GENDER AND RIGHT TO THE CITY IN TEHRAN

Ladan Rahbari
University of Mazandaran
Department of Social Sciences
rahbari.ladan@gmail.com

Mahmoud Sharepour
University of Mazandaran
Department of Social Sciences
sharepour@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The right to the city is a concept introduced by Henry Lefebvre in 1960s and further developed by David Harvey. It refers to the freedom to construct and reconstruct the city and us altogether; it consists of the right to fully appropriate spaces and participate in all processes therein. Appropriation is referred to having a share of the space, using it, owning it and to value it because it has use value; participation in the city includes decision making, constructing and living in the urban space equally as inhabitants. Both components of right to the city can be approached from three dimensions: a. political and economic, b. physical, c. socio-anthropological. Based on the three levels of urban analysis introduced by Lefebvre these three dimensions can be further categorized. The levels of the urban include: a. Level G (Global): this level consists of macro institutional guidelines provided by governors and decision makers in the context of city's political economy; b. Level M (Mediator): this level includes city's forms, structures and physical realities; c. Level P (Private): this level consists of the micro understanding of every inhabitant about their inhabiting. By extracting the components of the two dimensions of the right to the city in the three analytical levels, and by applying quantitative methodological approach, this article aims on investigating gender differences in realization of right to the city by measuring the realization of the right to the city based on gender in the Iranian capital city.

Field of Research: Appropriation, city, gender, participation, right, urban sociology.

1. Introduction

City is made of social spaces (Sharepour, 2011). Urban activities in this view must be approached as social processes taking place in urban public places and there is a mutual relationship between an urban space and a social action. Spaces facilitate, limit and hinder social actions; and actions form and shape social spaces out of mere physical places.

Looking at the overall urban theorists' works, one can conclude that urban spaces are considered to be constructed by either of three following forces: a. urban political economy (as seen in Mitchel (2003), Harvey (2008) and Lefebvre (1991)); b. urban design and management (as seen in Lynch's theory and Jacob's ideas of urban design and also Lefebvre's theory); c. socio-anthropological processes created by inhabitants (as seen in Lefebvre (1991, 1996)). In this paper it will be showed that all three processes are existent in Henry Lefebvre's urban theory. It can be suggested that it is rather perceived space than real space that impacts and forms social actions in a city (Elliott and Turner, 2011).

This proposal aims on investigating gender differences in realization of right to the city by first, exploring gender differences in appropriation of and participation in the city within the urban context and measuring the realization of the right to the city based on gender; second, exploring how much...
the right to the city is being acknowledged by citizens based on their gender and class; because it seems that women have, in Marxist terminology a class of their own and as lower classes are being denied, so are women; and finally, this paper is trying to analyze the probable gender differences in the realization and acknowledgement of the right to the city. Acknowledging a right is also as important as enjoying it because as long as a right is not being recognized by its beneficiaries and as long as they do not rise to claim it, history has proved, no rights are going to be provided.

Women in contemporary societies have different social roles, needs and problems from men. The traditional division of labor which is still the prominent mode of division in most societies has put some limits in women's urban practices and activities. This distinctiveness, aside from its origins and despite not being a universal issue, is a social fact that must be recognized; but the modern city seems to have ignored this fact, since urban spaces are mostly built by and for men's usage (Fenster, 2005), and women's right to the city is being violated. The right to the city is the right to fully appropriate spaces and participate in all processes therein (Lefebvre, 1996). It is not only women whose right to the city is not being realized, but also many cultural minorities and the lower class inhabitants are being denied.

2. Theoretical Framework

Urban sociology had suffered a theoretical crisis in the last decades of 20th century but revived by new ideas developed by David Harvey and Manuel Castells. Harvey's work especially was influenced by Henry Lefebvre's urban theory. Although already applied in political and urban studies and even effectuated in social movements, Lefebvre's ideas were ignored by sociology for years mostly because of complexity of his works and the difficultness of translating his ideas from French to English (Kofman and Lebas, 1996). This proposal is going to try to apply Lefebvre's urban theory and integrate it with others in order to develop a sociological framework to study the contemporary urban rights.

According to Lefebvre, it is not domestic space but the public space that can create self-consciousness in the inhabitants. Lefebvre prefers to use the word inhabitance instead of citizenship for two reasons; first, citizenship refers to the materialistic and organic needs of human beings, while inhabitance (as in Nietzsche and Heidegger) is defined by the unconscious satisfaction people gain by appropriating and participating in an urban space; and second, citizenship is also a political concept and it does not refer to people living in an area while inhabitant are not required to be lawfully accepted to live, but they have rights simply because they are inhabiting a space (Lefebvre, 1991).

The analysis of the results requires further theoretical work. For that I think we can integrate the Lefebvre's idea of right to the city with Castells' theory of urban consumption and feminist geography.

According to Castells, the urban consists of concentration of population in order to collectively consume (Castells, 1977). Although production, exchange and consumption processes are taking place in cities, in a capitalist mode of production, the main function of the city is consumption and it is only through social consumption values (housing, food, entertainment facilities...) that labor force is able to reproduce itself. The reproduction of labor force takes place because the state is responsible for providing consumption facilities and spaces. In this perspective, centralized collective consumption is a political issue (Saunders, 1989) and every decision made over how, where and when to consume will affect the city and its inhabitants. Studying patterns of centralization and locating consumption centers might lead us to mechanisms by which some social groups are denied access to them.

In most societies, both eastern and western, public urban spaces are not designed to be female-friendly (Massey, 1994). Contemporary urban geography is the natural result of current status of women as reproductive force not the production force in most societies. The ancient private/public space dualism is accepted as a cultural and ethical principal (Loyd, 1975). But the new emerging needs
of women are not yet being considered in urban policy making. Women are led to consume domestic and mostly individual-centered products, while men consume in public.

Feminist geography insists on reclaiming public space for women and localizing economy to fulfill women's expectations. As Lefebvre puts it by destroying local ambient in the city, a homogeneous built environment remains; an abstract space that is artificially divided in to districts and municipalities and gives a constructed exchange value to some spaces more than others and encourages people to accept these values. Centralization of economy adds exchange value to central business districts and creates a periphery occupied by women as day workers in houses.

Space as a historical analytical notion is based on three axes that produce the overall urban concept within a dialectical relationship:

1. Perceived space: the general daily understanding of space practiced by inhabitants. This space is related to social interactions that take place at a specific time;

2. Conceived space: the understanding designers, organizers or even real estate agents want to produce in the inhabitants; this space exists in the discourse and linguistic sphere more than real objective sphere;

3. Lived space: the fantasy of the space that can fully satisfy human needs and it is related to human subconscious (Goonevardena, 2008).

From these inter-relating axes, I propose that we would better put our focus on the perceived space; because as discussed lived space exists only in fantasy and although it shows how far people's expectations of their inhabited space goes, it is not real and not applicable to our analysis. The conceived space is the consequence of current mode of production and it effects inhabitants' perception of the urban space, but still not an objective notion.

Perceived space is the mediator between the lived and the conceived space (Smith, 2011: 294) and is a public understanding and perception that results in the social practice; it is this axes that provides us with an understanding of public idea because it is the impulse of every special practice. So the focus of this proposal will be on the perceived space and the perceived right to the city to reach to the pragmatic understanding of inhabitants from their rights in a city.

The right to the city is mostly a social right and is a concept introduced by Lefebvre and developed further by David Harvey. It refers to the freedom to construct and reconstruct the city and ourselves (Harvey, 2008). In Lefebvre's theory the concept has two dimensions:

1. The right to appropriation of the city: appropriation is referred to having a share of the space, using it, owning it and to value it because it has use value (contrary to exchange value as in Marxist theory);

2. The right to participation in the city: to participate in decision making, constructing and living in the urban space (DeCertau, 1984: 117).

To be able to evaluate the two dimensions of right to the city one needs to further categorize them. Hopefully Lefebvre has provided us with his idea of the 'levels' of the urban has as follows:

1. Level G (Global): this level consists of institutional guidelines provided by governors and decision makers in the context of city's political economy;

2. Level M (Mediator): this level includes city's forms, structures and physical realities;
3. Level P (Private): this level consists of the micro understanding of every inhabitant about their inhabiting (Lefebvre, 1991).

Castells, also, has divided the urban into three spheres which are political, economic and ideological (or social) spheres (Saunders, 1989). Based on the integration of the three levels of 'the urban' suggested by Lefebvre, and by adding a fourth process of 'urban organization' to the three urban processes already suggested by Castells (ideological, economic and political), every dimension of the right to the city can be categorized in three components (visualized in the following picture).

Perceived participation can be measured by its three components:

1. Decision making: in the G level, the decision making refers to making institutional decisions about the city. Regarding gender, it is most accepted that urban decision makers are mostly male in most societies. Political institutions and city councils are mostly governed by a male majority and even if women are members of these organizations, women's issues are not considered to be of high priority.
2. Urban organization: in the M level, the city organization and city design refers to how urban forms and structures are organized and how much they let the inhabitants participate in the process of organization. Women's perception of their contribution in urban design and urban organization will show how much they consider the structures and forms to be appropriate and suitable for them. In this regard, feminist geography can supply us with required historical information of city design; we can suggest that some structures such as highways, dead end roads and underground passages are not perceived as appropriate by women.
3. Production of space: this is a key word in Lefebvre work introduced in his book with the same title. The space is according to Lefebvre a social production. It can reproduce the same characteristics as the mode of production and can be used as a means to dominate and control inhabitants using capital. He also explains that inhabitants, once become conscious about the nature of urban space, can push away the alienation and claim the space as their own; production of space by inhabitants happens not only by urban right movements, but also by participating in the social interaction and spatial practice. Urban movements are a good way of evaluation how far inhabitants acknowledge their rights to the city.

Perceived appropriation can be measured by its three components:

1. Physical share: in the G level, physical share refers to the extent that all groups are provided with their required spaces and facilities. Having a share in the city and appropriating it challenges the existing hegemonic relationships (Secor, 2004). This includes the general understanding of city as belonging to all groups. Gendered spaces exist in all societies. These can be further divided into two categories:
   a. Spaces formally divided based on gender: public washrooms, many gyms, dance classes and in some societies (such as in middle east) parks are divided formally to serve one specific gender group.
   b. There are so many spaces in every city that are gendered without a formal and legal basis. Many districts, parks, isolated or unpopulated spaces are dominated by male inhabitants. But even the very unisex parts become only-male during the night.
2. Ownership and control: at the mediator level ownership includes the perceived right to have a space to occupy, to have a home to live and to feel like you have control over it. World statistics show that most of the homes and grounds are owned by male owners. Women, due to their roles as house workers, do not have access to capital as much as men. But the sense of control over one’s neighborhood is also a curious matter to be discovered.
3. Vitality: at the P level, appropriation of the urban space happens through three components of vitality, mentioned several times by Lefebvre and Harvey in their writings about the write to the city. By adding up all ideas about what vitality is I believe we can consider three components to describe it:

a. Urban security: perceived security is very different based on gender. It is a fact that men are more likely to commit crimes or become a victim of crime in urban spaces because of the nature of their social activities; but still women are more likely to feel insecure in urban spaces. Fear of victimization puts limits on women's activities and freedom in urban times and spaces and decreases their perception of vitality.

b. Urban communication and transportation system: public transportation plays an important role in women's movement through the city because they are less probable to have or use personal vehicles in urban trips. Safe, comfortable and appropriate transportation to all parts of the city is a basic right of every inhabitant.

c. Recreation and amusement: having space to play and enjoy is a component of urban vitality. Filling free times with fruitful and fun activities in provided spaces and facilities provides vitality.

I have developed the conceptual model in figure (1) to measure the amount of perceived right to the city, in both dimensions in all levels. By using multivariate regression, one can explore which components predict the right to city. The results not only show which components of right to the city are perceived to be more realized, but also indicate how far the inhabitants acknowledge and recognize their own rights.

![Figure (1): Conceptual model of the study](image)

By using logistic regression the differences of right to the city based on gender can be investigated. If the regression model is statistically significant, we may suggest that one of the gender groups (male or female) perceives their rights to be denied in the city.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and data collection method

This study is a survey based research conducted by sampling 138 respondents among both male and female inhabitants of 22 municipalities of the city of Tehran. Questionnaire includes 55 questions based on the conceptual model introduced in the previous chapter and measures the perception of respondents on 1 dependent variable (right to the city) and 6 independent variables (decision making, urban organization, production of space, physical share, control, and vitality). Target sampling was conducted in public spaces of the city of Tehran on inhabitants older than 18 years old.

3.2. Validity and reliability analysis
The questionnaire is constructed by the researchers. Validity of the questionnaire is approved by a group of scholars and by conducting factor analysis we have ensured that the group items are measuring one component. A pretest on 44 respondents had provided us with valuable insights to prepare the items. Reliability analysis is conducted using Cronbach’s Alpha. The alpha scores range from 0.646 to 0.878. These amounts approve the reliability of the questionnaire (Habibpour and Safari, 2009: 366).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component Set</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Component Set</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>Production of Space</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>Design and Organization</td>
<td>0.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>0.820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>Share</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to the City</td>
<td>0.878</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Descriptive Statistics**

The respondents’ age ranged from 18 to 63 with the average of 36. 58 percent of the respondents are educated in the levels over high school diploma and 42 have education ranging from elementary school to high school diploma. 45 percent of the respondents are female and 55 percent are male. 45.2 percent are single, while 54.7 percent are married or engaged.

The results show that in all independent variables the average of male perception of benefitting from the rights is higher than female average. The T-test results indicated that the gender differences in all cases are statistically significant. An interesting finding is the gender differences in the land/house and car ownership. 13 percent of the car owners and 3.6 percent of the land/house owners are female.

Personal vehicles are one of the most important means of transportation in the city of Tehran. The poor public transportation system and the high distance between residence and work spaces have made personal vehicles essential for the daily life. The results show that these vehicles are owned and used by male inhabitants. A similar situation is also reported in other countries. Greed (1994) had reported that only 15 percent of women in American cities have access to personal vehicles.

5. **Findings**

Based on the research model the effect of six independent variables including decision making, urban organization, production of space, physical share, control, and vitality on one right to the city as the dependent variable was tested by multivariate regression analysis. The test has been conducted for two main reasons. First, to use Lefebvre’s theory to figure out which variables are predicting the perception of right to the city; Second, to examine whether Lefebvre’s theory is also applicable in the context of Iranian urban society.

Before conducting the analysis, the statistical requirements such as normal distribution of the variables were tested and approved. The analysis was conducted on SPSS (statistical package for the social science) version 16. The results are reported in tables (), (), and ()

As reported in table (), the regression analysis is valid because of the statistical significance of the F-score.
The regression model summary indicates that correlation between the dependent and the independent variables is strong (0.892). The independent variables have been able to predict 73.4 percent of the variations of the right to the city.

Table 3: Regression model summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.744</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>2.45713</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effects of every single independent variable are reported in table (). With the exception of 'production of space', all variables have a significant positive correlation with the right to the city.

Table 4: Summary of regression coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-2.888</td>
<td>.895</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitality</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>-.083</td>
<td>.885</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>.651</td>
<td>.679</td>
<td>.460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results also indicate that the Lefebvre's theory is highly applicable and is relevant in the context of Iranian urban society. To address the reason why the production of space is not effecting the perception of Tehran's inhabitant of their right to the city, further studies must be conducted. This could be generated by the differences in cultural or political definitions of right in Iran or the historical differences of the definition of citizenship; citizenship is a newly formed concept in Iranian society (Enayat, 1982: 127).

The regression formula for the perception of the right to the city in Tehran is:

\[
RTC = -2.8 + 0.44 \times \text{Vitality} + 0.24 \times \text{Control} + 0.28 \times \text{Share} + 0.18 \times \text{Organization} + 0.65 \times \text{Decision making}
\]

Figure 2: Regression formula

After testing the theory's validity in Tehran, and recognizing the factors affecting the inhabitants' perception of the right to the city, the logistic regression analysis is conducted to see investigate if there is a statistically significant difference between the genders in the realization of their right to the city. Gender is the independent variable and right to the city is the dependent variable entered to the analysis. The regression results are reported in table ().
The Omnibus and the goodness of fit score have been both acceptable so we can move on to the regression model. The Wald score is also significant, indicating that being the right gender (male) can increase the chance of perceiving a higher amount of realization of right to the city. The table also shows that male inhabitants’ chance of benefiting from this perception is by 27.5 percent higher than female inhabitants. This indicates that gender equality is not existent in the realization of right to the city in Tehran.

6. Discussion and conclusion

Despite being introduced in 1960s, the concept of right to the city is very recently entered the debates of urban sociology. This study applied Lefebvre’s theory in the Iranian capital to both test the theory in the context of Tehran’s society and use it as the theoretical framework to investigate the gender differences in the realization of right to the city.

Results from the regression analysis show that although there is no significant correlation between 'production of space' and 'right to the city', the theory is applicable in Iranian urban society. Perception of inhabitants’ from the extent to which their right to the city is realized is predicted by the extent to which they perceive decision making, urban organization, production of space, physical share, control, and vitality.

This study also entered gender as a defining variable in to Lefebvre’s theory. Lefebvre himself had ignored gender as an important factor in benefitting from rights. This research’s results show that there are significant gender differences in the realization of right to the city. This does not necessarily alter the original theory for two main reasons. First, this study’s findings should be approved by further studies to enable us build a theory on it; second, the socio-cultural and political contexts can affect the results. While this research proves existing gender inequalities, it might not do so in other societies with social settings different from Iran.

This study is a part of an ongoing doctorate thesis. It seems to the authors that to further bolster the findings of this research, a qualitative approach must be taken in to consideration. In order to deeply investigate the gender differences of the realization of right to the city and to seek for a better understanding of why Lefebvre’s theory is not fully fitting the Iranian urban society, qualitative findings would prove useful. It is also necessary to conduct a survey in a larger population selected by more accurate sampling methods in the future.

References


