

Research Article

A STUDY OF PERCEPTION OF URBAN AFFORDABILITY AND ITS ECOLOGICAL KEY DRIVERS IN THE IRANIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This text examines a research study conducted on the competitiveness of Kermanshah. The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the primary factors that contribute to Kermanshah's competitiveness. In order to gather data, the study utilized the snowball method to survey 30 experts in the relevant field. The text examines the factors that influence the competitiveness of Kermanshah within an academic context. It highlights that out of a pool of 54 variables, 11 specific variables hold significance in determining its competitiveness. These variables encompass the city's position within the power structure, its geographic placement, national and local strategies, management practices, air quality standards, water sources, security measures, agricultural practices, domestic and foreign tourism initiatives, and sustainable sources of income. The text proposes that by directing attention towards these competitive advantages through diverse programs, the government can enhance Kermanshah's future competitiveness. In order for cities, particularly large ones, to reduce regional inequalities and become more competitive, local government officials and planners need to take action. By taking advantage of economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and security opportunities and potentials, Kermanshah could become a city with national and even international competitiveness in the next 20 years. However, if these opportunities are not utilized, it could lead to missed potential and negative consequences for Kermanshah and neighboring areas.

Keywords: sustainability, urbanism, urban development, competitiveness of cities.

INTRODUCTION

In the academic context, city managers prioritize enhancing the well-being of citizens and concurrently advocating for sustainable development. The availability of land and space within urban areas plays a crucial role in fostering economic growth (Indrajit, A.; Loenen, B.V *et al.*, 2021). Urbanizing cities possess inherent benefits with regards to development. The rise of urbanization has led to heightened competition among cities, whereby the competitiveness of a city is a fundamental consideration in formulating plans for achieving urban sustainability (Shaleen, S.; Stanley, M. *et al.*, 2013). Given that cities consume a substantial share of global resources; they are also engaged in competition for these resources (Koller, M.; Eckert, K. *et al.*, 2022).

The text explores the growing urbanization of the global population and its impact on the competition among cities for resources. This competition encompasses economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions. Cities are continuously aiming to surpass one another in order to achieve a superior position both nationally and internationally. Consequently, there has been an emphasis on adopting innovative approaches like competitiveness and future studies to analyze urban and regional challenges. Numerous studies have been carried out to evaluate the competitiveness of cities using diverse criteria and measurements (Jiang, Y.; Shen, J. 2010).

The academic literature on urban competitiveness indices spans three decades, yet a universally accepted definition remains elusive. While earlier studies primarily examined the economic dimension of competitiveness, recent research has expanded to include social, cultural, environmental, and scientific-technological aspects.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for more comprehensive definitions and greater attention to important facets. Notably, the security dimension has been overlooked despite its foundational role in other dimensions of competitiveness. In summary, a competitive city is characterized by its superior performance in terms of its economy, environment, culture, social aspects, and security compared to other cities within the same country.

Kermanshah city, situated in Iran, holds significant importance with a population of 946,651 individuals as of 2020. This city ranks as the second largest and most populous in the western and northwestern regions of Iran. It boasts numerous natural and human resources, including its strategic location along a major highway, close proximity to economic hubs within Iran, its pivotal role in land management, and its position as a transit route to Iraq. In addition, Kermanshah possesses distinctive tourist attractions and relatively ample water resources. Nonetheless, despite these advantages, it unfortunately faces the highest unemployment rate in Iran at 15.7%. In 2014, Iran had an unemployment rate of 10.6%. The industrial sector in Iran had a smaller workforce than both the national average and the neighboring city of Hamedan. Kermanshah, like Hamedan and Mashhad, has a lower number of libraries compared to other cities with a population over 500,000. These disparities in employment opportunities and cultural resources have resulted in various challenges such as suburbanization, informal settlements, migration, environmental concerns, and the shutdown of industrial facilities (Komasi, H.; Zamani, S. 2011).

The competitiveness of cities is determined by a range of economic, social, security, and environmental factors. It is crucial to comprehend the comparative advantage of cities in order to effectively facilitate urban development and attract investments. Without this understanding, urban development programs may lack direction and experience limited investment, potentially resulting in regional disparities and reduced international competitiveness. The objective

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of this study is to identify the various dimensions of urban competitiveness, explore their interconnections, and analyze the primary drivers of urban competitiveness in Kermanshah.

In this study, a descriptive-analytical methodology was employed to gather data on the competitiveness of Kermanshah. Data collection methods included the use of questionnaires, the Delphi technique, and documentary and library studies. The questionnaires were designed in two stages to assess factors impacting competitiveness in different areas such as economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and security. The data obtained was then analyzed using MicMac software. The text examines the significance of urban development, sustainability, and competitiveness in an academic context. It emphasizes that the decisions made by city managers at present will determine the success of future cities (Ben, D.; Xingjian, L. *et al.*, 2021). Various factors, including economics, politics, culture, and the environment, exert an influence on urban development (Zhenshan, Y.; Hang, Y.; Hong, W. 2020). These factors have the potential to enhance both urban sustainability and competitiveness (Ichikawa, H.; Yamato, N.; Dustan. 2017). For instance, in China, industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and information technology are believed to contribute to increased urban competitiveness (Mallick, S.K.; Das, P *et al.*, 2021) The text also acknowledges that economic elements are vital for competitiveness; however, socio-cultural and environmental aspects also play a role (Cucchiella, F.; Rotilio, M. 2021). To be deemed successful, it is crucial for cities to exhibit competitiveness across all dimensions (Ferraris, A.; Santoro, G.; Papa. 2018).

HYPOTHETICAL BASES

The subject of urban competitiveness has gained significant attention in the fields of urban economics, planning, and geography within the academic realm (Shen, J. 2004). Scholars are particularly intrigued by policies that foster collaboration among cities in order to achieve sustainable development (Pan, F. 2017). The advent of globalization has shed light on the intricate dynamics of urban competitiveness, particularly in relation to territorial competition (Remy, S.; Moon, H.C 2015). Competitiveness, as defined by international organizations, pertains to the rivalry between regions or cities and places great emphasis on the efficiency and effectiveness of resources, labor, and capital.

Ulengin 2002 conducted a research study aimed at evaluating the competitiveness of countries within an academic context. The researchers examined multiple factors that contribute to a country's competitiveness and employed sensitivity analysis techniques to gain insights into how changes in these factors may impact overall competitiveness. They identified seven primary criteria encompassing demographics, health, education, environment, technology, economy, and military power. Drawing from their findings, the researchers categorized countries into four distinct groups based on their level of competitiveness. The main objective of this research is to offer policy recommendations that can assist both developing and developed countries in enhancing their competitiveness. Furthermore, these recommendations can also be utilized to assess the competitiveness of countries that are not included in existing indexes.

The text examines a research study that sought to enhance the accuracy of future predictions for two regions in Western Europe by utilizing a regional competitiveness index. The study interviewed various experts specializing in regional matters and had three main goals: to comprehend the notion of regional competitive advantage, identify challenges associated with measuring and comprehending regional competitiveness, and explore potential methods for its

improvement. The research findings indicate that international markets primarily engage in competition based on absolute advantage rather than comparative advantage, highlighting the intricate and perplexing nature of regional competitiveness.

Another research focuses on the topic of urban competitiveness and its measurement. It asserts that competitiveness is a complex concept that can differ depending on the research objective. City competition arises when cities have comparable performance, size, and status. The factors that contribute to urban competitiveness can be categorized into two groups: those associated with the external environment (such as politics, economics, culture, technology, and the environment) and those associated with the internal environment (such as human resources, institutions, physical infrastructure, and the economy) (Sinkiene, J. 2009).

An academic study was conducted to assess the level of competitiveness among cities in Lithuania, taking into account economic, social, and environmental factors. The economic index was further divided into economic performance and capacity growth. Within the social index, various subgroups such as human resources, education, welfare, living conditions, and productivity were considered. However, the environmental index solely focused on evaluating the quality of the environment. The study's findings indicated a strong correlation between urban competitiveness and both regional and national competitiveness. It was also noted that the specific factors chosen to measure urban competitiveness significantly influenced the results obtained. The study identified Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Palanga, and Druskininkai as the most competitive cities in Lithuania. Conversely, Akmene, Taurage, Ukmerge, and Svencionys were found to be the least competitive cities. Interestingly, the study revealed that geographical location had minimal impact on urban competitiveness (Bruneckiene, J.; Guzavicius, A.; Cincikaite, R. 2010).

FINDINGS

In the academic context, a preliminary investigation was carried out involving a review of relevant documents and the dissemination of an initial questionnaire to thirty experts in Kermanshah. This process resulted in the identification of sixty-five factors. Through careful analysis, duplicate and overlapping cases were eliminated, resulting in the identification of 54 factors that were determined to be the most significant in influencing the competitiveness of Kermanshah.

The study utilized a matrix of dimensions 54x54. Upon analysis of the matrix, it was observed that in 75.34% of the cells, values other than zero were present, implying substantial effects between factors. Conversely, 32.72% of the cells exhibited a value of zero, indicating an absence of effect between factors. Following the data optimization process, a validity rate of 100% was obtained, affirming the reliability of both the questionnaires and their corresponding answers. The competitiveness of Kermanshah city was evaluated in relation to five key drivers and a total of fifty-four trends, primarily focused on the economy. This indicates that the economic sector significantly influences the determination of Kermanshah's competitiveness. The research discovered that all factors examined displayed complete compatibility, with two instances of repetition.

The distribution of competitiveness variables in the city of Kermanshah indicates an unstable system within the context of academic analysis. The majority of these variables do not fall within the optimal range and instead tend to cluster around the midpoint on the chart. These variables can be classified into five distinct groups according to their respective impacts: influential, two-sided (risk and target), dependent, independent, and adjusted variables.

The geographical location and weak domestic management of Kermanshah have posed challenges for the city. As a result, the air quality has been negatively impacted and the residents' quality of life has suffered. Nevertheless, Kermanshah holds promise in terms of attracting investors, particularly in the field of tourism development. This is due to its border location and economic collaboration with Iraq. The text explores the various factors that impact competitiveness in Kermanshah. A significant factor identified is the planning management at both local and macro levels. Competitiveness can also be influenced by other variables, including the capacity of the service sector, foreign activities, and exports of goods and services. Furthermore, these variables have an impact on factors such as social solidarity, employment rates for both men and women, utilization of recycling technology, population density, greenhouse gas emissions, and population composition. For instance, capacities in tourism, agriculture, and natural resources can strengthen employment rates. These variables can also affect migration rates and population density.

CONCLUSION

In the academic context, it is crucial to evaluate the competitiveness of cities as they undergo growth and encounter increasingly intricate challenges. This evaluation necessitates the examination of specific criteria and extends beyond a mere quantitative analysis, instead requiring a continuous recognition and utilization of a city's competitive capabilities. Given that multiple factors contribute to urban competitiveness; it becomes imperative to measure various dimensions of it. While economic competitiveness typically receives the most attention, it is equally important to consider other dimensions such as the environment, culture, society, security, politics, and technology. The text explores the notion of competitiveness in urban settings and emphasizes the necessity of considering multiple dimensions, such as social, cultural, environmental, and security factors. The study underscores the significance of security competitiveness and its influence on economic competitiveness. Additionally, it acknowledges the importance of integrated planning that encompasses both local and global viewpoints. Furthermore, the text delineates 11 crucial factors that will determine Kermanshah's future competitiveness; however, it acknowledges the difficulties encountered in implementing development plans for the city.

The text examines the future competitiveness of Kermanshah, an Iranian city, within an academic framework. It proposes that the government should prioritize the city's competitive strengths and address regional disparities. Additionally, the local government must undertake efforts to enhance Kermanshah's competitiveness by leveraging its economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and security resources. Failure to implement these measures will result in wasted opportunities and capabilities for Kermanshah, subsequently leading to challenges and crises in the surrounding regions.

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