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Evaluating the Performance of Urban Management within the Good Urban Governance Framework and its Relationship with the Quality of Urban Life and Social Capital

Behnaz Babaei Morad[a*]

[a] Assistant Professor of Urban Planning, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran (Corresponding Author).

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the challenges of urban systems and the importance of sustainable urban development make changes in the paradigms of urban management and provision of urban services. This paradigm shift has led to the dominance of the good urban governance approach, as the most appropriate and effective way to manage today's cities. In urban management, this approach, based on democratic and egalitarian sustainable development, is applied to influence all actors in urban management and also to meet all the needs of citizens. Nowadays, cities have achieved a new management approach, called good urban governance. Since city councils and municipalities are considered the most significant urban management bodies in Iran, the present study aims to assess the performance of urban management in Ahvaz within the framework of good governance and its relationship with social capital and quality of urban life. The statistical population includes citizens older than 18 years old in Ahvaz city in 2019. The sample size is estimated to be 400 people using Cochran's formula. The samples are selected using multi-stage cluster sampling technique. The findings indicate the indicators of good urban governance (including responsiveness and accountability, transparency, rule of law, efficiency and effectiveness, and participation) are not at an optimal level, and the urban management (city council and municipality) of Ahvaz has not been able to realize good urban governance. Moreover, social capital (social trust and social participation) and the quality of urban life are positively correlated with good urban governance. The variables of social capital and urban quality of life influence good urban governance by 0.42 and 0.45, respectively.

Keywords: Good Urban Governance, Urban Management, Quality of Urban Life, Social Capital, Ahvaz City.

* E_mail: ur.behbm@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nowadays, in developing countries, the urban management system faces many issues and challenges, including lack of services, poor healthcare, exceeding population growth, slum, lack of public participation in urban affairs, lack of urban culture, poverty, poor housing, air pollution, insecurity, injustice or unequal distribution of facilities in urban areas, etc. Meanwhile, the major problem of urban management is not the lack of fiscal resources, new technologies, or skilled labor but how to manage these factors (Taghvaei and Tajdar 2009, 46; Hosseini 2016, 43). On the other hand, extensive global developments have led to changes in the structure and function of cities, making it difficult to analyze their urban management.

The modern urban management system has provided several models to solve the problems and challenges of urban life. One of these models is good urban governance, considered the predominant model in urban management (Ziari, Nikpay, and Hosseini 2013, 70). Good urban governance is a new way to manage urban affairs and is a type of interaction between the government or urban management, civil society, and the private sector. Urban governance refers to the influence of all urban elements on urban management, along with all the mechanisms moving towards the excellence of the city and citizens, not putting together public and private arenas with the governing of the authority of the government sector (Kazemian et al. 2013, 118).

Recently, numerous studies have addressed good urban governance in different cities of Iran. They have investigated good governance in different aspects and provided different results. In general, the results of these studies indicate that Iranian cities are not at a desirable level in terms of good governance principles (Razavi 2013; Ajza Ashkohi et al. 2014). Therefore, in most Iranian cities, including Ahvaz, which experience many extra- and inter-organizational problems in urban management (Firouzi and Alizadeh 2017, 268), the fundamental problem is how to realize good governance and form a good urban governance mechanism. Also, one can evaluate good urban governance by investigating the quality of urban life and social capital. Because good urban governance includes indicators of the quality of urban life and social capital, and the concepts of urban governance, quality of urban life, and social capital complement each other (Tavakoli and Momeni 2016). Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the performance of urban management in Ahvaz city within the good urban governance framework and its relationship with the quality of urban life and social capital.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This section reviews the concepts of good urban governance, urban management, quality of urban life, and social capital.

2.1. Good Urban Governance

Discussions related to governance have been raised when the difficulties of governance were recognized. The debate between government and governance has led to the formation of fundamental applied research in the field of governance and gradually changed the question "Who should govern?" to the question "How should the government govern?" and "Should the government govern or manage?" (Boraz and Leglis 2010). Governance is a set of intercourses through which the public sector, the private sector, institutions, and individuals manage their common affairs (Mortazavi 2015, 10). As a concept, governance has been discussed from different perspectives. It includes a set of coherent mechanisms, processes, institutions, and mutual relations through which citizens and social groups express their preferences, favors, and interests and consult, mediate, and negotiate for the differences and conflicts between them. In this way, they get to know their rights (Lupala 2015). Governance is a combination of traditions (rules and customs), institutions, and processes that determine how power should be exercised, how citizens have the right to participate and protest, and how to make decisions on public issues (Dabbagh and Nafari 2009).

Today, the challenges of urban systems and the importance of sustainable urban development make changes in the paradigms of urban management and provision of urban services. This paradigm shift has led to the dominance of the good urban governance approach, as the most appropriate and effective way to manage today's cities. In urban management, this approach, based on democratic and egalitarian sustainable development, is applied to influence all actors in urban management and also to meet all the needs of citizens (Mohammadpour Zarandi and Tabatabaei Mozdabadi 2017, 5).

The macro goals of good urban governance can be listed as follows: 1. To recognize civil society to further strengthen and improve organizations, institutions, and local communities; 2. To eradicate poverty and social, ethnic, and cultural segregation in cities; 3. To increase the participation and intervention of individuals and stakeholders in the political processes within the cities; 4. To improve the quality of livelihood and increase life possibilities for all citizens; and 5. To provide opportunities and possibilities for people to show their wishes and hopes in their lives (Kazemian 2015, 15).

Several indicators have been considered to assess good urban governance. The variety of indicators,

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as well as their continuity within a macro definition of good governance, have made it possible for each country to draw a path to achieve good governance according to its culture, values, and norms and localize the indicators if necessary. Because good governance does not seek to impose certain culture and values but presents ways to achieve development, welfare, and effective interaction between the government, civil society, and the public (Heshmatzadeh, Haji Yousefi, and Talebi, 2017, p.5).

Table 1. Indicators of Good Urban Governance

Scholar/International Organization	Good Governance Indicators
World Bank (2000)	Accountability, participation, transparency, efficiency, responsiveness
United Nations Secretariat (2006)	Participation, accountability, efficiency, transparency, justice, rule of law, responsiveness, consensus-oriented
Roberts et al. (2007)	Transparency, justice, efficiency, accountability, resource management
Srivastava (2009)	Participation, efficiency, equity and inclusiveness, rule of law, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented
Epstein and Gang (2009)	Accountability, control of corruption, government effectiveness, rule of law, civil liberties, political rights
Elahi (2009)	Equality before the law, transparency, responsibility, accountability, efficiency, satisfaction, agreement
Lockwood (2010)	Participation, legitimacy, transparency, fairness, efficiency, flexibility, resilience, satisfaction

Among the several indicators of good urban governance, five indicators of responsiveness and accountability, transparency, the rule of law, efficiency and effectiveness, and participation have been used to assess good urban governance in the present study. Responsiveness and accountability mean that people can call the government or city management to account for what affects the people (Komijani and Salatin 2017, 3). The rule of law means observing legal frameworks in decision-making and keeping irresponsible people away from decisions (Adine Vand, Hajizadeh, and Ghadami 2013, 47). Participation refers to the citizens' power to influence decisions and participate in power (Ebrahimzadeh and Asadian 2013, 21). Transparency means following the decisions taken from the regulations and laws and refers to the free and direct availability of information for those influenced by these decisions and their implementation. Also, transparency means sufficient information provided in an understandable form (Taghvaei and Tajdar 2009, 53). Efficiency and effectiveness refer to the optimal use of resources by institutions that meet people's needs. In good governance, effectiveness refers to the sustainable use of natural resources and includes the conservation of the environment (Zahiri 2014, 97).

2.2. Urban Management

Management refers to the process of effective and efficient use of material and human resources in planning, organizing, mobilizing, directing, and controlling resources and facilities (Sattari Sarbanqali and Zabihi 2009, 111). Urban management must plan for the city, organize urban activities, monitor the activities performed, and even create motivation for taking measures optimally. Urban management aims to improve the working and living conditions of the residents, encourage sustainable economic and social development, and conserve the physical environment (Safaeipour 2016, 169). Sharma (2000) considers urban management as a set of activities that together form and guide the economic, physical, and social development of urban areas. Therefore, the main task of urban management is to intervene in these areas to enhance economic development and people's well-being, as well as provide essential services (Hajiloo et al. 2016). Therefore, urban management refers to the processes of decision-making and decision-taking in the city administration (Latifi 2011, 11). In the present era, considering the quantitative and qualitative development of cities, the municipality and the city council are among the significant institutions playing a key role in the city administration and provision of services in cities, and their role in city administration and management, meeting citizens' needs, and urban development is becoming bolder. Today, municipalities and city councils, especially in metropolises, play a decisive role in urban management. Because their good or bad performance directly influences the quality of life of citizens. In Iran, there is definitely no other governmental or non-governmental institution as closely related to the citizens' lives as city councils and municipalities (Zahedani and Zahri Bidgoli 2011, 85). In fact, it can be said that the institution in charge of urban management in Iran consists of two organizations of Islamic city councils and municipalities (Ebrahimzadeh and Asadian 2013; Koozehgar et al. 2015). Also, due to the two factors of being selective and having a close and direct

relationship with the public, municipalities and city councils are considered one of the most significant factors in realizing good urban governance (Ebrahimzadeh and Asadian 2013, 18).

2.3. Quality of Urban Life

There is extensive, albeit disintegrated, literature on the quality of life, and there is little consensus on its meaning and concept (Cordell et al. 2011, 784). Some consider this word synonymous with well-being. Others consider it an expression of well-being that is determined by the number of public goods and their distribution (Naghdi and Babaei 2014, 3). Individuals' overall satisfaction with life and welfare or the lack of welfare of people and their living environment (Fanni, Heydari, and Aghaei 2015, 67), are some of the definitions used for quality of life. The World Health Organization has defined quality of life as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns" (Pereira and Cannavaro 2015, 184). The quality of urban life is not a concept separate from the quality of life, and in fact, it is a definition and example of the quality of life in the area of the city and its related issues (Vazifeh Doust and Amini 2010, 8). Per its definition, the quality of urban life is considered a pleasant feeling coming from the combination of local identity, collective memory, and a sense of historical belonging to the city (Marsousi and Lajevardy 2014, 71).

There are various methods to investigate the quality of life in urban areas. However, no comprehensive framework has been developed for studying the quality of life in an integrated way based on spatial and social indicators. Recent studies have assessed the quality of life using two types of indicators: 1. Objective indicators; and 2. Subjective indicators. Objective indicators include social and economic indicators that can be measured to reflect the extent to which human needs are met. These indicators are obtained from formal reports and statistics. These indicators represent the apparent and tangible state of life. As examples of objective indicators, one can refer to GDP, primary development index, social health index, and human development index, which are used for national and international comparisons (Khajeh Shahkohi et al. 2016, 286). Subjective indicators evaluate the level of satisfaction of individuals and groups. These indicators are obtained from people's reports of their perceptions of different aspects of life. These indicators, which complement the social, economic, and environmental variables, represent individuals' perceptions and evaluations of the objective situation of their lives. Subjective indicators are obtained by surveying residents' perceptions of and satisfaction with their lives, while objective indicators are related to observable facts and are often obtained from secondary data (Khademolhoseiny, Mansoorian, and Sattari 2011, 46).

2.4. Social Capital

Social capital can generally be defined as resources that are the legacy of social relations and facilitate collective action. These resources are obtained through socialization and include trust, cooperative norms, and networks of social ties that bring people within the group together in a coherently and stably to achieve a joint goal (Zahedi, Shiani, and Alipour 2018, 11). Among the most important theorists in the field of social capital, one can mention Bourdieu, Coleman, and Fukuyama.

According to Bourdieu, social capital is a cultural platform resulting from social construct, which is organized and formulated in direct connection with the habits of people and the cultural field resulting from social actions (Abbaszadeh, Alizadeh Aghdam, and Eslami Niab 2012, 147). James Coleman, like Bourdieu, distinguishes social capital from other types of physical, economic, and human capital and considers a structural and interactive nature for it, that is the actor obtains the required information and enjoys collective life in the process of action by being a member of a group and interacting with other actors, and observing the principles and rules accepted in that group to gain the trust of others. Therefore, social capital facilitates actions (Rasolzadeh Aghdam, Adlipour, and Kohi 2016, 101). According to Fukuyama, social capital can be simply defined as a certain set of informal norms or values shared by the members of a group among whom cooperation is allowed (Fukuyama 2007, 10).

Two fundamental dimensions of social capital are participation and trust, which form social capital through a mutual interaction between themselves (Qorbani, Avazpour, and Rasekhi 2016, 278).

Social capital, which is often defined by the rate of participation and involvement of people in social life and the existence of trust between them, reduces the costs of coordination and greatly contributes to the efficiency and effectiveness of government and governance institutions (Bowles and Guinnes 2002). Moreover, social capital leads to the responsiveness and efficiency of the government to the demands of the society and provides the ground for more communication and interaction between the citizens and the government, thereby spreading civic virtues (Borg et al. 2014).

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. The performance of Ahvaz municipality within the framework of good urban governance is at a low level.
2. The performance of Ahvaz city council within the framework of good urban governance is at a low level.
3. There is a significant relationship between social capital and good urban governance.

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4. There is a significant relationship between the quality of urban life and good urban governance.

4. METHOD

The present study is quantitative survey research. The required data were collected using a questionnaire. The statistical population included citizens older than 18 years old in Ahvaz city in 2019. The sample size was estimated to be 384 people using Cochran's formula. However, to enhance the accuracy of the research, 400 people were considered. The samples were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling as follows. In the first step, each of the eight municipal districts of Ahvaz was considered a cluster. In the second step, sampling was carried out in each cluster, and most of the blocks or buildings of each cluster were included in the sampling plan. In the third step, the final sample was selected in proportionate to the number of households in the selected blocks, and interviews were conducted. Then, the data were analyzed using the SPSS software and the structural equation model was drawn using the Amos software. To assess the validity of the questionnaire after removing the initial drawbacks, using content validity, the final questionnaire was presented to five sociology, architecture, urban planning, and urbanism expert, and their opinions were also applied to the questionnaire to eliminate its possible defects in validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure its reliability. The alpha values of all variables was estimated to be above 0.70, which were acceptable and within the desired range (Table 2).

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Values of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Good Urban Governance	Responsiveness and Accountability	4	0.80
	Transparency	4	0.72
	Rule of Law	3	0.70
	Efficiency and Effectiveness	3	0.85
	Participation	3	0.87
Social Capital	Social Trust	22	0.94
	Social Participation	14	0.88
Quality of Urban Life	Sense of Well-being	14	0.87
	Sense of Satisfaction	6	0.79
	Citizenship Standards	18	0.85
	Role Status	9	0.94

5. FINDINGS

This section includes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the statistical description of the research variables, and finally the inferential findings:

5.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

According to the obtained results, 58% of respondents were men and the remaining (42%) were women. The average age of the respondents was 29 years. 61% of participants were single and 39% were married. In the educational status, most participants (46%) had a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree and higher (28%), an associate degree (14%), and a diploma (12%), respectively. In terms of employment status, 4% of participants were housewives, 48% were unemployed, and 48% were employed. Moreover, in terms of socio-economic status, 36% participant in the lower class, 41% in the middle class, and 23% in the upper class.

5.2. Statistical Description of Research Variables

Table 3 shows that the average social capital of the respondents is 83.87, indicating a moderate score in the social capital of citizens. Among the indicators of social capital, social trust (average score=49.16) and social participation (average score= 38.70) were also estimated to be at a moderate level. Moreover, the quality of urban life and its four indicators were all estimated to be at a moderate level.

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Table 3. Descriptive Indicators of Social Capital and Citizens' Quality of Life

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Trust	24	89	49.16	17.10
Social Participation	14	66	38.70	11.58
Social Capital	47	144	87.83	24.56
Sense of Well-being	27	66	51.76	9.12
Sense of Satisfaction	6	30	16.56	5.20
Citizenship Standards	18	90	61.22	12.14
Role Status	9	45	33.86	9.15
Quality of Urban Life	67	229	163.40	28.59

According to Table 4, the level of good urban governance implemented by the city council and municipality is lower than the average level. The results indicate that the indicators of good urban governance in Ahvaz are not at a desirable level, and the urban management (city council and municipality) of Ahvaz has not been able to achieve good urban governance. Therefore, the first and second research hypotheses are confirmed.

Table 4. Descriptive Indicators of Good Urban Governance in Ahvaz City by the City Council and Municipality

	Dimension	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
City Council	Accountability and Responsiveness	4	16	7.12	3.09
	Transparency	4	12	6.72	2.66
	Rule of Law	3	14	7.20	3.65
	Efficiency and Effectiveness	3	11	5.22	3.19
	Participation	3	15	6.92	3.50
Municipality	Accountability and Responsiveness	4	20	8.10	3.50
	Transparency	4	17	7.06	3.54
	Rule of Law	3	14	6.44	3.50
	Efficiency and Effectiveness	3	15	5.78	2.86
	Participation	3	13	5.66	2.78

5.3. Inferential Findings

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to test the third and fourth research hypotheses. As seen in Table5, there is a significant direct correlation between social capital and its dimensions (i.e. social trust and social participation) with good urban governance. That is good urban governance improves as the citizens' social capital increases. Also, there is a direct correlation between the quality of urban life and its dimensions with good urban governance, implying that increasing the quality of urban life will result in enhanced good urban governance. Therefore, the third and fourth research hypotheses are also confirmed.

Table 5. Research Hypothesis Testing

Variables	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	Sig.	Result
Social Trust and Good Urban Governance	0.33	0.000	Confirmed
Social Participation and Good Urban Governance	0.17	0.001	Confirmed
Social Capital and Good Urban Governance	0.31	0.000	Confirmed
Sense of Well-being and Good Urban Governance	0.24	0.000	Confirmed
Sense of Satisfaction and Good Urban Governance	0.22	0.000	Confirmed
Citizenship Standards and Good Urban Governance	0.34	0.000	Confirmed
Role Status and Good Urban Governance	0.18	0.000	Confirmed
Quality of Urban Life and Good Urban Governance	0.32	0.000	Confirmed

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In the following, the structural equation model of the present research is drawn using Amos software. One can see that the dependent variable, i.e. good urban governance, consists of five dimensions and the variable of social capital and quality of urban life influence good urban governance by 42% and 45%, respectively. Moreover, the model reveals that the variables of social capital and quality of urban life are assessed with 2 and 4 dimensions, respectively. The squared factor loading of each dimension shows how much each dimension explains the variances of social capital, quality of life, and good urban governance. As seen, the social trust, citizenship standards, and participation dimensions have the largest contribution to the construction of social capital, the quality of urban life, and good urban governance variables, respectively.
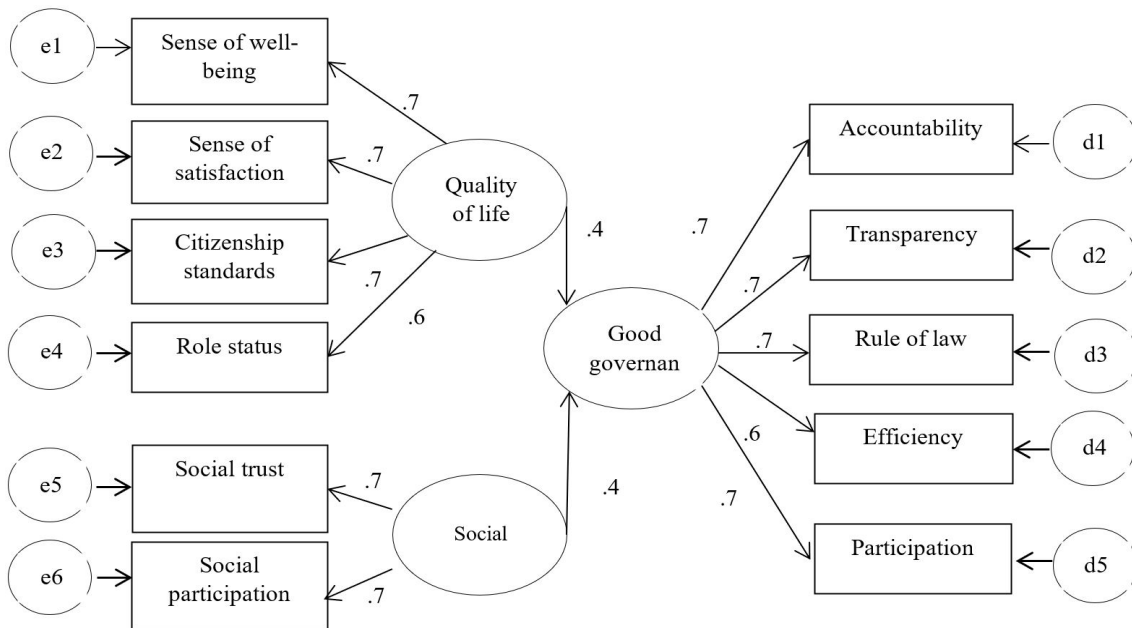

Fig. 1. Structural Equation Model

Table 6 shows some of the most important model fit indices. In general, it can be said that all the model fit indices are acceptable. Therefore, the drawn model shows that the experimental data of the research can be partially covered by the theories.

Table 6. Model Fit Indices

Absolute Fit Indices		Comparative Fit Indices			Parsimonious Fit Indices			
GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	TLI	PCFI	PNFI	RMSEA	CMIN/DF
0.90	0.93	0.92	0.96	0.91	0.54	0.55	0.03	3.40

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study has assessed good urban governance in Ahvaz city and investigated its relationship with the quality of urban life and the social capital of the citizens, for the first time. According to the research findings, Ahvaz city was estimated to be below the moderate level in the index of good urban governance (accountability, transparency, rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, and participation), meaning that Ahvaz's urban management system (municipality and city council) doesn't have a favorable performance within the framework of governance. This finding is consistent with the studies by Koozehgar et al. (2016) and Firouzi and Alizadeh (2017), who have shown that the indicators of good urban governance in Ahvaz city were not at a desirable level. Therefore, to enhance the performance of urban management in the framework of good governance, the urban management system of Ahvaz must take the following measures: to provide accurate and clear information on the implementation of various plans at the neighborhood level, to strengthen NGOs to improve the public participation in decision-making, to increase the public participation in planning and making decisions for the implementation of various

plans, to clarify urban rules and inform people about the rules of the urban management system to attract more public participation in the enforcement of these laws, to delegate some urban duties and responsibilities to the residents at the level of the districts and neighborhoods, such as neighborhood beautification, maintenance of public property and neighborhood green space, to enhance public participation, to enhance the accountability of city management to citizens, to provide continuous monthly and annual reports on obstacles, issues, and problems in the implementation of urban projects to citizens, to ask the citizens' opinions about the implementation of construction projects in the city, to holding monthly meetings to invite different guilds and organizations for more coordination, to make it possible for citizens to continuously visit urban management programs, to prove transparent information on the functions of city management and be honest in giving information to people, to pay more attention to equally apply regulations and equally provide services to all neighborhoods, etc.

Furthermore, the present study has investigated the relationship between social capital and the quality of urban life with good urban governance. The findings indicate that there is a direct significant relationship between social capital and its dimensions (social trust and social participation) and good urban governance and enhancing the citizens' social capital in Ahvaz city results in enhanced good urban governance. These findings are consistent with the studies by Pourmohammadi et al. (2010), Salehi et al. (2014), Bowles and Jintis (2002), Sampson et al. (2005), 10. Jankaskis and Septien (2007), Ritter (2013), Gu et al. (2013). To analyze this, according to the theoretical framework and studies by Saei et al. (2011) and Doule et al. (2018), it can be said that social trust represents the readiness and potential ground of citizens for cooperation and their readiness to engage in civic activities. With this view, at the micro level, due to the presence of social capital, the members of the society trust each other, and based on this trust, they start to form new groups and organizations and cooperate within their framework. At the macro level as well, enhancing social trust and civic participation of citizens will result in the increased cooperation and interaction of people with urban management, and the creation of the appropriateness of the authority of the urban management system and civil society with the decentralization of power in such a way that social capital leads to the active participation of citizens in urban programs and plans and provides an opportunity for citizens to actively participate in decisions. In such a situation, collective actions easily lead to results. With the increase of social trust and thereby citizens' social participation, the implementation costs of urban plans and programs will decrease, and people will have favorable cooperation with the urban management system by participating in community

management. Increasing social capital and the urban management-public interaction in joint projects leads to the institutionalization of social participation among citizens and helps to improve governance. In fact, the exchange of communication and trust between urban management and citizens leads to the formation of a rational cycle monitoring the exchange of information and energy between the urban management system, civil society, and the private sector. This rational cycle leads to a simultaneous increase in the efficiency of urban management and citizens. In general, it can be said that high social capital leads to good governance and good and efficient government.

Other findings indicate a significant direct correlation between the quality of urban life and good urban governance, implying that enhancing the citizens' quality of life will result in enhanced good urban governance. This finding is consistent with the research by Lintelow et al. (2018), Helliwell et al. (2014), and Lapis (2013). To analyze this, according to the research by Tavakoli and Momeni (2016), it can be said that achieving a city with viability and high quality of life, where the basic facilities and needs of every citizen are satisfied, depends on the realization of a good urban governance model because good governance provides consensus, legitimacy, and effectiveness of decisions and guarantees the participation of citizens in decisions and administration of city affairs. Therefore, the quality of urban life is considered a model for the optimal use of resources to achieve the goals of good urban governance. The quality of urban life and its components (sense of well-being, sense of social satisfaction, citizenship standards, and role status) can be used as a tool for formulating the framework of decision-making and planning strategies in urban management, and in this way, it provides the ground for the promotion of citizens' participation and good urban governance.

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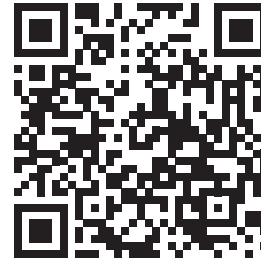
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