

Article

An alternative form of bureaucracy; the operational framework of the city's governing authority

Mahyar Hassani¹, Ataollah Rafiei Atani^{2,*}, Mohammad Reza Hamidizadeh³, Mahdi Abdolhamid¹

¹ Progress Engineering Department, School of Management, Economics and Progress Engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran 1684613114, Iran

² Economics Department, School of Management, Economics and Progress Engineering, Iran University of Science and Technology, Tehran 1684613114, Iran

³ Business Administration, Faculty of Management and Accounting, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran 1983969411, Iran

* **Corresponding author:** Ataollah Rafiei Atani, rafieiatani@iust.ac.ir

CITATION

Hassani M, Rafiei Atani A, Hamidizadeh MR, Abdolhamid M. (2024). An alternative form of bureaucracy; the operational framework of the city's governing authority. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(5): 4278. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i5.4278>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 17 January 2024

Accepted: 23 February 2024

Available online: 28 April 2024

COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2024 by author(s).

Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development is published by EnPress Publisher, LLC. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract: Background: The background and objectives of the research revolve around bureaucracy as a classic form of the modern division of labor, with Max Weber acknowledging its inevitability. However, the objective implications of the bureaucracy's iron cage are evident in governance and management experiences. The mayors of Tehran's districts exemplify how Iranian culture interacts with bureaucracy. This research seeks to establish principles and governance for district governors using an alternative bureaucracy, parallel to conventional bureaucracy. **Methods:** The methods employed include twenty strategically selected interviews, considering age, municipal area, and work experience for maximum variance. Grounded theory methodology, specifically the approach by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, guides the research, employing open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. MaxQDA 2020 software enhances the qualitative data analysis, facilitating organization, coding, and collaboration within the research team. **Results:** Findings indicate "inevitable violations" as a common starting point for interviewees, leading to three axes: "preconditions," "objectives," and "strategies and mechanisms" of alternative bureaucracy. In conclusion, breaking through bureaucracy becomes necessary for governors to act. Alternative bureaucracy, rooted in experience yet considering the bureaucratic field, requires transcendent goals. Hybridity and ethical principles are crucial when transitioning from conventional bureaucracy to the alternative in urban governance.

Keywords: bureaucracy; law; urban governance; alternative bureaucracy; inevitable violations

1. Introduction

This idea has been revived and expanded by New-Weberian such as Habermas, which introduces new concepts such as the rationality of the "system," "life-world," and the marginalization of daily life and common sense. Habermas argues "life world" can be exploited by the system's rationality. With the development of action theories, humans are now recognized as beings with broader and more diverse cognitive motives. In this sense, humans are not purely rational beings. Even the magnificent formations of bureaucracy cannot constrain their actions (Pezdek et al., 2020). The 2002 Nobel Prize was awarded to Daniel Kahneman for his efforts to uncover human cognitive errors when making decisions under uncertain conditions. Classical economic understandings of humans went beyond the rational subject, and alternative rationalities (e.g., irrationalities) have been conceived to understand human actions better.

This research aims to explore the actions of the urban governor when making decisions and undertaking acts of governance. While governors are classically invited to act within the sphere of bureaucracy and adhere to a priori and predictable governs calculated in abstract frameworks such as law and bureaucracy, the position of governance and its practical considerations sometimes require the governing subject to act in alternative circuits of bureaucracy. A rigid insistence on order under structures such as law and bureaucracy can block ways for social participation. Rezaei in his research has shown that administrative bureaucracy reduces the implementation of good governance in the city. As a closed system, administrative bureaucracy reduces citizens' participation in city management (Rezaei, 2017). The act of governance is primarily concerned with the continuation of social order. However, governance in the alternative paths for bureaucracy must be more anthropic and unconditioned to bureaucratic governs. Inevitable violations of the limits of bureaucracy have their limits, principles, grammar, and governs. Such violations are tolerable as long as these principles and governs are observed. However, because they are still managed within a legitimate or at least acceptable framework and are considered one of the arts of governance, they can be referred to as alternative bureaucracy. Alternative bureaucracy is “ways of widening and accommodating solutions” to attract maximum participation without provoking harsh legal reactions and reprimands.

This research aims to represent the action patterns of the urban governor in the heart of alternative bureaucracy. This study is focused on regional 1-level governance, which is the most concrete and closest point to making decisions and taking actions subject to objective consequences where everyday life and common-sense considerations go on. The district is a part of the city that has reached a significant degree of unity in characteristics that is completely distinct from its neighboring parts (Mubarakshahi et al., 2018). Paying attention to this border level and examining the performance of governance where abstract institutions such as law and bureaucracy work along with action and are put to the test are distinct aspects of this research. Understanding the characteristics and real situations that the governor subject faces are crucial. Understanding the governor subject as a positional agent and recognizing that violations are sometimes inescapable is necessary for governing art (Applbaum, 2019). Formulating permissible violations is a necessary part of the theory of bureaucracy and its possible causes emphasizing procedural justice and flexibility as necessities of good city governance, Hendriks (2014) suggests the necessary changes in urban governance include the integration of actual decision-makers and ordinary citizens in the process of choice or consultation (Hendriks, 2014). This study aims to go beyond the traditional legal interpretation of governance and examine the real situations and characteristics that urban governors face in their decision-making and action-taking. It recognizes the urban governor as a positional agent and acknowledges that violations are sometimes inescapable but absolute. Formulating management principles and governs that acknowledge these violations is a necessary part of the theory of bureaucracy and its possible alternatives.

This research aims to formulate preconditions, goals, patterns, and strategies for entering urban governance into the territory that provides an alternative system

inside the established system and overcomes the inadequacies of bureaucracy and law. The research can contribute to answer on which frameworks an urban governor bases his decision and actions in alternative bureaucracy. The other contribution of the research can be formulating preconditions for entering urban governance into alternative bureaucracy. Besides mentioned contributions, is discovering mechanisms of legitimizing the goals and justifications of alternative bureaucracy. At last, it should be articulated the strategies which urban governor use in alternative bureaucracy to initiate effective and successful governance. The vast majority of studies ground their definitions in location, size, and population (Schaffer et al., 2018).

Despite previous studies predominantly focusing on organizational management models for urban governance, often static rather than dynamic, our research takes a different approach. We delve into the actions and reactions of officials as agents, crucial in decision-making and implementation. This innovative perspective reveals that conventional bureaucratic organizational models may not effectively achieve organizational goals. We identify and quantify elements of this model and formulate it as an alternative to bureaucratic hierarchy, representing the actual governance actions undertaken by officials. This new model represents a real path through which urban governors advance affairs, constituting an innovative aspect of research in this field.

Limitations include restricted access to all relevant stakeholders and the omission of various indices like biological, psychological, and physical aspects, though attempts were made to utilize the action model.

As this model serves as a foundational framework, it can be applied to other major cities in different countries, albeit with consideration of local and indigenous indices. Nonetheless, it provides a common path for re-evaluating urban governance in a new light.

To achieve these objectives, the research survey was conducted based on interviews with district mayors of Tehran city, Iran, in 2023.

2. literature review

Over the past two decades, the concept of urban governance has gained significant popularity, assuming diverse interpretations across various individuals and discourse communities. In its broadest sense, urban governance encompasses the examination of structures, policies, and politics involved in governing cities, emphasizing the interaction among public, private, and civil society actors. Initially rooted in political science, the term has expanded its application to encompass diverse social science disciplines engaged in urban political research, including political science, political and urban geography, urban sociology, and public administration, among others. Furthermore, urban governance has found relevance in policy-making circles and the international development community. The most basic consensus between the different existing notions and applications of urban governance is that it is a broader and more inclusive concept than urban government. It acknowledges that the regulation of publicly relevant urban affairs, both in theory and practice, involves a wide range of social actors and institutions from the public

and private sectors, as well as from civil society. The starting point for any discussion of urban governance is to go beyond the more restricted and classical notions of urban government or urban management and to claim that urban politics and the making of urban policy have to be understood as interactive, sometimes cooperative, and often conflictive processes involving multiple actors, networks, and institutions on various scales. Furthermore, talking about urban governance (as distinct from urban government) implies not predetermining the locus of power in urban decision-making. Who decides and who governs is an empirical question and in research leads to the consideration of different actors, their relationships, and forms of interaction as well as the political and economic institutions and contexts structuring the different processes and arrangements of urban governance (Lukas, 2019).

Weberian bureaucracy is a multifaceted concept (Coppedge et al., 2019). Questions pertaining to bureaucracies figured prominently in the historical data collection and decisions (Knutsen et al., 2019). Hence, Weberian bureaucracy is a description of how state administrations are organized and should be distinguished from outcome-centered concepts such as “state capacity” or “quality of government”. Whether having a Weberian bureaucratic organization promotes “good outcomes,” including good governance, are ultimately empirical questions (Dahlström and Lapuente, 2017). Moreover, the effect of Weberian bureaucracy on economic development may depend on the time period under study. When reviewing research on the relationship between the state and economic growth, economic historians Johnson and Koyama (2017) point out that [sustained] growth began during the eighteenth century in England and in the nineteenth century in North America—prior to the development of a modern bureaucracy in either country” (p. 10). Borcan et al. (2018) suggest a more complex, non-linear pattern in bureaucracy. The article “Technology as ideology in urban governance” by León Luis F (León and Rosen, 2021).

León and Rosen (2021) can delve into the topic of bureaucracy by examining how the dominance of digital technologies in urban governance may influence bureaucratic structures and processes. The technological ideology discussed in the article, emphasizing smart solutions and infrastructures, could be analyzed in the context of bureaucratic frameworks. The impact of prioritizing high-tech industries and addressing urban problems through technological solutions may have implications for bureaucratic decision-making, organizational structures, and administrative procedures within urban governance. This perspective can provide insights into the intersection of technology and bureaucracy, exploring how the evolving technological landscape shapes bureaucratic practices and structures in the urban governance context (León and Rosen, 2021). Cities are witnessing the emergence of various innovative urban governance ecosystems, presenting the opportunity to transform the landscape of urban decision-making, establish novel institutional frameworks, redefine multiscale relationships within cities, and introduce fresh manifestations of power (McGuirk et al., 2021). An articulated urban planning perspective on intelligent governance, referred to as “smart urban governance,” is introduced, departing from the prevalent technocratic approach to city governance commonly observed in smart cities. A framework for smart urban

governance is suggested, built upon three interconnected key components: spatial, institutional, and technological aspects (Jiang et al., 2022).

Classic ideas of the modern state are based on theories that view humans as entirely rational beings. This assumption is the foundation of the classical understanding of organizations. This abstract view of humans primarily concerns the instrumental and formal rationality that leads to efficient individual benefit. Max Weber (1864–1920) introduced this situation as the inevitable destiny of the state and modern governance long before the appearance of the all-around domination of this type of rationality over various aspects of life. At the time, Weber's view was considered pessimistic and apocalyptic as it predicted that human life would be enclosed and buried in the circle of calculations of instrumental rationality, leading to an "iron cage" (Cochrane, 2018).

In the 21st century, the majority of the world's population has shifted to urban areas, with over fifty percent now living in cities, signifying the age of urbanization (Zhao et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the process of urbanization has introduced difficulties, including challenges such as air pollution, climate change, high energy consumption, and increased pressure on urban infrastructure, leading to the complication of governance for authorities, especially in developing nations (Hui et al., 2023). In this context, it is argued that technologies play a significant role and offer value in shaping the management of governmental health services, work relationships, employment, and education. The urban landscape undergoes daily transformations, experiencing rapid changes, and the integration of information technology is highlighted as a crucial ally. Additionally, it is suggested that cities with superior economic, social, and environmental indicators have the potential to provide improved living conditions for their residents (Guimarães et al., 2022). Governance as a process whereby decisions are made and implemented. Urban governance discussions are intrinsically linked to debates about who has responsibility to deliver climate change action and analyses of actors' motivations to participate in acts of governing (Broto, 2017).

Ema examines urban governance innovations' economic resilience impact in Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Their framework highlights structural factors, public actors, and evolving dynamics' roles (Corodescu-Roșca et al., 2023). The article by Hamdouch and Galvan (2019) evaluates social innovation's impact on urban transformation using a case study of a social housing project in La Barquita, Dominican Republic. Led by URBE, it integrates human needs, social relations, and citizens' capabilities, deemed socially innovative in territorial development. Seo and Joo (2019) analyze governance change in urban planning, focusing on South Korea's participatory urban regeneration policy in Daegu. They use the 'levels of governance' concept to explore factors influencing governance innovation across multiple scale. Zhu et al. (2020) investigate barriers to sustainable neighborhood renewal in China, emphasizing the need for long-term development in rapidly changing urban areas. They identify 19 barriers through literature review and expert interviews, highlighting the importance of effective policies and proposing countermeasures for sustainable development. Ahluwalia (2019) underscores the imperative of bolstering urban governance in India amid its economic evolution. While stressing planned urbanization's significance for sustainable growth and

improved living standards, the conclusion advocates for institutional reforms to engage the private sector in infrastructure financing and ensure effective service delivery, empowering cities and enhancing their investment climate. Kong and Woods (2018) discuss the rise of smart urban governance, emphasizing its efficiency and benefits while acknowledging critiques of its socio-political impacts. Focusing on Singapore's 'Smart Nation' initiative, they explore tensions between ideology and praxis, efficiency and control, access and choice, and smart governance and citizenship, highlighting the potential transformative role of digitally-enabled urban spaces.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Research design and data collection

This research used a qualitative method based on the grounded theory approach. "Grounded theory is both a tool for theory building and a set of techniques for conducting qualitative research" (Glaser, 1992). The process of forming an opinion in this method is to move from parts to the whole. In other words, foundational data is an iterative, interactive, and comparative inductive method to create one opinion that knows one thing. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using different stages of coding in the MAXQDA 2020 software. In this research article, the grounded theory methodology, coupled with the utilization of MaxQDA software, is paramount. MaxQDA plays a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the grounded theory approach by providing advanced tools for systematic data analysis. The software's features, including coding, memoing, and visualization capabilities, empower researchers to uncover patterns and generate meaningful insights from qualitative data. This integrated approach ensures a rigorous and systematic exploration of complex phenomena, facilitating the development of robust theories grounded in empirical evidence. The open codes were extracted from the formulation of themes emerging from the interviews, and the classification of open codes in general dimensions resulted in core codes. Finally, in a logical formulation based on the conceptual-theoretical understanding of the discussion, the general formulation was realized in the form of selective coding (Danayifard et al., 2016; Lapan et al., 2011). "The community under study in this research consisted of expert managers associated with the issue within the Municipality of Tehran. The sampling was targeted to ensure maximum geographical variance among the middle managers and governors of the Municipality, totaling 20 cases. Data saturation was achieved approximately after the 13th interview, and to ensure data validity, interviews continued until the 20th case (Figure 1).

3.2. Analytical framework

In qualitative research, the perspective of the subject and their understanding and imagination of the social world in which they live is of utmost importance. The following research pays attention to the views of district mayors as the main governing subjects who provide a direct understanding of the phenomenon and

experiences in dealing with the law and bureaucracy. Qualitative research does not start from a specific theory and does not rely on formal theories for data collection. Instead, it collects data in the form of narratives and quotes. However, the researcher must recognize the role of existing theoretical literature in forming research questions. In qualitative research, the researcher’s use of theories is citational, comparative, and formal rather than being a basis from the beginning of the work. Reviewing concepts such as bureaucracy, instrumental rationality, and iron cage follow the same methodological doctrine bloomer calls “sensitizing concepts” (Eiman, 2018, pp. 232–235). Weber believes bureaucracy can be seen as an “iron cage” that deprives individuals of their destinies and considers the existence of legal and rational authority in bureaucratic organizations as a reason for their success compared to other organizations (Teft, 2014; Champex, 1996; Farhangyi et al., 2014; Farhangyi, Mirzaei and Hosseinzadeh, 2014). According to Max Weber, modern societies are characterized by a wide dominance of Instrumental rationality, reflected in the spread of institutions based on formal rationality, such as bureaucracy. In this type of rationality, the most efficient means is considered, and the path aligned with the values and emotions of the actor is not necessarily followed (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2017; Weber, 1962). Bureaucracy, a manifestation of the dominance of instrumental rationality in modern life, can also be seen as a form of deprivation of individual destiny. According to Max Weber, bureaucracy is like an iron cage that surrounds and enslaves people, leaving no room for escape. The force that can break the rationality of the bureaucratic system is charisma, an irrational non-calculatable personal force. Iron cage creates a forced manner of living, and no one knows how the cage will be in the future (Weber, 1985, p. 181; Weber, 2004, p. 10). There should be more conservate and calculable way to overcome restricts of bureaucracy.

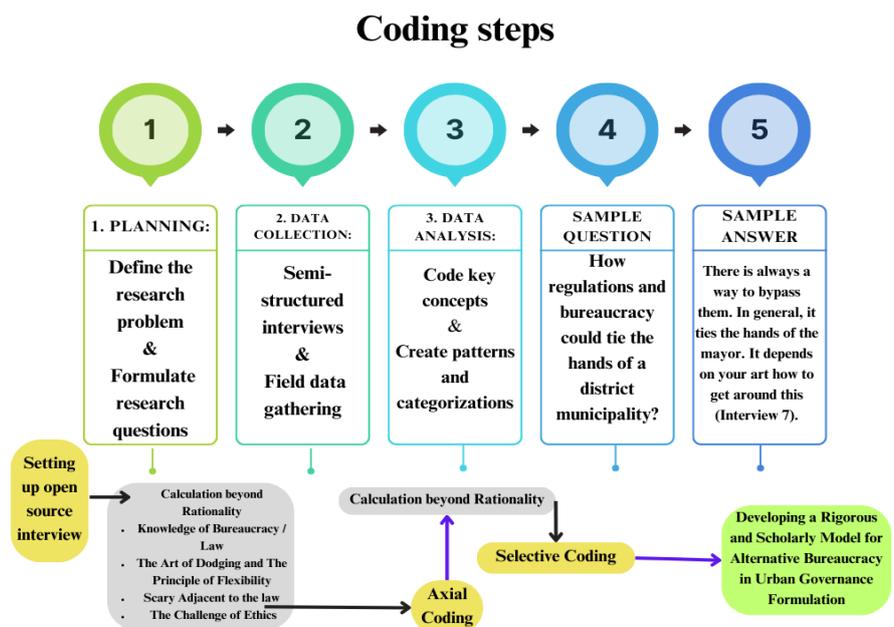


Figure 1. Coding steps and moving from concrete data to abstract concepts.

4. Results

4.1. Inevitable violations

Ethics purifies the moral fabric by eliminating unworthy elements. In the convergence of ethics, bureaucracy, and law in the field of action, the law establishes the legitimate procedure, bureaucracy prepares objective measures and the necessity leading to the result, and ethics cleans the morals from the unworthy. However, the implementation and execution of action only sometimes fit within the framework of the principles and a priori considerations of bureaucracy, law, or predetermined codes of ethics. The necessities surrounding the realization of the act of governance are similar to the necessities that bureaucracy is known for. These necessities shape subjects acting in the structure of bureaucracy and, from the same duct, produce and reproduce bureaucracy. However, some situations demand the breaking through of bureaucracy to make governance action possible. The expression “inevitable violation” is very telling for formulating this quasi-emergency situation. This situation can be found in the statements of many interviewees and is best described in the passage of interview 16, where the combination of ethical considerations, law, bureaucratic frameworks, and, most importantly, kind of coercion:

“You see, there are some cases in the municipality, because of the force and executive nature of works and affairs, governs and regulations prevent or at least slow you from doing what should be done. It is somewhere against your inner desire and the principles, governs, and laws that you have defined for yourself; you define a framework for yourself, but in order to be able to carry on the work, to complete it, to reach the end, for the betterment of the neighborhood and people, you have to put them aside and step on it somewhere. There is no other way” (interview 16).

4.2. Prerequisites of alternative bureaucracy

Governments globally are addressing challenges arising from 21st-century urbanization. The issues stemming from urbanization, Bureaucratic complexities, including urban poverty, elevated urban expenses, traffic congestion, housing shortages, insufficient urban investment, weakened urban financial and governance capacities, escalating inequality and crime rates, and environmental degradation, are being exacerbated (O’Brien et al., 2019). Governments worldwide are progressively endorsing inventive urban governance approaches as substitutes for conventional bureaucratic methodologies. A prime illustration is the Smart London Plan introduced by the British government, aimed at leveraging the innovative capacities of new technologies to enhance the quality of life for London residents. Similarly, Singapore launched the “Singapore Intelligent Nation” plan in 2015, declaring its status as a smart nation (Cavada et al., 2019). These undertakings serve as exemplars of alternatives to entrenched bureaucratic practices, embracing pioneering and technologically-oriented strategies for urban governance.

The favorable assessment of new urban governance structures concerning bureaucracy predominantly derives from theories of pluralism and deliberative bureaucracy, wherein governance networks are considered elements of a novel form,

namely a network bureaucracy. In the current political and institutional milieu marked by overlapping, decentralized, and fragmented power centers, the need arises for diverse channels of democratic influence, with governance networks and arrangements being one such channel. Networking governance, in this context, presents an opportunity to enhance deliberative processes among distinct actor groups and promote citizen participation. These mechanisms can serve as tools to overcome the crises and limitations associated with representative bureaucracy (Lukas, 2019). From an alternative perspective, the ascendancy of networked urban governance structures undermines traditional bureaucracy. Political decisions are no longer exclusively orchestrated by elected political institutions and actors; rather, they are organized through more informal channels. According to Pierre (2009), in these emerging governance frameworks, “accountability based on procedure gives way to accountability based on performance,” placing conventional bureaucratic institutions of accountability in a precarious position (Pierre, 2009). While it is acknowledged that intricate societies may necessitate new and more sophisticated forms of deliberation and decision-making on urban affairs, the evolving networked governance arrangements tend to align with the political interests of elites. This often manifests in coalition-building between private rentiers, developers, and city officials (Sehested, 2001). In essence, the investigation into the bureaucratic quality of networked urban governance revolves around the understanding and production of legitimacy in political systems. Conceptually and empirically, three distinct forms of legitimacy can be identified. The first form is input legitimacy, which involves evaluating who can participate and be represented in decision-making processes. The second is throughput legitimacy, concentrating on the quality of decision-making with respect to democratic procedural standards, such as transparency. The third is output legitimacy, which relates to the outcomes of public policy and the extent to which it can effectively address collective problems (Martí et al., 2016).

Going through bureaucracy does not mean reaching the valley of anarchy, disorder, irregularity, and illogic. According to the mayors of the districts of Tehran, who are the first and last circle of application and implementation of the laws within the city bureaucracy, the current requirements and procedures in the life world and everyday life are incompatible with bureaucratic frameworks. This dissonance generally indicates that the fast rhythm and beat of life in the city collide with the typically slow beat of bureaucracy. Handrails are necessary to overcome this obstruction, and this moment is precisely where alternative bureaucracy is born. The governor who wants to tame and harmonize the bureaucracy for the benefit of life beyond bureaucracy, without suffering from the disorder’s complications, cannot freely and, based on his desire, face the blockages and conventional subordinations of the bureaucracy. According to the statements of the mayors of the districts of Tehran, several preconditions are required for success in alternative bureaucracy. According to mayors of the districts of Tehran, the urban governor, if they pay serious attention to these preconditions, can advance the action of governance beyond the subjugations of bureaucracy.

4.3. Dynamics of power and bureaucratic mechanisms in contemporary urban governance: An in-depth exploration

Urban governance and the dynamics of power represent a critical inquiry into how power is (re)distributed, enacted, and (re)produced within the urban political landscape. As previously mentioned, the shift from urban government to urban governance implies that the locus of power is not predetermined. In contemporary networked governance frameworks, coalitions of local governments and the business community often wield influence over conflicting forces and shape policies. However, this outcome is not an inevitable consequence. Scholars like Coaffee and Healey (2003) and McGuirk (2000) employ more generative concepts of power, viewing it not as a “pre-existing quantitative stock of influence possessed by an individual and spent in persuading others to perform specific actions” (McGuirk 2000, p. 653). This perspective broadens the discussion, incorporating the intricate dynamics of power beyond traditional notions of possession and persuasion (Healey, 2003; McGuirk, 2000). The conceptualization of power involves its dispersion, composition, and generation through interactions. In this understanding, power is not pre-established but emerges as a result of interactions. The contemporary networked governance structures, therefore, do not primarily operate within pre-existing power structures; rather, they serve as arenas where power is continually (re)produced. This perspective highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of power within the context of governance, shedding light on how bureaucratic mechanisms play a role in shaping and perpetuating this ongoing process (Lukas, 2019).

4.4. Living in custom and staring at the law

When taking action, an urban governor resides in customs and social relations. Regardless of the contextuality of governance action, any ritualistic adherence to the formal law fails to advance governance and leads to double problems. The position of the urban governor at the level of city districts is a hybrid situation that sees the accountability and demands of the law and the bureaucratic system on the one hand and the serving and satisfaction of the citizens on the other. In the 20 interviews conducted in this research, one of the most frequent topics that emerged during conversations was the hybrid and pseudo-resonance situation of the district mayor. In the following paragraph from interview 8, for example, each sentence represents one of the considerations which should be regarded in the city at the level of the district mayor. For example, more than 15 considerations can be recognized just in one of the issues in which mayors of districts are involved. Most mentioned considerations are customary considerations arising from a particular situation and have no definite precedent code. Due to the high volume of work, they must decide and take action at that moment:

“(1) Depending on the location within Tehran, there are different models for construction issues. (2) In the suburbs of Tehran, there is one model, (3) while in the context of Tehran, the south and the north of the city, there are different models. (4) Conventionally, the measure that the construction issue is not challenging, and (5) is there anything about the payment to the municipality? In the Tehran Municipality, when administrators are exposed to administrative

violations, they are asked, “What did you do to get the right of the Municipality?” (6) Sometimes, they are acquitted with four warnings; (7) other times, even with 100 warnings, they are not. (8) If 100% of the law objects to it, the first thing that happens is determining whether it is a commercial or residential property. (9) In principle, the commission of article 100 votes are not implemented for residential, (10) commercials are prior” (interview 8).

4.5. Calculation beyond rationality

One of the most significant advantages of law and bureaucracy is making computable human actions and their consequences for legislators and citizens. Rationality, which in the classical sense involves calculation and regulation in law and bureaucracy, is referred to as instrumental and formal rationality. This rationality provides the most beneficial and least costly path to a defined goal. An alternative to bureaucracy becomes necessary where although simply following the legal and bureaucratic codes may make the governor absolved and exempt from regulatory follow-ups, it turns the act of governance into an incomplete and ineffective function. The act of governance requires surplus calculations, which cannot be found in the law book or bureaucratic designs alone. This insight can only be obtained through experience and practicing the act of governance. One of the conditions for a city governor to enter the alternative bureaucracy is the openness and insight necessary to accept and learn the unwritten principles that should be followed. During decision-making, the governor must consider the consequences of the actions and pay attention to hidden functions, usually overlooked in formal rationality calculations. The following paragraph from interview 4 illustrates the mentioned situation:

“It happened to us; there was one garage left; the owner would not let us destroy it. We destroyed it with a trick in the Yasini highway project in the 13th Region. A few years later, one of my very close friends came and said, Brother, I have a problem. Let us sit down and talk. A group of your colleagues came to my father’s garage and destroyed it, so it has different legal and juridical issues. I said I destroyed that garage and swore to him in the Quran not to confront me with your father. I think these experiences cause you to become more sensitive about the consequences of even the smallest things. For example, I see a damaged street water hatch as a district mayor. Imagining a motorcycle falling at me and I must go to the court ten times, I cannot neglect it easily anymore” (interview 4).

4.6. Scary adjacent to the law

City governor operates at the boundaries of law and bureaucracy. He sometimes even pushes those boundaries to meet the requirements of governance. This situation is the governor’s permanent position as a decision-maker close to the law. The law demands that the governor protects legal boundaries. In return, the governor plans to fulfill the citizens’ rights against the system. Enforcing the law at any cost, even if it means violating another law, is sometimes necessary when conventional frameworks are inadequate and ineffective. However, the governor must take steps with caution

in this dangerous situation. When working for the law and protecting its boundaries, the governor must also be careful that the law follows them simultaneously. Braving the bureaucratic obstacles of law enforcement can lead the governor to be impeached and tried by the same legal and bureaucratic structure. The scary adjacency of the law and the structure of bureaucracy is one of the essential prerequisites for the success of the alternative bureaucracy, as seen in the following statement taken from interview 2:

“I entered a property to be destroyed without an entry order because of my good relationship with the police. I fought with the owner, and the owner complained against me. They also gave me six months of imprisonment. The inspection organization also found the entry, and the owner went to the inspection organization to complain against me. The inspection organization has not indeed supported me. My question is, have I not followed the Municipality’s expediency? What could I have done that I did not do? In order to apply for an entry order, you have to get involved in a strange maze: two warnings, two entry orders, a lump sum order, then the Article 100 Commission, initial decision, initial decision, and an appeal decision. When there is no support, why should I put myself in trouble? After the ceremony, you will see that there is the least support for the rights of the mayors of the districts” (interview 2).

4.7. The art of dodging and the principle of flexibility

When pre-defined laws and bureaucracy do not satisfactorily include successful governance, the costly path of redefining legal frameworks must be followed, or the governor must learn to dodge the bureaucratic governs and frameworks consistently. District mayors often employ the “art” of “dodging” to navigate the twists and turns of this challenging path. Creativity in such situations is one of the prerequisites for entering the realm of alternative bureaucracy.

In an interview, I discussed how regulations and bureaucracy could tie the hands of a district municipality. The answer is very illustrative:

“There is always a way to bypass them. In general, it ties the hands of the mayor. It depends on your art how to get around this” (interview 7).

This art requires a certain level of flexibility, a prerequisite for the alternative bureaucracy. However, a dry and one-sided commitment to the bureaucratic structure and law may hinder the advancement of governance and lead to unnecessary costs.

4.8. The challenge of ethics

Successful governance involves navigating the boundaries of bureaucracy and law in a way that does not infringe on the individual and collective rights of the society being governed. However, this can be challenging and risky in terms of ethics. One of the prerequisites of successful alternative bureaucracy is the commitment of the governing subject to ethics. Without this ethical adherence, the boundaries of violations and anomalies of governance become blurred and obscured with alternative bureaucracy. Therefore, achieving a final statement of the principles of city governance based on Alternative bureaucracy in written form may take time and effort. As a result of this underdetermined situation, the governor must be

mindful of the ethical implications of their actions and decisions. Along with the speech of one of the mayors in interview number 9, it should be said: “Until the city governor has come to terms with himself in this field and is not morally in control of himself, he should not think of an alternative to bureaucracy” (interview 9).

4.9. Knowledge of bureaucracy/law and urban governance

Cities, functioning as pivotal nodes within governance networks, resource flows, material contexts, and spatial domains, are considered crucial entities for addressing the amalgamation of challenges associated with the future sustainability of urban environments (Baud et al., 2021). Recent literature on urbanism and sustainability has placed growing emphasis on the inquiry of improving ‘resilience’ and ‘sustainability’ or cultivating the ‘ecological city.’ It explores the transformative role of cities, connecting these endeavors to governance issues (Macintyre et al., 2018; Mutisya and Yarime, 2014).

Three distinct notions or sets of meanings regarding urban governance can be delineated: (a) urban governance serves as a descriptor of novel forms of cooperation, interaction, and decision-making in urban affairs, (b) urban governance functions as a normative concept prescribing how interaction, cooperation, and decision-making should be structured, informing local, regional, and international policy circles, and (c) urban governance acts as an analytical concept offering theoretical tools and categories to differentiate and comprehend the concrete forms and modes by which urban affairs are regulated and decisions are made in diverse geographical and sociopolitical contexts. Managerial urban governance represents a form of local politics and decision-making characterized by its technocratic essence, closely linked to the emergence of urban neoliberalism. This approach is intricately connected to the concept of “new public management, which strives to improve efficiency and reduce costs by professionally managing or outsourcing local public services. The primary focus of the coalitions prevailing in urban governance under this framework lies in output performance—achieving specific goals. Elected officials play a minimal role in legitimizing governance processes, with the primary emphasis placed on professional management and the pursuit of efficient outcomes (Lukas, 2019).

Successful governance within the law and bureaucratic relations framework can often feel like navigating an impossible labyrinth or, in Weberian terms, like an iron cage. For this game to succeed, knowing the governs is crucial. The structure over governs the agency in the duality of agency and structure in bureaucracy. Knowing the ways and means of bureaucracy is essential for successful governance. In most of the interviews, district mayors experienced executive directors emphasized the importance of knowing the law and the legal issues within the scope of the city district. Without this knowledge, the governor may get caught in the same arrangements and cycles that lead to inefficiencies and dead ends in bureaucracy. The following part of interview 11, for example, is very telling in this regard:

“It is impossible to open the blind knots in bureaucratic structures without knowing them in depth. Regulations are a significant part of executive work, and they can close the wings of the system. Therefore, it is necessary to find a

way to adhere to those regulations while also finding a way to circumvent them in a lousy form to proceed with the administrative work” (Interview 11).

5. Discussion

5.1. The goals of alternative bureaucracy

Urban governance is extensively recognized as a dynamic phenomenon encompassing a diverse socio-materiality and interconnected with multiple lines of authority. Over the past three decades, frameworks like urban regime theory and networked governance have conceptualized urban governance as a collaborative endeavor. In this context, the emergence of alternative bureaucratic practices alongside networked governance has become a noteworthy aspect in shaping the contemporary landscape of urban governance (McGuirk and Dowling, 2021).

The concept of alternative bureaucracy aims to unify the principles of successful governance with the field realities that the governor deals with in governance situations. The alternative approach to bureaucracy upholds the principles of bureaucracy but expands on the most strict principles of the law and conventional bureaucracy structures and mechanisms. Alternative bureaucracy aims to facilitate governance by pursuing goals that conventional bureaucracy cannot achieve in some situations or may be ineffective. The following parts introduce some of the most important and main goals that the alternative bureaucracy pursues, and it is through these goals that we can justify its departure from the conventional bureaucracy.

5.2. Replacing “law for the law” with “law for people”

Alternative bureaucracy prioritizes “law for the people” over “law for the law.” The experience of the interviewees in this research, who were mayors of districts in Tehran city, suggests that the law should be viewed as the limits of governance, not the perfection of governance. Bureaucracy in itself is customs related to the boundaries of governance. However, rigid and ritualistic adherence to this etiquette can lead to contradiction and violation of the purpose of the law, which is to serve the public interest. The following part of interview 19 is one of the best representatives for the idea of “law for the people”:

“For example, when a citizen requests you, sometimes the law has wholly closed your hands. A successful manager in Tehran Municipality uses all ways to get the citizen’s satisfaction. Of course, a citizen has true rights. I follow my principles; I have not crossed my redlines in twenty-three years of my service, but for the sake of the people sometimes, and God helped that nothing happened [...] Municipality, as you know, has a law book, but this book sometimes destroys itself. Nevertheless, we do not accept this either. When the Mayor comes, he chooses the head of security and inspection himself; he cannot be counted on anymore. Nevertheless, we have learned that to be popular and proceed with people’s work; we bend this governor of the law until just before it breaks” (interview 19).

5.3. Dealing with the “law against law enforcement and public interest”

One of the frequent challenges for governors is when legal and bureaucratic obstacles impede the implementation of laws and regulations in public administration. Sometimes, the governor must decide between adhering to the law, between different aspects of the law, or pursuing the public interest. In such situations, the answer is not easily found in any bureaucratic process or the law itself, and complicated calculations are necessary, which result in a conflict between different dignities of the law. The governing subject’s agency is a crucial factor in navigating such situations. In this situation, the alternative bureaucracy spins on the heels of the experience and will of the governing subject. The governing subject can directly face the structures and laws which even others, if they know it well, can find capacities from within it to circumvent or implement against its enforcers. Such confrontations with the bureaucratic and legal structure often fail the governor’s agency. The governing subject can also adopt a conservative approach and avoid implementing alternative ways to bureaucratic practices. This sentiment was expressed, for example, in interview 9:

“Unfortunately, in a series of decisions that were made, the work we did was for the benefit of the municipality and the benefit of the people, but in the end, based on the legal governs defined by the system, it led to the fact that we were filed as a violator. [...] Unfortunately, these were a series of issues that made me dare not to do some of these things again if we go back” (interview 9).

5.4. Overcoming the tendency of legal and bureaucratic structures to the inertia of rest

Legal and bureaucratic structures distort reality to facilitate the idea of order. However, in the duality of law and event, the social, political, and cultural reality formed by the governing subject who has the will can result in disorder and entropy. While law and bureaucracy provide an a priori framework for individuals to adhere to the social contract, they also have the potential to prevent social reality from evolving. The logic of law and bureaucracy tends to inertia and stagnation, while individual events tend to dynamism and entropy. When traditional bureaucratic codes become weak and helpless concerning new events, openness to alternative ways of bureaucracy can prevent legal and bureaucratic structures from freezing and blocking progress. One of the solutions of alternative bureaucracy to overcome the inertia and stagnation of conventional bureaucracy is to replace organic relationships with mechanical relationships. Trust-based social capital will be much more efficient in such situations than bureaucracy and its tortuous path. By replacing trust based on social support, alternative bureaucracy can reduce redundant steps and unnecessary bureaucracy costs. One of the main goals of Alternative’s bureaucracy is to use natural and situational capabilities to reduce unnecessary costs and streamline processes. As an example, in interview 19, the tendency of legal and bureaucratic structures to the inertia of rest and also some situational solutions can be traced:

“One of the challenges you face in the municipality is the bureaucratic nature of processes. Most of our work has many twists and turns, and many processes must be revised. Our work in the municipality needs to be revised and evolved

in unnecessary steps. For instance, in other countries, projects can be completed more efficiently by simplifying the process and focusing on speed and cost. However, when more parties are involved, such as the contractor, employer, monitoring body, and project manager, the work can become more time-consuming and costly. Therefore, working with an agent who can simplify the process and reduce unnecessary steps would be beneficial. We are forced to do some things, and others are out of our hands. However, in matters where our hands are more open to act, I will proceed with the work with communications and interactions (social capital) so that the work is less subject to these administrative twists and turns and bureaucratic and all these things” (interview 12).

5.5. Eliminating legal interferences

Resolving legal conflicts in decision-making turning points with legal inflation is one of the other vital goals of alternative bureaucracy. One law leads to a path of action and decision, and another law leads to another. Satisfying with legal and bureaucratic considerations leads to the wonderland of evidential sufficiency or equal credit. The mentioned position is one of the difficult but permanent and familiar positions for the city governors of Tehran. The decision in this situation does not have a predetermined pattern, and the “situation” will determine the correct decision. Therefore, one of the goals of alternative bureaucracy is to eliminate legal interferences by adhering to the principle of the contextuality of decision-making action in governance. Interview No. 1 provides a detailed account of the challenges faced by decision-makers in navigating legal complexities in the field of governance:

“It is suitable for a manager to know the high-level documents. However, now it is no longer helpful, [...] for example, I want to say that a problem comes in your district, and you identify it. It interferes with the comprehensive traffic plan of your district or with a plan they will implement later. You have a different process in your mind. The knowledge of the high-level documents as general knowledge is impractical, while the governor knows the place under his management well so that he can act in such a way that cuts both ways” (interview 1).

5.6. Eliminating legal loopholes

The scope of reality extends beyond the boundaries of the law. While the law attempts to regulate and control the routine of reality, it is only possible for it to encompass some aspects of social and cultural reality. As long as humans continue to shape and develop this reality, situations will always fall outside the purview of the law. When facing such situations, governors must be prepared to navigate them without the guidance of established legal or bureaucratic protocols. One goal of alternative’s bureaucracy is to equip governors with the tools necessary to handle such situations, which are common in the field of governance. In this sense, the alternative bureaucracy is productive, not rigid or static. Alternative bureaucracy actively fills the gaps and does not become passive in such situations. Interview No. 4 provides a clear example of the unique situations that arise in governance and

underscores the importance of Alternative bureaucracy.

“There is a proverb in the municipality; it says that if you cannot reach God one way, you can go through other ways; the same is true of performing municipal works, which is no law for them. For example, even though the system does not give you any credit but asks you and expects results beyond possibility, there is a time when you must steal to fulfill it; there is a time when you must think about making it more legal (Halal). I can explain to that extent” (interview 4).

5.7. Compensating for the lack of necessary resources to fulfill the codes and legal duties

Besides legal loopholes, complicated situations arise from clear and inviolable legal tasks and codes. These situations are challenging because they place the burden of fulfilling legal duties on the governor, who may need more resources to do so without violating legal procedures. In such situations, the most legitimate and justified course of action may be to abandon the task, But undoubtedly not the most efficient. Successful governance requires active engagement in such situations. The ability to navigate them effectively distinguishes successful governance from ineffective governance. Alternative bureaucracy is to recognize that the subject of governance is more than just the law and to develop approaches more consistent with the reality of governance. While this proposition poses ethical challenges, it is necessary to address the complexities of governance. Interview No. 16 provides a clear and humorous example of this interpretation:

“If you say to bypass the law, yes, we have done this many times, and it has worked very well, but why do we have to do this? If we want to work, we will have to do this. Sometimes, the judge will need to give you the order you need. Illegal work has been done. You know, for all that happens, the municipality is made a scapegoat, and inside the municipality, the districts. There was heavy rain in one district, the structure was worn out, and at the same time, seven of these abandoned and dilapidated properties were destroyed. A wooden beam had come into the street. Now, a district that did not even have primitive facilities is needed. The district mayor must do the work, but can the district mayor do miracles? Forced work in emergencies increases the experience of the district mayor, and he will understand, for example, where to find a crane; from where to pay the work costs without violation. The sum of these works becomes executive management, the text of experience. If you ask someone without experience working in the district to write, he will ask pen; but someone with experience will say Ok and goodbye” (interview 16).

5.8. Strategies and mechanisms of alternative bureaucracy

This section will outline the mechanisms that can be employed in alternative bureaucracy to improve governance efficiency. These mechanisms refer to the principles, techniques, and tools a leader who recognizes the need for an alternative bureaucracy can utilize to enhance their governance and decision-making abilities. Based on conversations with district mayors in Tehran, some of the most essential and innovative mechanisms are presented below:

5.8.1. Flat communication and friendly participation instead of cooperation based on instrumental rationality

The role of a manager in Alternative's bureaucracy differs significantly from that of a manager in a conventional organization with a conventional bureaucracy. While conventional bureaucracy is characterized by a hierarchical structure, defined roles and responsibilities, and impersonal relationships, alternative bureaucracy has its rhetoric; camaraderie instead of impersonal relationships; doing duty from the heart instead of the legal duty; leader instead of the boss; and people instead of the law book. If we want to formulate the distinction between conventional and alternative bureaucracy according to Weberian literature, in alternative Iranian bureaucracy in the context of urban governance, urban governor experiences of Tehran at districts indicate that in alternative bureaucracy, rationality and rational calculation give their place to a kind of paradoxical rationality and emotional calculation; Something that is mentioned in almost all interviews, including interview number 10:

“The outcomes are a direct result of the camaraderie and friendships developed with our colleagues, as we strive to address challenges. Municipal employees exhibit a characteristic whereby their willingness to engage in tasks is contingent on personal motivation. In essence, if they are inclined to undertake a task, they will proceed with it; conversely, if they lack motivation, they may not engage. It is noteworthy that their adherence to duties is framed in a manner that avoids explicit disobedience; they fulfill their responsibilities to the extent that they do not violate orders. However, this approach is not always effective. On the contrary, if approached as a friend, they are more likely to be responsive to requests and tasks” (interview 10).

5.8.2. Inter-organizational conciliation and exchange

The larger social structure shapes the structure of smaller organizations. In an alternative bureaucracy, the context turns into the text. Written governs and bureaucracy, even at an inter-organizational level, can lead to governance paralysis. To overcome such challenges, flexibility, and appeasement between institutions are essential mechanisms of the bureaucracy. Inter-institutional conciliation has customs and practices that must be learned and adapted to by urban governors in the process of action. In this position, the governor is more accountable to the field of action than to the court of law and bureaucratic procedures. Almost all mayors discuss this bottleneck of governance and the related mechanisms (or skills) of alternative bureaucracy in interview 13:

“It is no written formal model for inter-institutional cooperation in the work of the mayor with other organizations. For example, it depends on the person in the traffic police station with whom the mayors are in contact. If we follow the governs and the law, nothing can be done between the police and the mayor. There is no traditional custom. Maybe everyone knows, but they do not care anymore. It is a kind of interaction. As an illustration, when the police station's car malfunctioned, we engaged in informal assistance despite the absence of official protocols. Similarly, they reciprocated informally when we faced challenges requiring their support. Such informal collaboration proved essential.

In instances where formal cooperation was lacking, conflicts arose. For instance, when the Municipality intended to clean the fences, the police imposed restrictions on the schedule and conditions, citing a lack of resources at that specific moment” (Interview 13).

5.8.3. Executive as a judge; “this instead of that” strategy

One common strategy for the governor is making some judgments to bypass slow legal processes with creativity and pragmatism. In this position, the governor combines legal and pragmatic calculations to fill gaps and deficiencies in the field of action using their spare capacities. This strategy can be referred to as the “this instead of that” strategy, where the creativity and agency of the governor act as compensation for bureaucratic procedures. As someone engaged with the field’s reality, the governor can judge, “That can replace this.” The example provided in Interview 12 is just one of many instances where Tehran’s governors employ this strategy:

“As a district mayor, I saw that in my district, kennels are more than in other districts, and whatever I do, there are many messages from the city telephone system (137) about washing the kennels. Because of his long shift, my night shift worker needed more time to dredge and clean the kennels. I decided to exchange a service with one of my contractors. I told him their minipack car does not work, and I showed it to him with GPS, and he agreed. I said that I did not need this car. Could you give me one more night tanker instead? This authority was given to me. The problem was solved in this exchange, and the number of telephone messages decreased” (interview 12).

5.8.4. Resistance and jumping from the bureaucracy

One strategy of alternative bureaucracy to attain unattainable goals within the conventional bureaucracy is to resist bureaucratic considerations and, if necessary, even bypass them to attain more efficient performance. This strategy is commonly cited by Tehran district mayors when adherence to legal and bureaucratic procedures incurs high costs to actors in governance action. Resisting and bypassing conventional bureaucracy, even if it involves violations, is one of the most straightforward strategies of alternative bureaucracy, as seen in interview No. 17, where the simplicity and effectiveness of this strategy are evident in the decision-making actions of the governor:

“You see, today the hierarchy has become weaker [...] the routine works is clear. [...] However, the problem is when we need 80 tons of asphalt, and we are given 40 tons, or when we are given returned asphalt, that soon turns into the sand again and causes people to complain in 137. The mayor has done his work and duty, but citizens are unsatisfied. In such situations, the district mayor has to exert power and decide against his boss in the hierarchy. He decides that if the asphalt has tiny grains, it will not flow there, and it will flow there. The hierarchy differs from conventional forms” (interview No. 17).

The general formulation of the components related to the alternative bureaucracy can be seen in **Figure 2**:

dynamic governance mechanisms that can effectively navigate and address various challenges faced by urban environments. Moreover, new discussions have emerged concerning urban governance with a focus on bureaucratic developments. For example, the effective management of protected areas plays a pivotal role in ecological conservation, especially in institutional settings characterized by a limited operational scope and challenges related to the misidentification of crucial stakeholders and their proper representation in procedural matters (Michelle Bonatti et al., 2022).

6. Conclusions

Exploring an alternative manifestation of bureaucratic structures, this operational framework delineates the governing authority of the city. Urban governance, a term fraught with diverse interpretations and ongoing debates, encompasses more than a mere descriptor of novel public–private decision-making arrangements for urban affairs. It serves a prescriptive, often technocratic function, outlining imperatives for fostering sustainable, just, resilient, or competitive forms of urban development. Additionally, urban governance stands at the heart of a conceptual discourse, urging the construction of theories that navigate the intersection of urban policy, polity, and politics. The imperative lies not only in the pursuit of “grand theory” but also in the nuanced development of conceptually informed narratives. This scholarly approach seeks to delve into the intricate power struggles manifesting in various forms within the formal and informal arenas of urban governance, acknowledging the role of legitimate bureaucracy in shaping and sustaining effective governance structures. The conceptual exploration integrates the complexities of bureaucracy, networked governance, and an alternative or substitute bureaucratic paradigm, offering a scholarly and comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted nature of urban governance dynamics.

Bureaucracy and its governs are typically associated with legal work. On the other hand, alternative bureaucracy is an alternative procedure that works positively and relates to the field of experience while still considering and playing in the field of bureaucracy. The main finding of this empirical for a metropolitan leader is that breaking through bureaucracy is necessary to enable the action of the governor. New developments and events constantly challenge the critical position of action and decision-making in governance, and structures such as bureaucracy need more agility to keep up with changes in social reality. Although conventional bureaucracy cannot avoid flexibility and change, it remains one step behind the more sensitive alternative bureaucracy, which prioritizes customary and social considerations.

Moving from the idea of bureaucracy in governance to alternative bureaucracy requires lofty goals that are not entirely transcendental or customary. This research emphasizes the hybridity and resonance of ethical principles in the complex field of urban governance. The lofty goals of alternative bureaucracy are measured by the subject of an ethical governor who reconciles practical considerations with the public interest. Instead of a ritualistic commitment to “law for the sake of law,” the ethical governor pursues the goal of “law for the people.” The governor understands the law as a tool for realizing public interest and uses creativity to overcome obstacles of

legal and bureaucratic structures. The governor has complete knowledge of bureaucracy and law and takes advantage of their inner capacities to compensate for the lack of necessary resources and to fill gaps in the law. To maximize productivity in city governance, the governor must go beyond the procedures defined in the system's hierarchy and his organization. The successful experience of flat communication and social participation that improves the social capital of organization members at a level beyond their duty turns dry and rigid relations into quasi-family relations. One of the strategies of the urban governors to succeed in achieving the goals of the alternative bureaucracy is to bypass conventional bureaucracy. It should be without arousing the sensitivities of supervisory institutions. Such flexibilities require the promotion of the governing subject's ability in decision-making to apply necessary changes in the implementation of laws while maintaining correspondence with legal requirements. At the end, all the research findings and conclusions are presented in the form of a diagram (Figure 3).

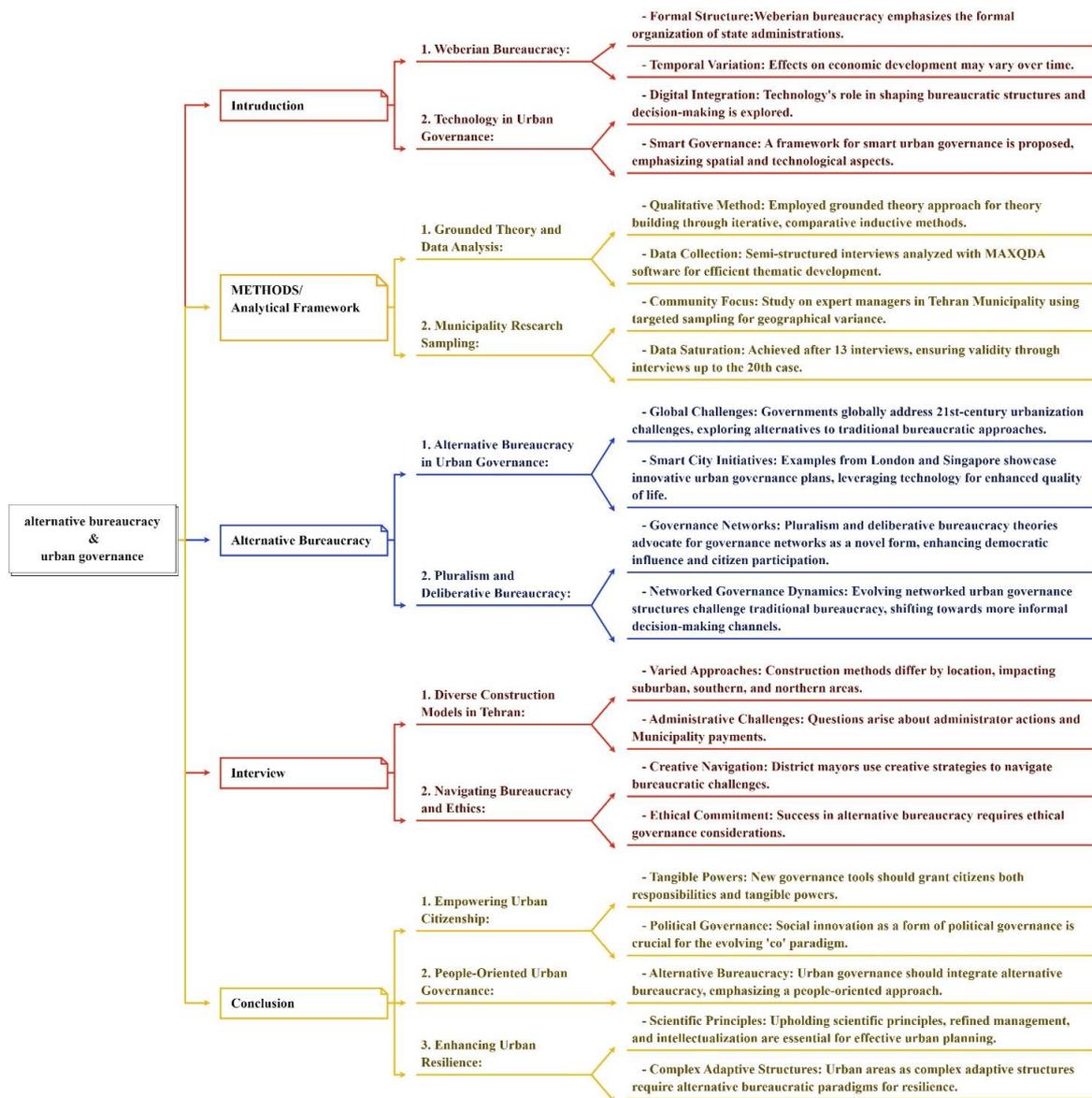


Figure 3. Abstract diagram.

Tips for summarizing:

- 1) Urban governance explores the (re)distribution, enactment, and (re)production of power within the urban political landscape.
- 2) The shift from urban government to urban governance highlights the influence of coalitions of local governments and the business community in shaping policies.
- 3) Power is viewed as a generative concept, not a pre-existing stock, involving dispersion, composition, and generation through interactions.
- 4) Contemporary networked governance structures serve as arenas where power is continually (re)produced, emphasizing the dynamic nature of power.
- 5) District mayors navigate a hybrid situation, balancing adherence to formal law, bureaucratic demands, and citizen satisfaction.
- 6) Calculation beyond rationality is essential in governance, requiring surplus calculations beyond formal rationality for effective decision-making.
- 7) City rulers operate at the boundaries of law and bureaucracy, sometimes pushing those boundaries to meet the requirements of governance.
- 8) The art of dodging and flexibility are crucial for district mayors to navigate bureaucratic rules and achieve successful governance.
- 9) Successful governance involves navigating the boundaries of bureaucracy and law while adhering to ethical principles.
- 10) Knowledge of bureaucracy, law, and urban governance is essential for effective governance, requiring an understanding of regulations and their implications.
- 11) Urban governance, within the law and bureaucratic relations framework, often feels like navigating an impossible labyrinth.
- 12) Alternative bureaucracy aims to unify principles of successful governance with field realities, expanding on strict principles of law and conventional bureaucracy.
- 13) The concept of alternative bureaucracy pursues goals that conventional bureaucracy may be ineffective in achieving.
- 14) Alternative bureaucracy prioritizes “law for the people” over “law for the law,” emphasizing the limits of governance rather than perfection.
- 15) Dealing with the “Law against law enforcement and public interest” requires the ruler to navigate legal and bureaucratic obstacles.
- 16) Alternative bureaucracy aims to overcome the inertia of conventional bureaucratic structures, emphasizing dynamism and flexibility.
- 17) Trust-based social capital is considered more efficient in alternative bureaucracy, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy costs.
- 18) The tendency of legal and bureaucratic structures to inertia can be overcome by replacing organic relationships with mechanical relationships in alternative bureaucracy.
- 19) Alternative bureaucracy seeks to use natural and situational capabilities to reduce unnecessary costs and streamline processes in urban governance.
- 20) The main goals of alternative bureaucracy include achieving effective governance in situations where conventional bureaucracy may fall short.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, MRH; methodology, MRH; software,

MH; validation, MH, ARA and MA; formal analysis, MA; investigation, MH; resources, MA; data curation, MH; writing—original draft preparation, MH; writing—review and editing, MH; visualization, MH; supervision, ARA; project administration, MRH; funding acquisition, ARA. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of mayors from various districts of Tehran. We would like to express our appreciation for the valuable contributions of the Tehran Urban Research and Planning Center, which played a crucial role in facilitating the arrangements for conducting the interviews related to this research.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Applbaum, A. I. (2019). *Legitimacy without Illusions: The Right to Govern in a Wanton World*. Harvard University Press.
- Ahluwalia, I. J. (2019). Urban governance in India. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 41(1), 83-102.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2016.1271614>
- Baud, I., Jameson, S., Peyroux, E., & Scott, D. (2021). The urban governance configuration: A conceptual framework for understanding complexity and enhancing transitions to greater sustainability in cities. *Geography Compass*, 15(5), e12562.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12562>
- Bixler, R. P., Atshan, S., Banner, J. L., et al. (2019). Assessing integrated sustainability research: Use of social network analysis to evaluate scientific integration and transdisciplinarity in research networks. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 39, 103-113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2019.08.001>
- Bixler, R. P., Lieberknecht, K., Atshan, S., et al. (2020). Reframing urban governance for resilience implementation: The role of network closure and other insights from a network approach. *Cities*, 103, 102726.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102726>
- Bonatti, M., Bayer, S., Pope, K., et al. (2023). Assessing the effectiveness and justice of protected areas governance: Issues and situated pathways to environmental policies in Río Negro National Park, Paraguay. *Social Sciences*, 12(2), 71.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12020071>
- Borcan O., Olsson O., Putterman L. (2018). State history and economic development: Evidence from six millennia. *Journal of Economic Growth*, 23, 1–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-017-9152-0>
- Bragaglia, F. (2021). Social innovation as a ‘magic concept’ for policy-makers and its implications for urban governance. *Planning Theory*, 20(2), 102-120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473095220934832>
- Broto, V. C. (2017). Urban governance and the politics of climate change. *World development*, 93, 1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2016.12.031>
- Cavada, M., Tight, M. R., & Rogers, C. D. (2019). A smart city case study of Singapore—Is Singapore truly smart? In: *Smart city emergence*. Elsevier. pp. 295-314. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-816169-2.00014-6>
- Coaffee, J., Healey, P. (2003). ‘My voice: My place’: Tracking transformations in urban governance. *Urban studies*, 40(10), 1979-1999. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098032000116077>
- Cochrane, G. (2018). *Max Weber’s vision for bureaucracy*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62289-7>
- Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., et al. (2019). V-Dem Codebook v9. varieties of democracy (V-Dem) project. Available online: <https://www.v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/codebookv111.pdf> (accessed on 4 March 2023).
- Corodescu-Roșca, E., Hamdouch, A., & Iașu, C. (2023). Innovation in urban governance and economic resilience. The case of two Romanian regional metropolises: Timișoara and Cluj Napoca. *Cities*, 132, 104090.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.104090>
- Dahlström C., Lapuente V. (2017). *Organizing Leviathan: Politicians, bureaucrats and the making of good government*. Cambridge University Press.
- De Guimarães, J. C. F., Severo, E. A., Júnior, L. A. F., et al. (2020). *Governance and quality of life in smart cities: Towards*

- sustainable development goals. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 253, 119926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.119926>
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs forcing. Available online: <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000797903931008> (accessed on 4 March 2023).
- Guo, L. H., Cheng, S., Liu, J., et al. (2022). Does social perception data express the spatio-temporal pattern of perceived urban noise? A case study based on 3,137 noise complaints in Fuzhou, China. *Applied Acoustics*, 201, 109129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apacoust.2022.109129>
- Hamdouch, A., & Galvan, A. (2019). Social innovation as a driver of urban transformation? The case of planning approaches in the Dominican Republic. *Urban Planning*, 4(1), 31-43. <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i1.1740>
- Hendriks, F. (2014). Understanding good urban governance: Essentials, shifts, and values. *Urban Affairs Review*, 50(4), 553-576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087413511782>
- Martí-Costa, M., Blanco, I., Parés, M., & Subirats, J. (2016). Urban regeneration and governance. How to evaluate participation in a governance network? Three theoretical perspectives and a case study (Spanish). In: *Participación, políticas públicas y territorio*. Ediciones UNGS. pp. 27-52.
- Lukas, M. (2019). Urban governance. In: *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of urban and regional studies*. Anthony Orum. pp. 1-11.
- Hui, C. X., Dan, G., Alamri, S., Toghraie, D. (2023). Greening smart cities: An investigation of the integration of urban natural resources and smart city technologies for promoting environmental sustainability. *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 99, 104985. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2023.104985>
- Jiang, H., Geertman, S., Witte, P. (2022). Smart urban governance: An alternative to technocratic “smartness”. *GeoJournal*, 87(3), 1639-1655. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-020-10326-w>
- Johnson N. D., Koyama M. (2017). States and economic growth: Capacity and constraints. *Explorations in Economic History*, 64, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2016.11.002>
- Knutsen, C. H., Teorell, J., Wig, T., et al. (2019). Introducing the Historical Varieties of Democracy dataset: Political institutions in the long 19th century. *Journal of Peace Research*, 56(3), 440-451. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343318823866>
- Kong, L., & Woods, O. (2018). The ideological alignment of smart urbanism in Singapore: Critical reflections on a political paradox. *Urban Studies*, 55(4), 679-701. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017746528>
- León, L. F. A., Rosen, J. (2021). Technology as ideology in urban governance. In *Smart Spaces and Places*. Routledge. pp. 166-175. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343318823866>
- Lukas, M. (2019). Urban governance. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of urban and regional studies*. pp. 1-11.
- Macintyre, T., Lotz-Sisitka, H., Wals, A., et al. (2018). Towards transformative social learning on the path to 1.5 degrees. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 31, 80–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.12.003>
- Martí-Costa, M., Blanco, I., Parés, M., Subirats, J. (2016). Urban regeneration and governance: How to evaluate participation in a governance network (Spanish)? Tres perspectivas teóricas y un estudio de caso. *Participación, políticas públicas y territorio*, 27-52.
- McGuirk, P. M. (2000). Power and policy networks in urban governance: local government and property-led regeneration in Dublin. *Urban studies*, 37(4), 651-672. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980050003955>
- McGuirk, P., Dowling, R. (2021). Urban governance dispositifs: cohering diverse ecologies of urban energy governance. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 39(4), 759-780. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420957329>
- McGuirk, P., Dowling, R., Maalsen, S., Baker, T. (2021). Urban governance innovation and COVID-19. *Geographical Research*, 59(2), 188-195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12456>
- Mubarakshahi, M., Nia, H., Reza, M., et al. (2018). Theoretical explanation of the ontology of regional governments (Persian). *Political Geography Research*, 4(2), 155-176. <https://doi.org/10.22067/pg.v4i2.85958>
- Mutisya, E., Yarime, M. (2014). Moving towards urban sustainability in Kenya: A framework for integration of environmental, economic, social and governance dimensions. *Sustainability Science*, 9(2), 205–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-013-0223-7>
- O’Brien, P., Pike, A., Tomaney, J. (2019). Governing the ‘ungovernable’? Financialisation and the governance of transport infrastructure in the London ‘global city-region’. *Progress in Planning*, 132, 100422. <https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0305900617300806>
- Pezdek, K., Dobrowolski, R., & Michaluk, T. (2020). Habermas and the therapeutic function of language. *Nursing Philosophy*, 21(2), e12290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12290>

- Pierre, J. (2009). Reinventing Governance, Reinventing Democracy? *Policy and Politics*, 37(4): 591–609.
- Rezaei, M.R. (2017). Measuring the impact of administrative bureaucracy on the process of good urban governance, a case study: Shiraz metropolis (Persian). *Research and urban planning*, 9(32), 31-40.
- Ritzer, G. Stepnisky, J. (2017). *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots: The Basics*, AGE Publications.
- Schaffer C. L., White M., Brown C. M. (2018). A tale of three cities: Defining urban schools within the context of varied geographic areas. *SAGE*, 50(6), 507–523. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517713605>
- Schubert, C. (2018). Social innovation: a new instrument for social change? *Innovation society today: Perspectives, Fields, and Cases*, 371-391. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-19269-3_17
- Sehested, K. (2001). Investigating urban governance: from the perspectives of policy networks, democracy and planning. Available online: https://rucforsk.ruc.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/57417928/Investigating_urban_governance.pdf (accessed on 4 March 2023).
- Seo, B. K., & Joo, Y. M. (2019). Innovation or episodes? Multi-scalar analysis of governance change in urban regeneration policy in South Korea. *Cities*, 92, 27-35. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.03.010>
- Shi, T., Zhang, W., Zhou, Q., Wang, K. (2020). Industrial structure, urban governance and haze pollution: Spatiotemporal evidence from China. *Science of The Total Environment*, 742, 139228. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.139228>
- Weber, M. (1962). *Basic concepts in sociology*. Citadel Press.
- Weber, M. (1985). *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, New York: Scribners Sons.
- Weber, M. (2012). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. United States: Dover Publications.
- Zhu, S., Li, D., & Jiang, Y. (2020). The impacts of relationships between critical barriers on sustainable old residential neighborhood renewal in China. *Habitat International*, 103, 102232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2020.102232>
- Zhao, P., Hu, H., Zhao, Y. (2023). Investigating the central place theory using trajectory big data, *Fundamental Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fmre.2023.08.007>