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The impact of planetary urbanization on the citizen's everyday life

**— Studying the impact of the Chinese Belt and Road
Initiative (BRI) on the housing sector in Behshahr city, Iran.**

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Course code: SGEM08
Semester/year: Autumn, 2022

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Abstract

The Chinese government has been working on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for the past 20 years to further its goal of expanding global hegemony. It attempts to increase its economic and political influence in the BRI destinations through several projects and six main corridors. These initiatives, in my opinion, have a significant impact on transforming the urban landscape. Considering that most of the previous studies have dealt with the economic effects of these projects, my goal is to examine their impacts on the daily life of citizens, especially in the housing sector. In my thesis, I attempted to address this gap. The theory of planetary urbanization, which commonly derives from Neil Brenner's beliefs, has received a great deal of attention. His views are influenced by the opinions of Henri Lefebvre, which highlights the 'implosion-explosion' and the links between capitalist forms of agglomeration and extensive transformations of territory, landscape, and environment. This theory asserts that cities are not limited by their physical borders and are impacted by external variables. It also offers differing views on the scales of the city. According to this theory, I intend to investigate how the construction of these projects causes transformations in the urbanization process and city landscapes. Based on the first research question, I analyzed how the development of BRI projects is related to the theory of planetary urbanization. To examine how these transformations brought about by the construction of the BRI projects have affected the residents' everyday lives, I formulated the second research question in continuation of the first. I considered access to public services as one of the components influencing the satisfaction level of citizens. To answer the research questions, I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I did six semi-structured interviews to analyze various viewpoints on how the Amirabad port's expansion in Iran, one of the BRI's destinations, affected residents' everyday lives. Also, I made an effort to do a more thorough examination of urban transition and evaluate the accessibility of residents to public services utilizing GIS analysis. I concluded that the planetary urbanization theory's guiding principles are consistent with how BRI projects affect urban transformation. And these initiatives have directly impacted people's everyday lives, particularly the housing section. I concluded by offering recommendations on how to lessen the adverse consequences of this initiative on residents' daily lives.

Keywords: Planetary urbanization theory, Chinese Belt and Road Initiative(BRI), Amirabad port, Housing.

Word count: 18975

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1. Introduction

The idea of planetary urbanization, which I learned about during my Master's studies at Lund University, inspired me for this thesis' topic selection. My desire to learn more about this idea was triggered by reading Henri Lefebvre's "The urban revolution" and several articles by Neil Brenner, particularly his book "New urban spaces." On the other hand, I lived for almost 20 years in Behshahr, a city in Iran, and I witnessed the urban transformation that occurred in my hometown after the construction of a project in the form of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Finally, I decided to choose the topic of my thesis on how large-scale projects like the BRI affect the everyday lives of citizens.

The planetary urbanization hypothesis states that we need to change our perceptions regarding cities and the urbanization process. The ideas of Henry Lefebvre, Neil Brenner, and others should be regarded as the cornerstones of this theory. Despite appearing to neglect the effects of other variables, they tend to concentrate on how capitalism affects the process of urbanization. On the other hand, The BRI initiatives represent China's efforts to deepen its economic and political relations. The largest infrastructure undertaking since the Marshall Plan and arguably the most ambitious in human history is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the "21st century Silk Road" and the "project of the century" (Financial Times 2017). At least since the late 1990s, ideas for New Silk Roads have been spreading. BRI projects range widely, from pipelines, industrial parks, special economic zones (SEZs), real estate, and business ventures to free trade agreements and treaties to attract foreign investment and market liberalization. They also include railroads, ports, airports, and other infrastructure (Blanchard and Flint 2017). The project is structured around six main economic corridors: The New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor, China-Central Asia-Western Asia Corridor, China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (OECD 2018). Although they are depicted as continuous surfaces in rhetoric, the spatial configuration of the flows of money, goods, and people are anticipated to take place across a network of urban hubs with several projects strategically positioned in chosen cities.

In this research, I'm attempting to determine whether these initiatives are connected to the planetary urbanization theory by looking at the theory's principles and considering the goals of BRI projects. I chose Behshahr city as a case study since it is one of the BRI projects' destinations in Iran. It is important to note that most studies in the BRI projects concentrate on its economic consequences and pay less attention to urban development and its effects at the local level, a subject that has also received less attention in the theory of planetary urbanization. In the next phase of my research, I want to look at how this project's construction in Behshahr has affected the urbanization process other than only the economy. The selection of the Amirabad project is significant since it can show the impact of an external (transnational) factor on the process of urban transformations. Also, by examining the everyday life of citizens, I intend to investigate the various effects of this project on Behshahr's urbanization.

In this research, I used the six semi-structured interviews of Behshahr citizens using several components to evaluate the impact of the construction of the Amirabad port project on their daily lives. I also used GIS analysis to investigate these effects more precisely. The key argument I aim to advance is that urban transformation driven by the BRI signals the emergence of a new form of infrastructure-led, authoritarian neoliberal urbanism. This engenders the urban formations and politics that are reconfiguring urban space and transforming the social geography of each city by creating, facilitating, or exacerbating spatial fragmentation and social segregation. I focused on the housing issue in this study, although other effects on the urbanization process can be considered in future research.

1.1 Aim and research questions

According to Brenner (2014, p.160), the discipline of urban studies has had an incredible outpouring of new ideas over the past several decades on how cities, urbanism, and urbanization processes fit into ongoing international trends. From Ernest Burgess' diagram of concentric rings to city-centered concepts, they appear to offer a limited basis for deciphering emergent formations of urbanization. Planetary urbanization theory accurately describe how urbanization has developed in the contemporary world. Neil Brenner in his recent book 'New Urban Spaces' states that the last forty years have seen several far-reaching implosions and explosions of the urban at all spatial scales in addition to a dramatic spatial expansion of major megacity regions into their surrounding hinterlands. Urbanization processes are being regionalized and reterritorialized. Former central functions increasingly spread outside the traditional city centers, along important transportation routes like superhighways and high-speed rail lines.

On the other hand, the global political economy has entered a period of systemic change in recent years. The development of new powers in Asia, particularly China, is the significant cause of this systemic transformation. China is transitioning from a rule-taker to a rule-maker in the international political economy in this new era. Participation in shaping new structures such as BRI, is undoubtedly the most important and most ambitious initiative introduced by this country (Shariatnia and Azizi, 2019). Iran has had extensive ties with China and has been affected by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) implementation. The urbanization process of Behshahr city, which is close to the Amirabad port in northern Iran, was severely affected by the port's construction.

In this thesis, I intend to assess the changes made to Behshahr residents' everyday lives due to the construction of the Amirabad port following BRI initiatives via the lens of planetary urbanization. The research questions that will direct my study are as follows:

R.Q 1: What is the relationship between the BRI project (Amirabad port) and the planetary urbanization theory?

R.Q 2: How has the everyday life of Behshahr citizens changed after the construction of this project (with emphasis on the housing sector)?

In the first research question, I seek to find the relationship between the effects and characteristics of the BRI project and the principles of planetary urbanization theory. From the principles of this theory, I can point to the 'implosion-explosion' trend, the regionalization of

the urban development process, and the non-urban impact on urban. The first research question seeks to find the relationship between these principles with the goals and effects of this project looking at the physical transformations of Behshahr city. I assume that the Amirabad project could be described in terms of the planetary urbanization theory when I formulated the second research question. In the second research question, I tend to explore the physical changes due to the construction of this project in Behshahr city and their impact on the daily life of citizens. To examine the changes in everyday life, I carefully analyzed the 'housing' sector and used the methods I present in the methodology section. It's important to note that in this investigation, I won't try to examine all the fundamental ideas of this theory. Furthermore, I'll consider other areas of daily life rather than only the economic ones.

1.2 Disposition

The following is the structure of my master's thesis. In the second part, I will introduce the theory of planetary urbanization and point out a number of criticisms related to this theory. In addition, I will discuss the BRI projects in detail before examining how they relate to urban development. In the third section, I study previous studies and explore Sri Lanka, Athens, and London case studies. I devoted the fourth part of this thesis to research design and methodology, where I will provide explanations about semi-structured interviews and GIS analyses. I will next briefly describe the case study I looked at for this research in the fifth chapter. In the sixth section, I discuss the results of the interviews conducted with citizens and the GIS analysis results and illustrate the maps prepared in this field. The final section summarizes the main findings of the thesis, where I attempt to draw conclusions based on my research questions.

2. Theoretical framework

The "planetary urbanization" theory, which primarily expresses the viewpoints of Brenner and Schmid, is the foundation of this thesis. They have written several articles in recent years and promoted a new perspective on the urban and urbanization phenomenon. This research will employ Brenner's most recent book, "New urban spaces," published in 2019, as a starting point, and this book will serve as the basis for the study. Also, I will dig into his other book titled "Implosion/explosion towards a study of planetary urbanization," published in 2013, and several lectures in my thesis. These contexts could be considered the core of the planetary urbanization framework, where the authors provide an overview of key concepts. Since the introduction of the framework, other scholars have published several academic articles that engage with these ideas in different ways. On the other hand, I will discuss the Chinese BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and the reasons for the global spread of such projects. I will use the OECD Business and finance outlook published in 2018 to introduce the BRI projects. Based on planetary urbanization, I will also analyze the implementation and extension of BRI and the impacts of these projects on citizens' everyday lives.

2.1 Overview of the theoretical framework

I'll give a summary of the theoretical framework's structure in this section.

Table 2.1. The theoretical framework.

R.Q	What is the relationship between BRI projects and the planetary urbanization theory?	How has the everyday life of Behshahr citizens changed after the implementation of the Amirabad port project (with emphasis on the housing sector) ?
Frameworks	Planetary urbanization and BRI	Planetary urbanization and BRI
Methods	Desk studies/ content analysis	Semi-structured interview with citizens/ GIS analysis

Source: Author

2.2 Urban theory with a focus on scale

Recent viewpoints on the city and the urbanization process have undergone fundamental revisions. According to Brenner (2019, p.110), the urban cannot consider a fixed or general area "in" which restructuring occurs; instead, it is continuously produced and reconstructed by processes. Lefebvre described this dynamic as an "implosion-explosion" in his description of capitalist urbanization. He used this phrase to illustrate the connections between capitalist agglomeration patterns and more extensive transformations to the territory, the environment, and the landscape. Lefebvre uses this metaphor to describe the destruction of European commercial towns (the moment of implosion) and the following creation of megalopolitan territorial formations to support industrialization (the moment of explosion). However, Lefebvre broadens his use of this metaphor to discuss some of the extensive territorial transformations that have occurred at various spatial scales throughout the history of capitalist urbanization. The formerly non-city zones are increasingly intertwined into large-

scale geographical divisions of labor as cities expand outward into their surrounding territories. Precapitalist and mercantile cities are either marginalized or transformed into strategic spots within heavily industrialized landscapes with the intensity, acceleration, and territorial extension of capitalist modes of growth. Following this, a new round of sociospatial explosion as urban practices is forcefully projected into and across the formerly non-urban area, eradicating any distinction between city and countryside and more closely connecting local and regional economies to transnational flows of raw materials, commodities, labor, and capital. So, the notion of implosion-explosion describes the creation and ongoing development of an industrialized urban fabric in which the agglomeration centers and their operational landscapes are intertwined while being co-articulated into a global capitalist system (Brenner 2014, pp 17-18).

Also, Brenner (2019, p.112) states that the "cities" are significantly questioned by scalar approaches to the urban issue. The point is not that socio-spatial agglomeration processes don't exist or don't produce highly significant zones of concentration and intensification. Instead, such processes cannot be deciphered coherently by focusing on cities as self-contained, territorially restricted, and distinct units of settlement territory. A multi-scalar conception of city development and the dynamics of socio-spatial agglomeration is required instead of a reflexively scalar approach to the urban question. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate them within inter-scalar configurations that cover urban transformation geographies at the regional, national, supranational, and eventually planetary scales. Cities and metropolitan regions may thus be considered as socio-spatial patterns woven into the geo-historical development of the capitalist urban fabric. Such a strategy demolishes the urban's long-accepted definitional equation. With these explanations, I intend to explore the planetary urbanization perspective on the city and urbanization.

2.3 Planetary urbanization

Brenner (2013, pp.160-162) states that, early in the 20th century, significant demographic and socioeconomic transformations in the former "countryside" coincided with the increasing consolidation of large-scale industrial city-regions and suburbanizing zones. The bulk of twentieth-century urban studies rested on the assumption that cities were unique regions that stood in qualitative contrast to the "non-urban" areas outside their boundaries. However, over the past 30 years, the urbanization process has undergone a fundamental reconfiguration. So, the inherited cartographies that have long served as the foundation for urban theory are questioned by this process. In addition to the significant spatial and demographic expansion of major megacity regions, the last 30 years have also witnessed several far-reaching global socio-spatial transformations. These include:

1- The creation of new scales of urbanization. Widespread "urban galaxies" extend beyond any one metropolitan region and frequently cross multiple national boundaries created around the world due to the extensive urbanization interdependencies being consolidated within extremely large, rapidly expanding polynucleated metropolitan.

2- The blurring and re-articulation of urban territories. Urbanization processes are being regionalized and reterritorialized. Former "central functions" are increasingly being

diffused outside of historic city centers, into formerly suburbanized areas, throughout vast catchments of small- and medium-sized towns, and along major transport corridors.

3- The disintegration of the “hinterland.” Major cities, metropolitan areas, and urban-industrial corridors are reconfiguring their former "hinterlands" as they functionalize them to support the continuous expansion of industrial urbanization and its associated planetary urban networks.

4- The end of the “wilderness.” Formerly "wilderness" areas are being transformed and degraded due to global urbanization's cumulative socio-ecological consequences.

Neil Brenner (2013, pp.162-163) believes that the entire field of urban studies faces a fundamental challenge to these geo-historical trends. Its epistemological assumptions and analytical categories require a significant reconceptualization to stay relevant to the massive transformation in the global socio-spatial structure we are currently experiencing. In today’s world, a city, city-region, metropolis, metropolitan area, megalopolis, or edge city can no longer be considered a specific "type" of settlement space. Furthermore, the traditional division between urban and rural areas (or urban and non-urban areas) is no longer a reasonable way to describe the distinctions between highly agglomerated zones and the less densely populated zones of a region, a national territory, a continent, or the planet. Today, the urban signifies a situation where political and economic interactions are intertwined on a global scale.

This planetary urbanization means that even spaces that lie well beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries have become integral parts of the worldwide urban fabric. In other words, our conception of the urban should be radically reconfigured in a time when the idea of the non-urban looks more and more to be an ideological projection derived from a long-dissolved. Henri Lefebvre proposed the radical concept of the complete urbanization of society almost four decades earlier, arguing for a fundamental change in the focus of analysis from urban form to the urbanization process. This concept has not, however, been undertaken in a systematic way. Maybe the time is now, in the early twenty-first century, for such an undertaking (Lefebvre, 2003 cited in Brenner, 2013, p.163).

In this part, I'll summarize the planetary urbanization theory according to Neil Brenner's 2011 Sidney University lecture: The research on planetary urbanization is an effort to provide a new epistemology for approaching the urban question. They want to highlight that the term planetary urbanization does not imply that every area of the world is being urbanized in the same way or that the world is becoming homogenized. It is fundamentally a concept of uneven spatial development and spatial inequality. And the core of that method can be summarized in three steps:

- 1- The urban is not a unit but a process of transformation. It is a process of socio-spatial transformation mediated through capitalist forms of industrialization.
- 2- This process unfolds in various sites, territories, and landscapes. There is no singular ‘urban’ morphology. Social scientists, planners, and geographers try to define the urban morphology characteristic of a particular time and place that we don’t think is productive. There are many patterns and pathways of urbanization. Look at what they are in different world regions and historical geographical moments.

- 3- The urban/non-urban divide is superseded, and there is no 'outside' to the urban condition. By saying that everything is becoming urban, we are not claiming that everything is becoming the same, instead, we are stating that there is a process of urbanization that is transforming in place and territory-specific ways in many different parts of the world. And it is more productive to analyze that by looking at a worldwide urban fabric and the connections of different places and the positionality of various areas within that worldwide urban fabric rather than using this classification of urban versus non-urban.

Most of the urban theories focus on concentrated urbanization, which is the moment that agglomeration and concentration coincide. This theory focuses on this and emphasizes what is referred to as extended urbanization. According to this theory, urbanization is a dialectic between concentrated and extended urbanization. Agglomeration and centralization are terms used to describe concentrated urbanization, whereas extended urbanization refers to the transformation of a society's environment and territory in a way that supports agglomeration. So, what they often think about the hinterland in this framework is not internalized part of urbanization (Brenner 2015).

According to Arboleda (2016, p.96), Henri Lefebvre started moving in this direction since, in his opinion, the population concentration that industrialization and economic expansion demand were eroding the boundaries of a historically self-contained urban form and turning urbanization into a boundless phenomenon. As a result, he described capitalist globalization as an all-encompassing "explosion of spaces" that is supported by opposing yet connected processes of homogeneity and fragmentation of territory.

2.4 Critique of the planetary urbanization

This project seeks to engage with planetary urbanization theory. Hence, it becomes relevant to present the criticism of the framework and summarize it in a separate section. This theory has received criticism from different scholars throughout the years. In this section, I will dig into the critiques around this theory.

According to Oswin (2016, p.2), the primary objective of the planetary urbanization framework is to revive radical urbanization techniques in response to and in light of current urban realities. The planetary urbanization project is also referred to as a 'return' since it has renewed previous discussions in urban studies on the politics of knowledge production. A wave of criticism has been leveled at this 'new epistemology,' this endeavor to transform a supposed 'academic Babel' into a single voice, particularly from academics who study feminist, critical race, and queer theories. These criticisms have echoes of prior arguments. For instance, Harvey's (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity's* critique by Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) reappears. Also, her attitude that 'today, totalizing impulses are routinely manifested in indifference to feminism – to feminism's difference from other social analyses, its internal differences, and its theories of difference' is repeated by Buckley and Strauss (2016). Overall, the critiques of the planetary urbanization framework share the same sense of frustration as Cindi Katz's (1996, p.488) claim: "Despite years of feminist, postcolonial, queer, and antiracist critique, and the rich, different productions of knowledge offered from these quarters, much social theory remains largely impervious to this work."

Moreover, Oswin (2016, p.3) argues for the significance of epistemic plurality within urban studies and disagrees with attempts to consolidate "a new epistemology of the urban." She writes against a radical approach to urbanization that primarily emphasizes capitalist exploitation and class dynamics and is in favor of a radical approach to urbanization that is motivated by insights from Marxist theories as well as queer, feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theories. She essentially responds to Brenner and Schmid's claim that there is "no longer any outside to the urban environment" by pointing out how their work highlights and perpetuates the presence of the various outsides within the critical urban theory.

Furthermore, I believe that although the planetary urbanization theory bases its interpretation of the urbanization process on capitalism and considers the effect of non-urban areas on cities, it ignores other components. According to Dewey (1960, p. 61), the table below shows the factors that affect urbanization:

Table 2.4. Factors affecting urbanization.

Heterogeneity	Impersonal relations	Division of labor	Anonymity	Mobility	Segmental roles	Class differences	Predatory relations
Emphasis on time	New family role	Employment patterns	More female employment	Multiple dwelling units	Secularism	Non-agricultural life	Cosmopolitanism
Tenancy	Complexity	Tolerance	Superficiality	Low fertility	Sophistication	Commercialization	Liberalism
Automation	Literacy	Creativity	Blase' attitude	Stereotyping	Critical attitude	Utilitarianism	Formal controls
Interdependency	Subjective outlook	Intense occupational space	Social participation	Transiency	Individualism	Objectivity	Practicality

Source: Dewey, R. (1960, p.61)

Considering the various components in the urbanization definitions, I believe that the theory of planetary urbanization has not paid attention to social and cultural relations in the urbanization process and has focused on the aspect of economic development.

2.5 Everyday life

Everyday life is an area that is full of challenges and conflicts. Space and places that used to be marginalized due to the homogenous and static ethnic communities are pluralistic and full of conflicts (Bennett, 2007). De Certeau stated that the realm of resistance in everyday life prevents it from being conquered by the constructive system of culture and cultural goods. This resistance is not a mere synonym for disagreement but also can be the result of the motionless and accepting of the situation and the creative forms of appropriating this situation (Kazemi, 2005, p.114). Henry Lefebvre, in the book *Everyday life in the modern world*, explained how the life of individuals is built through the decisions that they do not participate in making them. The routine human is surrounded by the resources and needs in everyday life. Therefore, he unconsciously regenerates the roles that are imposed by the middle class. Such a regeneration of modern everyday life occurs with triple moves. The first step is to socialize through the generalization of the society and then, this process is followed up by intense

personalization, resulting in privatization eventually. The third step is that the capitalistic societies transformed the people into a set of separated consumers (Lefebvre, 1991, p.15).

According to Khani et al. (2021, p.24), the ideas of different thinkers on everyday life is classified into concepts, categories, and sub-categories. The table below shows the content analysis of various thinkers on everyday life.

Table 2.5. The ideas of various thinkers on everyday life.

Theorists	Concepts	Categories	Sub-Categories
Henri Lefebvre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alienation of modern human. - Criticizing spatial trialectics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social production of urban space - Introducing spatial trialectics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social control and spatial control - Being free from spatial duality - Creating urban memory - People’s right in using and producing cultural, social, and physical spaces - The right of not expelling from the centrality and using it
Heidegger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Routine and constant repetitions of patterns, sadness, and uniformities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paying attention to the lived experiences - Dasein plan or being in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right of being in the space and conquering the space - Presence - Creating urban memory - The right of residents to use the space comprehensively
Marx	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The commodification of everyday life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcoming alienation and fetishism - Sub- commodity of goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Democracy - Having access to the service - People’s right to residence and societies - The right of the intrusive and sudden strangers and migrants
Lukacs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reification of daily life - The class critique of the proletariat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcoming reification - Social and revolutionary praxis of the working class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing service - The right of not expelling from the centrality and using it - Empowerment - Democracy - Absence of discrimination
Zimmel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mere attention to everybody life. - The alienating aspects of modern life and the gap between objective and subjective culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paying attention to the small phenomena and experiences of everyday life - Paying attention to the subjective culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social mix - Presence - Urban memory - Occupying space - Design right and beauties of the urban area
Benjamin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incapability in transferring the experiences - Accumulation of immediate experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Paying attention to the details of the material world and collective and exchangeable experiences - Representation of social differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public presence and social inclusion - The collective use of space and vitality - Occupying space - The right of socializing and mixing with the society
De Certeau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colonization of everybody life - Criticizing strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistance against colonialism and capitalism - Interpretation of cultural behaviors such as tactic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spatial control - Self- regulation - People’s intervention in producing cultural, physical, and social space - Social solidarity
Griddens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The insignificance of everyday social interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structural rigidity and efforts of actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social control - Occupying space - People’s right in using and producing social, physical, and cultural spaces - Belonging to the urban society
Habermas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colonization of the lifeworld by the system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - System and lifeworld - Introducing communicative action and social solidarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effectiveness - Empowerment - The assembly of different tastes - People’s residence right and communities

Source: Khani et al. (2021, p.24)

In “The Urban Revolution” book, Lefebvre discusses the notions of habitat and habitation. He believes that, habitat was imposed from above as the application of a homogeneous global and quantitative space, a requirement that “lived experience” allows itself to be enclosed in boxes, cages, or “dwelling machines” (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 81). He also wishes to emphasize the significance of everyday life and the "private level" (P), asserting that the continuing fundamental societal reorganization originates at the local level from changes in everyday practices and spaces. In the current critical phase between industrial and urban society,

"A level that was always considered unimportant now becomes essential, namely habiting.... I assume that the urban is primary and priority is given to habiting."

Lefebvre emphasizes the need for innovation and suggests that architecture, as opposed to planning or urbanism, may play a crucial role in enabling the new society and serving as a 'social condenser' (Lefebvre, 2003, pp. 89-90).

The above table and Lefebvre's beliefs lead me to believe that people's right to residence and their use of various urban services and spaces are crucial. These two subjects—*the right to housing and the accessibility of public services*—will be emphasized in my research. In this regard, Lund Hansen (2021, p.39) believes that housing politics is a social, geographic, and ideological battlefield where housing is considered a tool for strategy and investment than a framework for a human's life. Hence, responsible housing politics should avoid using housing as the foundation for a politics of displacement and a product in the conventional sense. Instead, he believes that "We ought to think of housing as a scale or unit where we may satisfy our fundamental socio-ecological needs (privacy, safety, shelter, storage, hygiene, reproduction, belonging, everyday life, activism); a place for human beings, togetherness, and habiting."

I should point out that I will take into account the components of this part that are connected to the housing and everyday life in the research design section.

2.6 Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

According to Apostolopoulou (2021, p.1), as the largest infrastructure project in human history, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the "21st century Silk Road" and the "project of the century," is being implemented. According to conservative estimates, the cost of this initiative will exceed US\$1 trillion. More than 125 countries have so far signed memorandums of understanding with China indicating their desire to take part in the program. Everything from business projects to free trade agreements and treaties to encourage foreign investment and market liberalization is included in BRI projects. Also, the OECD Business and finance outlook (2018, p.3) states that the world has a significant infrastructure gap constraining trade, openness, and future prosperity. The efforts of multilateral development banks (MDBs) are focused on bridging this gap. Recently, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative, a significant global initiative to reinforce this trend (BRI). The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), oversees and coordinates all BRI projects (including, among others, the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Development Research Centre of the State Council (DRC)), organizes the BRI's "Leading Group" for the purpose of promoting its work.

China intends to boost BRI initiatives around the world. According to OECD Business and finance outlook (2018, p.9), the BRI-participating economies represent more than one-third of global GDP and over half of the world's population. Over half of the world's population and more than one-third of the global GDP is represented by economies that are a part of the BRI. Although infrastructure investment is a significant component of the BRI, China claims that the initiative's goals are much broader and include all facets of sustainable growth for the country as a whole, as well as more balanced regional growth, industrial modernization, and greener economic growth. According to China, the BRI's emphasis on connectivity aims to promote commerce and investment, which will help neighboring nations develop, as well as strategically improve their security of food, energy, and resources by taking regional leadership. The BRI could boost the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in this way.

The six economic corridors of the BRI

China's growth plan focuses a lot on thinking about development in terms of economic corridors. There are six economic corridors (Figure below) along the Belt and Road that encompass vast regions of the world that are resource- and energy-rich:

1. New Eurasia Land Bridge: involving rail to Europe via Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and Poland.
2. China, Mongolia, Russia Economic Corridor: including rail links and the steppe road- this will link with the land bridge.
3. China, Central Asia, West Asia Economic Corridor: linking to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Turkey.
4. China Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor: Viet Nam, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Malaysia.
5. China, Pakistan Economic Corridor.
6. China, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor. (OECD Business and finance outlook 2018, p.11)

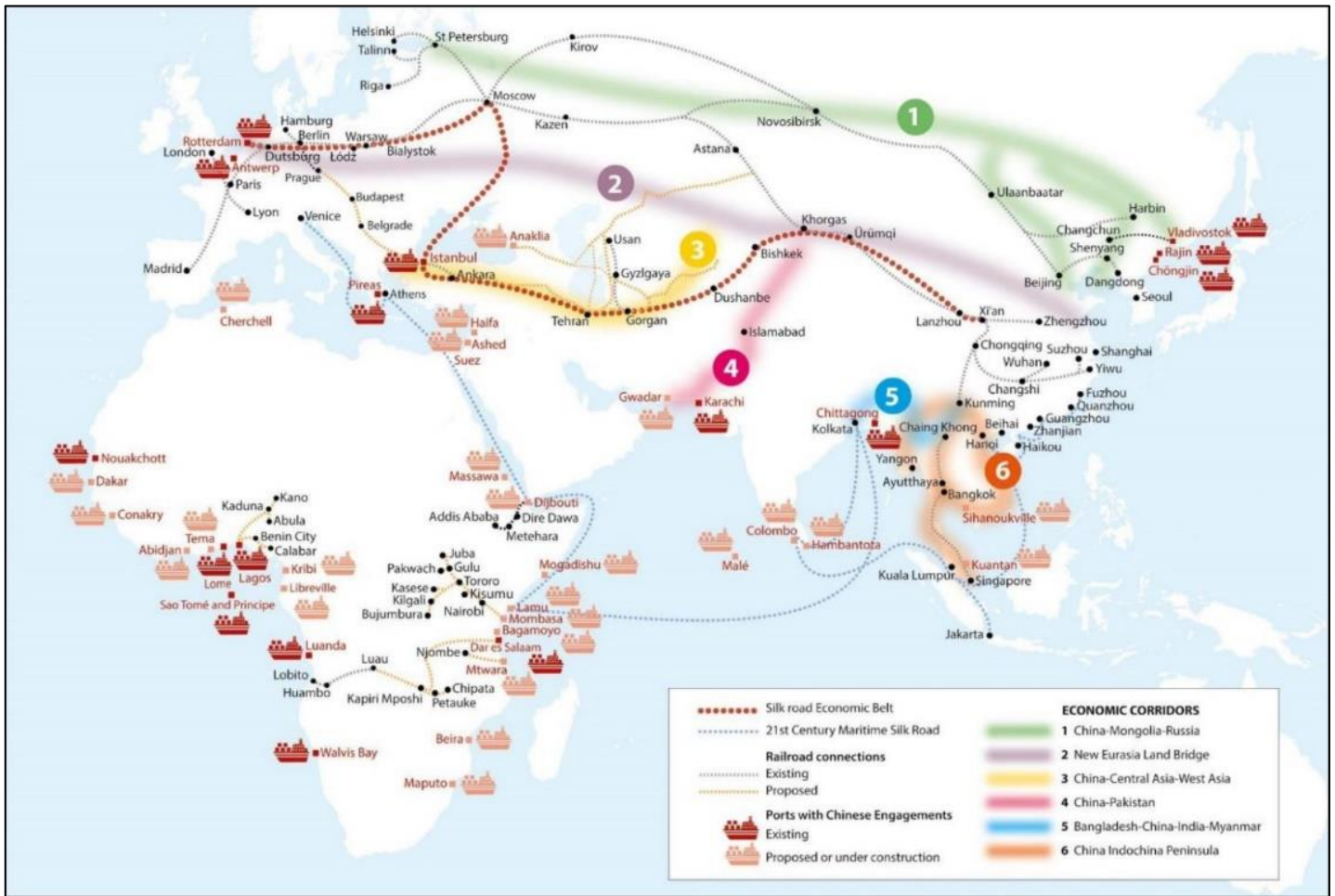


Figure 2.1. The six BRI economic corridors. Source: OECD Business and finance outlook 2018.

In these six corridors, Iran is located in the third corridor, in which China intends to access the economy of Central and West Asia.

2.7 BRI and urban development

Recent research (Olinga-Shannon, Barbesgaard, and Vervest, 2019) stated that the BRI is considered the latest moment in the process of geographical expansion and spatial reorganization. Its roots can be traced to the characteristics of the Chinese economy, including the vital role that infrastructure plays in the country's industrialization model, which is export-oriented, as well as to the broader international political-economic context following the 2008 financial crisis. Apostolopoulou (2021, p.3) states that the profitability issue prompted the Chinese government to respond with a state-funded significant economic stimulus package, of which 38% supported the development of domestic urban infrastructure, which altered urban geographies throughout China. The post-2008 construction boom and significant investments in the built environment led to an excess of production capacity in several industrial sectors, from cement to steel. The World Bank's adoption of the infrastructure-led development model during the post-2008 period also signified its global rise. A global infrastructure rush was also fueled by the need to extract new raw materials, reduce the distance between locations where resources are extracted, produced, and consumed, access cheap and skilled labor, and benefit

from favorable regulatory environments, as well as by the availability of cheap capital and low-interest rates by major economies like the US and China.

There is broad agreement that cities play an essential role in achieving the objectives of BRI projects. Apostolopoulou (2021, p.4) believes that the BRI was established to stimulate economic growth by promoting spatial restructuring and extension to prove the capital's life process entails ongoing movement. By serving as a significant spatial fix to capital's global overaccumulation dilemma, the BRI progressively came to represent the near-global hegemony of infrastructure-led development. Urban growth has always played a crucial role in the BRI since it absorbs undervalued surpluses. According to Ekers and Prudham (2017, p.1374), these entail a "combination of surplus capital looking for productive investment, surplus commodities looking for buyers, and surplus labor power looking for productive employment." Indeed, China invested in BRI projects to absorb labor and capital surpluses and convert domestic overcapacity and capital for urban and infrastructure development. The initiative facilitated the exportation of products to support overseas infrastructure construction.

In conclusion, Apostolopoulou (2021, p.4) believes that cities are crucial to fulfilling the BRI's fundamental objective, which is reterritorialization via improved connectivity. The initiative's organization around six key corridors demonstrates this effectively and testifies to the attempt to integrate subnational urban systems into transnational regions through massive infrastructure projects. The vital role of urban nodes reflects a spatial paradigm that reproduces hegemonic capitalist developmental ideas.

2.8 Summary

I aim to show that BRI's potential to alter urban geographies is considerable. However, the literature has relatively underexplored the urban transformation and its effect on urban inequality. This transformation encompasses hinterlands and urban centers that reflect the contradictions of capitalist urbanization, where adverse effects occur within the centers of capitalist economic activity. These projects also have an impact on megacities, whose expansion and location within the global order coincide with the escalation of poverty, urban marginality, and infrastructure deterioration.

This research is influenced by two crucial points of planetary urbanization theory. The first stated that the urban/non-urban divide is obsolete, and there is no 'outside' to the urban condition. And cities are functionalizing their previous 'hinterlands' to facilitate the ongoing growth of industrial urbanization. The second point out that the city is a process of social-spatial transformation carried out through forms of industrial capitalism. In light of the planetary urbanization theory, it is possible to comprehend the impact of the BRI projects on the transformation of the urbanization process and the side effects they will have on the inhabitants' everyday lives.

3. Examples of cases affected by the BRI project

In this thesis, I will explore the links between China's BRI implementation, urban transformation, and the citizens' everyday lives in one of the destinations of these projects in Iran. I focused on three cases (Athens, Colombo, and London) that were affected by the construction of these projects to more thoroughly examine how they altered the urbanization process and the residents' daily lives.

3.1 London- Albert Royal Docks

Over the past few decades, China has been investing in the public and commercial sectors of the UK. New rail routes, energy, manufacturing, telecommunications, education, and transportation are a few of these initiatives. Chinese investment in London's Royal Docks is one of the notable ones. This project entails transforming a 35-acre post-industrial site at the Royal Albert Dock into a center of Silk Road Urbanism. ABP (Advanced Business Park), a Chinese developer, has made a vast investment to help the reconstruction of Albert Dock to turn the region into a new financial and technological center. The project is connected to several transportation improvements including the train line between Yiwu and London. The ancient Docklands are being transformed into a new "boom town" in parts, including Albert Dock, which has 4.7 million square feet of commercial, residential, retail, and recreational space (Royal Docks 2020). ABP was given the contract to construct the 35-acre development in 2013 after the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the firm signed a Development Agreement. Despite the hegemonic rhetoric of turning a "wasteland" into a brand-new "global village," grassroots organizations opposed the agreement (ABD nd). Local protestors criticized the company's strategy, which calls for privatizing and converting (public) undeveloped land into financial hubs, cutting-edge eco-cities, and exclusive green enclaves. One of London's Opportunity Areas and its lone Enterprise Zone, the Royal Docks was established as part of the coalition government's 2011 "war on red tape." This project indicates that offering tax breaks and business incentives, such as streamlined planning processes and the retention of business rate uplift, encouraging foreign investment (Apostolopoulou 2021, p.8).

It's crucial to consider the negative consequences of the Chinese investment in this project. The investment has recently been recognized as the region's rescuer in the Belt and Road News. Given that East London, which is ethnically diverse and has one of the highest unemployment rates in the capital, is one of the areas with the highest unemployment rates, the narrative of prosperity and employment prospects has been particularly beneficial. Nevertheless, it omits to add that, despite the claims, evidence indicates that, thus far, Chinese corporations have played a significant part in the project (Heiduk 2018, p.234). It also fails to acknowledge that gentrification processes both inside and outside the Docklands have a history of removing low-income residents, which is another effect of the area's rehabilitation that deprives the public of the possibility of an open, accessible, and really welcoming urban space (Apostolopoulou 2021, pp.8-9).

3.2 Athens-Piraeus Port

Due to its strategic location as a point of entry for Chinese goods into Europe, Piraeus, the largest port in Greece, has been a significant investment for China (Belt and Road News 2019). The Greek government granted a 35-year concession to COSCO, state-owned Chinese shipping, and logistics company, to operate a section of Piraeus' container terminal in 2008. Major Greek shipowners who anticipated receiving advantageous loans from Chinese banks by agreeing to utilize Chinese shipyards supported the contentious decision to privatize Piraeus' most profitable industry (China Daily 2016). Numerous terms in the agreement allowed COSCO to gain a dominant position in the market. In 2016, COSCO and the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF) agreed to the acquisition of the majority (67%) of PPA's shares, making COSCO the significant port operator. Trade unions and dockworkers, who have historically played a symbolic role in the Greek labor movement, have fiercely opposed the contract. Both Greek and Chinese authorities said that converting the port into a crucial BRI center is a win-win deal that would deliver employment and prosperity in response to the rising societal conflict (China Daily 2016). China's President declared in July 2017 that Piraeus would become the largest container trans-shipment harbor in the Mediterranean, a symbol of sea-land transportation, a hub for global logistics, and a crucial BRI pivot.

One example of local opposition to the expansion of Chinese investments in the form of BRI projects is in the port of Piraeus. According to Neilson (2019, pp.13-14), despite the Chinese government's rhetoric of cooperation and the Greek government's assurances that the deal would be advantageous, empirical data reveals that COSCO's concession has facilitated processes of accumulation, dispossession, and exploitation that go far beyond the typical dynamics of terminal privatization, aggravating inequality and labor precarity. It is noteworthy that there was no mention of employees in the concession deal and that at least 500 full-time employees lost their jobs when COSCO bought the two Piers due to the implementation of an early retirement program (Frantzeskaki 2016). These issues should be exacerbated by the environmental impacts of COSCO's operations, which include a significant rise in atmospheric and noise pollution that disproportionately affects the surrounding neighborhoods and forces, residents of particular areas, to put up with 24-hour exposure to light and noise pollution. Local residents' groups and grassroots organizations fiercely opposed the projects, and they successfully persuaded the Piraeus municipality to request a building halt until the evaluation was authorized in April 2020. Piraeus is known as one of Athens' most exemplary areas where socioeconomic and spatial inequality is connected to environmental imbalance (Apostolopoulou 2021, pp.11-12).

3.3 Sri Lanka- Colombo Port City

One of Sri Lanka's most contentious development initiatives, Colombo Port city faced local opposition from the beginning. The government and China Harbour Engineering Company, a unit of the state-owned China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), the company in charge of the construction, signed an agreement for this project. It was agreed that the government would refrain from starting competing for infrastructure projects within a 20-kilometer radius around the port. CCCC was offered the choice to select the contractor, and despite the requirements for public procurement projects, there was no request for competitive

bids (Gunawansa 2018, pp.98-99). The Colombo International Financial City (CIFC) is thought to have places like hotels, shopping centers, upscale apartments, beachfront homes, office buildings, casinos, embassies, and skyscrapers. The city is supposed to have public space, but as of now, it is unclear who will be in charge of it or have access to it, and given how exclusive the development is, there are worries that access would be severely restricted (Apostolopoulou 2021, p.12). Numerous grassroots organizations, students, trade unionists, urban activists, fishing villages, and environmentalists opposed these projects. The opposition focused on the environmental and social effects of the new port city, claiming that sand mining would destroy Colombo's coastline, coral reefs, and areas used to breed fish, endangering the lives of those who depend on fishing and threatening the erosion and flooding of a region. Inadequate compensation for lost income and housing losses, land grabbing and dispossession, and criticism of the project's exclusivity, which was in favor of elites, were among the issues that drew attention (Apostolopoulou 2021, p.13).

Public protests spread as a result of the terrible consequences of this project. The project was suspended amid growing opposition, but in March 2016, the government allowed construction to proceed in light of national debt, a sizable portion of which was due to China (Gunawansa 2018, p.102). Project restarting was not without challenges. Communities of fishermen and a group of women who went on strike to protest the loss of their homes and means of livelihood held a protest with significant police presence (Colombage 2016). Even though there were a lot of protests, it hasn't yet been sufficient given the project's scope and effects. The BRI's announcement was crucial because it was used to persuade local stakeholders of the advantages of contentious, large-scale BRI-related projects financed with Chinese funding. In response to public outrage, the dredgers were finally moved farther offshore, and the CCCC pledged to donate \$500 million to the program to maintain fishermen's income. Protesters continue to claim that the project would ruin Colombo and cause large migrations (Apostolopoulou 2021, p.14).

The effects of the construction of large-scale projects in the form of BRI projects can be considered as transformation in the city and the daily life of citizens. The reconstruction of the Dockland area caused the removal of low-income residents from the city center and the lack of access to urban public spaces. The construction of the Piraeus port project has aggravated the inequality and instability of the labor force and increased environmental pollution. Additionally, the project construction in Colombo Port City led to an increase in urban migration, environmental pollution, and a lack of access for inhabitants to some public urban places. According to these three cases, I intend to review the urban transformation in Behshahr and focus on the daily life of the citizens. These three cases highlighted the impacts of a project's development inside the boundaries of these cities. In contrast, I concentrate on the consequences of constructing the Amirabad port, located near Behshahr city. My purpose is to consider how this project's construction, as an external, non-urban factor, affects inhabitants' urban life.

4. Research design and methodology

I will describe my thesis's methodology and research design in this chapter. Following the purpose of this research, I have selected to use both qualitative and quantitative methods for my research. According to Michael J. Albers (2017, p.8), both quantitative and qualitative methods have strengths and weaknesses, and robust research requires both. Research methodology books recommend doing qualitative research to obtain a sense of the overall picture and then quantitative analysis to look more closely at the details. I plan to use this process in my thesis.

It is worth noting that I used the library study method to answer the first research question and to answer the second research question, I used both quantitative and qualitative methods. To investigate the connection between planetary urbanization theory and large-scale projects such as BRI, I studied several sources on this theory and BRI projects. Also, using the semi-structured interview method, I collected the views of some citizens of Behshahr about the effects of the construction of the Amirabad port. Then, to review more details about the impact of the structure of this project on the urban changes in Behshahr, I used quantitative methods such as map production. Also, using GIS analysis, I analyzed the citizens' access to public services to investigate the impact of the construction of this project on the daily life of Behshahr citizens.

4.1 Philosophy of science

Being transparent about the philosophy of science is crucial for me since it will influence how I address the relevant problems. This thesis draws inspiration from critical realism for its epistemological and ontological approach. As a critical realist, I consider that reality exists irrespective of our knowledge. However, the critical realist acknowledges the world should be accessed considering different types of concepts or theories in the process. I find critical realism appealing for several reasons, one of which is that the view of knowledge is fallible (Sayer, 2000).

Even though there are several explanations for the same phenomenon, this does not always mean that all of them are incorrect because, in my opinion, there is no absolute truth. I will thus consider various viewpoints regarding the urbanization phenomenon. It enables me to explain and pursue an investigation of the current social world as well as understand various aspects of reality (Fletcher, 2017). I think it's vital to talk about ontology in more detail, which could affect my methodology. I would contend that reality is divided into several levels, with critical realism providing a more in-depth ontological analysis. These three subcategories—"the empirical," "the real," and "the actual"—make up this profound ontology. Events, mechanisms, and structures interplay in this view of reality, where the real is defined as the phenomena that exist, such as climate change (Sayer, 2000:10-12). In order to demonstrate the complexity of reality, where the "real" is sometimes difficult to recognize or interpret, critical realism distinguishes between these three aspects of reality. According to Sayer (*ibid*), this level has many power structures that may become visible or invisible. In contrast to the empirical level -which comprises experiences that we can observe in some way- this second

level, more commonly referred to as the actual, includes different events, some of which may be perceived as abstract yet still exist (ibid). A concrete example could help the reader better understand this ontological approach.

I believe that the capitalist mode of production or the accumulation of capital is considered as the sphere of the so-called "real," which includes both events and mechanisms. As a result, several events—like planetary urbanization—could manifest at the actual level, and at the empirical level, we would see increasing housing costs due to the construction of large-scale projects. Even if we did not observe an increase in housing prices, the capitalist mode of production would still continue to exist since it takes multiple forms depending on the circumstances. This brief illustration demonstrates how my philosophy of science enables me to see and interact with some capitalist structures.

The philosophy of science impacts the research design and the whole project structure. The main principle of the research project is the belief that there is no single explanation that can be employed to explain reality. This belief justifies the overall approach to move toward a critical understanding of planetary urbanization and implies an analysis that tackles. My view of reality allows me to move between different levels of theoretical abstraction throughout my thesis. I have ambitions to move from an abstract level, where I analyze urbanization, to a more concrete level, where I connect this theoretical analysis to the local context of Behshahr city.

4.2 Case study

As described in section 1.2, I will attempt to move from theoretical abstractions to an empirical level and I will operationalize it by using the case study approach. Clark (et. al 2021) emphasize the importance of describing the unit of analysis and discussing the case selection in-depth. I have chosen to investigate the urban transformation in the housing sector and infrastructure development of Behshahr which is located in the north of Iran (see figure 4). This city was chosen based on the fact that it is one of the cities affected by the implementation of the BRI projects in Iran. Clark, et al. (ibid:60) discuss different types of case studies, where I would categorize the Behshahr case as an ‘exemplifying’ case. I would argue that it corresponds well with the aim of my research and could provide valuable insights into the questions of urbanization and housing, even if the case is not representative of all cities that are affected by BRI projects. This research aims to explore planetary urbanization within an Iranian context, therefore Behshahr was the best option. Thus, by this approach, I will be able to shed light on details in my research and pursue in-depth explanations (Denscombe, 2010:53-56). Choosing a single case study allows me to delve into the resident's view on the effects of the BRI project and provide a deeper understanding of the situation in Behshahr, which would be more difficult with the use of multiple case studies (Ibid). Flyvbjerg (2011:310-315) highlights the benefits of case studies, where he notes that the researcher could obtain a deeper understanding by, for example, linking different ideas. For this reason, I believe that the case study approach is well connected to my philosophy of science (see section 1.2). It would be interesting to analyze multiple cases and compare, for example, the implementation of BRI projects in the south part of Iran, such as Bandar Abbas, or neighboring countries. However, the limited time frame did not allow me to dive deeper into multiple cases or conduct any sort of comparative analysis.

It is also worth noting the drawbacks and restrictions of this method. The generalizability of qualitative case studies is an issue of continuous debate in academia (ibid). However, I chose Behshahr as a case study after studying three examples of past studies on the effects of BRI on the cities of Colombo, Athens, and London. As I previously mentioned, the BRI projects constructed inside these cities affected the urbanization process and had other serious effects. I chose Behshahr as a case study to assess how the urbanization process transformed due to the construction of large-scale projects like BRI beyond the city borders. I should note that this city is where I was born. Therefore, to reduce how this matter might affect the research process, I tried to keep a neutral viewpoint during the whole research process and avoid making judgments about the results. I am aware that Behshahr is a small city with a restricted area however, the implementation of BRI project has had a significant impact on the landscape of this urban area (and the surrounding non-urban areas). Additionally, the case will shed light on how global-level initiatives affected residents' everyday lives.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews

One of the methods I used to answer the second research question was semi-structured interviews with Behshahr's inhabitants and an urban planner focused on the housing sector. These interviews could be used as a powerful tool in my research as it gives me insights into the citizen's view on the BRI project that would otherwise be difficult to obtain (Denscombe, 2010). I chose to use semi-structured interviews as opposed to unstructured or structured interviews, mainly due to the flexibility of semi-structured interviews as it allows the interviewees to freely express their opinions. It is far more difficult to acquire this kind of information with the survey or a questionnaire, where the interviewees cannot expand upon their ideas which is necessary when dealing with the complex issue (ibid). By using interviews, I will also be able to raise follow-up questions that fall outside of my prepared interview guide that could be of interest. However, it is also significant to be aware of the interview effect and how it affects what answers I will receive. I tried to reduce this interview effect by introducing myself as a student and being neutral when receiving interviewees' comments (ibid:178). The interviews were conducted via Zoom, an application suitable for voice calls and video conferencing. I believe that the online environment could impacted my research, however, Archibald (et, al. 2022) identifies several benefits of using Zoom for qualitative studies, including convenience and engagement with the researcher. In conclusion, the benefits of using Zoom as an interviewing tool during the pandemic, such as convenience, outweigh the potential drawbacks that may include any technical difficulties in setting up the interviews.

Since Behshahr is where I was born and I spent over 20 years, I am familiar with many residents and have access to the contact information of interviewees. My ability to conduct the interviews in Persian as a native speaker allowed me to complete this research. I translated the interviews into English after I had evaluated them in Persian. It was a process of going back and forth between languages to ensure nothing was lost in translation. It was a somewhat challenging process where some of key terms and concepts were difficult to translate properly into Persian without losing the initial meaning.

I should mention that all of the interviewees were familiar with the BRI project (Amirabad port), and some of their relatives are working there. As I intended to assess their

satisfaction before and after this project's construction, citizens were the best candidates for these interviews. After getting all the information, I conducted six semi-structured interviews that lasted around 25-35 minutes each. One of these interviewees is an urban planner who is an expert in the housing sector, and the other five are Behshahr's citizens who sold their old houses after the construction of this project and moved to new neighborhoods. Since the purpose of the research was to analyze, I was interested in talking to a wide range of different city dwellers. Due to ethical reasons, I could not mention their exact name or describe the interviewees in more detail, therefore, I have decided to use the broad categories of 'housing expert' and 'citizens' for the interviewees (see appendix 3).

As previously mentioned, I created an interview guide based on my theoretical framework that guided all interviews (see appendix 2). The interview questions were designed aimed to analyze the satisfaction of citizens. I conducted the questionnaire to assess the comfort level of the inhabitants both before and after the Amir Abad port project was built nearby the city of Behshahr. I prepared a table (see table 4.1) to illustrate how I operationalized my theoretical framework and translated the theoretical concepts into interview questions. My goal was to analyze how the city dwellers think about the project and how it affected their everyday lives -focusing on the housing sector.

Table 4.1. Operationalization the theory framework to interview questions.

Themes from the theoretical framework	Examples of interview questions
Planetary urbanization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Has the construction of the port project affected the development of Behshahr city? If so, in what way? -What are the opportunities and threats of the construction of the port project in your opinion? -What are the disadvantages and advantages of the expansion and development of Behshahr city?
Changing the everyday lives of citizens (with focus on housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Considering criteria such as privacy, safety, security, health, and belonging, what do you think about your new home? -Which of these items is better in your new home than your old one? - Explain about accessibility to public services such as education, health, sports facilities, public transportation and shopping centers.

Source: Author.

Schreier (2014, pp. 175–180) described the coding frame where the researcher generated categories or codes from both the data and the theoretical framework. I used this approach for analyzing the semi-structured interviews and constructed two primary categories with several subcategories. The two main groups derive from the theory section: planetary urbanization theory and citizens' everyday lives (see table 4.1). As a researcher, I should follow

some steps, including defining and structuring my codes to make the process easier, according to Schreier (ibid). I did this by organizing all the categories, defining them, and describing how they were classified in a so-called coding guidebook (see appendix 1). I revised the coding guide with additional sub-categories derived from the interview transcriptions as I went through the data from the semi-structured interviews. Throughout the research process, I review the coding guidebook and interview data to make sure that all the significant material was included.

4.4 GIS analyses

In this research, I also used a quantitative method to show the transformations created after the Amirabad port construction in Behshahr city. In this method, I used ArcMap software to produce several maps. According to Flowerdew and Martin (2005), geographic information systems (GIS) should consider as a toolkit for conducting research rather than a methodology per se. I created two groups of maps based on the Behshahr master plan, the first group focusing on the first research question and the second group focusing on the second research question. The first group of maps is to show the expansion of Behshahr from 2011 through 2021 (after the construction of Amirabad port). These maps analyze the city's landscape, illustrating the growth in construction demand over this period. In addition, I generated a map using the "Hot Spot" tool that displays the spread of residential building construction throughout the ten years after the construction of this large-scale project near Behshahr.

Another group of maps produced using ArcMap software included the access of residential buildings to public services such as educational, health, shopping centers, and sports facilities. I used the "network analysis" method to analyze the accessibility of different public services. This method is so accurate and close to reality, and it can be defined as follows: The area encompasses all the roadways that go to one or more specified locations. For example, the service level of 1000 meters for a specific point includes all the streets that are less than or equal to this number from that point and can reach that user by moving 1000 meters or less (Oh and Geong, 2007).

5. Case study

In this section, I'll provide a summary of Iran and China's political and economic ties. Next, I'll talk about the Amirabad port construction, which is close to Behshahr.

5.1 Iran-China relations in the form of BRI

President Xi proposed the concept of a New Silk Road Economic Belt during his official visit to Central Asian countries in September 2013, which resulted in the creation of the BRI initiative. According to the Chinese president, the new initiative is as follows: "To forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region, we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an economic belt along the Silk Road. This will be a great undertaking benefitting the people of all countries along the route" (Osiewicz, 2018, p. 222). One Belt One Road was the name of Xi's program (OBOR). Later, it adopted the title Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This program is a crucial component of China's grand strategy, which will have a significant impact on the international system and Chinese foreign policy. It is worth remembering that the BRI will enable China to produce more, sell more, and transport goods more quickly, facilitating trade and building new infrastructure. This is just one of the five main elements. The other four are regional political collaboration; unhindered commerce, particularly the elimination of trade barriers; integration of financial institutions and markets; and interchange of people and expertise (Buxbaum, 2018). Also, the BRI development aimed at increasing China's regional and international influence and the US's hegemonic decline. China has deep historical ties with Iran, and in recent years, Iran has figured into China's long-range plans for economic development and global political influence. A crucial basis for China-Iran relations is China's need for a long-term energy resource for its growing economy. China has emerged as a significant trading partner, assisting in economic growth, supplying weapons, and playing a vital role in Iran's nuclear development. Finally, China has helped to buffer international pressure on Iran through diplomatic efforts. BRI initiative involves trade route development around and through Iran, leading some observers to suggest that conflict between the US and Iran, in the long run, benefits China's economic and political aspirations (Kuznar, 2019, P.4). The political and economic aspects of Iran-China ties are discussed in this section.

5.1.1 Political aspects

Iran which is located in the Middle East, is a significant component of the new Chinese initiative. According to Scobell (Scobell, 2017, p.9), China is now more focused on the area than ever before. Beijing today appears to view the Middle East as a fragile region and an extension of China's periphery. Moreover, after being essentially agnostic for many years, China has started to worry about the stability of the regional governments. The Middle Eastern and North African areas have experienced considerable changes due to the Arab Spring, a political and social transformation in the Arab world that began in 2010. Moreover, Iran's negotiating skills have improved since 2011, which can be critical from the Chinese perspective during future BRI-related conversations. From the viewpoint of Iran, active involvement in the

BRI can only strengthen its position in the area. On the other hand, the BRI may assist in overcoming some of the Middle East's gaps and addressing some issues. Also, Osiewicz (2018, p. 222) believes that the People's Republic of China and Iran have positive and constructive ties. Iranians and Chinese both view the American presence in Asia as a threat to their national security. In order to reduce the influence of the United States in the Middle East, Central Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia, the PRC and Iran engage in various operations. Additionally, China exports weapons to Iran, and there are some security situations where the two nations work together.

5.1.2 Economic aspects

In recent years, trade between China and Iran has risen dramatically. Iran and China traded goods worth more than USD 50 billion in 2016. Additionally, by 2026, the present Iranian administration wants to double its commerce with China to 600 billion USD (Osiewicz, 2018, p. 227). According to John W. Garver, Iran "plays an increasingly crucial role in giving western China access to the oceanic highway of the global economy, along with Pakistan. Here, strategic and economic factors converge (Garver, 2011, p.288). Due to this, it would be hard to imagine the BRI project succeeding without significant Iranian participation, especially from a geopolitical viewpoint. The first direct train from China to Iran arrived in February 2016, the first notable development under the BRI framework. This cargo train completed the entire route from Zhejiang to Tehran. It took around 14 days, 30 days less than the sea journey. Putz (2016) claims that Iran wants to become a regional rail hub so that Chinese trains may go through its borders to reach Europe. Tehran may potentially connect to the trans-Caspian transit route that Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine are promoting as an alternative route to Europe.

5.2 Situation of case study

Iran is one of China's preferred destinations for strengthening regional and transregional economic and political relations. Amirabad Port, one of the largest ports in northern Iran, was built to expand ties with West Asia as part of the BRI project. The Behshahrs' urbanization process and surrounding infrastructure development were severely affected when the construction of this port began in 2006 (Amirabad port Website, 2021). Chinese companies also have been investing in the Railway route -which connects the north to the south of Iran- and new roads to access this port to provide better services and facilitate the transfer of goods to other places.

Behshahr is a city in the northern Iranian province of Mazandaran, close to the Caspian Sea. The distance between this city and the port of Amirabad is around 15 kilometers. This port locates in Iran's main transportation corridor from north to south. According to the comprehensive plan studies in 2021, this city's area is about 1211 hectares, and the latest Iran Statistics Center census in 2021 reported that its population was about 90000. It should note that this city had around 72000 residents as of 2011, demonstrating that the population growth rate had an incredible rise during this period (the growth rate of these ten years was about 1.9.) During these ten years, this growth rate was the highest in the Mazandaran province. This increase in the population growth rate was the result of immigrants entering this city. Behshahr's boundaries physically expanded due to the influx of new immigrants, which

increased the amount of new construction. These buildings include a significant expansion of the residential area in the city periphery and the commercial development in the city's core. The former group consisted of city dwellers who were forced to move to construct new homes. With the cooperation of Chinese companies, the port's construction started in 2006 and was completed in 2011. This port developed as part of the BRI initiatives aiming to transit goods to surrounding countries and development of transportation infrastructure to access international markets. The following maps show the location of Behshahr city and Amirabad port. Iran locates in the third corridor out of the six economic corridors of BRI, aiming to establish a connection between China and Central and West Asia. Amirabad Port was constructed in this direction with links to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, as its primary objective.



Figure 5.1. The Location of Amirabad port and Behshahr city. Source: Google maps, 2022.
Source: Author.

6. Analysis and discussion

In this section, I will go through the analysis based on my research questions and the two significant themes that emerged from the theory section (see section 4.3). In the first section, I will analyze how BRI projects relate to planetary urbanization theory. My goal is to connect the theoretical analysis with the empirical case. To do this, I will carefully evaluate how Behshahr city transformed after the Amirabad port construction. Also, I will present the results from the interviews throughout the second part of the analysis. In addition, I'll discuss how this initiative affected the inhabitants of Behshahr's everyday life according to the findings of the GIS analysis.

6.1 The relationship between planetary urbanization and BRI project

6.1.1 Planetary urbanization

Planetary urbanization has its roots in Henri Lefebvre's ideas, whose theories were developed by Neil Brenner. Henri Lefebvre uses the "implosion-explosion" to highlight the links between capitalist forms of agglomeration and more extensive transformations of territory, landscape, and environment, to describe the generalization of capitalist urbanization. This notion describes the production and ongoing transformation of an industrialized urban fabric in which agglomeration centers and their operational landscapes are intertwined in transformative ways while co-articulating in a global capitalist system. The implosion-explosion notion describes the broad constellation of historical-geographical transformations that would herald the beginning of global-scale urbanization. Additionally, Lefebvre claims that when this "critical point" is reached, complete urbanization will have become a fundamental determinant of planetary social and environmental relations, imposing new constraints upon the use and transformation of the worldwide built environment, unleashing potential inequalities, conflicts, and dangers, but also opening up new possibilities for democratic appropriation and self-management of space at all scales. In one of his final publications from the late 1980s, he claimed that the critical point of complete urbanization had already been crossed and that urban planetarization was taking place.

On the other hand, planetary urbanization means that even spaces that lie well beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries have become integral parts of the worldwide urban fabric. In other words, the concept of urban should be radically reconfigured in a time when the idea of the non-urban looks more to be an ideological projection derived from a long-dissolved.

In my perspective, the planetary urbanization aims to offer a new epistemology for the urban question. I believe that the phrase "planetary urbanization" does not indicate that the world is becoming more homogenized or that every region of the world is urbanizing in the same way. It is a notion of unequal geographical development. I summarized the principles of this theory in three steps:

- 1- The urban is not a unit but a process of transformation.

- 2- This process unfolds in various sites, territories, and landscapes. There is no singular 'urban' morphology.
- 3- The urban/non-urban divide is superseded, and there is no 'outside' to the urban condition.

I believe that this theory gives a realistic perspective on the city and urbanization and focuses on economic and political relations (external forces) in the urbanization process. However, the city and urban transformations are not simply affected by these components. Other key elements that impacted the urbanization process were neglected due to the scientists' intense focus on these variables. Although other factors are also significant in urban developments, cultural and social aspects are the most important ones that missed in this theory.

6.1.2 BRI project

The BRI roots can be found in the economic characteristics of China, particularly the importance of infrastructure to the export-focused industrialization model. By promoting spatial restructuring and expansion to indicate that the capital's life process needs constant mobility, the BRI was developed to promote economic growth. This initiative gradually came to stand for the near-global hegemony of infrastructure-led growth by acting as a significant spatial fix to capital's global overaccumulation crisis. Urban expansion was vital to the BRI since it absorbs undervalued surpluses. These involve a combination of surplus funds seeking productive investment, surplus commodities seeking consumers, and surplus labor for productive employment. China made significant investments in BRI projects to absorb capital surpluses and redirect its domestic overcapacity and capital for infrastructure and urban development. The strategy made it easier to export goods to aid in the construction of infrastructure overseas. In conclusion, cities are essential to achieving the BRI's primary goal of reterritorialization through enhanced connectivity.

I believe that the BRI project is the result of changing political-economic relationships and the processes of global capital accumulation, notably a startling manifestation of China's rising hegemony and its efforts to make infrastructure a defining feature of its "inclusive" globalization model. In my opinion, BRI initiatives are promoting the creation of new bordering areas and creating "structural holes" inside the fabric of national territory. They are noticeable expressions of the aggressive prioritization of private profits, corporate interests, and multinational, cross-scale growth coalitions over the infrastructures of social reproduction. Also, I believe that this infrastructure-led development is the emergence of a new stage of revanchist and authoritarian urban development that intensifies social segregation, territorial stigmatization, and geographical fragmentation. This is demonstrated by the rise in housing precarity and inequality and the construction of new transportation facilities intended to support international business, commercial, and real estate ventures rather than urban residents. The BRI project leads to the emergence of new urban formations that exemplify the pivotal role of global infrastructure as a driver of contemporary urban transformation and the global prevalence of an urban-oriented regime of capital accumulation.

6.1.3 BRI project and planetary urbanization

Based on the first research question, I will analyze how the planetary urbanization's principles relate to the construction of the BRI project in this part. For this purpose, I referenced Henri Lefebvre, Neil Brenner, and other authors' summaries in the previous parts. On the other hand, I reviewed the BRI projects' objectives.

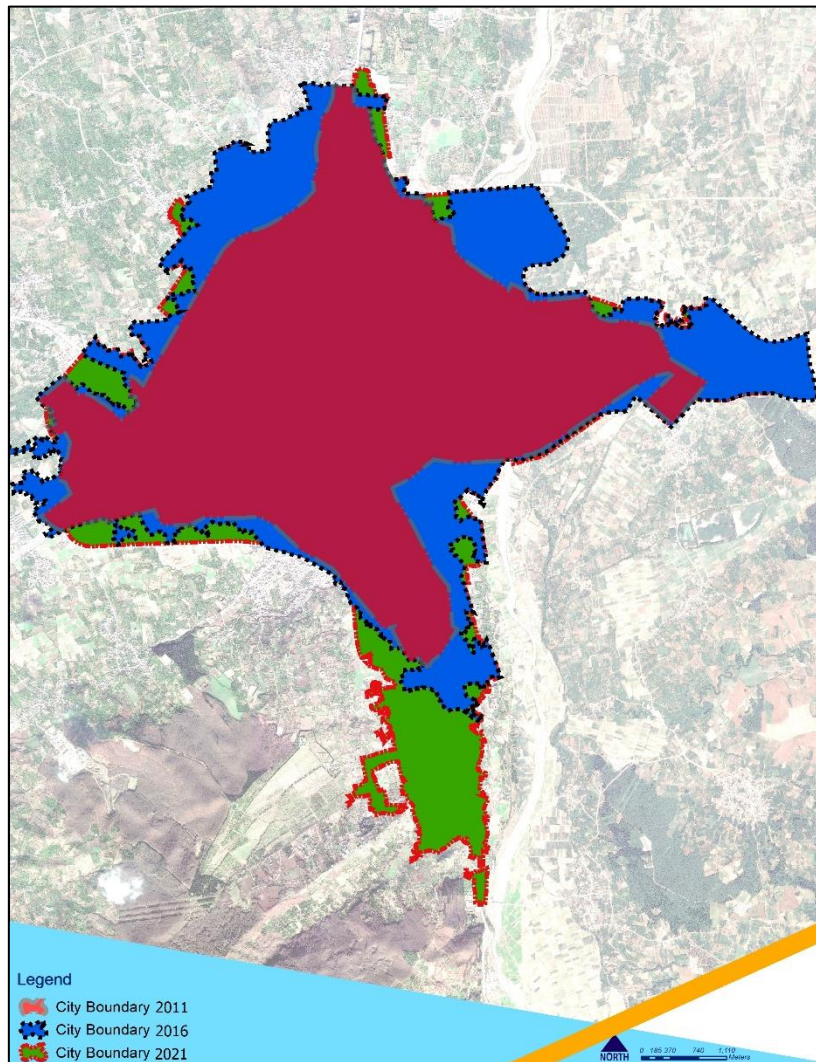
In my view, the following summarizes the theory of planetary urbanization: The process of urban transformation varies around the globe and affects both urban and non-urban areas. This process is not limited to the city boundaries; non-urban areas affected the urban areas and vice versa. The main issue in this theory is the impact of economic and political power, which can affect the urbanization process in different scales.

On the other hand, I believe that BRI projects are the consequence of shifting political-economic ties and the processes of global capital accumulation, particularly the China's emerging hegemony and its efforts to make infrastructure a feature of its "inclusive" globalization model. Also, BRI projects are enabling the making of new bordered territories generating structural holes inside the tissue of national sovereign territory. These interpretations of the BRI projects rely on two main themes that are consistent with the principles of the planetary urbanization theory. The first is the influence of political and economic relations on the process of urban transformations. The construction of BRI projects, which is a result of the political and economic power of the Chinese government, has a significant impact on the urbanization process of the destinations of these projects. Also, the concept of implosion-explosion -proposed in planetary urbanization- can be seen in the BRI destinations. The increase in economic activities in the destination cities of these projects will result in the concentration of the population and the expansion of the urbanization process, and the boundaries of the city will expand in its surrounding areas, thus the city and the non-city will be integrate. This transformation process indicates that the city is not an independent unit but a process of transformation.

6.1.4 BRI project and Behshahr's urban transformation process

As stated in the previous section, the goals of the BRI projects are in line with the principles of the planetary urbanization theory. The theoretical principles will be seen in this case study while taking into account the transformation that Behshahr city experienced following the establishment of this port. According to data from the Behshahr city master plan, approved in 2021, the urban area has experienced unprecedented growth in the ten years after the construction of the Amirabad port. The boundary of Behshahr city has nearly doubled during the past ten years, as seen on the map below. The red area represents the city area at the beginning of the establishment of Amirabad port (2011), and the green boundary indicates the city area ten years after the port's establishment in 2021. Since the construction of the Amirabad port, both the urban and non-urban parts of Behshahr city have expanded, and the formerly non-urban regions are integrated into the city boundaries. As a result, Behshahr experienced the effect of the Chinese government's economic and political policies on a local scale. So, Behshahr is not considered a distinct unit with bounded borders following the planetary

urbanization principles. Furthermore, the external factors at the regional, national, and even transnational levels transformed the urbanization process of this city.

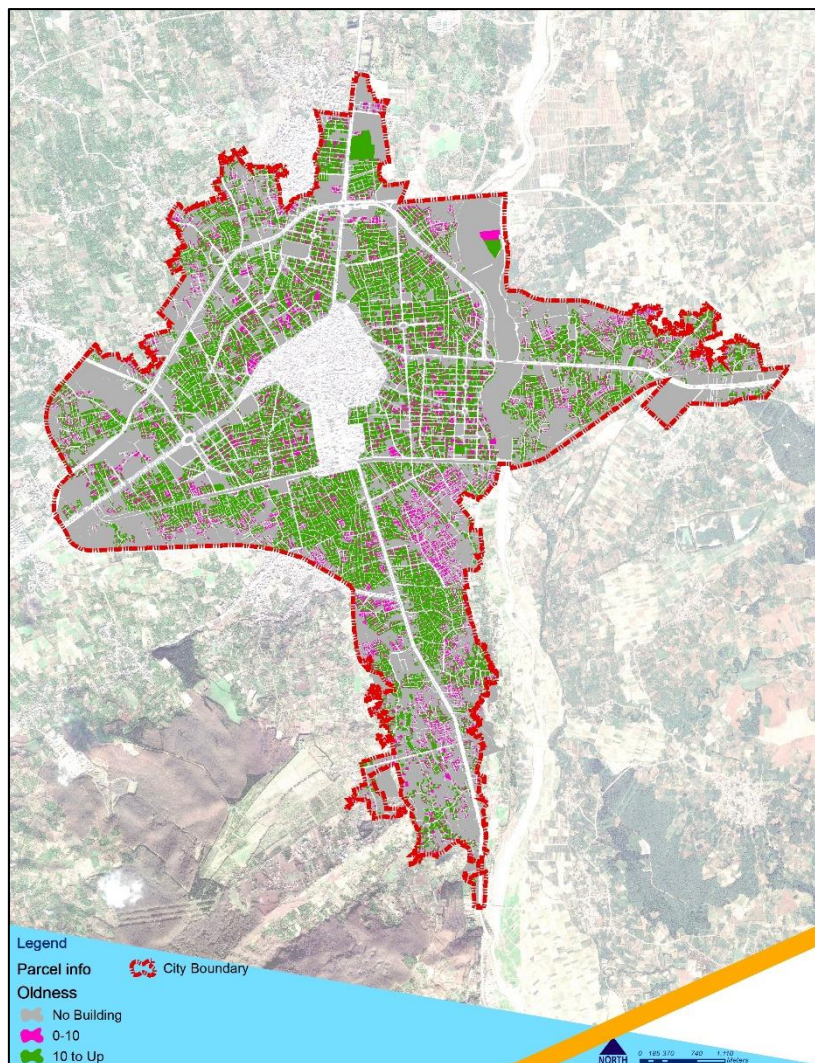


Map 6.1. Transformation process of Behshahr boundary from 2011 to 2021.

Source: The Behshahr city master plan, 2021. Prepared by author 2022.

The landscape of this city and its surroundings has changed significantly due to the expansion of Chinese companies' investment in Amirabad port and the influx of domestic and foreign capital. Investor firms began constructing both commercial and official buildings in the city center. Conversely, native habitants who live in the core area sold their homes to these companies to commence the construction of residential structures beyond the city's borders, sometimes illegally. According to the Master plan data for 2021, I prepared the following map, which illustrates the lifespan of residential buildings in the Behshahr. I created this map to show the residential development tendency throughout the ten years between 2011 and 2021 (after the construction of Amirabad port). I prepared the following map using the output from the 'symbology' tool of ArcGIS. I selected two-time periods that included buildings with a lifespan of between 0 and 10 years and more than ten years. The concentration of red dots

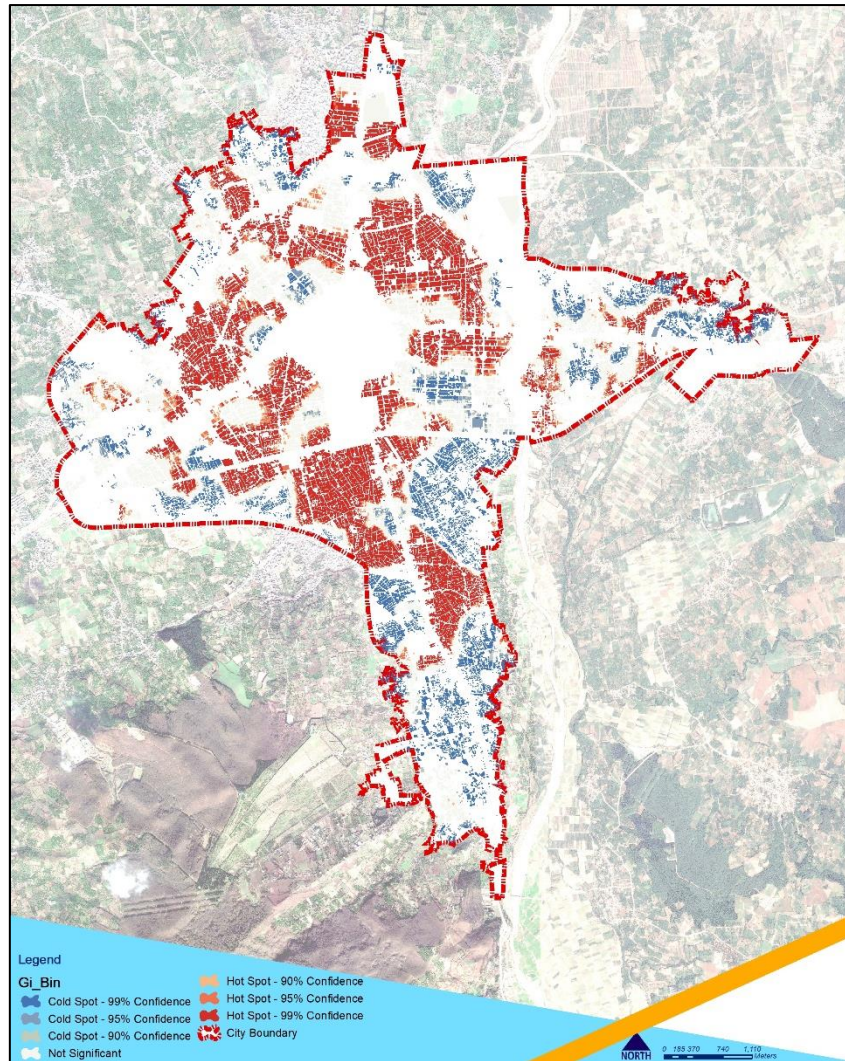
denotes recent home construction in peripheral areas. Also, buildings with a lifespan of more than ten years are represented by green. I should point out that I had no access to the information in the city center (the gray CBD).



Map 6.2. The ages of residential structures.

Source: The Behshahr city master plan, 2021. Prepared by author 2022.

I prepared another map using the 'hotspot' tool to depict the details of the construction trends over the last ten years. The blue spots on this map indicate clusters where residential construction has taken place during the past ten years. The tendency to construct in the surrounding areas during the past ten years is a significant point on this map. I should point out that this type of transformation in Behshahr's urbanization started with the construction of the Amirabad port.



Map 6.3. Clusters of residential construction areas in the last ten years of Behshahr city.

Source: The Behshahr city master plan, 2021. Prepared by author 2022.

These two maps illustrate how the BRI large-scale project has affected Behshahr's urban development (on a local scale). In these maps, the consequences of Chinese economic and political policies are clearly shown. The construction of Amirabad port led to the physical expansion of Behshahr's boundary and the increase of new buildings in this city. One of the consequences of the establishment of the BRI project close to this city is spatial segregation.

6.1.5 Citizens' view on urban development

In this section, I refer to some of the results of semi-structured interviews. To comprehend the urban development process in Behshahr, particularly the housing sector, I used the semi-structured interview method in this thesis —details of which are provided in section 4.2—. I interviewed a local Behshahr urban planner with expertise in the housing sector to better understand the residential and urban development process (the interview's question can be seen in Appendix 2). I asked this expert two questions independently to comprehend the housing condition, and the answers were crucial. In this expert's estimation, the cost of land in Behshahr has dramatically increased after the construction of the Amirabad port. He emphasized that this unprecedented rise was directly tied to the establishment of the port. Investment firms rushed to Behshahr to build the official buildings and accommodations for their employees. These companies aimed to purchase Behshahr's central region lands, which had more facilities. Due to this process, the land price increased by up to three times. However, the townspeople were eager to sell their aging buildings, most of which were of poor quality. The search by locals for shelter led to the next phase of Behshahr's urban transformation. After selling their houses to the newcomer investors, the only area locals could find a place to live was on the city outskirts. Native inhabitants of Behshahr were forced to start building residential buildings with fewer areas and amenities in the surrounding areas of the city due to the rising trend in land prices. Based on his field observations, he added that "Behshahr residents now have a greater demand to construct residential units with smaller floor plans than 60 square meters."

The semi-structured interview findings were highly significant. As stated in the methodology section, I conducted some semi-structured interviews to get comments from several residents on the urban development of Behshahr following the establishment of the Amirabad port. All of the respondents stated in response to the interview questions that Behshahr city experienced unprecedented transformations during the last years, and they related these changes in urban growth to the undertaking of the port project. These participants cited modifications like the arrival of foreign investment firms, the expansion of construction projects, the rise in land prices, the lack of amenities for city dwellers, the environmental pollution caused by the establishment of industries near the port, the high price of goods compared to other cities, and the lack of access to the sea coast.

The interviewees pointed out important tips in answer to a question concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the growth of Amirabad port on the lives of the Behshahr citizens. Five of them claimed that contrary to their expectations before the construction of this project, not only were there no opportunities for the inhabitants, but the residents also face numerous threats. One of the interviewees brought up the rising unemployment in Behshahr city and believed that it was related to the port's growth. He said, "Before the port's establishment, the officials had claimed to promote youth employment, but laborers from other regions and even other countries began arriving in Behshahr to work at the port." Additionally, two respondents brought up the problem of foreigners with diverse cultures and said that occasionally these foreigners and the citizens of Behshahr have disagreements. Other concerns highlighted by the respondents include noise pollution brought on by city center construction,

the destruction of gardens and agricultural land for the construction of residential and commercial buildings, and a rise in the cost of products and services. I summarized the respondent's perspectives regarding the negative consequences of the Amirabad port on the urban growth of Behshahr in the table below.

Table 6.1 The negative consequences of the Amirabad port on the urban growth of Behshahr according to interviews.

The negative consequences of the Amirabad port on the urban growth of Behshahr	The rising unemployment
	Foreigners with diverse cultures
	Noise pollution
	The destroy of gardens and agricultural land
	The rise in the cost of products and services
	The rise in land prices
	Lack of amenities
	Environmental pollution
	The lack of access to the sea coast

Source: Author

In short, I concluded the interviews that although the local officials had made promises to the inhabitants before the start of this project, the locals had experienced a different reality once it had begun. Increased employment, the influx of foreign capital into the city, the prosperity of the local economy, and an improvement in the quality of municipal services were among the official slogans. According to the unofficial facts given by one of the interviewees who works in the port, only a few Behshahr natives are employed in this project, and their contracts are not long-term. Behshahr's local businesses are significantly stagnant, and most newly arrived residents purchase their goods and services in other cities. I should add that the increase in the price of land and welfare services was one of the noteworthy points among the interviewees. Also, based on the interpretation of one of the interviewees (an urban planner), Behshahr city is divided into two sections: the central area is where newcomers settle, and other regions for local residents. In conclusion, the spatial fragmentation and social segregation in Behshahr should be considered as the result of the construction of the Amirabad port in line with the decisions of the Chinese government regarding the development of the BRI projects. Therefore, the transformation process in Behshahr is the consequence of external factors (national and transnational).

Result: After reviewing the results of sections 6.1.4 and 6.2.1, in which I examined the Behshahr case, I should confirm that the urban development process in Behshahr was affected by the construction of the Amirabad Port project. This conclusion can be seen in the inhabitants' views, the maps of Behshahr's urban boundary expansion, and the new construction trend. In response to the first research question, I should state that the construction of BRI project in this city is related to the principles of the planetary urbanization theory that I mentioned in section 6.1.3.

6.2 Everyday life in Behshahr

Based on the findings of the interviews, I intend to analyze the second research question in this section of my thesis. As I discussed in section 2.5 about everyday life, the two components of 'The right to housing' and 'Access to public services' are crucial to evaluating the citizens' everyday life. In line with the second question of this research, my goal is to examine the components of privacy, security, health, safety, and belonging in the context of the right to access suitable housing. I will do this analysis based on the results of semi-structured interviews. Additionally, I utilize the GIS method to evaluate individuals' access to health, education, sports, public transportation, and shopping centers to look at the component of access to public services.

6.2.1 Citizens' view on everyday life

In this part, by conducting semi-structured interviews, I tried to analyze the opinion of some citizens about some criteria for housing. Table 4.1 presents the criteria I focused on in this study and comprises the following items: 'privacy, safety, security, health, everyday life, and belonging'

Almost all interviewees stated that they were not pleased with the level of 'privacy' in their houses. Some of the issues they mentioned included the small space occupied by residential homes and the proximity of building blocks. Due to the proximity of the residential units to one another, one of the respondents said that "the noise of the neighbors has damaged our privacy." Another of these respondents stated that the noise of automobiles during busy and high-traffic hours annoys them because of the use of low-quality materials in buildings, such as non-standard windows. In general, I should point out that the use of poor quality materials in building homes, the small size of residential units, the absence of adequate individual rooms, and the lack of proper distance from the street have all led to resident dissatisfaction.

Another component that I discussed in the semi-structured interviews is the 'security' factor. The respondents are generally satisfied with this component, according to the findings. I should point out that this city has a reasonably high level of security because of its small population and the strong familial and ethnic ties that most of its residents share. However, one of them made an interesting point, pointing out that "our house locates in one of Behshahr's peripheral areas, and non-native people dwell in this neighborhood, and from time to time we encounter verbal conflicts between these residents and other neighbors." My interpretation of this matter is that a significant number of immigrants have just moved to this city in search of jobs, and in some cases, they have caused cultural conflicts with the locals. Most of Behshahr's original inhabitants are Muslims who uphold their cultural and religious values. In contrast, Behshahr experiences conflict -not so much- when new immigrants from other cultures settle there.

The 'health' was the third component I talked about in my conversation with Behshahr inhabitants. Regarding this component, I received a diverse range of responses; I'll mention them below. One of the respondents claimed that their residential neighborhood is experiencing issues including "due to the municipality's neglect to timely collect rubbish, there are insects

and unpleasant odors." I should point out that this interviewee resides in one of Behshahr's outlying regions. Another respondent who lives close to the nearby river that passes through the city also brought up the issue of the waterway's lack of timely cleaning and said that it caused troubles for the residents who live there. On the other hand, other interviewees who live in Behshahr's inner neighborhoods are satisfied with the condition of their homes and neighborhoods' health. I concluded from the assessment of this component that the urban context of Behshahr splits into two sections: the internal regions of interest to the city officials (like the municipality) and the outer districts. Residents of Behshahr have expressed discontent due to this spatial and physical segregation.

The views of one of the respondents, an urban planner, caught my attention while I was looking into the 'safety' component in residential homes. He claims that "the new homes constructed in recent years are unsafe, and because Behshahr is located in an area with a high risk of earthquakes, this puts the population at irreparable risk." According to this expert, one of the significant threats to the citizens in new regions is the issue of residential home safety because of the expansion of new structures, the absence of supervision by municipal authorities on the construction of these buildings, and the use of poor materials.

Evaluating the 'belonging' component and the interviewees' responses to this subject was quite fascinating to me. I selected the respondents from among the city dwellers who recently had to move out of their old homes in the city center and into new homes. When asked if they felt a feeling of belonging to their new area and residences, all of these respondents gave a negative response. One of the interviewees gave an interesting answer and mentioned that "he still goes to his previous neighborhood for daily needs even though there is another mall near his current residential neighborhood." Since Behshahr's original inhabitants are primarily Muslims, as I already indicated, many of their significant religious events take place in mosques. I questioned the respondents about whether they perform religious ceremonies at the mosques in their former neighborhoods or in the mosques near their new homes to look into their sense of belonging. The intriguing response to this query was that all of these individuals went to the mosques in their former neighborhoods. My interpretation of this condition is that these people still have a deep connection to their former areas and see themselves as belonging there.

I also included the citizens satisfaction with access to urban public services in the interview questions. I asked these respondents what they thought about the accessibility of sports facilities, health, education, shopping centers, and public transit. I came to the general conclusion that the residents' responses to this question indicated that they were not satisfied with their access to city services. However, one of the citizens I spoke with offered an interesting interpretation, claiming that "the city officials had forgotten us." It's also crucial to note the planning expert's reaction to this query. He said that "the standard per capita rates for urban services like healthcare, education, sports facilities, and shopping centers have not been provided for the newly developed areas." I should point out that I employed GIS analysis, which I will discuss in detail in the following part, for a more thorough examination of how public services are distributed and how citizens access these services.

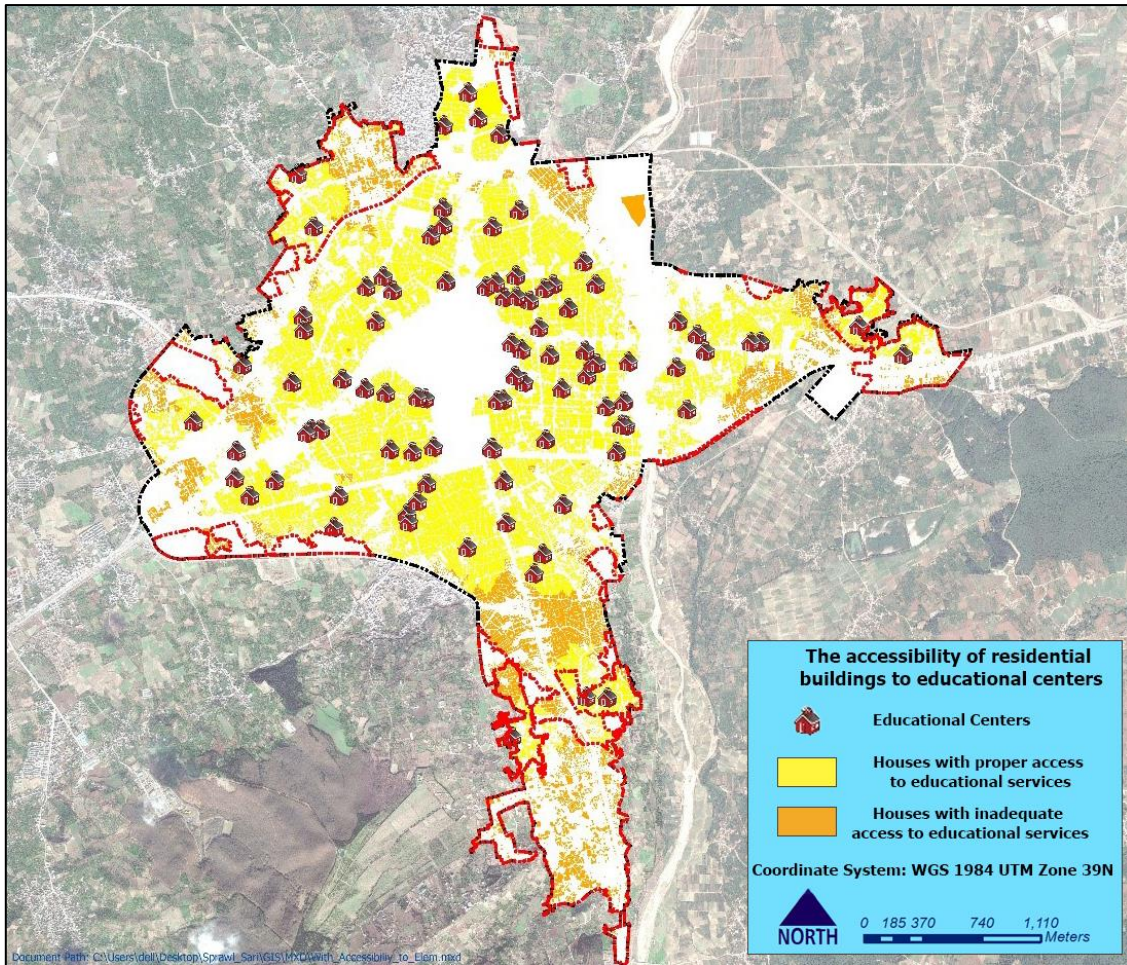
At the end of the interview, I asked the interviewees to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of their new houses and to indicate if they would prefer to move back into their previous homes. All interviewees said that although their new homes were newly constructed and occasionally included more up-to-date amenities if they had the opportunity, they would go back to their previous neighborhoods and homes.

6.2.2 Accessibility to public services

The connection between access to public services and the everyday life of citizens is mentioned in many texts, including Hattke and Kalucza (2019, p.2), who state that “citizens depend on public service in many aspects of everyday life” and emphasizes the co-dependency in citizen-state interactions. In this part of my thesis, I intend to analyze the citizen's accessibility to public services in Behshahr using the 'network analysis' method in ArcMap.

Education services

One of the most crucial measures of justice and quality of life is access to education services. Inappropriate access to these services, especially for elementary school students, is one of the most critical issues that should be addressed by local officials due to their increased vulnerability to accidents and road accidents. The threshold distance to access these services is considered 500, 750, or 1000 meters based on a study about access to child care centers published in Tokyo; I assumed this distance to be 750 meters in this research (Kawabata, 2014, p.14). The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to education services (elementary schools).



Map 6.4 The accessibility of residential houses to education services. Prepared by author 2022.

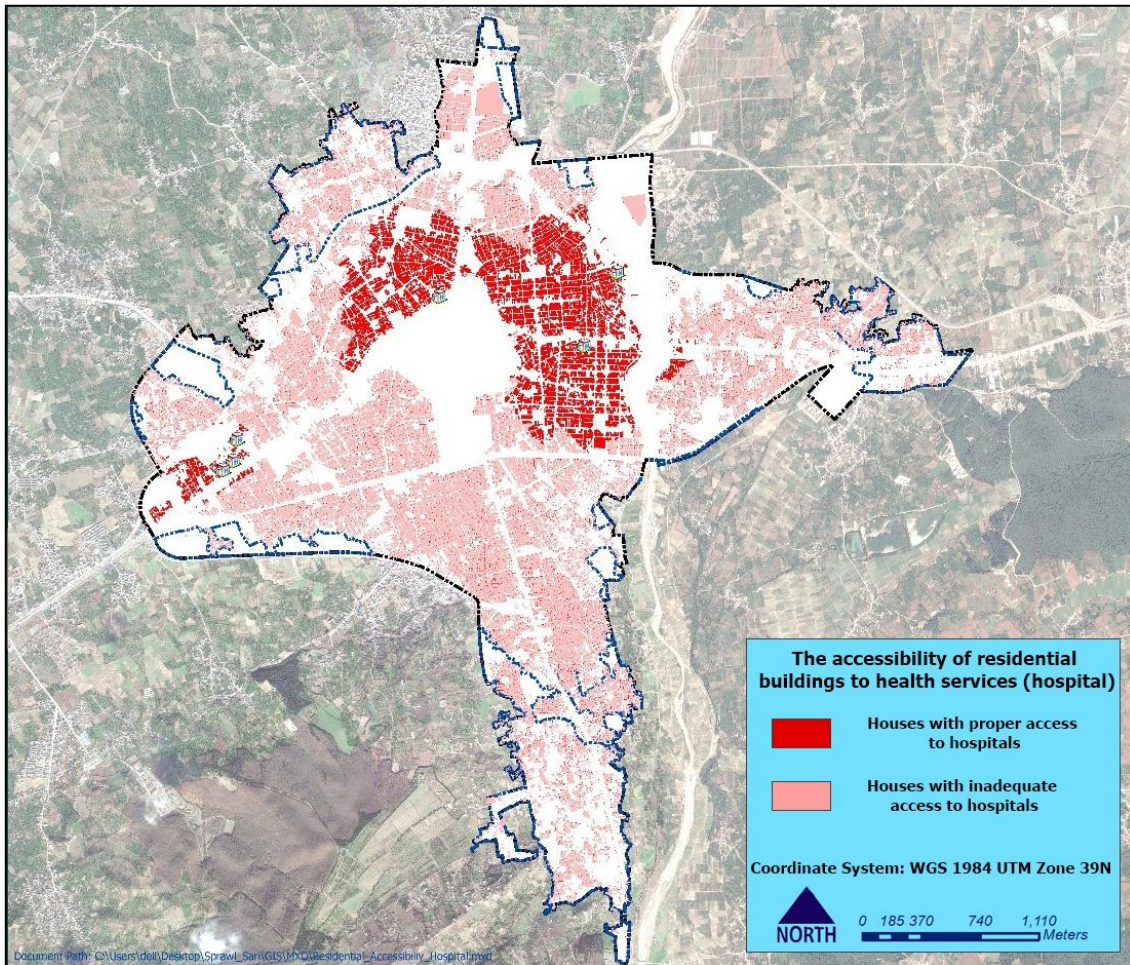
My analysis indicates that 16% of Behshahr's residential units lack proper access to educational purposes, and most of these residential units are located in the city's peripheral neighborhoods. The light-yellow areas on the map above represent residential areas with proper access to educational services, while the orange regions represent districts with inadequate access to educational services. The above map shows that several sections of Behshahr's south and north do not have good access to this service. On the other hand, these regions are among the areas that have experienced new construction during the last ten years, according to map 6.3.

Health services

Hospitals (city scale):

One of the essential components that determine the value of living in a city, neighborhood, and eventually a residential unit is the availability and quality of access to healthcare facilities. According to Iran's Ministry of Health, there are several scales on which citizens can receive medical care. In my thesis, I looked at two aspects of the scale of urban (hospital) and neighborhood (clinic). The master plan for Behshahr (2021) states that the threshold distance for access to the hospital should be no more than 1500 meters. This threshold indicates that, under normal circumstances, each resident should travel a maximum of 1500

meters to access a healthcare center (hospital). The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to medical services on a city scale (hospital).

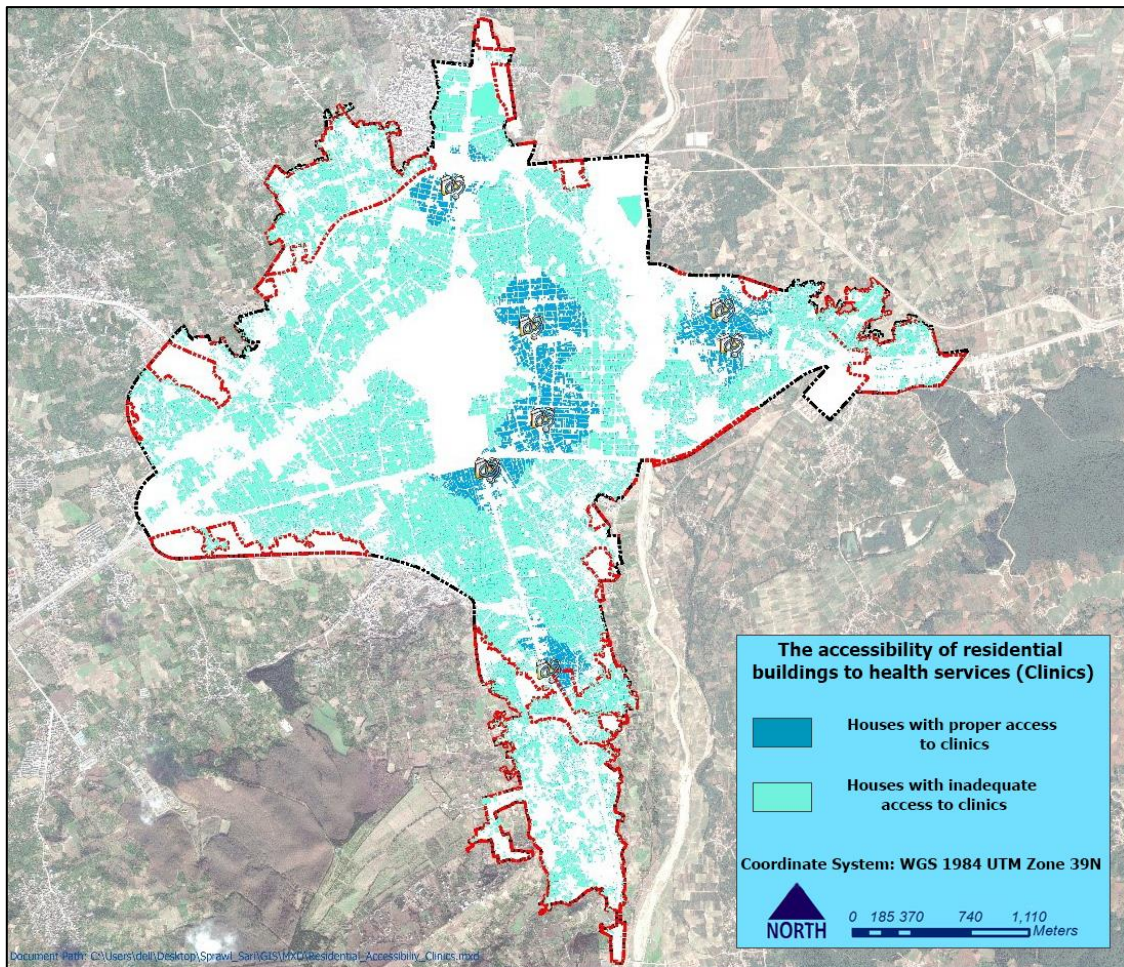


Map 6.5. The accessibility of residential houses to health services (hospitals). Prepared by author 2022.

According to the Behshahr (2021) master plan, this city has six hospitals that operate on a city-wide scale. The noteworthy point is that only 26% of residential units in Behshahr have proper access to these hospitals. The dark red areas on the map above have good access to the city's hospitals, whereas the light red regions have poor access. It should note that these hospitals are not appropriately accessible to the city's peripheral areas (new constructions over the past ten years).

Clinics (neighborhood scale):

As I previously stated, the clinic provides healthcare on a local level, according to the Iranian Ministry of Health. According to the Behshahr master plan in 2021, there are seven clinics in this city, and the recommended threshold distance to access a clinic is 750 meters. The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to medical services on a neighborhood scale (clinic).

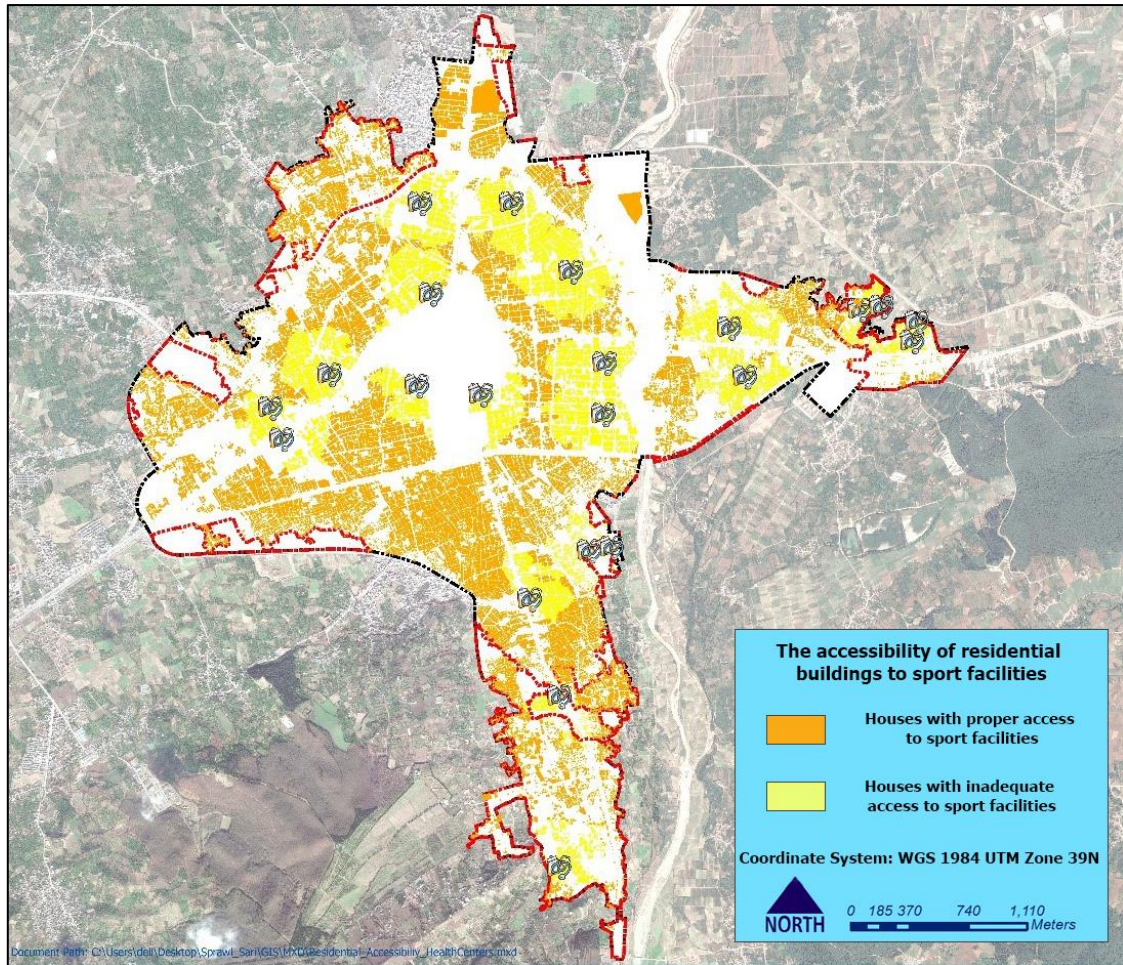


Map 6.6. The accessibility of residential houses to health services (clinic). Prepared by author 2022.

The above map shows that inhabitants who live in the dark blue regions have good access to the clinics, whereas those who reside in the light blue areas do not. I should point out that the clinic is only properly accessible to 16% of Behshahr's residential units. Also, this level of accessibility is much less in the peripheral areas of Behshahr. It is evident by comparing map 6.3 with the previous map that the parts of Behshahr that have expanded over the past ten years do not have sufficient access to healthcare facilities.

Sport facilities

One of the services that have to be considered in cities is the sports facilities. Citizens' health will be ensured by the proper development, appropriate distribution, and construction of sports facilities, and it is considered a vital requirement that these spaces be available to all citizens. Studies for the Behshahr Master Plan in 2021 indicate that the city's current per capita sports services are less than the standard average. In other words, there aren't enough sports facilities in this city. According to the Behshahr Master Plan, this city includes seven centers that offer sports services, and the recommended threshold distance is 750 meters. The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to these services.

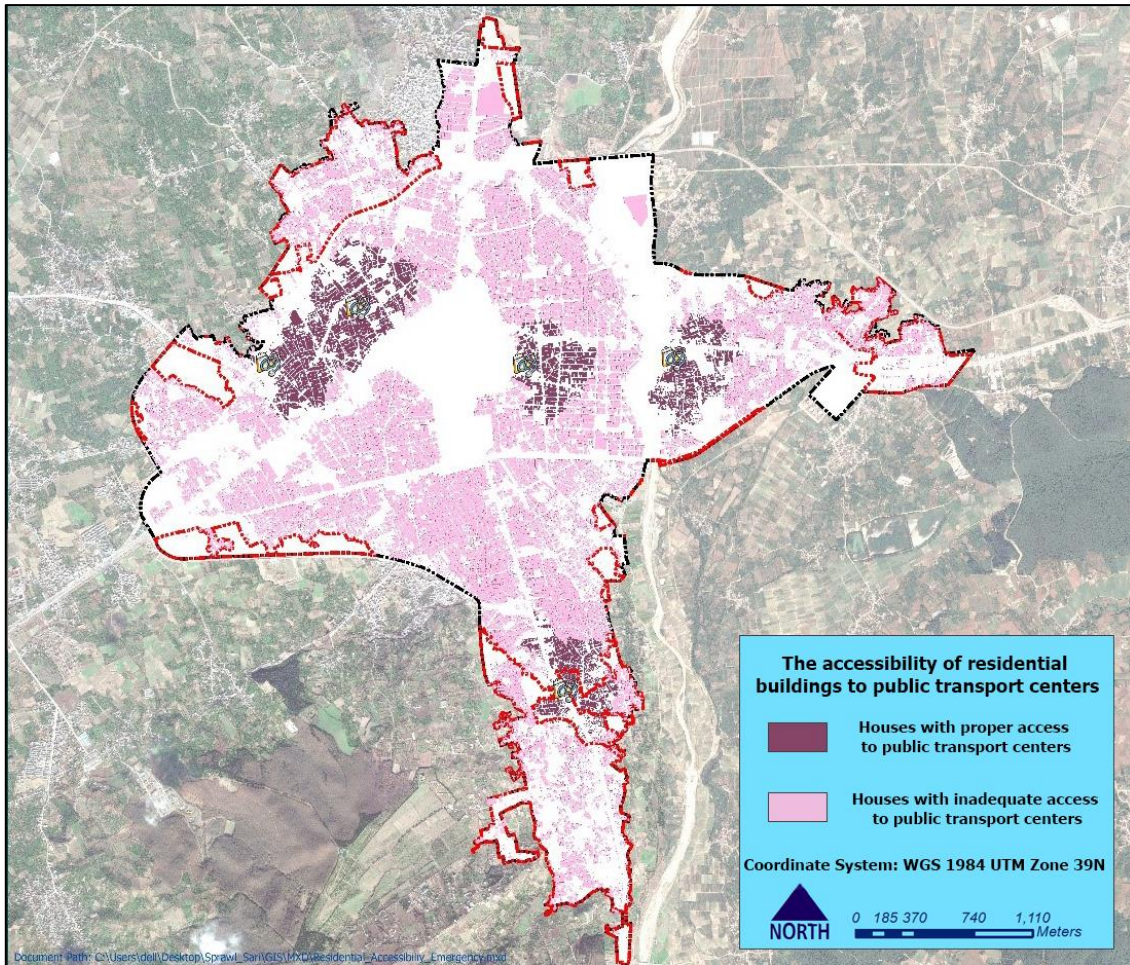


Map 6.7. The accessibility of residential houses to sport facilities. Prepared by author 2022.

According to the analysis, 36% of Behshahr's residential units have appropriate access to sports services. According to the above map, those who live in the light-yellow areas have proper access to these services, while people who live in the dark yellow regions do not. The analysis's most notable finding is that the recently developed peripheral parts of the city do not have adequate access to these services.

Public transportation centers

Stations and hubs for public transportation are among the most efficient services that directly affect residents' satisfaction levels and boost their quality of life. An efficient public transportation system will also make it easier to access other city services. The Behshahr master plan states that in 2021, the city's public transportation system is not meet the required requirements and is not in proper condition. This plan recommended threshold distance for public transit is 500 meters. The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to public transit centers.

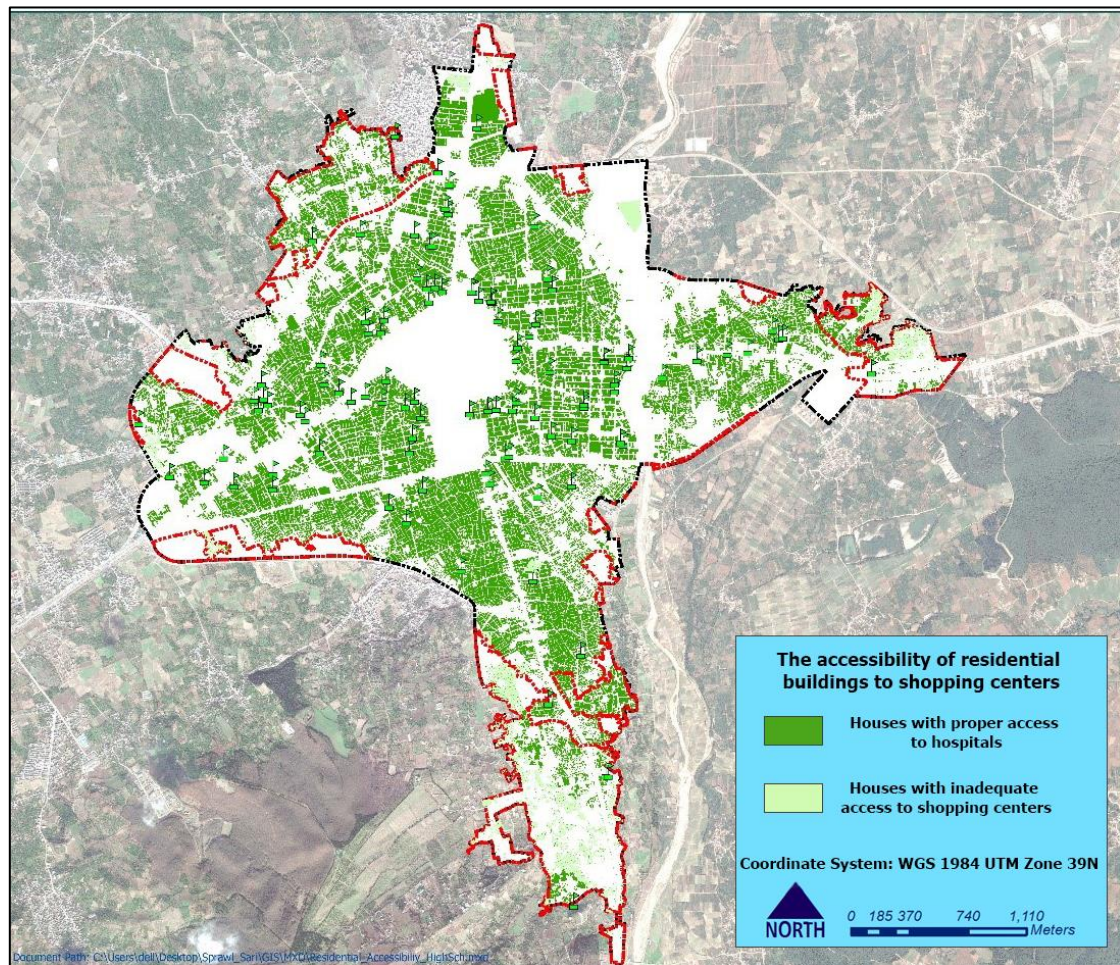


Map 6.8. The accessibility of residential houses to public transport centers. Prepared by author 2022.

The analysis shows that just 18% of the residential units in the city have sufficient access to public transportation services. On the above map, places with good access are shown in dark red, whereas areas with poor access are represented in light red. I should add that there is poor access to public transit stations in the regions that have grown during the past ten years.

Shopping centers

Commercial complexes are one of the most significant urban lands uses. These centers contribute significantly to the formation of new urban spaces and urban economic growth. Nowadays, constructing commercial complexes with multiple uses is seen as a viable solution for developing new urban centers. These facilities have the potential to boost urban vitality and improve the quality of urban environments in addition to providing for residents' daily and weekly requirements. The master plan of Behshahr states that the standard per capita indicates that the city is delivering commercial services in a satisfactory condition in 2021. Also, in this plan, the threshold distance of access to shopping centers is proposed to be 500 meters. The map below shows the accessibility of residential units to shopping centers.



Map 6.9. The accessibility of residential houses to shopping centers. Prepared by author 2022.

According to the analysis, 95% of residential areas in Behshahr have good access to shopping centers, and only 5% of residential units have to travel a distance of more than 500 meters to access these centers. Bold green on the above map indicates locations with good access, whereas light green indicates residential areas with poor access to these centers. It's important to consider that 5% of Behshahr City lacks sufficient access to these services. I should point you that these areas are situated in recently created peripheral parts of the city.

It seems appropriate to provide an overall conclusion in this part in light of the various maps and the brief analyses I made of each of them. In my opinion, Behshahr City's level of access to public services, which is one of the responsibilities of municipalities under Iranian regulation, is inadequate. It is significant to mention that, in contrast to residents in Behshahr's outer neighborhoods, those who live in the city center have appropriate access to public services. Comparing the maps of access to various services (educational, healthcare, sporting, public transportation, and shopping centers) and the development map of Behshahr over the past ten years (map 6.3) reveals that the city authorities primarily care about serving the people who live in the city's center sections. They do not see themselves as having any responsibility to the residents of the city's outlying districts. In addition, I should point out that my research of the Behshahr 2021 Master Plan shows that the proposed public services focus on the city's central areas, with people of the surrounding suburbs will receive a smaller proportion of them

over the following ten years. The results of the semi-structured interviews I performed with several residents are consistent with the analysis I did in this section. So, the majority of these citizens were unsatisfied with the municipality's providing public services. Additionally, as one of the interviewees noted, it seems that city officials have forgotten about the citizens in the suburb and have focused only on meeting the needs of those who live in the city's center.

Result: I can now respond to the second research question after examining section 6.2 utilizing semi-structured interviews and GIS analyses. According to the interviews' findings, most of the residents are dissatisfied with living in the new homes. They mentioned the physical and geographical divisions brought about by the BRI project in Behshahr. They also said that they would move to their old neighborhoods. In addition, the analysis of inhabitants' access to public services reveals that the residents in the surrounding areas do not have sufficient access to urban services. As a result, I should point out that the construction of the Amirabad port affected the everyday life of Behshahr citizens and that these impacts are harmful.

7. conclusion

I will conclude my master thesis with this section by summarizing the key findings to address the research questions and achieve the goal. Additionally, it will examine this thesis' contribution and propose research directions for further study. Drawing on critical theory, this master's thesis scrutinized how Chinese BRI initiatives affected urbanization transformation under planetary urbanization theory. I also looked at how the BRI project in Behshahr city affects people's everyday life, particularly in the housing sector. Most of the previous studies emphasized the economic effects of the construction of this project and did not mention other aspects affecting the urbanization process. Also, there have been few studies that have looked critically into the planetary urbanization theory. In this thesis, I sought to focus on one component of urban development—housing—and explore the inhabitant's issues encountered due to the BRI project's expansion. I organized the following research questions to help me achieve the study's goals:

R.Q 1: What is the relationship between BRI projects and the planetary urbanization theory?

R.Q 2: How has the everyday life of Behshahr citizens changed after the construction of the Amirabad port project (with emphasis on the housing sector)?

I researched the notion of planetary urbanization in numerous sources and critically analyzed the areas where it has been neglected. As mentioned in the methodology section, I used the semi-structured interview method and GIS analysis in this thesis. I used five semi-structured interviews with Behshahr residents and an expert in urban planning to explore the research questions. I identified several components for the GIS analysis and interview guide based on the theoretical framework of the research, including privacy, safety, health, everyday life, and accessibility to public services.

According to various sources, the basic principles of the planetary theory are as follows: The urban is not a unit but a process of transformation. And this process unfolds in various sites, territories, and landscapes. Also, the distinction between urban and non-urban areas is removed, and there is no 'outside' to the urban condition. Based on these principles, I believe that the process of urban transformation varies around the globe and affects both urban and non-urban areas. So, this process is not limited to urban territories.

On the other hand, the interpretations of the BRI projects rely on two main themes. The first is the influence of political and economic relations on the process of urban transformations. The first is the influence of political and economic relations on the urban transformation process. The construction of BRI projects, which is a result of the political and economic power of the Chinese government, has a significant impact on the urbanization process of the destinations of these projects. Also, the concept of implosion-explosion -proposed in planetary urbanization- can be seen in the BRI destination in this thesis. The increase in economic activities in Behshahr city results in the concentration of the population and the expansion of the urbanization process, and the boundaries of the city expanded in its surrounding areas, thus the city and the non-city will be integrated. This transformation process indicates that the city is not an independent unit but a process of transformation. The case example of Behshahr shows

well the relations between the BRI project and the principles of planetary urbanization theory. It is noteworthy that the citizens pointed to effects other than the economic aspect after the implementation of this project. Factors such as social, cultural, and environmental problems have not been considered in the theory of planetary urbanization.

To assess the second research question, I prepared semi-structured interview and did GIS analysis. I asked the respondents about their thoughts on components such as 'privacy, safety, security, health, everyday life, and belonging,' and the findings were noteworthy. The majority of interviewees stated that they were less satisfied with these components of their new houses than those of their previous residences and neighborhoods. I should point out that the respondents said they are pleased with the new home's security level. Remarkably, all interviewees stated they preferred the old neighborhoods and homes to their new ones. Analyzing the accessibility of residential home to urban public services using GIS analysis is another part of the research I conducted in this thesis. I assessed the citizens' access to services such as commercial centers, sports facilities, public transportation, and health care facilities. A significant issue is the inadequate access to these public services in recently constructed residential areas over the last ten years (after the construction of Amirabad Port).

I analyzed semi-structured interviews and looked at access maps for public services to respond to the second research question. In my interpretation, once the construction of port project, the people who lived in the center part of Behshahr sold their homes to the immigrants and had to look for accommodation in Behshahr's peripheral areas. However, the non-native inhabitants of central regions are the only ones the city's officials are focused on satisfying. They have not delivered the public services they initially pledged to the locals. As a result, Behshahr experienced social segregation and spatial fragmentation, resulting in the division into the center and peripheral regions. The Behshahr residents were directly affected by this separation, which led to dissatisfaction with living in their new homes and neighborhoods. The results of these surveys indicate that the citizens everyday life has faced various problems, some of which can be related to housing and access to public services. In general, citizens expressed dissatisfaction with privacy, safety, security, health, everyday life, and belonging in their homes. On the other hand, GIS analysis also confirmed that the peripheral areas do not have proper access to public services. The result of these two issues indicates the everyday life transformation after the construction of the BRI project near Behshahr.

I should mention several limitations in this research. First, I should state that there are many resources on the theory of planetary urbanization that I haven't had time to look into in depth. Additionally, I only identified a limited number of sources providing critical views on this theory; if I had more time, I would have found more. Also, I only interviewed a limited number of citizens in my research due to time constraints, which prevented me from receiving more comments. Additionally, since authorities' perspectives on urban developments are crucial, I did not examine in my thesis what the thoughts of the municipal officials are regarding this project. The lack of data such as land price fluctuation that could be used to conduct appropriate analysis was a significant limitation in this thesis. Future studies can focus on the transformation process brought about by the construction of this port and public protests against these initiatives. I should note that Behshahr is unlike the other examples I mentioned in the

previous studies in terms of scale and location. However, Behshahr could be a significant example of the impact of large-scale projects like BRI on the process of urban transformations and everyday life. This study could be used as a complement to future research projects that analyzes the implementation of BRI projects in small municipalities.

7.1 Suggestions

In this part of the thesis, I offer some suggestions considering the experiences of similar countries, such as Sri Lanka, where the Chinese government has also expanded the BRI projects and caused problems in the destination cities of these projects.

- Improving debt management

It would be prudent to reduce the risk of Iran falling into a Chinese debt trap in the future. An initial step would be to appoint a committee of independent experts to study the treasury and debt implications of projects with Chinese participation. In addition, the country could strengthen its debt management system to reduce debt-related vulnerabilities and improve debt transparency (particularly in infrastructure projects) with technical assistance. By reducing the risk of China's debt trap, Iran can reduce the extensive influence of Chinese companies on its domestic decisions.

- Promoting domestic spillovers

In the wake of rising wages in China and an economic slowdown, international and Chinese investors are looking to relocate manufacturing activities to other parts, such as Iran. China should undertake supplier development programs that foster linkages with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and create local jobs.

- Enhancing skill transfers

The inflows of unskilled, skilled, and professional workforce have mitigated domestic labor in the construction industry and resulted in some skill transfer from abroad. Iran could introduce legislation to incentivize firms that employ foreign workers to increase the training of local workers and formally report their efforts.

- Strengthening environmental protection

Chinese investment projects in Iran had a significant impact on the local environment. Iran should improve domestic environmental standards and enforcement for infrastructure projects. These standards should mirror international standards and encourage working with innovative partners in green technology and green financing systems. Iran could introduce incentives for projects that meet a minimum requirement of green or energy-saving technology. The EIA process could benefit from enhanced transparency and local stakeholder consultation.

- Ensuring public trust

There is a need for public trust in infrastructure development projects funded by China and processes to ensure this is achieved, namely transparency, stakeholder engagement, and anti-corruption measures. Remedies include holding regular media briefings to disseminate accurate information about Chinese projects.

These recommendations could decrease the Chinese government's dominance in local politics and the economy. It will lead to an improvement in local economic conditions and, consequently, in the quality of life in cities.

The current crisis that has gripped a significant part of the world, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is what I want to draw attention to in this final paragraph. China's ambitions to expand the network of its BRI projects have been severely affected following the ongoing war in Ukraine. With the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the dynamics of the whole European region have changed. As the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are situated in the vicinity of Ukraine, their governments perceive NATO, and by extension the US, as a significant security guarantor. By supporting Ukraine against Russia, the US has consolidated its position in the region. It has rallied the European governments to stay united against foreign forces, including Russia and China. The US has been projecting Russia as a security threat, whereas China is considered a strategic and economic threat. This subject can be interpreted in light of the thesis's focus, researching how external factors affect citizens' everyday lives. These modifications will directly affect how BRI projects development and impacted the urban transformation process and citizens' everyday lives.

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Appendix 1. Coding handbook for semi-structured interviews.

Planetary urbanization theory: In this study, I'm searching for connections between the theory of planetary urbanization and the construction of the Amirabad port project (as a BRI), as well as how this project has affected urban development according to citizens' viewpoints.

Subcategories:

Urban development- landscape transformation.

Everyday life: According to the second research question, I am looking to analyze the effects of the construction of this project on the daily life of citizens, and the main focus of this thesis is on the changes in the housing sector.

Subcategories:

Privacy- safety- health- everyday life- accessibility to public services (education, health, sport facilities, public transportation and shopping centers).

Appendix 2. The interview guidance.

About you:

How many years have you lived in Behshahr?

How big is your family and how many square meters does your home have?

Urban development:

-How many of your relatives or family are working in Amirabad port?

-Has the construction of the Amir Abad port affected the development of Behshahr city? If so, in what way?

-What are the opportunities and threats of the construction of the port project in your opinion?

-What are the disadvantages and advantages of the expansion and development of Behshahr city?

Everyday life:

-Regarding the “privacy” component, what do you think about your home?

-Regarding the “safety” component, what do you think about your home?

-Regarding the “security” component, what do you think about your home?

-Regarding the “health” component, what do you think about your home?

-Regarding the “belonging” component, what do you think about your home and your neighborhood?

-Considering criteria such as privacy, safety, health, security and belonging, what do you think about your new home?

-Which of these items is better in your new home than your old one?

-Explain about accessibility to public services such as education, health, sports facilities, public transportation and shopping centers.

These two questions are for housing expert:

- How has the price of land and housing changed in the past years (after the construction of Amirabad port)?

- Has the construction of Amirabad port had an effect on the increase or decrease in the price of land and housing? If not, what is the most important reason?

Conclusion:

- Are you satisfied with life in Behshahr? Name the most important weaknesses and strengths of Behshahr.

Appendix 3. List of interviewees.**Table 9.1. List of interviewees at this thesis.**

Alias	Category
Interviewee A	Urban planner (Housing expert)
Interviewee B	Citizen
Interviewee C	Citizen
Interviewee D	Citizen
Interviewee E	Citizen
Interviewee F	Citizen