improvement of quality of life indicators in Tolem City

Simultaneous multiple regression	Standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T value	Sig.
	B	std	Beta		
Intercept	---	0.115	----------	6.3	0.000
Access to communication service and Post Bank	0.136	0.117	0.383	4.8	0.000
Access to shops	0.120	0.107	0.306	3.9	0.000
Improving transportation and roads	0.129	0.112	0.352	4.6	0.000
Improving the education, health and fitness infrastructures	0.148	0.119	0.396	5.3	0.000
Access to administrative facilities	0.122	0.109	0.312	4.2	0.000

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Table 10 shows the regression results between the indicators of infrastructure and service provision and the improvement of quality of life indicators in Tolem City. The highest indicators are improving the education, health and sports services (sig=0.000, Beta=0.396), access to communication services and Post Bank (sig=0.000, Beta=0.383) and improving transportation and roads (sig=0.000, Beta=0.352). In other words, these indicators were affected by the village-to-city conversion of Tolem City. The study used a one-sample t-test for the village-to-city conversion of Tolem City and its effect on the resident's quality of life. Table 11 shows that this transformation had more effects on improving education and health services (5.22) and access to communication services and Post Bank (5.13). Also, the T value in this table is higher than 1.82 for all indicators.

As the last table shows, the relationship between variables is linear. Therefore, village-to-city conversion is in linear relation to the improvement of the quality of life.

Table 11. One sample t-test results from the respondents' opinion

Indexes	T	sig	Mean	95% confidence level	
				Low	High
Improving the education, health and sports services	5.22	0.000	3.23	0.259	0.428
Access to communication service and Post Bank	5.13	0.000	3.16	0.212	0.410
Improving transportation and roads	4.93	0.000	3.10	0.183	0.315

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5. Discussion

Turning the village into a city or a small city usually lead to changes in the quality of life, which is reflected in economic, social, and physical indicators. This study found that the village-to-city conversion greatly affected physical, infrastructure and service provision, economic, social and cultural dimensions from the residents' viewpoint.

In the infrastructure and services component, "improving the education, health and sports services," with an average of 2.9 and standard deviation of 2.38, was the highest, and access to shopping services, with an average of 1.9 and standard deviation of 0.723, was the least affected indicators. These results are consistent with the findings of Rahimiyan et al. (2019).

The highest correlation coefficient was for physical-environmental indicators ($R=0.583$, $p<0.01$), and the lowest one was for social-cultural indicators ($R=0.144$, $p<0.01$). Environmental-physical indicators as the most affected ones (sig=0.000, Beta=0.285), infrastructure and services indicators (sig=0.000, Beta=115), economic indicators (sig=0.000, Beta=0.108) improved the quality of life for residents of Tolem City. These results are consistent with the findings of Buser (2011) and Senata and Szark (2020).

Based on the results of regression between the indicators of infrastructure and service provision and the improvement of quality of life indicators, the highest indicators are improving the education, health and sports services (sig=0.000, Beta=0.396), access to communication service and Post Bank (sig=0.000, Beta=0.383) and improving transportation and roads (sig=0.000, Beta=0.352). These results are consistent with the findings of Rahimiyan et al. (2019) and Mohajerani et al. (2016).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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