



Triggering Political and Social Change in the Iranian Society

negotiating space in the
environmental field

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*When two elephants fight, the ground is changed, but when two elephants are working together they will destroy
a village.*

Ciro (January, 2018)

Abstract

This research shows the negotiation of space in the environmental field and whether this triggers political and social change in the Iranian society. Iran is governed by an authoritarian regime limiting the freedom and space to act of the people. At the same time, environmental degradation is very present in the Iranian society, especially in urban areas where air pollution and waste management are pressing. To see whether participating in activities concerning the environment reflects on and engages with broader political and social change in the Iranian society, interviews were conducted with individuals involved with environmental activities in Tehran. The analyses, using the Spiral Dynamics approach and the Power Cube of Gaventa, show that the environmental field is a playing ground for triggering change in the society, but no huge impact is observed at national level. Two reasons discussed are the small amount of people involved with the environment and the lacking actions taken by the interviewees outside the environmental domain. Contrary to what was expected at the beginning of the research, the environmental field turned out to be political after all. This was illustrated by the events that happened to Madani and Seyed Emami. Moreover, there appears to be a division among the governmental bodies between the hardliners and reformists having a different vision and direction for the Iranian society. This might be one of the reasons why change is going too slow for many people feeding into a growing anger and dissatisfaction over the system, expressed in the January protests and the protest against the forced hijab. The negotiation of space in the environmental field is, thus, a starting point to criticise other issues in the Iranian society as well, however, the impact on broader political and social change is limited.

Keywords negotiation of space, environmental degradation, political and social change, Tehran, Iran, authoritarian government, theocracy, Spiral Dynamics, Gaventa's Power Cube, Seyed Emami, Madani, January protests, hijab

Table of Content

ABSTRACT	I
TABLE OF CONTENT	II
LIST OF FIGURES AND BOXES	IV
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	V

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	RESEARCH BACKGROUND	1
1.1.1	AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES	1
	Islamic Theocracy	2
1.1.2	ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN	2
1.1.3	AGENCY, SPACE AND SOCIAL CHANGE	4
1.1.4	ENVIRONMENT	5
1.1.5	URBAN	6
	Tehran	7
1.2	RESEARCH OBJECTIVE	8
1.3	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
1.4	RESEARCH OUTLINE	9
2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	11
2.1	POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE: SPIRAL DYNAMICS	11
2.1.1	LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT	12
	Survival (beige)	13
	Kinship (purple)	14
	Domination and self-indulgence (red)	14
	Moral and obedience (blue)	15
	Self-expression and rational (orange)	16
	Harmony and balance (green)	16
2.2	NEGOTIATION OF SPACE: POWER CUBE	18
	Social Space	18
	Boundaries	18
2.2.1	POWER CUBE	19
	Spaces	20
	Places	20
	Forms of Power	21
2.3	POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE TRIGGERED BY THE NEGOTIATION OF SPACE	22
3	METHODOLOGY	25
	Case Study	25
3.1	DATA COLLECTION	25
3.1.1	INTERVIEWS	26
	Interviewees	28
3.1.2	OBSERVATIONS	30
3.1.3	LITERATURE	30
3.2	REFLECTION ON THE METHODOLOGY	30

4	POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE	35
4.1	POLITICAL HISTORY	35
4.2	HARDLINERS VS REFORMISTS	37
4.3	SPIRAL DYNAMICS: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE	38
	Levels of Development	38
5	THE ENVIRONMENTAL FIELD	43
5.1	POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL INVOLVEMENT	43
	DoE	46
5.2	PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON ENVIRONMENT	49
5.2.1	AIR	49
5.2.2	SOLID WASTE	51
5.2.3	WATER	52
5.2.4	ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	55
5.3	RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENT	56
5.4	SPIRAL DYNAMICS: THE ENVIRONMENTAL FIELD	58
	Levels of Development	59
6	NEGOTIATING ENVIRONMENTAL SPACE	65
6.1	LOCAL ACTIVITIES	65
6.1.1	‘WE WANT TO DO SOMETHING FOR OUR COUNTRY’	66
6.1.2	START WITH ONE SELF	67
6.1.3	ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS IN IRAN	69
6.2	MEDIA AND ENVIRONMENT	70
	Media Blocking	72
6.3	RED LINES	73
6.4	ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE AUTHORITIES	74
6.4.1	KAVEH MADANI	74
6.4.2	KAVOUS SEYED EMAMI	74
6.5	POWER CUBE: NEGOTIATING ENVIRONMENTAL SPACE	77
	Boundaries or ‘Red Lines’	77
	Spaces	78
	Forms of Power	79
	Places	82
7	ENVIRONMENT AND BROADER CHANGE	85
7.1	NATIONAL POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE	85
7.1.1	JANUARY PROTESTS	85
7.1.2	HIJAB	86
7.1.3	PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE	87
7.2	POWER CUBE: NEGOTIATING NATIONAL CHANGE	89
7.3	ENVIRONMENT AND BROADER CHANGE	90
8	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	93
8.1	ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS	93
8.2	DISCUSSION	97
	Gradual or Revolutionary Change	97
	Generations	98
	Change is Inevitable	98
	Eye Opener	98
	Expanding Freedoms	99
8.3	REFLECTION ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	100
8.4	CONCLUSION	101

REFERENCES	104
APPENDIX	113
APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW LIST	113
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE	114

List of Figures and Boxes

Figure 1: Map of Iran	3
Figure 2: Spiral Dynamics' Levels of Development	13
Figure 3: Gaventa's Power Cube	19
Figure 4: Geographic Map of Iran	53
Box 1: Iran	3
Box 2: International Sanctions	47
Box 3: Iran's Topography	53

List of Abbreviations

BRT	Bus Rapid Transport
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DoE	Department of Environment
FRWO	Forest, Range, and Watershed Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HAARP	High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USA	United States of America
VPN	Virtual Private Network



1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Freedom is an important foundation of the human rights; including ‘freedom of movement’; ‘freedom of thought, conscience and religion’; ‘freedom of opinion and expression’; freedom of information; and ‘freedom of peaceful assembly and association’ (United Nations [UN], 1948, 1966). According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016), enlargement of freedoms increases the possibilities and opportunities of people to make their own choices and achieve the dreams and ambitions they value and have reason to value. One major aspect violating the freedom of people is the “denial of political and civil liberties by authoritarian regimes and ... imposed restrictions of the freedom to participate in the social, political and economic life of the community” (Sen, 1999, p. 4). The last decade, political rights and civil liberties have been reduced, according to the Freedom House (2018), partly due to “emboldened autocrats” and “beleaguered democracies” (p. 1). This research will focus on the restrictions of freedoms by authoritarian regimes.

1.1.1 Authoritarian Regimes

Authoritarian regimes are systems in which a few have the power (Khan, Batool, & Shah, 2016). This varies from “individual-centred dictatorship[s]” (ibid, p. 658) to monarchies, military regimes, one-party regimes, or “limited multiparty regime[s]” (Hadenius & Teorell, 2007, p. 147). The rulers of authoritarian regimes “seek to maintain their own control (and increase their wealth) by limiting mass participation rather than by mobilizing the population” (Hague & Harrop, 2007, p. 61). Control by the people over the rulers is therefore lacking (ibid).

Hague and Harrop (2007) state that:

Authoritarian politics is typically driven by fear and vulnerability. The result is a repertoire of control mechanisms in which politics comes before economics and obedience before initiative. Communication is opaque, trust is lacking, government spending is misused, corruption is endemic, laws are ignored and foreign investors are scared away. (p. 64)

The leaders maintain control by three means, Hague and Harrop argue, “the military, patronage and media” (p. 63). The military is used to show the power the rulers possess, which will only work when they are perceived as “willing to use this resource” (ibid). Patronage is an “unofficial ... network in which other power holders are incorporated by providing them with resources, ... which they can distribute, in turn, to their own supporters” (ibid). Due to this mechanism most authoritarian regimes are corrupt, using the resources to maintain the system instead of investing in the country. The last mechanism mentioned is the media. Especially nowadays, the media plays an important role in the provision of information and can be a playing field during elections or can be used by any kind of opposition to spread their voice and ideas (ibid). Controlling the media is, thus, a means for authoritarian regimes to control power. Due to the vulnerability of these systems, these control mechanisms are necessary to keep the system running as the autocrats want.

Besides the control mechanisms, authoritarian regimes are characterized by other features as well. Elections and political parties are limited; there might be no elections and political parties at all; only one party is allowed

to run during the elections; or a limited amount of parties can participate only when they do not challenge the existing regime (Linz, 2000). Moreover, civil rights are not respected (Hague & Harrop, 2007); political participation of the people is limited and discouraged (Linz, 2000) and freedom of expression and information are violated. The judicial system is ineffective, since the leaders stand above it and the rules are not enforced in a consequent manner (Hague & Harrop, 2007). The limitation of free elections, political parties, civil rights and the judicial system are violating human freedoms.

Authoritarian regimes, thus, limit people's freedoms by restricting them access to the political, economic and social sphere of the society.

Islamic Theocracy

One form of authoritarian rule is the theocracy. A theocracy is an authoritarian regime in which clerics are the rulers (Hague & Harrop, 2007). It literally means “government by God” and is referred to as “a self-appointed group who claim to speak and act on God's behalf” (Ferrero, 2013, pp. 723-724). This also means that the rule of law:

lies not in any man-made code, or even in the will or opinions of one or more human rulers, but in absolute standards revealed to man by divine agency, so that in theory at least the real ruler of the community is the divine agency that sets the standards, while the earthly ‘rulers’ are in the nature of High Priests whose task is to interpret and enforce them. (Bluck, 1955, p. 69)

A theocracy is a rare form of authoritarian regimes, present-day examples are Vatican City and Iran (Hague & Harrop, 2007). Vatican City is ruled by catholic clerics, while Iran is an Islamic Republic. Currently the Islam is a much-discussed topic in Europe due to an increasing number of Muslim immigrants and the terrorist attacks committed by Muslims (Goodwin, Cutts, & Janta-Lipinski, 2016). This triggered my interest and made me wonder how people living in these societies deal with such strong and strict believe systems and an authoritarian regime imposing them.

1.1.2 Islamic Republic of Iran

Currently, the most Islamic theocracy existing, is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since 1979, Iran is called the Islamic Republic of Iran and the governmental structure has been denominated by scholars as an ‘electoral theocracy’ (Chehabi, 1991; Fukuyama, 2009; Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016; Kazemipur & Rezaei, 2003; Pourezzat, Moghadam, Ejlal, & Taheriattar, 2018). Ayatollah Khomeini stated, in 1978;

clerics themselves will not hold power in the government. They will exercise supervision over those who are in charge of governance and will give them guidance. The [Islamic] government will be based on the people's vote and will be under public surveillance and assessment. (as cited in Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016, p. 456)

However, it turned out to be a “combination of democratic elements within an authoritarian structure” (ibid, p. 461). Ghobadzadeh and Rahim (2016) state, that Iran's governmental structure can be defined as “claiming divine authority in the political sphere, where religious leaders ostensibly govern in accordance with Islamic law” (p. 453). Fukuyama (2009) describes it, as a constitution that is a “hybrid of authoritarian, theocratic and democratic elements” (para. 6); “Iran is fundamentally an authoritarian regime run by a small circle of clerics and

military officials who use elections to legitimate themselves” (para. 4). Or as Kazemipur and Rezaei (2003) put it, a “caesaropapist embrace of throne and altar” (p. 348).

Although there are several political parties in Iran from which the people can choose during elections, the parties are “regulated by the state ... [and] can hardly be considered autonomous entities” (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016, p. 454). Moreover “when a party becomes more institutionalised and effective, the ruling clergy predictable responds by dissolving it” (ibid). However, the clerics are not fully in control of who will be elected; the elected presidents have been a serious threat to “ruling clergy”, especially when reformists were elected, according to Ghobadzadeh and Rahim (2016, p. 457).

Iran also complies with other characteristics of an authoritarian regime. For example, due to the “restrictive regulatory environment by the state’s economic planning process and excessive bureaucracy” as well as the international sanctions that “limit foreign investment” (The Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 311), Iran has one of the lowest economic freedom in the world (Miller & Kim, 2015). Moreover, the corruption of the public sector perceived by the citizens is high (Transparency International, 2017) and the restrictive political system limits political participation and personal rights (Porter & Stern, 2017). Besides, “the judicial system is not independent”, and the governing people have “gained great wealth through control of tax-exempt” (The Heritage Foundation, 2017, p. 311). Also the freedom of press is violated, since news and information is controlled as much as possible by the state (Reporters Without Borders, n.d.). Overall, Iran complies with the

Box 1: Iran

Iran is located in Western Asia or more specifically in the Middle East. It is “one of the critical connecting nodes between the continents Asia, Europe and Africa, facilitating the exchange of people, services and products” (Pourezat et al., 2018, p. 175). Iran borders several countries; Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan (see figure ...). North of the country is the Caspian Sea and south the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman (see figure ...). Due to its location in the middle of several cultures, Iran knows a rich history that is going back thousands of years taking in aspects of all bordering continents. The aforementioned exchange between the continents in which Iran is located is also reflected in the diverse ethnic background the country has; the majority is Persian (61%) and the rest differs from Azeri, Kurds, Lur, Baloch, Arab, Turkmen and a few others (CIA, n.d.).

Figure 1: Map of Iran



Source: Global Security.org, retrieved May 2018 from <https://www.globalsecurity.org/jhtml/jframe.html#https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/images/iran-map.gif>.

characteristics of an authoritarian regime, and especially with a theocracy, limiting the freedoms of people by denying them to participate in the political, economic and social life of the country.

As a consequence of the limited possibilities, around 150,000 people are leaving Iran every year (Pradhan, 2015). Iran is “leading the world in terms of brain drain”, according to Al Monitor, “even though President Hassan Rouhani’s moderate government has tried to address it since coming to power” (2018). Especially the young and educated do not see a future in Iran and this is a big group; from the 80 million people living in Iran, almost 40 percent is younger than 25 (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], n.d.) with a median age of 29.5 years (UNDP, 2016). Moreover, the majority of the population has been enrolled in tertiary education¹; from 16 percent in 1995 to 69 percent in 2016 (The Worldbank, n.d.). Also the percentage of educated women at university level has increased; in 2012 18 percent of women was educated at university level, compared to almost 5 percent in 1997 (Khalaf, 2015). Being an authoritarian regime and limiting the freedoms of people, thus, scares away ambition and motivation and the future generation.

1.1.3 Agency, Space and Social Change

Several strategies have been tried to remove the limitation of freedoms imposed by authoritarian regimes; foreign powers invading countries to depose the regime, coup d’états from within a country, revolutions or assassination. However, few of these examples have led to more freedoms in history, according to the Walker and Orttung (2011).

Sen (1999) states that agency is central in dealing with deprivation, destitution and oppression. Agency is the capacity of individuals “to shape the circumstances in which they live” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 965). “The freedom of agency that we individually have is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us” (Sen, 1999, pp. xi-xii). The social, political and economic rights and opportunities people have, in their turn, help “to advance the general capability of a person” (p. 10) and “expansion of the ‘capabilities of persons’” (p. 18) will “contribute ... to the overall freedom people have to live the way they would like to live” (p. 38). Expansion of freedoms will increase the opportunities and rights and, thus, the capabilities people have and therefore agency. Agency can lead to movement by citizens and expands freedoms. In other words, “the removal of major sources of unfreedom” (p. 3) increases the opportunities and rights and, thus increases people’s capabilities and agency, so that people can “lead the kind of lives they value and have reason to value” (p. 18). It is, thus, a virtuous circle which can strengthen people’s capabilities, agency, freedoms, rights and opportunities, but also weaken them; when the freedoms are expanded, for example, the opportunities and rights of the people increase and the space for the capabilities and agency of people becomes bigger. At the same time, when the capabilities of people are expanded, agency is expanded, more space is created and more freedom is generated. However, as mentioned before, freedoms can also be limited constraining rights and opportunities, weaken the capabilities and contracting the space for agency.

When the space does not comply with the demands of the people, the stability of the society is threatened (Beck & Cowan, 1996). This dissatisfaction starts the negotiation for space between the ones in control of that space and the ones participating in that space, and forces the society to change one way or another; this can be

¹ “Tertiary education, whether or not to an advanced research qualification, normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level” (Worldbank, n.d.).

small adjustments as well as major changes (ibid). Small adjustments include, for example, opening possibilities for the people to advice and criticise the current policies or the assignment of people with a different ideology to a post in the government. Major changes might be a revolution causing a total shift of governments, or getting rid of the dominant ideology and following a different direction. However, it is not necessarily the case that more space and thus more freedom is created when negotiating for space, it can also be that space is limited and that more freedoms are restricted. For example, a revolution might cause the former regime to make place for a new one, but this new one can be more restrictive towards freedoms than the former and thus leaving the people with less freedoms to enjoy.

Based on the statement of Sen that agency is central in dealing with deprivation, destitution and oppression, and because the freedoms for this agency are limited in a society like Iran by the ones in control, the focus of this research will be on the capacity of individuals to negotiate for their demands in Iran and how this negotiation changes the society.

1.1.4 Environment

The freedoms people have differ per topic and domain and, thus, the demand of the people also varies. Due to the pressing characteristic of environmental degradation in Iran, more and more people are demanding change concerning the environment.

The last decades, environmental degradation has been discussed in various lights. The popularity of the topic has increased in academia as well as in the media (Monbiot, 2017; Plumer, 2017; Speksnijder, 2017; Spiegel Online, 2017; Van den Berg, 2017). Environmental degradation is the disruption of the ecological balance of all the involved factors, that would make a healthy environment (Akbarirad, 2013). “Chemical pollution and habitat loss” (Brown et al., 2015, p. 1237), increasing “emissions of greenhouse gases” (McDonald et al., 2011, p. 6312), forest degradation (Augustaitis, Bytnerowicz, & Paoletti, 2013), air pollution (Bollen, Hers, & Van der Zwaan, 2010), and “non-organic waste and plastic pollution” on land (Hanson, 2017, p. 222) and into the “marine environment” (Wilcox, Van Sebille, & Hardesty, 2015, p. 11899) are all becoming a global concern disrupting the balance and damaging the environment, affecting ecosystems and thus human life (Akbarirad, 2013). All these processes lead to environmental degradation and demand global change.

Iran, like the rest of the world, is confronted with environmental degradation: “air pollution, deforestation, desertification, eutrophication, water pollution, excessive industrial and agricultural wastes, degradation of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity losses, soil erosion, and a broad spectrum of other environmental stresses” that impact the natural environment in Iran (Parizanganeh, Lakhan, Yazdani, & Ahmad, 2011, p. 2836). Iran’s environmental problem is among the most critical in the world. The annual cost of “environmental degradation in Iran (including water, land and forest, air, waste, coastal zone and CO₂ emissions) was estimated at 8.8% of Iran’s GDP²”, more or less 10 billion USD³ (Barakpou & Keivani, 2016, p. 154). Air pollution in Iran is threatening human health causing diseases and even death (Gharehchani et al., 2013; Heydarpour et al., 2014; Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016; Miri et al., 2016; Tahbaz, 2016). Most of the waste collected in Iran is disposed to the landfills or dumped at sites increasing the greenhouse gas emissions (Mahmoudkhani, Valizadeh, & Khastoo,

² Gross Domestic Product.

³ United States Dollar.

2014; Rajaeifar, Tabatabaei, Ghanavati, Khoshnevisan, & Rafiee, 2015). These landfills and dumping sites are also polluting the ground and surface water transmitting waterborne diseases, risking human health and degrading the environment (Mansouri, Salehi, & Rezaei, 2014; Mohammadi, Ebrahimi, & Amin, 2012). Water tables have been lowered to dangerous levels, lakes, rivers and wetlands have dried up entirely and the rural population has been threatened with displacement (Mirchi & Madani, 2015; Tahbaz, 2016). This also influences Iran's wildlife species; facing extinction due to habitat loss. Environmental degradation is thus a noticeable problem in Iran, causing risks for human health and the environment. This research will, therefore, take environment as the domain of interest and focus on agency negotiating in the environmental domain.

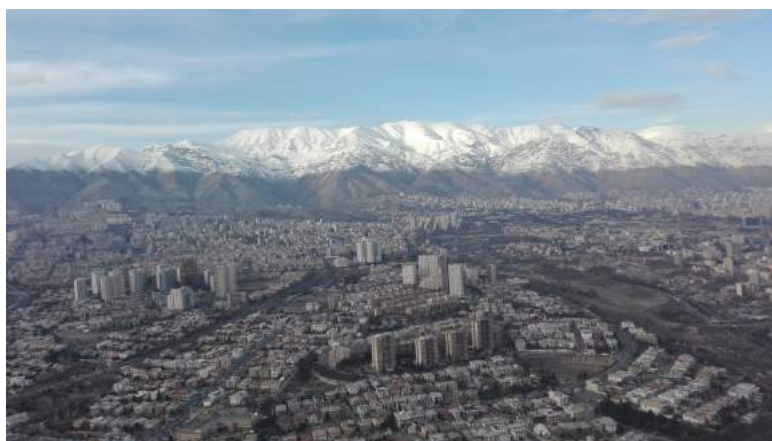
1.1.5 Urban

The processes of environmental degradation in the world and in Iran are accelerated in urban areas by urbanization, population growth, industrialization and increasing wealth and consumption (Heravi, Sabour, & Mahvi, 2013; Kakaee & Paykani, 2013; Miri et al., 2016; Mirsadeghi, 2016; Noorhosseini, Allahyari, Damalas, & Moghaddam, 2017; Oyekale, 2015; Peters & Bratton, 2016). In 2011, 52% of the global population lived in urbanized areas, exceeding the amount of people living in rural areas (Zeeman, 2012). Urban areas discharge up to 90% of their waste in the surrounding rivers, lakes, and coastal zones (Esrey et al., 1998). As a result of a growing population in urban areas due to migration, increasing economic activities, and tourism (Govender, Barnes, & Pieper, 2011; Mohapatra, 2008), the urban population in developing countries is expected to double from 2 billion to almost 4 billion between 2000 and 2030 (Stockholm International Water Institute [SIWI], 2005). The rapid growth of cities makes the problem more urgent in urban areas, since the environmental problem is growing every day when new immigrants arrive in the city.

Also Iran is experiencing rapid population growth, urbanization, industrialization and increasing wealth and consumption. The population of the country has tripled over the last 50 years to a population of more than 80 million people (Tahbaz, 2016). 73 percent of this population lives in urban areas now (UNDP, 2016), compared to 30 percent 50 years earlier (Tahbaz, 2016), and 49 percent in 1979 (Khalaf, 2015). "Many cities are currently the fossil-fuel consumers, land-devourers, and waste producers" (Ahmadia, Hashima, Mohameda, Moharamnejadand, & Shamsheiria, 2013, p. 630). The energy consumption of which the majority is consumed in cities has increased between 2000 and 2011 from 85 million tons oil to 146 million tons respectively; natural gas consumption increased from around 31,000 million m³ to 107,000 million m³; and electricity consumption grew from 101,000 million kilowatt-hours to 184,000 kilowatt-hours in the same period (Tahbaz, 2016). Moreover, Tehran – the capital city of the country – and other cities in Iran, are among the most polluted cities in the world, next to Mexico City and Beijing (Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016; Parizanganeh et al., 2011). The rapid population growth, urbanization and change in behaviour and consumption have pressured the natural ecosystems and resources, especially in urban areas. Drawing upon this observation, this research will focus on environmental activities executed by Iranians in and around Tehran – the capital city of Iran.

Tehran

Tehran is the capital and the biggest city of Iran, it grew between 1941 and 2006 from 80 km² to 730 km² respectively (Ahmadian et al., 2013). The population is estimated between the eight and more than ten million people during the night (Heydarpour et al., 2014; Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016; Rajaeifar et al., 2015; Swinkels, 2016) and has, thus, grown enormously since 1941 when it were just 700,000 people living in the city (Ahmadian et al., 2013). During the day a few million more people are active in Tehran; around 12 million. Since the city is that big and is growing quite fast due to urbanisation, it are these areas that produce the most waste, use the most water and need the most food. The processes of environmental degradation are therefore the most pressing in areas like Tehran.



Tehran⁴

In the city a difference can be seen between the north and the south; socially, topographically and climatically. The north is considered to be richer, while the south is where the poorer and more religious people live. The north and south of Tehran do not only differ socially, but there is also a difference in altitude between the areas. The city has an altitude between 900 meter in the south and 1700 meter in the north at the slopes of the Alborz mountains (Tehran Municipality, n.d.) (see picture). While the north is limited by the mountains that border the city, the south runs into the central dessert of the country. Expansion is therefore mainly possible to the east and west following the mountain range. The topography also affects the weather in the city; the north is experiencing more rain, snow and cool weather, while the south is significant dryer and warmer. At the moment, there are 22 local municipalities, which have been divided into “several areas based on the population density, urban fabric, vastness and some other parameters” (Heravi et al., 2013, p. 759). It can thus be argued that in Tehran one has to deal with different cultures and needs since there is a big difference between the neighbourhoods in the north and the south. A standard way of dealing with environmental degradation in the city will probably not be so effective as when the different factors are taken into account.

⁴ All pictures are taken during my stay in Tehran with my own camera (January-March 2018).

1.2 Research Objective

As described above, political rights and civil liberties declined over the last decade in the world, partly due to the restrictions of authoritarian regimes. Authoritarian regimes limit the freedoms of people by denying them access to participate politically, economically and socially in the society. A rare form of authoritarian regimes is a system in which the clerics are the rulers; a theocracy. Due to the increased debate on Islam in Europe, I am interested, specifically, in the Islamic Republic of Iran – being an electoral theocracy ruled by Islamic leaders – and I wonder how the people living in Iran deal with this authoritarian regime limiting their freedoms.

There are several ways of dealing with the limitations imposed by authoritarian regimes. This research will focus on the influence individuals have, solely or as member of a group, on the negotiation of their demands. It will discuss this negotiation in Iran and how it changes the society.

The demand of the people differs per domain, therefore, the environmental field will be used as the domain of interest to analyse the negotiation and social change in Iran. Environmental degradation is an urgent matter all over the world, and, as explained above, even so in Iran. In this regard, the field of environment will be used as the domain of interest on which this research will focus. Since environmental degradation is most present in urban areas due to population growth, urbanization, industrialization and the increasing wealth and consumption, the focus of this research will be on environmental activities executed by Iranians in and around Tehran. Acting in the domain of environment might increase the possibilities in that domain and maybe lead to more freedoms in other domains. In other words, taking action concerning environment might open the discussion about other issues and, in the long run, change society. This is an assumption which will be discussed later on in the research.

This research adds to the ongoing questions about the freedom there is for environmental defenders. Just recently, Global Witness and The Guardian published data showing that more than 200 people have been killed in 2017 because they were protecting land and environment, meaning that 2017 is the deadliest year so far (Global Witness, 2018; The Guardian, 2018; Zachos, 2018). Asking about this freedom is thus very relevant and seems like an urgent matter.

The objective of this research, therefore, is to explore the way freedom is negotiated by individuals participating in activities concerning environment, and if and how this negotiation changes the society. Analysing the influence of the environmental activities of citizens in Tehran on the society might give an answer to these questions.

1.3 Research Questions

One main research questions and three sub questions are formulated to analyse the influence of individual activities concerning environment on the negotiation of space and social change in authoritarian regimes:

How do activities concerning the environment reflect on and engage with broader political and social change in Iran?

- What are the broader political and social changes in Iran which happened the last decades?
- What is the political and social setting concerning environment from a local perspective?
- How do Tehrani⁵ negotiate for space in Iran, while participating in environmental activities?

1.4 Research Outline

This chapter has introduced the problem on which this research is based. In chapter 2 the theoretical framework will be explained. Subsequently, the methodology chapter describes the approach used to answer the main research question and the three sub questions, it also touches upon some limitations of the research.

This is followed by four chapters (chapter 4, 5, 6, and 7) describing the empirical data found during the fieldwork in Tehran and connecting it to the theoretical framework. The main research question will be answered by using the answers of the three sub questions. Sub question 1 addresses what political and social change is observed in Iran over the last decades. The second sub question focusses on the political and social setting concerning the environment based on the perspectives of citizens of Tehran. Both questions will be analysed by using the approach of Spiral Dynamics (see chapter 2) in chapter 4 and 5. The last sub question discusses how space is negotiated by the people from Tehran participating in activities concerning the environment. The Power Cube of Gaventa (see chapter 2) will be used to analyse this question in chapter 6. Chapter 7 will zoom out of the environmental domain and discuss political and social change on national level.

By giving these descriptions, the setting of the environmental field is better understood and the opinions and views of the participants is showed. This makes it easier to analyse the data and give an answer to the research questions. The final chapter (chapter 8) discusses the findings, forms the answers to the research questions, the limitations and the conclusions of this research.

⁵ Tehrani: citizens of Tehran.



2 Theoretical Framework

This research will focus on two concepts; political and social change, and the negotiation of space. The domain of interest in which it will be discussed is the field of environment. In other words, how activities in the environmental field negotiate for space and how this affects the society. The approach of this thesis will be a bottom-up approach; it will focus on the activities in which citizens of Tehran take part. The theoretical framework consists of two parts; a model to better understand political and social change and a model for the negotiation of space. For the analysis of political and social change the Spiral Dynamics approach will function as a frame and for analysing the negotiation of space the Power Cube model will be used.

2.1 Political and Social Change: Spiral Dynamics

In order to analyse the political and social change that is occurring in the Iranian society, especially concerning environment, the Spiral Dynamics approach of Beck and Cowan will be used. It will help to analyse and better understand the dynamics that have occurred in the past and which are currently happening in the Iranian society.

Spiral Dynamics is a model based on the ideas of Clare Graves from the 70's, later refined in 1996 by Don Beck and Christopher Cowan (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Cowan & Todorovic, 2000; Mann, 2011; Stambolovic, 2002; Straatsma et al., 2011; Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010; Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). Graves observed that human beings constantly adapt to the complexity of their circumstances, not only physiological or psychological, but also in a sociological way (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). When the circumstances are stable there is no need for change. However, the circumstances can change due to the influence of events – like a change in the family due to death or marriage, a flood or the invention of technology – in that case it is necessary to adapt the cognitive mind set to the new life conditions. In other words, the purpose of human development is “to match the cognitive mindset with a particular array of life conditions that face an individual or group” (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005, p. 93).

The concept of Spiral Dynamics can be used in practice for individuals, organisations and societies to understand the dynamics between the circumstances and the people's physiological, psychological and sociological mind set (Beck & Cowan, 1996). In this research the focus will be on societal change and therefore the society level of Spiral Dynamics will be used as framework for the analysis. The society consists of individuals who have to deal with the circumstances, for example, the climate, topography, political systems or economics (ibid). The society and the circumstances continuously interact; when the circumstances change – due to an earthquake, migration flow, or environmental degradation, for example – a society has to adapt to the new situation as well. History shows, according to Van Leijden and Zuiker (2007), that a society does not have the choice to adapt or not, when it does not adapt, it will slowly vanish.

The reason for choosing the Spiral Dynamics approach for this research is because it does not focus on one aspect of development, instead it focusses on all aspects of life; the “biological, psychological, sociological and systemic” development including the connection between the four aspects (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010, p. 102).

Moreover, it takes several perspectives to look at the world; the so-called levels of development and their belonging vision, motives and incentives that form the culture, attitude, the way of thinking and the behaviour of the people. In this way, a broader and more holistic picture can be given of the situation.

So far, there have been six major fundamental changes in human history, according to Beck and Cowan (1996). These changes have been expressed in the Spiral Dynamics approach as transitions of levels of development or existence (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The levels are not superior or inferior towards each other; the best level is the level that fits the present circumstances the best (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005; Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). Moreover, “well-functioning societies exhibit an optimal combination of [levels of development]” (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010, p. 102). In other words, they have a stable basis of all former levels of development and these do not disappear but they will exist within the new one and they will form the fundamentals for the new level; the complexity increases. Spiral Dynamics is, thus, a tool that does not follow a linear path, according to Beck and Cowan (1996), it is rather an evolutionary approach in which one stadium merges into the next one. Besides,

it should ... be noted that Spiral Dynamics is not a rigid classification designed to pigeon-hole individuals or groups into a specific type, but a growth hierarchy where each level includes parts of the lower levels. Depending on the situation, different [levels] are more active than others. (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010, p. 102)

These different levels are expressed in all manifestations of society; for example, the way a society treats poor people, the cultural expressions, the role of religion, the way the environment is treated, the political system, and economy. Important to notice is that the dominant level that is seen in a society does not exclude the existence of the other levels; all individuals in a society have their own visions, experiences and opinions, and a society consists of different institutions with different visions and goals, which might belong to different levels of development.

The levels of development can be seen as glasses through which people look at the world, conclusions are made and actions are taken (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). For example, someone who perceives the world as a jungle in which only the strongest survives, will behave and think differently than someone who perceives the world as one big community in which everyone is responsible for the well-being of others (ibid). By analysing the levels of development in a society, one is better able to evaluate why and how events occur in a social situation.

Spiral Dynamics is, thus, a model which “describes values systems and worldviews as deriving from the interaction of “life conditions” and “capacities of the mind”” of individuals, organisations and societies and it “uses this worldview analysis to evaluate why and how events occur in social situation for both individuals and groups” (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005, p. 93). Since this research focusses on the change a society is experiencing, it will analyse social change in order to understand the dynamics of the past and the current events in Iran and the dynamics present in the Iranian society concerning environment. The research will use the framework of Spiral Dynamics to describe the social change that has occurred during the last decades in Iran, specifically concerning environment in Tehran. In the next part the six levels of development will be described.

2.1.1 Levels of Development

The six major fundamental changes are labelled in the approach of Spiral Dynamics with different colours; beige, purple, blue, red, orange and green. Although Graves has defined what the next two steps are; the yellow and turquoise level, at this moment, a seventh major change did not take place (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). For this reason, only the first six developments will be addressed in this research.

The colours of the levels represent the focus of the level; the warm colours (beige, red and orange) focus on the individual, while the cooler colours (purple, blue and green) “are oriented on the community” (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010, p. 102). In the ‘I’ levels a person disengages himself from the clasping social structures. In the ‘we’ levels a person values the social structure that is necessary for a society to function under the existing circumstances. The blue level, for example, is the “polar opposite of the orange one; a green is polar opposite again to the orange, and so on” (Mann, 2011, p. 576). To make it easier and more understandable to read, the colours of Spiral Dynamics will not be used in this research, instead, a name based on the characteristics of the level of development will be used. In the next parts, the six levels will be described. Figure 2 depicts the different levels of development including some key characteristics, the colour, and the place in the growth hierarchy.

Figure 2: Spiral Dynamics' Levels of Development



Source: based on Valuematch.net, retrieved August 2018 from valuematch.net/en/en-spiral-dynamics.

Survival (beige)

The first level of development is labelled with the colour beige by Beck and Cowan. Beige is the “survivalist level” (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60); people in this level “express self instinctively and automatically for biological survival” (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 6) and thus “concentrate on the satisfaction of imperative physiological needs; food, water, sex, warmth, shelter” (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60). Humans are controlled by this impulsive consciousness that exists of “reflexes, senses, motoric skills and instincts” (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007, p. 48). Everyone lives for oneself in the here and now, due to which no society exists in this level of development. The closest form of society in this level is a herd-like community which is led by an alpha male who only sticks out due to his physical power and ability to produce strong children (ibid).

All people go through this survivalist phase when they are babies. However, there are also people that are dealing with the primitive circumstance at the moment; for example, homeless people who are looking for a place to sleep, food and shelter every day or victims of natural disasters, like floods or earthquakes (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007).

Kinship (purple)

People want to extend their chances of survival and because the “individual survival ability” is limited compared to the benefits of becoming “part of a social group” (Mann, 2011, p. 576), a transition is made from the survivalist level to the kinship level – labelled purple by Beck and Cowan. The most obvious group is the family. In the family one finds “kinship, affinity, security and protection” in a world that is experienced as dangerous (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007, p. 48). In these groups people share their experiences and feelings and the acquired knowledge and skills are transmitted to the next generation through traditions and rituals (Stambolovic, 2002). Examples are; marriage, funerals, the division between elderly and young members of the community, and the division between men and women. The rituals come along with stories, sacrifices and myths. Everyone has his or her own duty and task in the group. Since logical thinking has not yet developed, the personal perception and experiences, fantasy, and reality are mingled forming a magical world full of natural powers and gods (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007).

The kinship level of development is a “tribalistic level” (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60) and therefore the level in which the first forms of society arise; the feeling of dependency makes the ‘we’ feeling central instead of the ‘I’, like it is the case in the survivalist level. The first decision-making bodies emerge, for example, tribal councils in which the most experienced and wise people come together and make decisions for their tribe. Moreover, the tribes have a nomadic way of living, trekking from one place to another.

Nowadays this level of development is expressed in traditions and rituals, friendship, a strong family bond, supporting a certain team and the social cohesion between neighbours.

Domination and self-indulgence (red)

After the kinship level, a more “egocentric level” arises distinguishing from the former due to the ‘I’ focus of the system (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60). Where the ‘kinship’ person feels connected with the family, the ‘will-power’ person becomes aware of his or her self-interest (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000) and wants to fight his or her way through the group hierarchy (Mann, 2011). The stubborn phase of a child in which he rebels against his parents is a good example of this phase. This level brings the need to be the strongest to the front and people focus on themselves and strives for the satisfaction of their own lusts and desires. The lusts and desires consist of possession, power and sex. People learn to make their own choices but only take care of themselves. It is “a level of aggression, exploitation and immediate gratification of impulses” (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60).

Because people can make their own choices the family ties and natural religion weakens (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). People realize that they can influence their surrounding and that they are not submissive to the nature gods and their power. The inexplicable events and phenomena that are not controlled by humans are still explained by myths and magical powers, but they get a human aspect; the ghosts make place for the gods with a human appearance, like the Greek and Roman deities. People try to win these deities for their own benefit due to which the priests, as communication channel for these gods, rise in standing and power (ibid).

The equality of the kinship level is broken and a class distinction emerges (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The distinction is based on differences in power and possession and is expressed in respect. The higher one’s standing, the more respect one gets. Most of the time, this respect is commanded physically and by oppression. One has to prove oneself and has to fight for one’s place. This does not only coincide with violence, but also intimidation

and corruption. A set of ethics has not yet been developed and the awareness of the consequences of people's action on their surrounding is lacking. Due to the need of possession, awareness of scarcity arises and make certain goods valuable; trade and a means of payment emerge. This also leads to plundering and stealing (ibid). Nowadays, these aspects are expressed in terrorism, gangsters, drug cultures and (organised) crime.

In political terms this is the level of the dictators and absolute rulers, because the essence of this system is to force your will on others (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000). Politics oppresses his surroundings in his own favour and because only the best can win, war is necessary to decide who is best. Feelings like pride, jealousy, aspiration, greediness or losing honour are enough reasons to start a war. The military force and generals fight for the rulers in power. Due to these wars, many families merge forming big tribes in order to fight the oppression.

On the positive side, this level of development is also expressed by "vitality, will-power, passion, energy, the lust for life and the courage to deal with dangers" (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007, p. 49).

Moral and obedience (blue)

When the people experience that the chaos created by the level of development of domination and self-indulgence threatens their existence a transition is made towards a more orderly level – blue by Beck and Cowan –; "there are limits to how much a single dominant person can achieve without 'buy-in' from others" (Mann, 2011, p. 576). After the chaos one needs "order, control of impulse and respect for authority" (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60). This order and stability can only exist when enforcement of the set rules is practiced (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). More and more institutions, like the legal order, the church, the police and education, are established to serve the order and stability. In exchange for the protection and security provided by these systems, people obey the ruling class.

Because of the need for peace and stability people are more aware of others and the feeling of 'we' arises again – like in the 'kinship' level (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). Fraternities, rankings and classes and a hierarchical political system that does not use violence but is led by authoritarian leaders emerge. It is not any longer the right of the strongest that is determining, but to what class or group people belong.

Humans develop in this level the ability to postpone the satisfaction of their needs and to oversee the consequences of their deeds before taking the action, this shifts the focus from the here and now to the future (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). It is this level in which morality, principles and self-discipline emerges. The development of norms and values is a reaction to this and are the basis for feelings like guilt and responsibility.

The focus on the future and the ability to link cause and consequences make it possible for people to see a chain of actions and grow their own food, for example (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The nomadic way of living changes into a settlement. This is the start of agriculture and cattle-breeding, in which one saves food for lesser times. Because agriculture and cattle create more than is needed, less people need to work in the food production and more food is available, this leads to population growth and the specialization of crafts. The specialization increases the variety of products at the market and to manage this, rules and regulations are made. The protection of trade and people is enforced by the police, the firemen and the army (ibid).

Dogmatic interpretation of regularities is the basis of this level; people are not expected to think for themselves, because the rulers and religious leaders will do that for them. "It is absolutistic and linear, producing categories for people and a dogmatic belief in rules and procedures ... stability comes from obedience to proper higher authority" (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 7). It is in this level of development that the monotheistic religions are

founded (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). They form in many countries the fundamentals of the political system and the societies norms and values. In other words, clerics and other representatives of god are playing an important role in the ruling of the people in the level of development characterized by order.

Nowadays, this level is seen in schools, churches, courtrooms, and other institutions where order and rankings are important.

Self-expression and rational (orange)

The “rule-bound system does not respond well in times where there is need for adaptation and change” (Mann, 2011, p. 576). As a consequence, increasing “self-interest and questioning of authority” make the awareness of individuality increase (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 7) and the “need for innovation emerges, prompting need for knowledge” (Mann, 2011, p. 576). As a result, a transition is made from the order to the self-development level of development – orange by Beck and Cowan.

People realize that the religious clarification have a more symbolic purpose than that they are realistic and based on rational and scientific logic (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). They start to observe their surroundings and think about these observations, developing a more realistic way of explaining what is observed. Due to this, new skills and knowledge are acquired with which people constantly try to improve themselves and surpass others (ibid). The continuous pressure to perform and the need for success, status, enrichment and improvement awakens competition, leading to innovation, modern science and the increasing material wealth the world is experiencing today (ibid). Due to the expansion of consumption, the demand for raw materials and the range of companies increases.

People like to experience and learn new things, they look around and visit different cultures, countries and cities; people are open for other visions and opinion in order to improve their own. The individual is central; the individual that is self-willed, who wants to be creative and who takes initiatives. This is a level of self-development, rationality and “progress ... dominated by high technology, the struggle for autonomy and material abundance” (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60). The people become aware of the power of knowledge and the possibilities it offers to dominate the natural life conditions (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). Due to the importance of science, power goes to the people who are knowledgeable and the meritocracy emerges out of the continuous need of achievement. In a society democratic aspects and secularization are valued.

The technological developments make the production processes standardizes and automatized making it more efficient and effective; the human craft is replaced by machines (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The mining and the gas and oil sector steer the production and form new incomes and jobs. Maximization of profits, functionality and the increase of wealth are the main goals. The means of production are in the hands of the private sector and the modern way of communication and transport is going faster and reaches more places. A global network emerges.

Harmony and balance (green)

Not all flourish in such a self-expressive and rational society, some people cannot keep their heads above water or do not want to join this rat race, inequality increases and some people become lonely, the question emerges; “Is that all there is?” (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 8). The excess of everything; activities, knowledge,

and matter calls for a more moderate way of living and listening to feelings. The transition to the 'harmony and balanced' level of development emerges when people realizes that they have accomplished much, but lost the touch with themselves, other people and nature (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007).

The sense of well-being arises and people turn against the ideas that the head is chosen over the heart and the industry over the environment and the well-being of employees (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007); "the need for self-improvement to gain advantage becomes self-discovery to gain a sense of belonging and harmony with others" (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 8). "Inner peace, a balanced life, equality, and contributing to the common good are important" (ibid). People "serve each other, learn together, and share their collective vision" (ibid).

Awareness for the environment, recycling, sustainability, "shared responsibility and collective guilt" emerge (Cowan & Todorovic, 2000, p. 8). The urge to cure the whole world by reducing the human impact and to protect the natural life conditions will motivate people to take action. Besides, minorities and the weak have to be protected, and the working conditions of employees have to be improved (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The increasing involvement of people striving for justice and equality – for example, equal rights for men and women or rich and poor – leads to the foundation of the civil society. Moreover, due to media, people from all over the world can be involved with all issues; the global community becomes stronger and more present to take action. Immaterial aspects of life are more valued, like health, peace and sport. People develop their own ethics leading to discussions about euthanasia, abortion and homosexuality, for instance (ibid).

In politics this means that instead of left and right wing, parties have to discuss and debate in order to find a middle ground. This is the level of "human bonding, with emphasis on consensus, sense of community and unity and sensitivity to feelings" (Stambolovic, 2002, p. 60). However, this also leads to a lack of fast and decisive decision making and limits progress (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007).

The drive of this level of development for "equality and fairness eventually hits a limit of indecision, procrastination and in-action, which then provokes recognition of the existence of 'natural hierarchies'" (Mann, 2011, p. 576). This will be the transition to the 'integral' level of development. As mentioned before, this transition has not occurred yet in human history, and therefore, it will not be discussed in this research.

This section has briefly described the six levels of development relevant for this research. The levels of development are the major fundamental changes human history has experienced so far. They can be seen as glasses through which people look at the world, opinions and conclusions are made and actions are taken. As has been explained, changing into another level of development is a reaction on the flaws of the former level of development; the self-expressive and rational level is a reaction on the moral and obedience one, while the harmony and balance one is a reaction on the self-expressive and rational one. All the levels of development are "available to all humans and all levels have their healthy and unhealthy expressions" (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010, p. 102). The levels together form a model to analyse the dynamics of events occurring in social situation.

In this research, it will be used to better understand the dynamics that have occurred in the past in the Iranian society and why certain tensions arose and conflicts have happened. The approach will help to analyse the current dynamics present in the society especially concerning environment. Focusing on the different levels of development present in the society in the past and currently; the interaction between the society consisting of these levels of development and the situation it is in; and the way the society adapts to the circumstances. At this

moment, the society in Iran is changing partly due to the environmental degradation that is taking place. When these circumstances do not match the cognitive mind set of the people anymore, people have to adapt to the changes. Spiral Dynamics helps to better understand these different dynamics happening in the society.

The goal of this thesis is to understand how the negotiation of space in the environmental field in Tehran changes the Iranian society; what motivates the change, how does the change happen, and does it achieve broader change? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to know, next to what political and social change is observed in Iran especially concerning environment, how space is negotiated. The next section will, therefore, provide an approach for analysing the negotiation of space.

2.2 Negotiation of Space: Power Cube

The Power Cube of Gaventa (2003, 2005, 2006) is used to analyse the negotiation of space in the environmental field from a bottom-up perspective. In order to use and understand the Power Cube a definition of space will be given.

Social Space

At the roots of the social space lies the work of the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre defines social space as:

a (social) product The space ... produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; ... in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power. (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 26)

Cornwall (2002) and Gaventa (2006) have rephrased this definition of Lefebvre in; “space is a social product ... it is not simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 6; Gaventa, 2006, p. 26). Moreover, Gaventa defines space “as opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests” (2006, p. 26). “Every society – and hence every mode of production ... – produces a space, its own space” (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 31). Space is, therefore, seen by these academics and in this research as socially constructed.

Boundaries

In addition to the description of space, space cannot exist without boundaries, otherwise there would not be space. Gaventa (2006) describes boundaries as well; “power relations help to shape the boundaries of ... spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests” (p. 26). Power is understood in that sense “as the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible action. Freedom ... is [then] the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible” (Hayward as cited in Gaventa, 2006, p. 26). Gaventa concludes that in that case “participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space, but the right to define and to shape that space” (2006, p. 26).

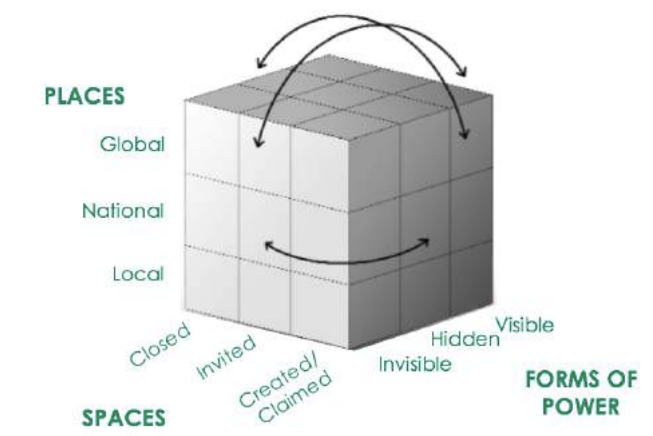
The boundaries that demarcate the spaces in which citizens can act differ per society and per way of governing. In Iran, being governed by an authoritarian regime, these boundaries are probable set by the government, who has the power to decide what is possible within the space and who can enter. The authoritarian character of the way Iran is governed might, for example, create stricter boundaries, more severe consequences when crossing them and smaller space in which people can act compared to societies in which the way of governing is freer. These set boundaries define, as described above, the space for the opportunities, moments and channels where the citizens of Tehran can act to affect the policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interest (Gaventa, 2006).

Space is, thus, defined by Gaventa as socially constructed and is seen as the space in which citizens can act to affect the policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests. These spaces are demarcated by the boundaries which are shaped by the power relations defining what is possible within the space and who can enter them. This research focuses on how this space looks like in an authoritarian setting and the way the citizens of Tehran negotiate for it. Since there are many fields in which space can be negotiated, like human rights and freedom of religion, for example, this research will take, as described in the introduction, the field of environment as the domain of interest. The framework of Gaventa will thus help to analyse how Tehrani negotiate for space by taking part in activities concerning the environment. In order to analyse the negotiation of space the three dimensions of the Power Cube – spaces, places, and forms of power – will be explained.

2.2.1 Power Cube

The Power Cube model has three dimensions; spaces, places, and forms of power. Together they form a cube and are used to “assess the possibilities of transformative action in various political spaces” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 25).

Figure 3: Gaventa's Power Cube



Source: Gaventa, 2006, p. 25.

Spaces

Gaventa (2006) distinguishes three types of spaces on a continuum that help to examine how spaces are created, by whom and with “what terms of engagement” (p. 26). The spaces he distinguishes are; closed or provided spaces; invited spaces; and claimed or created spaces.

Closed spaces refers to closed decision-making processes (Gaventa, 2006). These spaces are:

provided spaces in the sense that elites (be they bureaucrats, experts or elected representatives) make decisions and provide services to ‘the people’, without the need for broader consultation or involvement. Many civil society efforts focus on opening up such spaces, through greater public involvement, transparency or accountability. (ibid)

Invited spaces are spaces into which “users, citizens, and beneficiaries are invited to participate” (Gaventa, 2004, p. 35). The “citizens are invited in by different authorities. In these spaces citizens can, from within the official boundaries, try to change the power relations and influence decision making” (Swinkels, 2016, p. 31). The agency is broadened, to move to a more open space and “new spaces are created” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 26).

Claimed or created spaces are the spaces “which are claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 27). These spaces:

emerge out of sets of common concerns or identifications and may come into being as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue-based concerns, or may consists of spaces in which like-minded people join together in common pursuits. (Cornwall as cited in Gaventa, 2006, p. 27)

In this space “citizens seek to change power relations from outside the boundaries of official decision-making spaces” (Swinkels, 2016, p. 31).

How spaces are created, by whom and with what terms of engagement depends, thus, on the type of space. However, “those who create it are more likely to have power within it, and those who have power in one [space] may not have so much in another” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 27). Moreover, “these spaces exist in dynamic relationship to one another, and are constantly opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy and resistance, co-optation and transformation” (ibid). “Power gained in one space, through new skills, capacity and experiences, can be used to enter and affect other spaces” (ibid).

Places

According to Gaventa (2006), the place or level where the power occurs that is engaged is also important for understanding the negotiation of space and its effects on social change. Gaventa distinguishes three levels; local, national, and global. On the one hand, it could be argued that space creation should start at a local level as it is “in the arenas of everyday life in which people are able to resist power and construct their own voice” (p. 28). On the other hand, it is argued by some that power shifts should be enforced by global actors (ibid). In between these two is the role of the nation state; “how it mediates power, on how the possibilities of local spaces often depend on the extent to which power is legitimated nationally, but shared with the locality” (ibid). Although the global level also influences the life in Iran it will not play a big role in this analysis because the focus will be on the space that is created at local level and how this influences the space at national level.

Forms of Power

The third dimension distinguished by Gaventa (2006) is the dimension of the forms of power. This dimension also includes three types; visible power, hidden power, and invisible power. These forms of power “shape the inclusiveness of participation” (p. 28) and set the boundaries.

Visible power includes:

visible and definable aspects of political power – the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions and procedures of decision making. ... Strategies that target this level are usually trying to change the ‘who, how and what’ of policymaking so that the policy process is more democratic and accountable, and serves the need and rights of people and the survival of the planet. (Gaventa, 2006, p. 29)

Hidden power is the power that is not directly visible and operates on the background;

certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda. These dynamics operate on many levels to exclude and devalue the concerns and representation of other less powerful groups. ... Empowering advocacy strategies that focus on strengthening organisations and movements of the poor can build the collective power of numbers and new leadership to influence the way the political agenda is shaped and increase the visibility and legitimacy of their issues, voice and demands. (Gaventa, 2006, p. 29)

Invisible power:

shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation. Significant problems and issues are not only kept from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of the different players involved, even those directly affected by the problem. By influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people’s beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo – even their own superiority or inferiority. Processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe. Change strategies in this area target social and political culture as well as individual consciousness to transform the way people perceive themselves and those around them, and how they envisage future possibilities and alternatives. (Gaventa, 2006, p. 29)

The three dimensions of Gaventa’s Power Cube will help to analyse the data collected in order to answer the research questions. The spaces describe how they are created, by whom and with what terms of engagement; places define the level where the power occurs that is engaged in the negotiation; and the forms of power address the way the inclusiveness of participation is shaped and the boundaries are set. They form the theoretical structure to analyse how Tehrani negotiate for space by taking part in activities concerning the environment.

2.3 Political and Social Change Triggered by the Negotiation of Space

The last two parts of this chapter have explained the models for analysing and understanding the political and social change and the negotiation of space. This research couples the two concepts, focussing on how the negotiation of space in the environmental field in Tehran affects the Iranian society.

In an authoritarian regime the government has the biggest power, they control this through control mechanisms, as explained in the introduction. Using these control mechanisms defines the spaces and limits the freedom of the people to act and move the way they want. As long as the people agree with the ideology, the way the government functions and the space that is provided, there will be little tension. However, as soon as the people demand more space conflicts may arise. The shift from satisfaction to dissatisfaction of the people can be caused by an event happening to the people or the society. For example, when an earthquake happens, people demand for adaptation to the new situation. When the government meets these demands, probably no conflict will occur, however, when the government does not adapt to these changes the gap between the government and the people will increase and more and more tensions might cause more and more conflict. This is also what is happening with climate change and environmental degradation. The circumstances in which the society is functioning are changing and societies have to adapt in order to survive and keep a society running. When these changes are ignored and no space is created or expanded for the environmental field, the life conditions and the capacities of the mind are growing apart leading to tensions and conflicts. It is in these settings that change is demanded.

According to Gaventa (2006), “transformative, fundamental change happens ... in those rare moments when social movements or social actors are able to work effectively across each of the dimensions [of the Power Cube] simultaneously” (p. 30). In other words, “when they are able to link demands for opening previously closed spaces with people’s action in their own spaces; to span across local and global action, and to challenge visible, hidden and invisible power simultaneously” (ibid). Social change happens, thus, when social movements or actors are able to work across the three spaces, the three levels and the three forms of power of the Power Cube simultaneously. The Power Cube is used to assess the possibilities of transformative action in various spaces.

Spiral Dynamics is used, as explained before, to analyse the dynamics which occurred in the last decades in Iran leading to change and to better understand this change. Moreover, it is used to better understand how the current dynamics relate to each other forming the setting, possibilities and space for transformative action. The past events are described and analysed because they are important for the understanding of the current situation of the society and the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place. Meanwhile, Spiral Dynamics gives a more abstract picture of the social change that is occurring in Iran in general as well as in the field of environment specifically.

As mentioned before, Spiral Dynamics provides a broad and holistic picture of the situation by focussing on different aspects of life; biological, psychological, sociological and systemic, and taking several perspectives to look at the world. In light of this, it is used to provide a framework for understanding the overall and general social movements and changes, while the Power Cube is used more specifically for analysing how environmental activities negotiate for space in this setting described by Spiral Dynamics.

One side note; Gaventa is stating that social change happens when social movements or actors are able to work across the three spaces, the three levels and the three forms of power of the Power Cube simultaneously. This would mean that social change is only possible to happen when the local, national as well as the global level are addressed. In my opinion, social change can also happen without touching upon the global level. The degree of connectivity with the global world influences the effect of a local or national change, but it does not exclude change to happen on the local and national level only. As mentioned before, since this research focusses on the effects of change at the local level on the national level, the global level will not play a big role in the analysis.

In this chapter Spiral Dynamics and the Power Cube are explained and combined. Together they form the theoretical framework of this thesis. They will be used as a tool to analyse how activities in the environmental field by citizens from Tehran negotiate for space and how this affects the society.



3 Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of the research will be explained to show how the data is collected, analysed and interpreted, in order to give an answer to the research questions. The thesis focusses on the viewpoints, perspectives and opinions of the interviewed about the environmental situation, the space available to act in and the social change that occurs from the negotiation of space for environmental activities. The space and social change are, thus, seen as socially constructed. This means that “social actors construct knowledge and co-shape human understanding of the world” (De Bruijne, 2018, p. 28). It is an ongoing process constantly subject to change.

Due to this social constructivist character of the research, the research method applied is an ethnographic approach. This involves, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007),

the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal or formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available. (p. 3)

This research is mainly based on semi-structured interviews – more information about the interviews and interviewees will follow later –, however, it is supplemented by informal conversations, observations and the collection of documents. Since this research is a case study, this will first be explained.

Case Study

A case study is defined in social science as a way to get in-depth understanding and a multi-perspective view on the complex reality of a certain “project, policy, institute, program or system” (Simons, as cited in Thomas, 2011, p. 512). As Simons (ibid) states, the case study is not the methodology through which the data will be collected, the case is the subject about which an analysis will be done. Cases are demarcated by “places and time periods” and its selection depends on “personal, organizational, or other factors” as well (p. 512). In this research, the case will be about environmental activities at local level in current day Tehran. Since Iran and its capital city are experiencing rapid change, the time period will be short and continuous research is necessary to stay up to date with the pace of the process and directions that certain events may take; it might be possible that by the time this paper is finished, new events have happened or processes discussed in this paper have changed. Also the opinion and perspectives of people will change over time. However, the importance of the research is not the facts but the way change is experienced and space is negotiated for by the interviewees. This research will tell something about the way space is negotiated in authoritarian regimes and how social change is demanded from the local level starting with environmental activities.

3.1 Data Collection

As mentioned before, this study is based on an ethnographic research approach and includes qualitative research methods. There are three kinds of data sources used; interviews, observations, and literature. By using

this methodological triangulation, I hope to increase the validity and credibility of the research and give a more complete picture of the situation. To collect the information needed through interviews and observations, I went to Tehran myself. From the beginning of January 2018 till the end of March 2018 I was in Iran spending most of my time in Tehran.

3.1.1 Interviews

The interviews are primary sources and function as the core of this research. Twenty interviews were conducted. The majority of the interviews in English, although sometimes a translator was necessary to streamline the conversation. Three different translators have helped to make the conversation better to understand for both sides. One translator in specific has translated three interviews, since she had a strong opinion about the environment as well, I have interviewed her to make it easier to filter her opinion out of the conversation with the interviewee she was translating. Also during one of the other translated interviews I sensed that the translator had a strong opinion as well which sometimes came to the light during the interview. I wrote this down when taking notes during the interview and tried to take this into account during the analysis.

The selection of interviewees is based on snowball sampling. I emailed as many people as possible and from some of them I got a list of people active in the environmental field. I emailed or called them and either arranged an interview or I got another contact. Also, after the interviews, the interviewee would suggest another person active in the field or I would ask for it. Besides, some of the interviewed arranged new meetings for me. This way of networking needed some time in the beginning but showed to be effective after a while.

Very important to mention is the change that occurred in the data collection after an event happened in the environmental field. At the end of January 2018, Kavous Seyed Emami – a well-known Iranian environmentalist – was arrested by the authorities. Two weeks later he died in prison. His death is an example of an environmental defender that has been killed for the sake of environment, and as explained in the introduction, he is not the only one in the world; in 2017 there were 207 environmental defenders killed (Global Witness, 2018; The Guardian, 2018; Zachos, 2018). In spite of the horror of the event, it was very instructive to learn about the topic I was researching. It made clearer what space there was and is for environmental activities in Iran and that the boundaries are always under construction with all consequences included. The event underlines the relevance of the questions of this research about the space there is available for environmental activities and how this space is negotiated for.

At the same time, this event changed the attitude of the people towards my research; some cancelled our meeting and it felt less safe to talk about environmental issues. From that moment on, I have conducted some interviews but I did not reach out to new people because no one knew what the consequences would be of talking about the environment. Moreover, some people told me, that environmentalists were restricted by the authorities to talk with foreigners. Being a foreigner, this made it even more difficult to get new participants. The unsafety to talk about the topic and reach out for new participants limited the research. The interviews conducted after the date of the event are therefore with people I already knew or friends and colleagues of these people and they have a slightly different tone than before the event; before people were quite open and somehow optimistic, however, afterwards I sensed more insecurity and fear in the interviews conducted. A good example is the contradiction between the following two quotes; one of an interview conducted before mid-February and one after the event;

“Now we can talk about something [the environmental issues] we were not able to talk about before, all due to the efforts of the environmental activists, there is a bit more freedom.”

Ciro (January, 2018)

“If you start doing much more than your responsibilities, they come to you and ask: ‘what are you doing? come to our office and answer’. So out of fear you do not want to do anything, because we are young and have many desires and I want to get married, I do not want to go to jail.”

Roya (February, 2018)

These two quotes show the difference of the way interviewees talk about the space there is to talk and act in the environmental field. This change will be discussed more elaborate further on in the research. For the methodology it is important to know that after this event, the way of research changed to a more careful and under-the-radar way of conducting interviews and gathering data.

The interviews done were based on an interview guide made before going to Tehran. The interview guide includes questions about the current situation concerning environment in Tehran, the way Tehrani negotiate for space by participating in environmental activities and the perceived social change in the Iranian society (see appendix ... for the interview guide). The questions of the interview guide are based on the levels of development of the Spiral Dynamics approach and the dimensions of the Power Cube of Gaventa (see chapter 2). Although the questions are tight and set, I conducted semi-structured interviews to give the interviewee space to tell his or her story and make it possible to go in-depth on certain topics. Therefore, I did not ask the questions as they are formulated in the guide, but I chose to use broader questions which would cover several questions of the interview guide. The interview guide was, therefore, more of help for myself to see whether all aspects I needed, in order to answer my research questions, were covered during the interview. However, an interview guide made beforehand is not based on your experiences in the field, adjustment is, therefore, necessary “to accommodate the reality of the field” (Hays-Mitchell, 2001, p. 314). For example, after the arrest and death of Seyed Emami more questions were focused on this event and the change and consequences it had for other people active in the environmental field and what this event meant in the Iranian society.

Due to safety reasons, the interviewees have been protected during the fieldwork and analysis. For example, not all the interviews were recorded, since sometimes the person did not want to be recorded due to safety reasons. Notes were also not always made, because it would be too obvious that an interview was taking place at some locations and that would endanger either one of us. When an interview was recorded and noted, the data was directly put in my computer, which was always staying at home – so that it could not be stolen, for instance. After the death of Seyed Emami, a friend of mine, who helped me connecting to some of the interviewees and who also advised me on the situation, told me to burn my notes on paper. So we actually burned all the notes, the information was only available at my computer. Moreover, after two months, a friend came to visit me from the Netherlands. I gave him my USB with all the recorded interviews and notes I had to make sure that data was safe. I was also very conscious about what I wrote via social media, like WhatsApp, email or Instagram, or what I would tell on the phone. I tried to keep it as vague as possible and only when we met face-to-face more details were given. I trusted upon the people who I wanted to interview and who are involved in the environmental field, that they

knew the risks – at least better than I did – and that they would act according to it; they decided where to meet or whether the conversation could be recorded or noted.

Back in the Netherlands, all interviews have been transcribed and sorted along the lines of the topics of the current situation, the negotiation of space and social change. I never send the interviews via the internet. Besides, I tried to give as little information about the interviewees as possible, so that it would be difficult to track someone. This means that there is just a general picture given about the interviewees and not a detailed description. I hope that it does not influence the research that much and that enough information can be extracted from the small lines that are added here and there to the description. Together with the information from the observations and literature (see below) I have tried to make a clear and concise text to sketch a picture of the current situation in Iran and Tehran, specifically concerning environment, the way space is negotiated in the field of environment, and the change that is observed in the society. In the following chapters (chapter 5, 6, and 7), the result are written down. In the text, the reference to the interviews are between brackets, including the name, the month and year of interview. The inclusion of the month distinguishes the interviews from the other sources used in this thesis and tells whether the interview was done before or after the death of Seyed Emami. In appendix ... the name(s) in the brackets is connected to the interview and some information is given about the interview. In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees random Persian names have been picked.

Interviewees

Since the research is based on social constructivism the realities in the research are formed by the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. It is important to be aware that it is, thus, impossible to maintain objectivity in this research. However, in order to keep the reliability of the research consistency is essential, according to Gobo (2008). This research seeks for consistency by focusing on patterns in the narratives of the interviewed.

The people I interviewed are all active in one way or another in activities concerning environment in and around Tehran. They all live in Tehran at the moment of the research. This last is important to mention, since the people living in rural areas might have different opinions than the people who live or grew up in the capital city. During my trip through Iran and the conversations with the people I had, I realized that the people outside Tehran, for example, are more religious and have bigger families than the people I spoke with in Tehran. These are examples which can influence the opinion of people and it is therefore important to keep in mind that this research is only based on the realities of citizens from Tehran.

Most of the interviewees came from Iran but one is a Dutch journalist living in Iran. The interviewed are between the 18 and 70 years old and are both women and men. What is interesting of this broad range of age, is that it includes people who have experienced several phases of Iranian society; the time of the Shah, the revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the rebuilding of the country in an Islamic Republic, and current day Iran. At the same time, it includes people who have not experienced all these phases, but only relatively peaceful periods; from the nineties on there has not been a war or revolution in Iran. Due to these different experiences the perspective on the current situation and how it should be improved also differs;

“When I was young I thought the government had to change fundamentally, but now I think that progress is made with hard work and slowly.”

Ciro – who has participated in the 1979 revolution (January, 2018)

“A revolution is the best way to improve the situation, because at this moment the government is not working well; they assign their own people and the distance between the government and the people is growing.”

Roya – a 22-years old bachelor student in Tehran (February, 2018)

This example shows the difference between the perspective of two different generations. Almost half of the Iranian population is born after 1990. This means that almost half of the population has not experienced the revolution, war and rebuilding of the country, it will be this generation that will make the decision in the future. However, the sample of this research is too small to make generalized conclusions about the opinion and perspective of generations. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice the difference and to keep in mind that this research is also based on the stories of different generations with different experience.

Originally, I wanted to focus on the activities considering air pollution and solid waste solely. However, it appeared that, although people were very aware of the air pollution, nobody seemed active in this specific field, at least not without being connected to the government. Talking to the government was not an option for me, due to the lacking papers and safety reasons. Concerning solid waste, people were not so much involved in solid waste in Tehran, but more with the collection of waste in the surroundings and natural areas around Tehran. Solid waste in the city did not seem to be such a big issue for the people. Only when people were involved in the solid waste sector, they knew the urgency of the matter, but again, this were mainly governmental officials and therefore not accessible for me. Interestingly, almost all the participants started to talk about the water problems of the country at a certain point during the interview. It seemed that the water issue was on every bodies mind. For these reasons, I decided to leave my specific focus on air pollution and solid waste behind and focus on environmental activities in general. This included the garbage collection in the mountains, making people aware of the overconsumption of gas use or being involved with the protection of natural parks or animals.

The participants of the research have different backgrounds. One third of the interviewees take action as member of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), another five are studying and doing research in the field of environment, and some are working in this field. Three participants founded a NGO in the environmental field in the 90s and are still active members. Most of the NGOs of which the interviewees are member or founder are focused on the protection of animals and mountains. The study areas of the interviewed are quite diverse; some focus on the social side, for example, lifestyles or behaviour taking into account environment, and others are studying engineering, focussing on the designs of waste management or recycle plants. The jobs in which participants are active with the improvement of environment include solid waste management, journalism, urban planning, and photography and documentary making. Some try to increase the awareness by spreading photos or documentaries, for example, and others want to improve the infrastructure for waste management. Just three of the interviewed used the words ‘environmental activist’ to describe themselves, the others did not give themselves a name, they were ‘interested’, ‘concerned’ or ‘loved’ the nature and environment. For this research, this did not really make a difference, since all are involved in environmental activities and want to improve the situation. However, it shows that many people are ‘concerned’ and maybe involved, but just a few have a deeper fire inside them for the case. Three of the interviewed have known Seyed Emami, the environmentalist who died in prison, and they are trying to get other environmentalists out of prison. They do so by hiring lawyers or making people aware of what is happening. More information about the activities of the interviewed will be given in chapter 6.

The interviewees have, thus, different backgrounds to be active in environmental activities, but all are negotiating for this space.

3.1.2 Observations

Since this research is based on an ethnographic research approach, observing and participating in the social situation that is studied is included in the research methods. According to Spradley (1980), the social situation consists of a place, actors and activities; “you will locate yourself in some place; you will watch actors of one sort or another and become involved with them; you will observe and participate in activities” (pp. 39-40). In this research, as mentioned before, the place in which I was located is Tehran, the actors observed are the citizens of Tehran and the activities observed are the actions taken by the actors concerning environment.

Observations do not play a big role in this research and are solely used to get a better picture of the situation. For example, it is interesting to see that the words of the people do not always comply with their actions. The interviewees stating that the air pollution is so bad and that something has to happen, still took the car instead of going by public transport even on small distances.

Besides, it was not always possible to record a conversation due to safety reasons or people were reluctant to be interviewed about the topic. Having a conversation with these people, small talks or more in-depth conversations, allowed me to get a broader idea about the perspective of people in Tehran on the environmental issues. Especially after the arrest and death of Seyed Emami, I had many conversations about the environment with people, but just most of the formal interviews are recorded or made notes about during the interview. I have tried to write as much down as possible of my observations and off-record conversations at the end of the day when I came home in Tehran.

Moreover, during my stay in Iran it was possible to look around and take pictures; they function as an illustration of the text and give this research colour.

3.1.3 Literature

The literature used for this research consists of primary sources, like news articles reporting the events, and secondary sources including academic articles, books, reports of organisations, review articles, master theses, and news articles interpreting the events. The literature is found through search engines and on websites of newspapers.

3.2 Reflection on the Methodology

This part will reflect on the research methodology and its limitations. To start with, as has been described in the beginning of this chapter, the research method is an ethnographic approach, meaning that I, the researcher, am part of the world I am doing research about (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). My presence during the interviews, small talks, or observations has influenced this information. Moreover, as mentioned before, not all interviews and conversations have been recorded or noted. This together with the generally small sample makes that all descriptions of the chapters are based on my interpretation of the interviews and conversations. Although some

literature is used to triangulate the stories of the interviewees and my interpretation, the subjectivity of the researcher has to be taken into account, while reading the research.

Furthermore, this research is based on snowball sampling. A disadvantage of snowball sampling is that “it is very unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population” (Bryman, 2008, p. 185). I tried to have a sample as diverse as possible. However, it was impossible to contact people working at governmental institutions; doing research about certain topics and as a foreigner without the right papers and connections it was better to avoid these institutions for safety reasons. This provides a rather one-sided view on the environmental situation and the action that is taken. It limited the diversity of the sample and therefore it affects the outcome of the research.

Since environment appeared to be way more political than was expected the freedom to talk and approach people for the research was more limited than expected. I experienced the inability to contact people freely without consulting someone I trusted beforehand. Due to this, I could only talk with friends, family or colleagues from the people I trusted. Moreover, simpler questions about the environment, for instance, what people think about the air pollution could be asked to anyone, but politically sensitive questions addressing national or environment movements had to be discussed with people you trusted and in safe settings. I, therefore, do not expect the sample to be representative for the population. However, for addressing this topic in this country it was the most achievable way of collecting data.

The sample used for this research is also relatively small. Due to the small sample and the way of sampling, the generalization and transferability of the research is expected to be low; other people might have other opinions and the outcome of the research would be different. This research tells, thus, the story of the group of people interviewed. Although this is just one story, they are part of the Iranian society.

Moreover, as mentioned before, the time and place also influence the result of the research. Due to the rapid change Iran and Tehran are experiencing the perspective of people and the society in which they live will change as well. This research gives a reflection of the situation at a certain time and place and can therefore only be of added value while placing it in its context.

Doing this research in another city or country will change the data and therefore the analysis and result of the research. This research is based on people living in the capital city of the country. Based on my observations and conversations with people from Tehran, as well as from other cities or rural areas, it appears that the beliefs, habits and traditions are different between the city and the rural areas. For example, the family size is bigger in rural areas, girls marry younger, the people are more religious, there is less access, time and money for fashion, plastic surgery, fancy cars and going to restaurants and cafés, more time is spent on working in the agricultural or the cattle breeding industry, and life goes slower. This research is especially focused on the urban areas, like cities like Tehran, since in these places environmental degradation is most pressing. It is therefore important to keep in mind that this research is based on the realities constructed by the interviewees involved in present-day Tehran and not on the realities from the people from the rural areas.

As mentioned, translators were needed since I do not speak Farsi and some of the participants did not speak English at all or fluently. Overall the collaboration with the translators worked fine, as mentioned before, but working with a translator is not the ideal situation for research due to their influence on the conversation and opinion of the interviewed. Moreover, it slows down the conversation and makes it difficult to get the emotions of the participant or notice certain dynamics in voice or word use.

At the same time, not working with a translator but interviewing someone whose English was not so good but understandable, also influenced the conversation. Since the vocabulary of that person was not so extensive, he or she might use ‘wrong’ translations, found it difficult to express themselves in English, or left behind details. Due to this, my interpretation of the conversations might be different than when we would have done the interview in Farsi. Moreover, some – maybe – essential information got lost due to this limitation; like emotion or small aspects.

Another point that has to be taken into account when reading this thesis, is the availability of written sources, especially about the current events happening. Since freedom of press is not widely practised in Iran, there are just a few journalists who can operate from within the country. One of these journalists is Thomas Erdbrink. For this reason, much information about the current events happening in Iran is based on news article, documentaries, and an interview with Thomas Erdbrink. Although his analyses are very useful, accurate, and are in line with my own observations, it might give a rather one-sided view on the situation. When reading this research, this limitation of information should be kept in mind.

Despite all these limitations, I tried to stay as close as possible to the stories of the participants. By seeking for patterns I hope to have used their information to show overall trends and dynamics among the realities of the interviewed. By using these realities, I have tried to sketch a picture of the situation as it currently is from their perspective and see how it reflects on or engages with the broader political and social change taking place in Iran.

This chapter has described the methodology of this research and shows how the data is collected, analysed and interpreted, in order to give an answer to the research questions. Moreover, a reflection of the methodology gives insights to the limitations of this research.



4 Political and Social Change

The dynamics which have occurred the last decades in Iran leading to change will be described and analysed in this chapter using the Spiral Dynamics approach, especially focusing on the political history and the influence of the government on the lives of the people. By knowing a bit of the Iranian history, it will be more understandable what is happening now and how this forms the space in which people can move and act. In other words, the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.

4.1 Political History

The current form of Iran's political and cultural structure is not so old yet; the country has gone through a major change after the 1979 revolution. Before the revolution, Iran had been a monarchy for thousands of years, the last dynasty being the Pahlavi dynasty. Muhammad Reza Shah – the second Pahlavi monarch – was the last ruling Shah of the country and ruled between 1941 and 1979 (Shakibi, 2016). He wanted to modernize Iran by implementing “radical socio-cultural and economic Westernization” (p. 251). In order to do so and maintain his power, the Shah arrested and tortured many people crushing any kind of opposition. At the same time, the gap between the rich and the poor became bigger due to the self-indulgence of the Shah and his friends and family. Moreover, as a result of the religiosity of the Iranian people at that time, a big part was “not satisfied with the non-religious behaviour of the ruling system” (Pourezzat et al., 2018, p. 181). Meanwhile, the United States of America (USA) was supporting the house of Pahlavi and Israel, since Israel was fighting against Muslims people disliked the support of the USA and thus the Shah (ibid).

Since the early 70s, Iran got into a downwards cycle of economic regression; due to the oil crisis in 1973 inflation rose and caused increasing unemployment and food shortages (Hurd, 2008). As a result, the state and the society grew apart. Because of the secularization and modernization strategies of the Shah, opposition rose in the society;

many Iranians sought their salvation in Islam as a counter to the Shah's rapid modernization and the far-reaching processes of social and economic change with which they were burdened. This was especially the case since the ‘imported’ western philosophies and concepts of nationalism, socialism, and constitutionalism had failed them. (Buchta, 2005, p. 48)

They still experienced the economic recession that had started after the oil crisis of 1973 (ibid).

The dissatisfaction of the people, due to their economic and religious situation, with the regime erupted into the revolution in 1978-1979 (Shakibi, 2016). A period of “uncertainty and disruption” started, marking a turning point in Iranian history (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 943). It was Ayatollah Khomeini that led the revolution and stated in 1978; “we are for a regime of total liberty. The future regime of Iran has to be one of liberty. Its only limits will be, as in any other state, the general interest of society, but also considerations of dignity” (Chehabi, 1991, p. 76).

Not long after the start of the rebuilding of the country, Iraq invaded Iran and started a war that would last eight years (Tahbaz, 2016). The new Islamic Republic was directly tested and all the resources and focus of the country were directed to defend “the homeland” (p. 944). Although not all the men fighting supported Ayatollah

Khomeini, they fought for their society, religion, norms and values. This was a period of time in which the sense of unity of the Iranian people against ‘the rest of the world’ was strengthened and increased the support for the Islamic Republic. Nowadays, the people that died in the Iran-Iraq war are still depicted in every street and square as the ‘martyrs’ of the Islamic Republic, the heroes of the country. Their stories are still used by the current regime to increase the sense of belonging and unity.



Paintings of the ‘martyrs’ in the streets of Tehran

After the war ended in 1988, order and structure arose. Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989 and Ali Khamenei – president of Iran from 1981 till 1989 – was chosen to succeed Khomeini as Supreme Leader of Iran (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016; Shahidi, 2006). Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani took office as president and stayed there until 1997 when Mohammad Khatami was elected (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016; Mehran, 2003; Shahidi, 2006). Although Rafsanjani is seen as a moderate, he was still strongly influenced by “religious forces” during his presidency (Kinzer, 1997).

The election of Khatami as president was the start of a more reformist government (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016). The election campaign of Khatami was based on three principles: “the rule of law, institutionalisation of freedom, and political development aimed at the sovereignty of the people” (Mehran, 2003, p. 311). In both his first election and his re-election, he won 22 million votes out of 30 million eligible voters, a nearly 70 percent victory (Kinzer, 1997; Mehran, 2003; Shahidi, 2006). Unfortunately, little was possible of the promised reforms, due to the clerics and hardliners opposing his ideas. After eight years in office a more conservative president was elected in 2005; Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Hunter, 2014).

Ahmadinejad was the first non-cleric president of the Islamic Republic, and fitted perfectly in the regime; campaigning for “anti-corruption ... and [to] maintain the principles of the revolution”, totally in line with the ideas of Ayatollah Khamenei (Hassan, 2008, p. 2). A third pillar he proclaimed to be important during his campaigning was “more economic support to the poor” (ibid).

The mismatch with the regime and the society was first expressed after Ahmadinejad was re-elected in 2009, when big protests – the Green Movement – started all over the country, demonstrating against the fraud and repression that took place during the elections (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016). The protests were driven by the youth who were “suppressed by hardliners working in tandem with formal and informal security forces” (Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018, para. 1). The crowd was protesting against the suppression and the way the

enforcement and punishments took place against the people who did not comply with the set order and authority and they demanded more freedom. Depending on which information is true, between the 30 to 100 people died and 2,500 and 4,000 were arrested (Jeffery, 2009; Khalaf, 2015; Press TV, 2009). Even today there are still people in prison from the Green Movement (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016). Although the protest took place for almost eight months, Ahmadinejad stayed in office until the end of his second term.

In 2013, current president Hassan Rouhani was elected (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016; Hunter, 2014). The outcome of the elections was highly unexpected; “the elevation of a moderate candidate running on a reformist platform in a regime dominated by conservative clerics” was not the predicted outcome (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016, p. 450). It was a cry for reform from the people, who had been dissatisfied by Ahmadinejad’s office. In May 2017 Rouhani was re-elected. Like Khatami, being a cleric Rouhani fits the beliefs and fundamentals of the Islam, however, “during his campaign, he promised to deliver more freedoms, to provide greater employment opportunities and to get the country’s notorious morality police⁶ off the streets” (Erdbrink, 2018g, para. 2). This vision matched the demand of the public, due to which he got elected. But, as well as during Khatami’s period, it appeared to be difficult to insert these more modern beliefs. Rouhani is more progressive than the conservatives and hardliners of the government, but he still fails to satisfy the people because of his limited power in the control and decision making of the country. However, the hardliners and reformists are not always opposed to each other. According to Thomas (March, 2018), Khamenei has not blocked any of Rouhani’s decisions; about the nuclear deal, inviting foreign investors, and other big decisions.

4.2 Hardliners VS Reformists

As mentioned in the introduction, the governmental structure of Iran has been denominated by scholars as an electoral theocracy; combining elements of religion, democratic and authoritarian structures. This combination of elements can be noticed in the people being part of this structure as well; the so-called ‘hardliners’ and the ‘reformists’. The hardliners are the non-elected clerics, who control certain political institutions “and insist on the priority of religious authority” (Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018, para. 1). The reformists are, for example, some of those who are elected every four years, and who are extending “platforms of democratic reform and accountability”, however, struggling to implement their policies (ibid). Not all elected presidents have been reformists, Ahmadinejad, for example, is a hardliner.

President Hassan Rouhani is considered to be a reformist, and was elected to “calm international tensions and improve the economy” (Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018, para. 1). Rouhani is, for example, against the blocking of messaging app Telegram – which happened May 2018. He states (as cited in Reuters, 2018), that this move is a “failure to follow legal procedures and the use of force and judicial means is ... the opposite of democracy. ... The filtering and blocking of Telegram was not carried out by the government which does not approve of it” (para. 5-6).

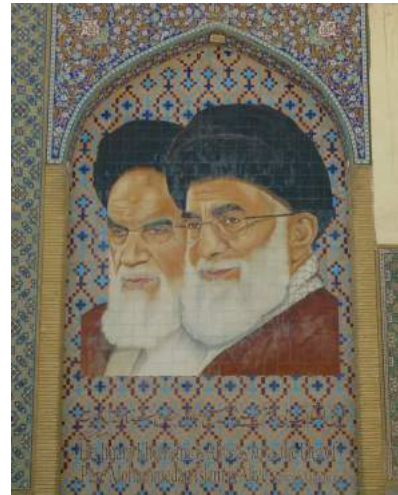
⁶ The morality police checks whether the women in the streets are wearing the required clothing and hijab.

Although the president has some kind of power,

Iran is not quite a tyranny, petty or grand, and the office does not give [the president] final say in Iranian affairs. That role is more truly occupied by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, head of the Council of Guardians and Iran's Supreme Leader. (Fukuyama, 2009, para. 2)

Khamenei is a cleric and close to the conservatives and hardliners (Reuters, 2018). He also directs the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and according to Torfeh (2018), he is giving this corps more power by providing them entrance to the economic sector as well, being active in "intelligence, culture and politics when it was established to be only a military set up" (para. 1). Ayatollah Khamenei has the power in the end, controlling the guards and giving them power in the economy.

There is a great division seen between the chosen and non-chosen institutions of the country, and although the chosen bodies have some kind of power, it are the non-chosen institutions that decide in the end what is going to happen, and these are, generally speaking, more conservative than the chosen ones.



Khomeini (left) and Khamenei (right). In the description under it "He (Imam Khomeini) is Alive as far as the Idea of Pure Mohammedan Islam is Alive" signed Imam Khamenei.

4.3 Spiral Dynamics: Political and Social Change

The last part has described the political situation of Iran in which environmental degradation takes place. This section will analyse the described history using the Spiral Dynamics approach. Spiral Dynamics, as explained in chapter 2, is an approach used to analyse certain tensions or conflicts. In the case of Iran, it helps to understand the dynamics of the 1979 revolution and the more recent events happening, to understand the current situation of the society and the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.

Levels of Development

As has been explained in the theoretical chapter, according to the Spiral Dynamics approach, the society interacts and has to deal with the circumstances it is in. In this chapter, the focus is on the political system as part of the circumstances, how it influences the society – the people – and shapes the society.

The political system of the Shah was a typically dominant and self-indulgent system; the violence used by the regime in order to stay in power and the self-indulgence of the Shah to satisfy his own needs and that of his family and friends. However, the Shah wanted to introduce new modern socio-cultural and economic elements originating from 'the West'. Secularization and modernization are self-expressive and rational characteristics; religion became less important, while economic benefits, modern science and medicine increased in interest. Meanwhile, the majority of the Iranian population valued the Islamic religion and its norms and values, being moral and obedient to the religious leaders. So, a regime focused on domination and self-indulgence wanted to

impose self-expressive and rational norms and values on a society which was moral and obedient to religious rules. The norms and values of the government and its people did not fit, which demanded change from one of them and caused friction.

The order of the Spiral Dynamics levels of development is important here to understand why the different groups in the society clashed in a revolution. Due to the direction of the regime of the Shah there had not been enough space for the society to expand and experience their needs and beliefs belonging to the moral level of development of Spiral Dynamics. The enforcement of the dominant and self-indulgent regime imposing self-expressive and rational elements was skipping one level of development of the society; namely the level of moral and obedience. As has been argued by the Spiral Dynamics approach, in order to be a stable society all former levels have to be gone through before a society is able to change towards the next level (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010). Since the Shah was skipping one of the levels, the society became instable and demanded the regime to take one step back. The society – being mainly based on moral and obedience to religious rules – got rid of the dominant and self-indulgent regime with its self-expressive and rational goals and created a strong opposition totally submerged of moral and religious obedient characteristics; a group of clerics was leading the revolution and religious values were the fundamentals of the new republic. People that had already a dominant self-expressive and rational level of development left the country to fulfil their ambitions elsewhere. The Spiral Dynamics approach suggests, thus, that the revolution took place because of the suppressed moral level of development which was dominant in the society but not answered by the ruling regime. In other words, the government and the norms and values of its people did not fit each other; the people demanded for change of the political system, but the political system did not change. As a consequence, the society changed the political structure in something that fitted their norms and values better. A new balance was found by this interaction.

In the first years that followed the revolution, the level of development based on moral and obedience was strengthened due to the war with Iraq – the people did not fight for their rulers, but they fought for their society, religion, norms and values – and the rebuilding of the country; order and structure arose in Iran. These are all characteristics of Spiral Dynamics's moral and obedience level of development (Van Leijden & Zuiker, 2007). The phase in which moral and obedience dominated the society and created a somehow stable society did not last long; with the election of Khatami the first signs of self-expressive and rational norms and values were noticed. He campaigned with three principles: the rule of law, institutionalisation of freedom, and political development aimed at the sovereignty of the people. Although little achievement has been seen towards these elements due to the strong moral establishment, it was the beginning of something different.

During Ahmadinejad's presidency, the moral system tried to regain power and diminish all self-expressive and rational traces, but, it was too late to turn back to a total moral and obedient state. The Green Movement – the protests against Ahmadinejad's re-election – , the election of Rouhani, and the more recent January protests of 2018 show the mismatch of the regime and the society. The people do not want to live longer in a society based on moral and obedience, they are looking for more freedom in a system focusing on self-expression and rationality. Many of the people who had a dominant self-expressive and rational level of development during the revolution already left the country back then, and still many people are leaving because of the limited freedom they have to express and develop themselves in Iran. Although Rouhani has campaigned for a society focusing on more self-expression and rationality; promising more freedoms, greater employment opportunities and diminishing the morality police, it stays difficult to steer the government and country towards this direction when

the majority of the authorities stick to their values based on moral and obedience. There is, thus, a conflict between the hardliners – valuing moral and obedience – and the reformists – more in favour of self-expression and rationality – and a mismatch between the regime and the society. However, the conflict is not balanced since Ayatollah Khamenei has the power, controlling the guards, the media and many people.

It is interesting to see that at the moment the Shah wanted to introduce elements of the self-expression and rationality in the Iranian society in the 60s and 70s of the last century, the majority of the people did not agree, while now it seems that the society is demanding for these aspects. Professor Chehabi (personal communication, December 15, 2017) assigns this phenomenon to the way modernization and westernization took and are taking place; during the time of the Shah the society was ‘made’ modern or as Chehabi calls it, it was “authoritarian modernization”, while now the society is ‘becoming’ modern and it is thus “modernization from below”. This can also be coupled to the Spiral Dynamics approach. The moral and obedient society was made self-expressive and rational (modern) by the regime, while norms and values like self-expression and rationality were not yet dominant in the society. Now, the society has gone through the moral and obedience level of development and is on the edge of becoming self-expressive and rational, or as Chehabi says, becoming modern. The modernization taking place at this moment is therefore more an intrinsic movement than an external enforcement of the government.

This intrinsic movement is triggered by the external developments of today. An example is the technological developments the world is experiencing – at the global level of Gaventa’s Power Cube. As a consequence, Iran is connected to the world, getting informed about other norms and values and ways people live with each other. In this regard, people in the Iranian society are influenced by aspects of other levels of development opening their own views and visions on the world. This change in the world is observed and analysed by the people of the country forming an opinion about it and acting according to it. Due to the interactional aspect of the circumstances and the people living in them, the society is shaped. When the people change, it asks for change in the circumstances as well. In the case of Iran, the society, which is changing due to external factors, like the technology or environmental degradation, is demanding change of the political and social system as well. They are asking for circumstances that fit their mind set better. In other words, the people in the society have developed to another level of development and are now asking the government to do that as well and provide them with the freedoms they need for these new developments. However, part of the government does not want to meet these demands, instead it wants to hold his current power and control of the society. Ironically, when the government does not adapt to the new circumstances, as seems the case in Iran, it will most probably disappear – as has happened to the regime of the Shah forty years ago. Adaptation and transition to the next level of development is thus necessary for the government to sustain their power and control.

Forty years ago, the society of Iran has made a transition from a dominant and self-indulgent government to a moral one, now the people are demanding change again, this time from the moral government to one providing space for self-expression and rationality. During the Shah, the society was not yet ready for the self-expressive and rational elements introduced by the regime, the country was made modern. Today, modernization is coming from inside the society, it is becoming modern. One major shift of levels of development can, thus, be observed in the last decades in Iran and it seems that the country is on the edge of another transitions right now.

This chapter has discussed the past events that have occurred the last decades in Iranian political history. The brief description and analysis of the political historic events help to understand what is happening nowadays and how the space in which people can move and act is formed. It gives an abstract depiction of the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.



5 The Environmental Field

The last chapter has discussed the last decades of Iranian political history. This helps to understand the setting in which the environmental activities take place. This chapter will focus more on the environmental field, briefly describing the political involvement with environment over the last decades, the role of religion and the perspective of the interviewed on the environmental situation. The chapter gives an depiction of the environmental setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.

Most of the information, especially the part on the perspective of the interviewed is based on the data collected through semi-structured interviews with citizens from Tehran (see chapter 3). This means that the realities in this research are formed by the participants and interpretation of the researcher. As explained in the methodology, to keep the reliability of the research patterns in the narratives of the interviewed are sought for. More information about the participants of this research can be found in the methodology (chapter 3). The data is analysed using the framework of the Spiral Dynamics approach.

5.1 Political Environmental Involvement

At national level the attention for environment depends on the president in office and the situation of the country. In 1906, oil was discovered in Iran, which affected forest and other environmentally important resources (Sadeghian, 2016), and gave Iran a significant geopolitical role in the world (Pourezzat et al., 2018). Reza Shah has taken some environmental measurements during his reign. For example, “forests were nationalized in 1963” to combat deforestation (Sadeghian, 2016, p. 974), and laws to protect the environment were passed in the 70s (ibid). The Shah even planted many trees in cities and along roads, and there was an “International Pahlavi Environment Prize” awarded annually to “the most outstanding contribution in the field of environment”, according to two articles (Environmental Policy and Law, 1978; Marine Pollution Bulletin, 1977). Concern about the environment was, thus, present during the reign of the Shah. However, when the Shah was overthrown during the revolution, and the country was in war with Iraq, the focus of the government turned away from environment and used all its resources for the defence of the country, neglecting “the environment or environmental issues” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 944).

After the war, the government fully focused on the rebuilding of the country (Tahbaz, 2016) and in 1996, they stated, that “the religious leaders in Iran have found the principles of environmental conservation compatible with the general guidelines of the holy religion of Islam” (Foltz, 2001, p. 156). They included it in the constitution of the country;

in the Islamic Republic protection of the natural environment, in which the present and future generation must lead an ever-improving community life, is a public obligation. Therefore, all activities, economic or otherwise, which may cause irreversible damage to the environment are forbidden. (p. 157)

When Khatami was elected in 1997, he stated, that “pollution poses an even greater threat than war” (Foltz, 2001, p. 156) and more attention by the government was paid towards the environment (Tahbaz, 2016). Unfortunately, the attention for environment did not survive the change of presidents; when Ahmadinejad was

elected in 2005, the importance of environment declined again, because Ahmadinejad turned his focus towards other issues, like the economy and politics (ibid). Oil was still a big part of the Iranian economy, however, “little of that revenue found its way to resolving” environmental issues (p. 944). At the same time, dams were build and “large-scale construction and infrastructure programs with significant negative environmental impacts” were implemented (ibid). Also roads and mines, have been constructed in national parks during Ahmadinejad’s presidency, disrupting the habitat of many animals (Mehrdad, February, 2018) (see pictures). Moreover, the international sanctions implied during this period made “the acquisition of equipment and expertise for environmental studies and monitoring, and the import of necessary additives for producing higher quality gasoline, considerably more costly and difficult” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 944).



A road through a national park (left) and a salt mine in a national park (right).

When Rouhani was elected, the importance of environment in national policies increased again (Mirchi & Madani, 2017). “A serious look at the situation was clear necessity. [Rouhani] personally sounded the alarm regarding water shortage and air pollution and pledged to tackle these issues” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 944). Since many people started to feel the consequences of the environmental degradation, due to health issues or a lack of water, the strong statement of Rouhani about solving these issues made him more popular during the elections.

However, there was a clear consensus amongst the interviewees about the limited budget available for environmental improvement, holding back progress in the field (several interviews⁷); “in spite of the gas, oil and mines we have in Iran, it is very difficult to invest. It is not interesting to invest in [waste management, for example], because the investment in other fields is more beneficial” (Nasim, February, 2018). “Gas is cheap why would we save energy or invest in alternatives? That is a big challenge in Iran” (Dilshad, January, 2018). For these reasons, the government does not support investors in this field (Nasim, February, 2018). According to Kamran – who is a business man in his mid-40 –, oil and gas make the system sick; “they [the government] do not have to work and become lazy and they do not invest in alternatives”. Moreover, according to Daghagheleh and Salime (2018), “many [people] believe that state officials use their positions to dole out benefits to their relatives, granting them access to state resources” (para. 2).

Although the “financial resources remained insignificant”, “the government began to address the most important crises: water shortage and air pollution” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 944). The authorities are, for example, extending the metro system or BRT (Bus Rapid Transportation) in Tehran, providing public transport (several

⁷ Interviews with Alborz, Gulshan, Jafar, and Nasim.

interviews⁸) (see pictures). But, according to Nasr (2015), “there are really no major religious or political leaders who are known for espousing the cause [of environment]. It’s mostly individuals, professors, scholars, sometimes even engineers and others who are working in environmental organizations” (p. 16).



Metro station (left) and BRT system (right) in Tehran.

Most of the environmental problems occurring now are rooted in decades long of mismanagement of the countries resources, state several interviewees (several interviews⁹); “Iran has suffered from a symptom based management paradigm, which mainly focuses on curing the problem symptoms rather than addressing the main causes” (Madani, 2016). One of the interviewed said;

“I myself think that the resourceful managers are not hired in the best position and if they are hired they cannot do anything. They do not have authority and the power. They are planning short term programs and it is useless.”

Zohreh (March, 2018)

According to Nasim – an engineer of waste systems –, the management style has to be changed, but that is difficult;

“In Iran it is difficult to accept a new style in environmental management; the officials do not pay enough attention to new ideas in the field of environment. You have to change their mentality and highlight the necessity of protecting the environment in order to make them think differently and to accept the new ideas and technology, which can be beneficial for both the environment and the country, their mentality is very ‘kurtz’ [narrow minded]. It needs time to change the mentality.”

Nasim (February, 2018)

Also academics see this happening; “even today, the legacy of Khomeini and his ideas, and more importantly, diverging interpretations of his ideas, act as a limiting factor on those trying to reform the Iranian state” (Hunter, 2014, p. 259).

The involvement of the government depends, thus, on the president in office. However, regardless of the appointed president lack of action, low budget allocation and mismanagement limit the process in the environmental field.

⁸ Interviews with Zohreh, Roya, Laleh, and Banu.

⁹ Interviews with Banu, Thomas, Soraya, Roya, Havva, and Kamran.

DoE

There are two major governmental organisations dealing with natural resources and environment in Iran; the Department of Environment (DoE), which is not a ministry but functions under the president and the head is selected by the president; and the Forest, Range, and Watershed Organisation (FRWO) (Alborz, January, 2018). These two are officially authorized. Most relevant for this research is the DoE.

The DoE was established in 1972 – dealing with environment based on the policy and president in office – and included the responsibility over “research on appropriate technology, a national biological survey, public education and national regulation of air, water, urban development, biodiversity, waste disposal, noise pollution and agricultural toxics” (Foltz, 2001, p. 157). The framework for the Iranian legislation concerning environment is based on the “principle of sustainable development as outlined at the Rio Earth Summit (Agenda 21)” (ibid). Iran is taking part in international summits concerning environment. Even Ahmadinejad went to Rio de Janeiro in 2012 to attend the summit (Stratfor, 2012).

Running the DoE during Khatami’s and part of Rouhani’s presidency was Dr. Massoumeh Ebtekar (Tahbaz, 2016). She has been a “former revolutionary spokeswoman” (Foltz, 2001, p. 158), and “has been working very hard on the issue” of environment (Nasr, 2015, p. 16). However, the DoE and “its budget was no longer considered as important as they had been before 1979 and insufficient focus was given to the ongoing environmental deterioration” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 944).

Since the 17th of September 2017, the head of the DoE has been Kaveh Madani. His nomination was seen as “a new approach for attracting Iranian elites who live abroad” (Al Monitor, 2018, para. 3). He was invited to come back and use his expertise, knowledge and skills for the improvement of the environmental situation in the country. Madani’s nomination came a little late, according to Thomas, “he is the symbol of millions of Iranians living abroad, with a lot of knowledge, but who cannot come back to Iran because they are afraid of not finding a job or getting arrested” (March, 2018). Madani’s come back is thus presented by the government as a form of progress. However, shortly after, he was arrested several times because he was accused of spying and providing information to Israel, the United Kingdom (UK) and the USA (Al Monitor, 2018). Hardliners pressured him and even published photographs of Madani while dancing and drinking at a party to show his ‘inappropriate’ behaviour (Smyth, 2018). For these reasons, Madani decided to resign in April 2018 when he was abroad (Al Monitor, 2018). On April 17, he tweeted;

‘He ran away’. Yes, the defendant ran away from the land where the ignorant [figures] don’t accept science and knowledge and expertise, and through conspiracy illusions, [they] sought to find a victim for all the problems because they realized well that finding a culprit, enemy and spy is much easier than accountability and participating in solving problems. (para. 10)

One of the reactions from reformists of the government on his resign showed the disagreement with the way the hardliners have handled this situation;

Kaveh Madani has left the country due to incorrect behaviours, which is an example of mismanagement of human resources and a significant loss of human capital as one of the most important factors of development inside the country, and this question appears in one’s mind ... why can’t we take advantage of this capital to develop the country? (Al Monitor, 2018, para. 13)

Governmental bodies are, thus, at least on paper and for the outside world, involved with environment. The strength of the involvement depends on who is in office. The reformists are paying more attention towards it, while the hardliners focus on other issues than environment, like economic benefits. Due to this vague and weak direction on environment of the government, little progress is seen; the biggest achievement of Madani during his time in the DoE was to prohibit the use of plastic bottles in the DoE (Smyth, 2018; Thomas, March, 2018). In order to deal with the environmental degradation more action has to be taken. In the next section, the perspective of the people interviewed is given, who also address possible activities or measurements for the improvement.

Box 2: International Sanctions

An important aspects affecting the economic situation in Iran are the international sanctions; not only Iranian economy is affected by this measurement but also the citizen of the country in their daily lives (Laub, 2015).

“Sanctions are political tools aimed at isolating and hurting the target country’s economy, forcing it to change policy. But in the short run, a target country may adopt alternative, survivalist means to evade the grip of sanctions” (Soroush & Madani, 2014, para. 1).

The sanctions date back as far as the 1979 revolution when the USA froze around 12 billion USA dollar of governmental assets from Iran and imposed a trade embargo, because of the USA hostages that were held in the USA Embassy in Tehran (Laub, 2015; Levs, 2012). This lasted until 1981 when an accord was signed (Levs, 2012). A few years later, in 1987, another “embargo on Iranian goods and services” was implemented, because Iran was accused of supporting “international terrorism” (para. 2). This was expanded in 1995, when the USA banned “involvement with petroleum development in Iran” (para. 3). After Ahmadinejad was elected, the uranium enrichment programs increased, awakening international concerns and thus tightening the sanctions again (Hassan, 2008; Laub, 2015).

In 2010, some of the sanctions were lifted and certain goods, like medicine, carpets and caviar, were permitted to be imported to the USA (Levs, 2012). Violating the ban by USA companies was punished

with high fines or imprisonment – a fine up to 1 billion USA dollar or up to 20 years of prison (ibid). It was not until 2013, when Rouhani was elected president, when part of the frozen assets was released and some of the sanctions were lifted; Iran and the USA, the UK, Russia, China, France and Germany (P5+1: refers to the five permanent members of the UN security council and Germany (+1)) signed the Joint Plan of Action forcing Iran to limit their uranium enrichment program and allowing international inspectors to access the sites (Hunter, 2014; Laub, 2015).

In July 2015 a nuclear deal was signed between Iran and the P5+1 (Okov, Filipovic, & Konstantinova, 2018). Iran would restrict its nuclear program and allow international inspections to take place (Laub, 2015). The deal would lift most of the international sanctions that hinder economic development (ibid). It was expected to “calm international tensions and improve the economy ... but the general population has felt little economic benefit” (Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018, para. 1);

“On paper the sanctions are lifted but not in real life. The European countries are afraid to work and invest here, they fear that if they trade with Iran they will be punished by the USA and the European banks do not want to risk that.”

Kamran (February, 2018)

“The people have been waiting for the sanctions to be lifted and expected that everything would be fine afterwards. But this is not what happened; the foreign

Continue box 2

money did not pour into the country, nothing has changed. There has not been production over the last years due to the waiting, while during that time everything has been imported from China and all the local companies that did the work are now closed due to the substitution of Chinese products.”

Alborz (January, 2018)

In May 2018, Trump decided to quit the Iran nuclear deal (Okov et al., 2018). However, the European Union, China and Russia disagree with this decision and try their best to uphold the deal (Fox News, 2018; Lemon, 2018; Okov et al., 2018).

Due to the international sanctions there is limited foreign investment (The Heritage Foundation, 2017; interview with Gulshan & Kamran), international standards are not met (Bizaer, 2018), the international relationship with Iran, the banks and the world are blocked (Kamran, February, 2018), and there is limited access to new technologies (Madani, 2016). They can, therefore, not fully participate in the world market and the limited access to technology slows down processes to improve the situation in the country concerning environmental degradation. Moreover, “the United States has managed to restrict and even block environmental financial aid from major international institutions such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility” (Soroush & Madani, 2014, para. 5). As a result, “the sanctions have increased a thirst for accelerated development to expand water-resource infrastructure, generate power, and secure food and energy for Iranians. With aggressive, home-grown policies Iran has managed to evade the sanctions to an extent, while overlooking the environmental consequences”, according to Soroush and Madani (2014, para. 1).

Moreover, according to Kamran due to the sanctions;

“We have old and sick systems of oil and industry here; mismanagement, laziness of the people, and malfunctioning of the national relation with the

world make the country suffer and have high inflation rates. Some businesses have nothing to do with the West, so they are less affected, like restaurants, but companies that are international are affected and because everything is interlinked it affects the whole economy and everyone’s life. The economic decline experienced now, is, thus, mainly because of the sanctions that were lifted in 2015.”

Kamran (February, 2018)

(The currency of the Euro in Rials has increased from 50,000 Rials in January 2018, to 60,000 Rials in March 2018, to 75,000 in May 2018, to 110,000 in June 2018 (own experience)).

Due to this, the first priority of the households and the government is the financial situation and surviving with this, environment is just a luxury concern, ‘a second need’ (interview with Omid & Alborz);

“When there are economic problems in life you cannot act as you want. When you are in poverty you cannot act towards the environment and that is the main obstacle.”

Ciro (January, 2018)

Also the governmental priority are not the environmental issues, but rather the political situation and the economic decline (Gulshan, February, 2018). Moreover, “the interest of banks is high, it is therefore more beneficial to save instead of invest” (Nasim, February, 2018). All these aspects influence the investment climate of the country and more specifically investment in environmental issues.

The sanctions, thus, influence the economy and trade with foreign countries, the people in Iran in their daily lives, but also the environment. Although a deal was made a few years ago, the future of the sanctions is insecure again due to Trump quitting the deal. If the sanctions would be reinforced, the country’s situation will not improve and even less will be invested and less attention will be paid to environmental issues.

5.2 Public Perception on Environment

Based on the interviews done for this research, three fields of interest jumped out concerning the environmental issues with which Tehran and more general Iran is dealing; air, solid waste and water. These three will therefore be described in the following part. The information provided in this part is based on the opinion and perception of the interviewed, these are people who are involved with the environment, one way or another, and who are living in Tehran. A broader description of the interviewed is given in the methodology (chapter 3).

5.2.1 Air

The most visible problem in Tehran¹⁰ is the air pollution (several interviews¹¹). It is not only written about in articles and academic papers, it is also observed and experienced on a daily basis (see pictures). As mentioned in the introduction, Tehran is among the worst polluted cities in the world (Heydarpour et al., 2014; Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016; Parizanganeh et al., 2011; Shobeiri, Meiboudi, & Kamali, 2014; Soroush & Madani, 2014).



Tehran the 14th of February 2018 after a day of rain (left) and Tehran the 19th of March 2018 (right), both are sunny days. You can clearly see the effect of air pollution on the city.

Tehran's air pollution consists mainly of "high concentrations of carbon monoxide", but recently the city has "been plagued by high levels of particles¹²" as well (Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016, p. 1029). As a consequence, about 25 percent of the deaths in Tehran are directly related to air pollution (Soroush & Madani, 2014). Besides, "among the top ten causes of death in Iran, four are related to arthrosclerosis¹³, with air pollution among its major risk factors" (Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016, p. 1030). According to Tahbaz (2016), Tehran had less than 150 "healthy days" in 2011 (p. 950). Already in 2001 more than 4000 people died of "air-pollution-related lung cancer" (Foltz, 2001, p. 153) and it has only gotten worse.

The pollution is caused by several factors; "transportation, extensive use of fossil fuels¹⁴, outdated urban fleets of gasoline and diesel vehicles, industrial sources within and close to the city boundaries and natural dust" (Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016, p. 1029). Trucks and buses are considered to be the worst polluters contributing 63

¹⁰ Information about Tehran and environmental degradation in Tehran can be found in the introduction.

¹¹ Interviews with Zohreh, Taraneh, Soraya, Roya, Parvaneh, Laleh, and Banu.

¹² Particles: "any solid particle in the air with a diameter of 10 microns and below is considered and air pollutant" (Amini et al. as cited in Hosseini & Shahbazi, 2016, p. 1044).

¹³ "Arthrosclerosis is a disease in which plaque builds up inside your arteries, [these] are blood vessels that carry oxygen-rich blood to your heart and other parts of your body" (National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, n.d., para. 1).

¹⁴ Fossil fuels: coal, oil and natural gas (Kakaei & Paykani, 2013, p. 805).

percent of the air-polluting particles (Bizaer, 2018). The newer cars consume 60 to 100 percent less fuel and are therefore more environmental friendly (ibid). Plans have been made to replace the old vehicles with new ones, however, only part of the planned cars have been replaced so far (ibid). Moreover, the consumption of fossil fuels has increased due to urbanization, the population growth, and the changing consumption behaviour of the people in Tehran (Kakaee & Paykani, 2013). Besides replacing cars, the authorities are extending public transport; metro and BRT¹⁵. However, at the moment, the public transport cannot handle the population size of the city, meaning that it is always crowded (see pictures), according to Zohreh, who goes to work every day by public transport therefore waking up earlier than when she would go by car (March, 2018).



Busy metro; on the left the women department and on the right the men

Although the country has so many other resources, investment in renewable energy is low, states Nasim (February, 2018). Because, the country has plenty of fossil fuels that are used and which are cheap; “the lack of interest in external benefits of clean energy, higher risks of these projects have caused low investment in [renewable energy] projects” (Tabatabaei, Hadian, Marzdan, & Zibaei, 2017, p. 164). Between 2005 and 2012, “the share of fossil fuels in the total primary energy supply was 99.3 percent”, while renewable energy and nuclear energy were 0.63 and 0.08 percent respectively (p. 165). Meanwhile, Iran’s energy consumption per capita is also high compared to other countries; “the intensity of final energy consumption in Iran is approximately twice the world average; or, in other words, Iran’s energy efficiency is almost half of the average world indicator” (Barakpou & Keivani, 2016, p. 154).

Different solutions have been suggested for the polluted air, ranging from “slicing off nearby mountaintops to facilitate air circulation” (Foltz, 2001, p. 153) to simply moving the capital to another location (Soroush & Madani, 2014). Many of the interviewees point at the authorities to take some measure to improve the situation; for example, the car and fuel industry which is almost totally owned by the government should become more environmental friendly (several interviews¹⁶) and public transport and the use of bikes should be made more attractive (several interviews¹⁷). However, little has been done by the authorities to improve the air for the citizens of Tehran, according to most of the interviewed.

Besides, several interviewees said that the citizens themselves can also act differently to improve the situation; for example, many people smoke polluting the air (Banu, January, 2018) or take the car instead of public transport

¹⁵ Bus Rapid Transportation.

¹⁶ Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Laleh, Thomas, Zohreh, Nasim, Parvaneh, and Roya.

¹⁷ Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Havva, Laleh, Roya, Zohreh, and Taraneh.

(interview with Zohreh & Banu). Most of the people do not know the impact of their behaviour on the air quality of the city (interview with Ester & Ciro). It is therefore necessary, state the interviewed, to make them aware of the impact of their lifestyle and to change the habits and behaviour of people (several interviews¹⁸). So that they turn of the heating while they are out of their homes or put on an extra sweater to keep themselves warm (interview with Dilshad & Zohreh).

The pollution of air is, thus, a big problem in Tehran and also in other cities in the country. Several actions have to be taken to improve it. Some improvement is seen by the interviewed, however, they stated that it is going way to slow and without clear measurements. Authorities as well as the citizens themselves have to change their mind set and start caring about their surroundings if they want to diminish the negative effects of the air.

5.2.2 Solid Waste

Although Tehran is a clean city concerning solid waste, because it is not so present, it is very much a problem. The cleanliness of the city is due to the cleaners that wipe the streets and collect the garbage every night. The next morning the streets look clean again (interview with Ester & Havva). As a result, people throw garbage in the streets (see pictures), because it will be cleaned anyways. “If the people do not throw waste in the streets, the municipality does not have to clean it and this time and money can be invested in something else” (Parvaneh, February, 2018).

Tehran produces around 2.7 million tons of solid waste every year and they do not have a sustainable waste plant that has the capacity to recycle and process all the waste, instead, most of the solid waste ends up in a landfill (Rajaeifar et al., 2015; interview with Nasim, Gulshan, & Ester). A few years ago, they installed an anaerobic digestion system in Tehran, that is able to deal with ‘wet waste’. Wet waste includes vegetables, fruits and other organic products. This plant can handle 300 tons of wet waste a day and it produces power from biogas (Nasim, February, 2018), processing about 12 percent of the city’s waste (Rajaeifar et al., 2015). But it is not enough, the rest is dumped in a landfill, polluting the groundwater and soil around it (Mansouri et al., 2014; interview with Nasim & Ester). Investment in recycle systems are low, due to the low benefits, “but if the energy prices would increase, it would be more beneficial to invest in waste systems that produce biogas” (Thomas, March, 2018).



People throw garbage in the street or go through garbage in the bins after which the garbage is left in the street (left).
There are collection services (right).

¹⁸ Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Gulshan, Roya, Thomas, Soraya, Taraneh, and Zohreh.

Another obstacle that limits improvement in recycling waste is the limited access to the newest technologies and limited budget. This is partly caused by the international sanctions (see box 2), which make exchange of knowledge and financial means difficult, and partly because of the low benefits and high financial risk of investing in recycling systems. Due to this, no investment takes place in projects trying to produce energy out of waste, for example (Nasim, February, 2018).

The solid waste system in Tehran is organised in two systems, according to Thomas and Ester; there are people separating the waste from the garbage bins in the streets, collecting certain waste after which they sell it; and there are companies collecting the waste for the municipality (see pictures) and selling it to other companies who separate or process the waste (Nasim, February, 2018). The municipality tries to encourage the households to separate at home, but only 3 percent of the total solid waste in Tehran is separated at home (several interviews¹⁹).

Most of the action taken by the interviewed is done outside the city in the mountains or other natural parks, they have organised garbage collection days or make people aware of the garbage left in the mountains (interview with Roya, Ciro, & Alborz); “when we are camping in the nature, we always take our garbage down”, states Roya – the daughter of a fanatic mountain climber (February, 2018).

Solid waste is not seen as such a big problem since the cleaning and collecting system works fine. However, there is no long term solution yet for the produced solid waste, which is now mainly polluting the groundwater and soil.

5.2.3 Water

Although water shortage is not yet directly noticed in Tehran, in the rest of the country it is an urgent matter and Tehran will follow soon. Almost all interviewees, who are citizens of Tehran, referred to the water crisis in Iran making it an important issue in the perspective of the interviewed (several interviews²⁰). Therefore, some information about the water situation in Iran will be given here as well.

The last decades, people have dealt with water less carefully than before. Due to decreasing rainfall and increasing water consumption and climate change, water is “used faster than it is being replenished” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 947). Moreover, “drought-related water shortages and inefficient, wasteful and excessive use of existing water resources have become critical and many believe they represent the country’s greatest challenge” (ibid). The main drivers for the water crisis are, according to Madani (2016), “population growth and spatial distribution”, “inefficient agriculture”, and “mismanagement and thirst for development” (para. 5-9). Major rivers are running dry or are already without water for some years (see pictures next page) (Mirchi & Madani, 2015; Banu, January, 2018). Lake Urmia is “one of the greatest ecological disasters in modern history of Iran” (Thomas, March, 2018); it shrunk by 90% during the last decade (Hakim & Madani, 2016), because of the interference of dams, “unregulated withdrawal of water, water-intensive irrigation and the unsustainable use of fertilizers” (para. 6).

Most of the water is used by the agricultural sector using more than 92 percent of the available water, while almost 7 percent is used for human consumption (Tahbaz, 2016). “Iran’s traditional irrigation systems have a high wastage of water, and there is little to no concrete supervision of how much water farmers consume” (Bizaer,

¹⁹ Interviews with Ester, Nasim, Gulshan, and Ciro.

²⁰ Interviews with Thomas, Roya, Soraya, Nasim, Laleh, Gulshan, Dilshad, Ciro, Ester, Banu, and Alborz.

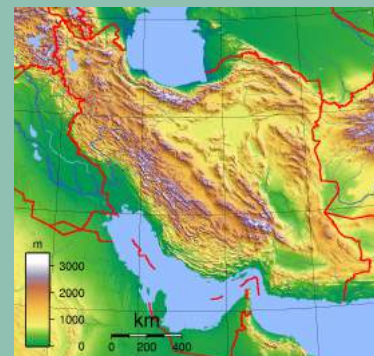
Box 3: Iran's Topography

Iran is the 19th largest country in the world, meaning that it is almost 40 times the size of the Netherlands (CIA, n.d.). Just 30 percent of the country is used for agriculture and only 7 percent of the country's surface is covered with water (ibid). On all sides the country has mountains, framing plains, desert, and steppe (Tahbaz, 2016) (see figure 5). All the agricultural areas are located in between mountains and desert, steppe or sea (ibid). Just a small part – 7 percent – is forest (CIA, n.d.). Because of this topography, not all areas are fit for settlement, most cities or villages, therefore, occur near water and close to the mountains (Tahbaz, 2016). However, Iran does not have so many rivers, most of the cities and villages are designated to other water sources (ibid).



Snow in Tehran (north of Iran) and dessert more south and in the centre of the country

Figure 4: Geographic Map of Iran



Source: Wikimedia.org, retrieved May 2018 from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_Topography.png.

As a result of the different topography, the climate and temperature also vary among the areas; in the mountain areas and in the north it is snowing during the winters, while in the south and in the more desert like areas, the winters are mild but in the summer it can become up to 50 degrees Celsius (Weather Online, n.d.) (see pictures). In summer, almost no rain falls, while during the winter months around 250 mm can fall every year. Also the rainfall differs among the county; in some mountains and near the Caspian Sea the average precipitation is 500 to more than 1000 mm annually (Climates to Travel, n.d.). However, this is changing over the years, and less and less rain is falling. Due to its topography and climate, just a small part of the country can be used for the production of food and the provision of drinking water. Combined with the growing population, increasing consumption and climate change, as mentioned in the introduction, the scarcity of water and food becomes more visible every year.

2018, para. 5). This is partly caused by the international sanctions, as mentioned before, limiting foreign investment and expertise to enter the country and help to improve the situation. Another cause for the old fashion technology in use, is the lack of space provided by the authorities for Iranians to use their skills and knowledge in practice for the improvement of their country. The authorities only want people to follow their plans, limiting new technologies and farming practices to be developed (Al Monitor, 2018; Thomas, March, 2018). Due to these old-fashion water systems, water consumption in agriculture is inefficient and therefore uses such a big portion of the available water. Moreover, the mismanagement of the sector and natural resources, and the lack of acknowledgement for the problem have had an enormous impact as well (Bizaer, 2018; Tahbaz, 2016).

In order to comply with the demand for water Iran has built many dams in the last decades to irrigate farms and provide power (Khalaj, 2015); before 1979 “Iran had only 14 large dams”, while in 2011 “541 large and small dams had been built, 135 were under construction and 546 were in the planning phase” (Tahbaz, 2016, p. 947). This resulted in the “drying up of wetlands and lakes, with major impacts on wildlife ... in some areas, local inhabitants have been forced to migrate due to lack of water” (p. 948). This shows the misuse of the environment for the increase of wealth, not taking the consequences on nature into account. Although Rouhani’s government has stopped the construction of 14 dams due to the damaging effect on the environment (Khalaj, 2015), not enough action is taken to solve the water shortage. Just recently, conflicts arose near Esfahan, when farmers cut a water pipe which was connecting the cities of Esfahan and Yazd, in order to provide Yazd with water (Bizaer, 2018; Thomas, March, 2018). When water is scarce the life of people becomes insecure and conflicts arise.

Besides the harmful character of the dams, sewage, urban runoff, garbage and the landfills for solid waste



Water shortage all over the country. From up to down:
Marharlu lake near Shiraz; the water made place for parking spots in Yazd; dried lake near Varzaneh; Zayandeh Rud river in Esfahan (SioSe Pol bridge); Namak Lake near Kashan.

are a major polluter of rivers and groundwater, decreasing the amount of usable water as well (Mansouri et al., 2014; Noorhosseini et al., 2017; Ester, January, 2018).

Water is, thus, not yet a big problem in Tehran, but the rest of the country is already dealing with the scarcity of it. Madani (as cited in Dehghan, 2018) also calls it the ‘water bankruptcy’, believing that the country has passed the time of water crisis.

Air, solid waste and water are among many environmental issues present in Tehran and Iran. Air pollution is very visible and urgent in Tehran, while solid waste is collected and the problem is not so visible, but behind the screens many problems occur. Water is an overall problem in Iran, causing many other issues and conflicts, which have already taken place at small scale.

5.2.4 Environmental Responsibility

This part is meant to give an overview of the opinion of the interviewed about who they think is responsible for the improvement of the environmental situation and what kind of measurements have to be taken to improve it.

According to most of the interviewed, the government has a big responsibility in solving the current problems, like providing public transport, improving the car and fuel industry, encouraging the investment in recycling plants and improving the irrigation technologies. Most of the projects by the government, however, are short term, while long term is needed, according to Zohreh (March, 2018). They should, therefore, make a strategic plan, state Alborz and Gulshan (January-February, 2018), allocate budget to environmental issues (interview with Gulshan & Nasim), and support the NGOs in what they are doing (Alborz, January, 2018). Most important, many interviewees state, the government has to make policies and regulations concerning environment and enforce these rules (several interviews²¹).

“They [the government] should restrict it, they should, you know, with some dictatorian, not dictator but restrictive strategic decisions, restrict environmental depletion and the people should follow these rules because now many people are not and therefore making the situation worse.”

Roya (February, 2018)

However, some say, that when the government enforces the rules and, for example, increases the price of gas, oil or water, people will start to protest and they do not want to risk that (Dilshad, January, 2018).

Although many people point at the government to solve the problems, the behaviour of the people is also an important aspect causing many of the problems, interviewees say (several interviews²²). A big part of the population is not aware of the issues; 60 percent of the rural population is “not highly concerned about the environment” (Shobeiri et al., 2014, p. 228). Most of the environmental issues in Iran, therefore, originate from “inadequate awareness and poor outlook on the relationships between humans and nature” (ibid) or as

²¹ Interviews with Banu, Ester, Ciro, Havva, Jafar, Nasim, Roya, Soraya, and Zohreh.

²² Interviews with Dilshad, Havva, Roya, Soraya, and Zohreh.

Noorhosseini et al. (2017) state, “many environmental problems and their consequences are the result of ignorance” (p. 2020). This makes it even harder to deal with the problems present.

All the sectors of the society have a role to play in the improvement of the environmental situation, according to the interviewed. Although everyone is pointing at the government, they also all argue that it starts by the people themselves and that a big part of the problem is caused by the citizens. The government is responsible for the facilities providing alternatives for ‘bad’ environmental behaviour (interview with Banu & Zohreh) and the citizens have to change their behaviour by becoming more aware of the situation (several interviews²³). The interviewed have been less elaborative on the role and responsibility of the private sector and the NGOs. The private sector and the NGOs, for example, have to support environmentally friendly behaviour at the offices and extent their activities, state several interviewees²⁴. Cooperation is, thus, a necessity, according to the interviewed, to deal with the environmental issues Iran is facing.

5.3 Religion and Environment

As mentioned before, Iran is an Islamic Republic or an electoral theocracy (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016). This means that due to the political structure the Islamic religion plays a dominant role in the political spheres, and thus also in the society and in the daily life of the people (Ciro, January, 2018). According to the CIA (n.d.), 99.4 percent of the population is Muslim; 90 to 95 percent is Shia and 5 to 10 percent is Sunni Muslim, the other 0.6 percent includes Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian. Although people in the cities are also religious, the Islam has a bigger impact in the rural areas. Based on the interviews and observations made during the fieldwork in Tehran, everyone is religious officially, but in real life it depends on the person and family whether religion is practised and in what way. Some go to the mosque, some pray at their homes every day, some pray only when they feel like it or even never, and some are not religious at all. Religion plays an important role in Iran and therefore it is important to pay some attention to it. However, not everyone is religious, as the numbers suggest, it depends on every individual whether he or she is religious and how he or she practices its beliefs.

Environment plays an important role in the Islamic religion (Al Damkhi, 2008) and “the religious leaders in Iran have found the principles of environmental conservation compatible with the general guidelines of the holy religion of Islam” (Foltz, 2001, p. 156). They included it in the constitution of the country;

in the Islamic Republic protection of the natural environment, in which the present and future generation must lead an ever-improving community life, is a public obligation. Therefore, all activities, economic or otherwise, which may cause irreversible damage to the environment are forbidden. (p. 157)

However, Iran is still confronted with extreme environmental degradation, which contradicts the importance of environment in the Islam.

Concerning environment, it is said in the Qur’an, that “all the sources of life and all resources of nature” are a gift from Allah to humankind (Al Damkhi, 2008, p. 13). This can be interpreted in roughly two ways; as a gift to be used or as a gift to take care of and maintain. Parvaneh interprets the Qur’an in the second way; as the duty of mankind to “maintain the harmony of inner and outer environments” (Khalid, 2002, p. 4);

²³ Interviews with Banu, Ester, Gulshan, Laleh, Nasim, Parvaneh, Roya, and Soraya.

²⁴ Interviews with Banu, Jafar, Zohreh, and Nasim.

“Environment is a blessing from God to use and protect it. We should not destroy it. Mohammed said; ‘protect the environment like a mom protects her child’. We should consider them (trees and flowers) as living creatures and educate the children about the feelings of the trees. If I protect the environment, I can benefit from it and the environment can benefit from humans. The benefits from the environment are oxygen, food, water, weather, and happiness. Without water we cannot live. We all have to work together to be the best and the environment helps me to stay alive. But people do not know and are focused on the economic benefits from the environment in the short term, but they do not think about the long term.”

Parvaneh (February, 2018)

In other words, “each Muslim has a duty to be a good steward of the environment” (Parizanganeh et al., 2011, p. 2836). It is even written in Islamic law that human beings do not have the right to abuse, misuse, or exploit natural resources and that these resources have to be protected (Al Damkhi, 2008; Khalid, 2002; Havva, February, 2018). “The people can use it but we should also safeguard it. People are responsible for the preservation of the environment” (Ciro, January, 2018). But, as Banu states, that is not what is happening in practice;

“There are amazing traditions in Islam concerning water, environment and animals. Be kind with animals, take care of the use of water and of plants and flowers. That is real Islam, however, this is not practised. Most people are not so religious, and use everything and consider it as God’s blessing, only the true religious people take care of these environmental things. If all would practise religion, the earth would be saved.”

Banu (January, 2018)

According to Banu, most people have interpreted the Qur’an on environment in the first way; as a gift of God to be used (January, 2018). Also the Iranian government has interpreted the Qur’an in such a way, “many authorities and people think that God has created everything for the people to use it”, which endangers the environment (Parizanganeh et al., 2011, p. 2836). However, Rouhani has shown to interpret the Qur’an in a more positive way towards the environment (Ciro, January, 2018). He states, that the environment should be protected and not be used as is thought by many people and governmental officials, he therefore interprets the environmental aspect in the Qur’an as a gift to take care of and maintain. Moreover, “when you talk with the head of the DoE, he will refer to the Qur’an as; ‘God has created the world for the people as a deposit’” (ibid). Environment as a deposit is, thus, a quite new interpretation of the Qur’an, according to Giro, who is an environmental activist in his 60s (January, 2018). It seems that the government is starting to interpret the Qur’an in a more positive way concerning environment.

Havva (February, 2018) – who is 49 years old – and Parvaneh (February, 2018) – the translator of Havva and 30 years old – argue, that there is a difference between the generations in the degree of religiosity. They state, that the older generation is more religious than the younger one and that this affects the behaviour towards the environment. Since wasting water and food was seen as a sin, they argue, that the older generation wastes less than the younger one; the younger generations do not base their behaviour on religion as much as the older generation (interview with Havva & Parvaneh). More research is necessary to see whether the older generation wastes indeed less than the younger generation. If this is the case, there are probably many other factors, like the changing consumption pattern, that could explain the difference in wasting between generations. What is

interesting to see in this conversation, is that apparently, there is a difference in religiosity between generations, meaning that this might be the start towards a more secular society.

Although the differences between the generations, religion still plays a prominent role in the society. Almost all the interviewees have mentioned the role of religion in the field of environment. Some see it as a tool that can be used to improve the environmental situation, others have mentioned the limiting effects of it. As *Ciro* said, “religion is like a knife, which can be used for the good and for the bad”. For example, in the mosques people think and learn about the Islamic norms and values. The mosques could, therefore, also play an important role in educating and making people aware of the environmental problems the country is facing and how the people themselves can play part in improving it, argues *Alborz*; “via the mosques some of the education is done” (*January*, 2018). However, the clerics are focussed on other topics that are more important and urgent, according to them, like politics and differences in religion, states *Alborz*, there is not much room for the environment in these talks (*ibid*).

Being religious can also limit progress on environmental aspects, states *Firuz* (*January*, 2018). A very religious person has faith in Allah, meaning that everything happens by the will of God; “and we hope God will save this problem” (*Taraneh*, February, 2018). This is rooted more deeply in the Shia branch of Islam, in which waiting for a Redeemer is an important aspect (*Thomas*, March, 2018). However, such a belief also makes people passive and limits him or her to take action himself to improve the situation. Besides, some initiatives in favour of the environment, are limited by Islamic rules. For example, one project – about creating awareness for the environment by decreasing the heating in the cafes and offer blankets instead (*Dilshad*, January, 2018) – could not offer a blanket to couples due to Islamic rules prohibiting boys and girls to touch each other before marriage (*ibid*). This are two examples in which religion is limiting environmental improvement.

The position of the government towards environment, the public perspective on environment of the citizens of Tehran interviewed and the connection between the Islam and environment show that environmental degradation is an urgent issue which needs attention from all groups in the society. However, the government does not take enough action, according to the interviewed, even though they claim that environment has their priority. Besides pointing at the authorities, people themselves also have to change their attitude and mind set, state the interviewees. Moreover, the interpretation of the Qur’an also influences the way people look at the environment; religion can be used as an advantage to improve the environmental situation and at the same time it limits the possibilities.

5.4 Spiral Dynamics: The Environmental Field

The last part has described the environmental situation in Iran. This section will analyse the described information using the Spiral Dynamics approach. Spiral Dynamics, as explained in chapter 2, is used to analyse and help to understand the dynamics taking place in the society to understand the current situation concerning environment and the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.

Levels of Development

As has been explained in the theoretical chapter, according to the Spiral Dynamics approach, the society interacts and has to deal with the circumstances it is in. The environmental situation, the political involvement in environment, as well as the religious institutions influence the circumstances the people are living in. The perspectives of the interviewed reflects the visions from the society. Caring for the environment for the sake of the earth and animals is denominated by the Spiral Dynamics approach as an element of the harmonious and balanced level of development.

The degree of political involvement in the environmental field depends on the president in office; the hardliners tend to pay less attention towards environment than the reformists. Moreover, the way the Qur'an is interpreted concerning environment by the officials also differs between using it for your own good – a characteristic of the self-expressive and rational level of development – or taking care of it – a characteristic of the harmonious and balanced level of development. Rouhani and the head of the DoE use the last interpretation, while the hardliners stick to the first one. This is another expression of the recurring conflict or disagreement between the two governmental groups. It seems that economic aspects are more important than the environmental consequences for many of the authorities. This shows that self-expressive and rational elements are more important than valuing harmony and balance. The reformists are, therefore, touching upon the balanced level of development, while the hardliners include self-expression and rationality in their visions.

The struggle between the two government groups is also seen in the example of Kaveh Madani. Madani left Iran, taking part in the brain drain²⁵ of the country. In 2017 he was assigned head of the DoE, which is a governmental body in Iran. Appointing him as a governmental official presented a form of progress opening space for more progressive people to take part in policy making. Shortly after, he was accused of spying and he was arrested, contradicting the progressive step the authorities had made by assigning him. It seems that some governmental officials wanted to assign Madani and others disagreed. The bodies who assigned him wanted to take care of the environment, while the others did not like his progressive way of working and wanted to stick to their way of doing things. Most probably, this again is a clash between the hardliners and reformists in the government. The reformist showing their self-expressive, rational, harmonious and balanced vision of the country, including expertise, knowledge and skills in order to improve the environment, while the hardliners feel threatened by the progressive attitude and want to maintain their moral and ideas of obedience and control.

The fact that Rouhani got elected suggests, using the Spiral Dynamics approach, that the people are demanding change and a transition towards the next level of development. The rhetoric used by Rouhani – touching upon self-expressive and rational as well as harmonious elements – got him elected and was a promise of change to the people. However, little of the change has been seen and the people are losing their patience. The question is; was it just rhetoric or is Rouhani really trying his best to fulfil the wishes of the people?

Rhetoric without action is seen more often in the history of Iran concerning environment. The framework for the Iranian legislation is based on the principles of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, Ahmadinejad took part in the Rio Earth Summit in 2012, and the principles of environmental conservation are included in the constitution of the country. However, little action is seen for the improvement of the environmental situation over the last

²⁵ The huge brain drain Iran is experiencing shows that Iran has enough potential to deal with its problems, like environmental degradation. However, due to the brain drain, knowledge and skills leave the country creating a lack of access to the acquired help that is needed to improve the situation.

decades. It can, thus, be rhetoric fitting Spiral Dynamics harmonious and balanced level of development in order to satisfy the people. But it seems, that the patience of the people is now wearing thin. People want to see more action and are not so easily deceived anymore.

It could also be that Rouhani is really trying to meet the demands of the people, however, he is limited by other governmental bodies. The duality in the government, the difference in vision between the un-chosen hardliners and the chosen reformists, weakens the direction of the government. There is no one course and instead of taking action and dealing with the issues the country is facing they are hindering each other. So far, it seems that the hardliners have the most power, because in the end it is their path that is followed in the environmental field, as is shown by the example of Madani and the actual action that is taken concerning the environment by the government. Moreover, the path of the hardliners is sticking to the moral and obedience level of development, while the people are demanding change and more freedom for self-expression, rationality, harmony and balance.

At the same time, it is interesting to see that although the hardliners are promoting the moral and obedience structure of the government and religious institutions, they also focus on economic benefits generated from the oil and gas companies. This last is an element belonging to the self-expressive and rational level of development of Spiral Dynamics. This shows that although they would like to stick to their moral ideas, they are also slowly taking in self-expressive and rational elements – like having their own Instagram pages –, and thus, they as well have started a transition to a new level of development. However, not fast enough for the society.

As has been mentioned by a few of the participants of this research, one problem causing environmental degradation is the mismanagement of the country and its resources. They state, that ‘the officials’ are not interested in new management styles and that the ideas of Khomeini are still important and limiting reform in the Iranian state. It is necessary to change the mentality of ‘the officials’, the interviewees argue, but this is difficult and takes time due to the narrow mindedness of them. Connecting this to the Spiral Dynamics approach, it can be seen as that the authorities are not interested in another level of development and stick to the moral and obedient paradigm limiting the transition to another level. The mind set of the officials has to develop from moral and obedience to more self-expression and rationality in order to accept new management styles and use that for the improvement of the country. A self-expressive and rational management style would include and respect the knowledge and skills of the experts, it would work together, and ask and listen to their advice. At this moment, the government is not open to expertise, as Madani tweeted; ‘the ignorant figures don’t accept science and knowledge and expertise’.

The political involvement in environment and the religious institutions have a passive attitude towards environment. Due to the duality between the hardliners and the reformists the course of the regime is not clear and the two bodies are holding each other back. In the end, it seems, that the hardliners have more power, limiting progress and slowing down the process demanded by the people.

The interviewees of this research are all concerned with the environment, that is why they participated in the first place. Although the motives of participating can be different there seems to be a consensus among them; most of them are touching upon the damaging effects on the environment, nature and animals as an important aspect. However, according to the interviewees, the lack of awareness and the behaviour of the general population limit improvement of the environmental situation. Using the Spiral Dynamics approach, it suggests that the interviewees’ attitude toward environment belongs to the harmony and balance level of development. This means

that the group participating in this research might already be transitioning from the self-expressive and rational to the balanced phase. But, the majority of the people in the Iranian society has a dominant moral or self-expressive level of development. More research is necessary to examine this.

One could ask why harmonious and balanced elements occur in a society which is on the edge of shifting from the moral and obedience to the self-expressive and rational level of development. This can be explained by the idea of Spiral Dynamics that a well-functioning society exhibits an optimal combination of levels of development (Straatsma & De Nooij, 2010). Accordingly, this would mean that although moral and obedience or self-expression and rationality is the dominant level of development of the Iranian society, aspects of the other levels can be observed as well and individuals with other dominant levels of development exist in the same society. This also explains why caring for the environment is not yet supported by the majority of the public and the institutions in the country; it is simply not yet part of the dominant level of development of the society. Iran is now in a transition from moral and obedience to more self-expression and, thus, not yet ready for the transition from self-expression to harmony. For the sake of the environment, it is important that harmonious and balanced elements and individuals with a dominant level of development favouring these elements get some space in the society, otherwise, environmental degradation will become worse with all the consequences it entails.

Referring back to the last chapter, the limiting of space led after the revolution, for example, to the brain drain of Iran. The enormous brain drain is caused by the limited space people with a dominant self-expressive and rational or harmonious and balanced level of development get in the moral republic founded by the ayatollahs. After the 1979 revolution there has not been enough space for such people and therefore they left the country; the society favouring moral and obedient did not accept these people. Now it seems that the group of self-expressive and rational or harmonious and balanced people is growing making it more difficult to ignore and get rid of. Moreover, some of the rulers are also changing and becoming more progressive, like Rouhani. The self-expressive and rational mind set is slowly taking over.

It is interesting to notice that although the interviewees are transitioning to or have a dominant balanced level of development, they all argue for more regulations and better enforcement of the rules, concerning environment. Rules and regulations enforced by the authorities are elements of the moral and obedience level. This complies with the idea of Beck and Cowan that former levels of development merge into the next one. The moral and obedience level of development did not disappear in the people, it just lost its dominant position when it made place for elements and visions of self-expression, rationality, harmony and balance. This means that the society, if it gets the space to develop exhibits an optimal combination of levels of development and therefore is a well-functioning society.

A transition is also seen in the religiosity of the people. According to some of the interviewees and based on the informal conversations and observations done during the fieldwork, it seems that the younger generations, mainly born after the revolution, are less religious than the generation born before. Moreover, due to the connection of the government with the Islam and the perceived misbehaviour of the government by some of the people, the government is losing its reliability and so does the Islam. This leads to less people taking the Islam serious, since they associate it with the behaviour of the government. Due to this, and probably other factors like social media, people born before the revolution, and thus part of the older generations, are also losing their faith. This transition towards a more secular society is a self-expressive and rational expression as well. Whether this affects the behaviour towards the environment cannot be concluded from this research.

The society of Iran shows many signs of a transition from moral and obedient norms and values to self-expressive and rational ones. Although there are some people with a dominant harmony and balance level of development, it does not seem to be the case for the society as a whole. This would mean that to really take action and affect the environment the minority of people valuing harmony and balance should get some space in the society based on moral and obedience or self-expression and rationality. However, so far this space is limited due to actions taken by the government. The Iranian society is, thus, changing from the moral and obedience level of development to the self-expression and rational one, and demands the political system to do the same. However, the government is not yet ready for it and tries to keep the set order as long as possible, possibly digging its own grave. The interaction between the government and the people of the society cause friction because the government is not doing what the people asks for and vice versa.

In the next chapter this friction will be discussed and analysed using the Power Cube of Gaventa. It will describe how action is taken to improve the environment in the setting just discussed and how the people of the Iranian society negotiates for space with the government.

This chapter has discussed the involvement of the political system in the environmental field and the perspective of the people on environmental degradation. The brief description and analysis help to understand what is happening nowadays in the field of environment and how the space in which people can move and act is formed. It gives an abstract depiction of the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place.



6 Negotiating Environmental Space

The last chapters have given some information about Iran and the developments in the field of environment in Iran and Tehran. They showed the dynamics of the country and how past events have formed the current situation. Moreover, the position of the government, the opinion and perspectives of the interviewed about the environmental situation, and the link between the Islam and environment have been addressed. The overall dynamics are presented, which helps to understand the setting in which the negotiation of space takes place. In this chapter, the friction between the government and the people observed in the last chapters will be discussed and analysed using the Power Cube of Gaventa (see chapter 2). It will describe how action is taken at local level to improve the environment in the setting discussed before and how the people negotiate for space. In other words, how space is created in the Iranian society for movements and activities concerning the environment at local level. It will show how the spaces are created, who is involved, at what level and what forms of power shape the inclusiveness of participation and the set boundaries. By analysing these elements, it becomes clear how spaces are negotiated by environmental activities and how they can push for change and maybe more freedom in the Iranian society.

In the next section, the activities done by the interviewees will be described. As has been explained, most of the information is based on the data collected through semi-structured interviews with citizens from Tehran (see chapter 3). This means that the realities described here are formed by the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. To keep the reliability of the research, patterns in the narratives of the interviewed are sought for. More information about the participants can be found in the methodology.

After describing the activities of the interviewed in the environmental field, the involvement of NGOs in the field and the link between media and environment will be addressed. This last because media can be used by any actor in a society, thus also any individual actor or local group, to take action and make people aware of what is going on. The chapter continues with discussing the boundaries perceived by the interviewees. The part will continue with describing two events that recently happened showing the way space is negotiated in the environmental domain. The chapter finishes with an analysis of the data using the Power Cube.

6.1 Local Activities

This part will zoom in on environmental activities taking place in and around Tehran. In this research environmental activities are seen as any action taken by the citizens of Tehran concerning environment. As mentioned in the methodology (chapter 3), this includes activities as members of NGOs, doing research and studying in the field of environment, or having a job related to the improvement of the environmental situation. The focus will be on activities at local level. The research will, thus, address a bottom-up approach.

6.1.1 'We want to do something for our country'

The motivation of the participants of the research to be involved with environmental activities are somewhat varied, but a recurring response is that they do it for their country (several interviews²⁶);

"We are concerned about our environment; our air, our soil and our water. We want to do something for our country."

Ciro (January, 2018)

Experiences have triggered this motivation; "I love mountains. When I was five, we went to the mountains regularly" (Alborz, January, 2018), or as Ciro says, "I saw the garbage in the mountains and I was depressed about it, I wanted to do something" (January, 2018). Also Firuz states, that when he was a kid he experienced the nature the first time:

"We always went to a village, we went to the nature, we saw animals and worked on the farm of my grandfather. This experience has formed me and I want to give other people and kids such an experience as well."

Firuz (January, 2018)

Some of the interviewees are involved because they like animals, plants and trees (interview with Jafar & Mehrdad), or because they want justice and an equal society (Omid, February, 2018). Others protect the environment because of the function and importance of the environment for the earth and society now and in the future (interview with Alborz, Dilshad, & Parvaneh);

"We are human beings and everyone has the responsibility for himself, for other people, and for the environment. Because, I think we are linked together, we should not be selfish; our quality of life has an impact on others. Environment is a blessing from God to use and protect it, we should not destroy it. If I protect the environment I can benefit from it and the environment can benefit from humans. Without water we cannot live. We all have to work together and do the best and the environment will help us to stay alive."

Parvaneh (February, 2018)

However, not everyone is activated by an idealistic motivation. Some are also participating because of financial incentives. The cafes participating in a project to reduce the gas used by households is triggered by the extra advertisement on social media they get (Dilshad, January, 2018). The company providing the blankets for free for this project wants to increase their brand awareness, and the customers get discount by participating (Dilshad, January, 2018).

Since this thesis focuses on the space in which people can act and move and how the negotiation of environmental space influences social change, the motive of action is not so influential. More important is, that the interviewees try to expand the space in one way or another. It is interesting to see how different activities and

²⁶ Interviews with Alborz, Ciro, Omid, and Gulshan.

different incentives create this space, intended and unintended. Moreover, there seems to be a consensus among the participants; most of them are touching upon the damaging effects on the environment, nature and animals as an important aspect.

There are thus several reasons why people would be involved in environmental activities; for the economic benefits, or motivation to leave the world as good as possible for the future generation, or morals being concerned about the earth, nature and animals and the human being part of this. The interviewees have, thus, different backgrounds and motives to be active in environmental activities, but all are negotiating for this space.

6.1.2 Start with One Self

There was a clear consensus amongst the interviewees (several interviews²⁷) about, that one has to start with him or herself in order to make the situation better. They use, for example, less paper and plastic, less electricity and water, they do not throw garbage in the streets, separate their waste at home, and use public transport or bikes (several interviews²⁸).

“It are small things that I can do, I am not powerful, but I think that when all the people do these things a great change may be happen. It is like learning a language; you start with the words, and then you put the words together and make a sentence, a paragraph, an article and a book, and in the end you speak a new language.”

Parvaneh – who is an English teacher (February, 2018)

Another way of starting from oneself, according to the participants of this research, is by studying in the field of environment; for example, electrical engineering (Gulshan, February, 2018), urban planning (Omid, February, 2018), or designing of aerobic digestion (Nasim, February, 2018). They want to improve the environmental facilities and reduce the pollution via the technical side of environment using their skills (interview with Gulshan & Nasim). There are also interviewees involved, who are interested in the social side of environmental improvement; they are interested in the link between the behaviour of people and the environmental problem, like waste (interview with Banu & Ester); “you have to be close to people to understand them and solve the problem in a social way. Garbage is a social issue and people need to participate. We have to open the discussion and continue the path” (Ester, January, 2018). For example, Banu – a young girl studying environmental sociology – is doing research on green lifestyles (January, 2018), Mehrdad has done research on the protection of certain endangered animals (February, 2018), and Zohreh on the environmental effects of fishing in the Caspian Sea (March, 2018). Others extend information and knowledge by writing reports and articles concerning environmental topics and publish them in magazines and on other news channels (interview with Banu, Alborz, & Laleh). “Having knowledge will help to better investigate. When you do research, you know what is going on”, Ester states – a woman working in the waste department of the municipality – (January, 2018), and “that is necessary in order to understand the situation and better act upon it” (Omid, February, 2018).

Some of the interviewees focus on their friends and family in raising awareness for the topic (several interviews²⁹). “Friends think at first that I am very strict when I tell them not to throw garbage in the streets, but

²⁷ Interviews with Banu, Gulshan, Parvaneh, Roya, Ester, Havva, and Soraya.

²⁸ Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Gulshan, Parvaneh, Roya, Taraneh, and Zohreh.

²⁹ Interviews with Ciro, Firuz, Gulshan, Laleh, Parvaneh, and Zohreh.

in the long run they see that it makes sense” (Parvaneh, February, 2018). However, according to Thomas due to missing guidelines from the authorities, most of the people have no idea what they should and should not do in order to improve the environmental situation (March, 2018); “people are not aware of the seriousness of the situation” (Taraneh, February, 2018). Moreover, people do not care or are lazy and ignore the set rules to improve the situation (several interviews³⁰). It should, therefore, be a collaboration between organisations and authorities – giving the guidelines, the structure and enforcement– and the people themselves – following these guidelines and adapting their behaviour according to it (Tahbaz, 2016; several interviews³¹).

Several interviewees said, that informing citizens about what they can do themselves is the first step in changing the behaviour towards environment (several interviews³²). This is done in various ways; some translate books, articles and news items in Farsi to publish on websites of NGOs or in magazines about the environment (several interviews³³), others make photographs and documentaries through which the story about an environmental issue is spread (Mehrdad, February, 2018). Education can be an effective tool as well (several interviews³⁴); Ignatow found “after analysing data from ... 21 countries” that “education correlated positively with ecological concerns for the environment” (Ignatow as cited in Shobeiri et al., 2014, p. 228). Especially educating children, since they are more interested, more in school, and they will take the message home and maybe affect the adults around them, state several interviewees³⁵; “I am a teacher and I can use this position to increase the awareness of environmental issues, it is my duty to educate” (Parvaneh, February, 2018). However, according to Alborz, there is not enough attention for environment in the educational system of the country (January, 2018).

Moreover, in Tehran, Dilshad – a student at Tehran University – tried to encourage people to use less gas in the winter and wear more cloths in their homes by turning the heating down in cafes and providing blankets instead (January, 2018). Others are working on projects for protecting forest and animals (Jafar, February, 2018), producing energy out of waste (interview with Gulshan & Nasim), or waste management in Tehran (Ester, January, 2018).

Although it is a slow process, according to Alborz, small steps have been taken by the authorities (January, 2018). Since a few years, it is possible to advice the national government via a website about certain issues;

“We have been able to affect policies; there is a website [npps.ir] that belongs to the president [Rouhani]. This is the centre of policy making. I am not affiliated with the government but I can write articles and Rouhani can see these articles. They check your resume before you can add an article, and when it is fine, you can write. The vice president is the head of the website, it exists for 5 years now, and you can hear in the speeches of Rouhani that he uses some words of the critics; he is using the site, he is more active than other presidents.”

Ciro (January, 2018)

This last is an interesting development concerning the space in which citizens can act. Giving the citizens of Iran a forum on which they can criticise and advice the government without getting into trouble is a sign of

³⁰ Interviews with Alborz, Banu, Kamran, Zohreh, and Roya.

³¹ Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Jafar, Havva, Parvaneh, Roya, Taraneh, and Zohreh.

³² Interviews with Ester, Jafar, Soraya, and Taraneh.

³³ Interviews with Alborz, Gulshan, Laleh, and Ester.

³⁴ Interviews with Firuz, Jafar, Laleh, Nasim, and Parvaneh.

³⁵ Interviews with Banu, Havva, Parvaneh, and Zohreh.

opening the space of policy making. Later on in the chapter, this will be discussed more in-depth linking it to the theory of Gaventa about the negotiation of space.

There are thus several ways of being involved with environmental issues; as a member of a NGO, by studying or doing research in the field of environment or by having a job related to the improvement of the environmental situation. Awareness is created at several levels and in several ways, people are doing research or are active in projects that deal with the more technical side of the problems, like the engineering of the infrastructure for waste management or aerobic digestion systems. However, according to Alborz – a middle aged man in his retirement –, not much has changed after these events (January, 2018); a lack of information and access to technology and financial means slows down the process and limits the improvement of the situation. Moreover, the conflict within the government, as mentioned before as the conflict between hardliners and reformists, makes the course of the authorities unclear and the governmental bodies too passive to deal with the situation. The chosen government states that it wants to improve the situation but the process is slowed down by the hardliners.

6.1.3 Environmental NGOs in Iran

Besides individual activity concerning the environment, the environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) are also active in the field. Many of the interviewed are member of a NGO (several interviews³⁶) or founded one themselves (interview with Alborz, Ciro, & Jafar). The NGOs mentioned by the respondents are focused on the protection of mountains, animals and nature parks. They are small NGOs having between the 200 and 500 members and take part in international conventions concerning their topic, for example, mountains or protected animals (interview with Alborz & Mehrdad). The NGOs are active in organising projects for special days concerning the environment, for example, to collect garbage or plant trees (interview with Alborz, Laleh, & Taraneh). On these days, they provide flyers and brochures with information in order to raise awareness and sensitize people (Alborz, January, 2018). Besides, organising conferences and seminars to inform people about certain environmental topics (interview with Alborz, Omid, & Gulshan) and a photo exhibition to inform about the nature schools³⁷ (Omid, February, 2018) are initiatives taken by individuals and NGOs. Also cooperation with foreign NGOs or investors is sought for (Jafar, February, 2018) or participation in international committees or conferences (Alborz, January, 2018). Moreover, information from foreign NGOs is provided to the local NGOs in order to stay up-to-date and make the public aware by sharing it on social media or websites (ibid).

Some of the interviewees lobby and advocate in order to make the authorities pay attention to environment in the legislation and management of the country (interview with Alborz, Ciro, & Nasim). They meet with officials to see what can be expected and what can be done by the authorities (interview with Ciro & Omid). The NGOs are seen as a link between the society and the government;

“We try to make a relationship with the parliament; the DoE³⁸. We have been successful to make a connection between the society and the authorities. NGOs act between the people and the government.”

Ciro (January, 2018)

³⁶ Interviews with Firuz, Gulshan, Omid, Zohreh, Mehrdad, and Laleh.

³⁷ Nature school: primary school where children learn by playing outside in the nature.

³⁸ Department of Environment.

Some of these actions have achieved good result; the radio and TV – that belong to the state – have many programs on environment and covers critics on the government of Rouhani, according to Ciro (January, 2018). However, several interviewees do not have the feeling it matters;

“After 25 years active in the NGO sector, we have done everything we could as NGOs, now it is time for the government. But the government does not care, they do not want to interfere with the economy or religion. NGOs are seen as something luxury, there is no support from the government; they do not understand and they do not accept the role of the NGOs.”

Alborz (January, 2018)

“The NGOs, I think, cannot do anything anymore concerning environment. They can only educate, train and teach people in order to make people aware.”

Laleh (February, 2018)

It has, therefore, become a futureless situation, state some of the interviewees, it is difficult to keep on putting energy and effort in the improvement of the environment, while not seeing any results and projects being rejected time after time (several interviews³⁹). Several NGOs and organisations have been forbidden over the last years, for example, Greenpeace (interview with Ciro & Dilshad); “the government are paranoid people, who do not want to share their power. People in the government believe that NGOs can become competitors for power; uncontrolled, infiltrated by foreigners” (Thomas, March, 2018). According to Mirsadeghi (2016), “a strong civic society could have played a significant role ... [in] the preservation of the environment” in Iran (p. 142). However, “such organizations in Iran are quite weak, and historically speaking, a civic society ... has never existed in Iran” (ibid).

NGOs are not fully accepted by the authorities. They can be there, but not all and if they cross certain boundaries or be involved with certain topics the authorities will forbid their existence. The NGOs that are allowed to act have to do so within set rules and certain boundaries, because they have become competitors for power and the authorities do not want to share their power and therefore control anything and anyone that hints for some power. More about this competition of NGOs will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

6.2 Media and Environment

The media is important to mention here because it can be a powerful tool used by all actors as medium to cross a message or make people aware of certain events (Hague & Harrop, 2007; several interviews⁴⁰). The media consist of television, newspapers and radio as well as social media.

Ten or fifteen years ago when environment started to be debated, it got little attention by the media, but “nowadays, there is a page about environment in every newspaper and every magazine”, states Ciro (January, 2018), due to the increasing environmental awareness (Abe, 2013). Considering environment, the media have

³⁹ Interviews with Alborz, Laleh, Nasim, and Gulshan.

⁴⁰ Interviews with Banu, Ester, Roya, Soraya, and Zohreh.

been used to promote the activities for the environment (several interviews⁴¹). Television is seen as the “most important channel for information on issues of climate change and environment”, according to Schroder and Schmithals (2016, p. 94). The DoE has produced “educational programmes on the environment for television and radio and publishes a scholarly journal, called *Mohit-e Zist* (The Environment) four times a year” (Foltz, 2001, p. 157). Besides, a few years ago, a documentary about endangered animals, changed the policy for protecting these animals (Mehrdad, February, 2018).

However, not everyone agrees that television is an effective tool to increase environmental awareness; “people watch television about environment, but they do not do anything” (Soraya, February, 2018), “face-to-face is better” (Jafar, February, 2018). Besides, less people are reached by television because the new generation uses Telegram and other social media (interview with Alborz & Parvaneh). Television, newspapers and radio are mainly owned by the state, international media is received via illegal satellites from abroad (Thomas, March, 2018).

Besides the state owned ‘official’ media, social media has become an important way of communication on an individual level, but also in the society it has been used as a platform to organise and promote ideas and activities. This is also applicable for raising awareness about the environmental issues. According to Parvaneh there is some movement happening in social media;

“Even the religious ones are investigating and are getting information about environment. I have been following some pages about environment that are religious, especially of clerics. Social media can be very helpful, because people get information and knowledge; these are platforms to raise your voice.”

Parvaneh (February, 2018)

Since two years there are “hundreds of groups and channels on Telegram for the environment” (Ciro, January, 2018). Also famous Iranians have joined the environmental movements, bringing their environmental statements to the attention through social media (interview with Ciro & Alborz);

“five days ago I had a meeting with a famous actor, who had been active for Urmia Lake – which is getting dry. I asked him to join me to protect some wetlands. For the Lake he had collected 1.5 million signatures for a petition.”

Ciro (January, 2018)

This shows the reach of famous people and the influence social media can have; the media has a big role to play, they have influence on the people’s views. The media should encourage people, they should give the people the information about these topics, several interviews⁴² state.

“Social media have also become an effective forum for debating the weaknesses of the system” (Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018, para. 6). Before the ban of Telegram, the network was used to organise protests in January 2018

⁴¹ Interviews with Alborz, Roya, Soraya, and Jafar.

⁴² Interviews with Banu, Dilshad, Roya, and Zohreh.

(Daghagheleh & Salime, 2018; Reuters, 2018) and Instagram is used to give a voice to the protests against the forced hijab⁴³, for example (Ciro, January, 2018). More about these examples later on in the chapter.

The media spheres have changed over the last decades, television, newspapers and radio are still used but the younger generation are mostly focussed on social media. Media is seen by most interviews as a useful tool to increase the awareness of people. However, more and more limitations for the media have occurred over the years.

Media Blocking

In the media there are restrictions implied by the government that limit the freedom of the people. It is stated in the constitution of the country that “publications have freedom of expression, except when it is detrimental to the ‘fundamental principles of Islam’ or the rights of the public” (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016, p. 454). In practice this means that media is restricted. For example, in the beginning of this century more than 100 newspapers have been closed down, and journalists have been imprisoned or ‘attacked’ (Shahidi, 2006).

“The last 17 years have not been without problems of course, but so far they accept it. However, I [Thomas Erdbrink] am one of the only reporters left in Iran, and I think that is also one of the reasons they let me be, because now they can say to foreigners; ‘Thomas is writing critical articles, what do you mean we do not have critical journalism?’ I do what I can.”

Thomas (March, 2018)

The authorities are, thus, controlling the media and, therefore, the freedom of expression.

More recently – May 2018 – “Iran blocked Telegram, the most popular messaging app in the country”, stating that it “endangers national security” (Erdbrink, 2018g, para. 1). Telegram, used by 40 million people, has been accused of “supporting terrorists and other hostile groups” (ibid). While Supreme Leader Khamenei initiated this move, not everyone from the Iranian authorities agrees with it; as mentioned before, president Rouhani states that this move is “the opposite of democracy” (Reuters, 2018, para. 5). Besides Telegram, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other channels are also blocked by the Iranian authorities. However, some “senior officials” from these authorities are still using Twitter (Erdbrink, 2018g, para. 2) and Khamenei and Rouhani have both an Instagram page with around two million followers (https://www.instagram.com/khamenei_ir/; <https://www.instagram.com/hrouhani/>) (see picture).

The authorities make it harder and harder for the citizens of Iran to use the forums they want and need for spreading the information in order to increase awareness and take action. Closing down newspapers,



Instagram pages Khamenei and Rouhani

⁴³ Movements against the forced hijab on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/masih_alinejad/; <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/whitewednesdays/>.

imprisoning journalists and blocking social media channels, all limit the freedom of people and make it difficult to raise the awareness for environmental issues.

6.3 Red Lines

Limitations, like the restrictions in media, make the space in which actors can act shrink. These spaces are demarcated by boundaries, as Gaventa calls them (see chapter 2). The interviewees have called these boundaries the 'red lines'. The red lines are the unclarified lines between what is accepted and what not by the authorities.

According to Alborz and Ciro, the red lines have moved (January, 2018). Before it was not possible to talk about water issues and dams, for example, while now everyone is criticizing the government about their management towards such environmental problems. The red lines are pushed by the activities described before;

“These actions have made a better sphere all over the country. Now we can talk about something we were not able to talk about before, all due to the efforts of the environmental activists, there is a bit more freedom. In environment, the case is not so complicated, there are not so many obstacles, you have to put time and money in it and talk about it.”

Ciro – this interview took place before the death of Seyed Emami (January, 2018)

However, as mentioned before, the arrest and death of Seyed Emami – an environmentalist – in Iran mid-February have changed this perception of openness;

“We are scared and do not want to go to prison, so we do not take action.”

Soraya – this interview took place after (February, 2018)

“If you start doing much more than your responsibilities, they come to you and ask: ‘What are you doing? Come to our office and answer’. So out of fear you do not want to do anything, because we are young and have many desires and I want to get married, I do not want to go to jail.”

Roya – this interview took place after (February, 2018)

People are scared about the consequences of their action and due to recent events they do not know where the boundaries are (interview with Soraya, Dilshad, & Roya). These examples show the difference of the way interviewees talk about the space there is to talk and act in the environmental field before and after the event of mid-February. The red lines are unclarified and are pushed back and forth. Nobody knows exactly where the red lines are. Further discussion on the red lines will follow later in this chapter. The pushing back and forth of the red lines in the environmental field can be illustrated by what happened to Kaveh Madani, discussed earlier, and Kavous Seyed Emami.

6.4 Actions Taken by the Authorities

Two events will be described here that happened in the environmental field and influenced the why people move and act in this field.

6.4.1 Kaveh Madani

As described in the last chapter, Kaveh Madani was assigned head of the DoE at the end of 2017. Being part of the brain drain group it was a move to open up the process of policy making for a new generation with another background, knowledge and skills. However, in April 2018 he fled and resigned because he had been arrested a few times in Iran and accused of spying. More details about what happened to Madani can be read in the previous chapter (chapter 5).

The authorities showed that the red lines were a little wider when they invited Madani to come to Iran to become head of the DoE. However, shortly after, it appeared that the red lines were not as wide as was thought – they arrested him – due to which he ‘fled’ the country and resigned from his post. The contradiction of the events shows the conflict within the government, between the chosen and non-chosen bodies of the government, which is probably present behind the screens. Madani has become a victim of this strife.

6.4.2 Kavous Seyed Emami

Another event showing the way the negotiation of boundaries and thus space takes place is what has happened to Kavous Seyed Emami. During my stay in Iran, the way space is negotiated concerning environmental activities became quite clear after an incident happened. At the end of January 2018, Kavous Seyed Emami, a 64 years old sociological professor at the conservative Imam Sadiq University (Aljaazera, 2018; Erdbrink, 2018d, 2018e) and “prominent environmentalist” (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 1) was arrested – on the 24th of January 2018 – together with six other employees and volunteers of the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (Erdbrink, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e). Nobody knew exactly why they got arrested (Erdbrink, 2018e). According to the authorities, Seyed Emami used his environmental commitment as a cover for spying for the USA and Israel (Aljaazera, 2018; Erdbrink, 2018d, 2018e). The foundation, of which Seyed Emami is the director, deals with water shortage and protection of the wild sheep and Persian leopard (Erdbrink, 2018e). Seyed Emami invited foreign experts and put cameras in the national parks to photograph and track rare animals (ibid). These activities were seen by the authorities as suspicious and led to the “spying charges” (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 16). The cameras installed in the national parks, the prosecutors said, were used to make pictures of the ‘strategic places’ “to monitor Iran’s missile activities, sending information to foreigners” (Erdbrink, 2018e, para. 8). However, Seyed Emami’s son Ramin states, “those cameras ... are for shooting wildlife, their range doesn’t go beyond 25 meters. They are cheap and can be bought anywhere. Even if they wanted – which they didn’t – how could they spy on the missile program with those?” (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 23). Thomas has been at the organisation of Seyed Emami quite often; “it is super professional, everything is online, showing how transparent it is, and he is working together with the DoE. Nothing about what he is accused of is true” (Thomas, March, 2018). One of the interviewed stated,

“They did some research about what the government is exactly doing with our resources. So if they make people aware of what is exactly happening, the government will think it is a dangerous situation. The government is never happy with people being aware of what is happening. The environmental activists make people aware of the misuse of the resources and the policy of government.”

Zohreh (March, 2018)

As soon as you pay attention to the water shortage of the country, you are accused of being a spy by the authorities (Erdbrink, 2018e).

Two weeks after the arrest, Seyed Emami’s wife was called to inform that her husband had committed suicide in prison (Erdbrink, 2018e). Before this final call, she had only spoken with him once very briefly; “he sounded terrible. ‘I’m O.K.,’ he said” (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 26). On the 8th of February 2018 Kavous Seyed Emami died in Evin Prison Tehran. He has confessed and later committed suicide out of shame, according to the authorities (Erdbrink, 2018e). The autopsy of the body and a “surveillance video” were shown to his sons – Ramin and Mehran –,

“I saw my father entering his cell, pacing through the room,” Ramin said. “They have taken his eyeglasses, without which he can barely see. He makes the bed, places a shirt around his neck and enters the bathroom. Seven hours later he is brought out, dead.” “I can’t determine what happened there,” the son went on. “Why would he make his bed? How can he hang himself in a high-security prison?”. (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 32)

They were denied an independent autopsy (ibid).

Family, close friends and colleagues have been interrogated for several hours by the secret intelligence – Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps – or went to jail for a few days (Erdbrink, 2018d, 2018e). The two sons were warned by the interrogators not to speak about the event that happened to their father, however, they want to spread the story:

in hope of pressing the authorities to be more forthcoming about what had really happened to their father and to other prisoners who have died recently under mysterious circumstance in Iran’s prisons. “We want a transparent investigation”, said Mehran, who denied any and all accusations that his father was a spy. (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 6)

According to Erdbrink, it happens regularly that people get arrested, although they get free after a few years, they are mentally broken (Erdbrink, 2018e).

During Seyed Emami’s funeral the intelligence agents were watching from a distance, according to Erdbrink (2018e). “After being constantly harassed and threatened, our family has decided, for the sake of our own safety, to leave Iran and head to Vancouver, where we can start a new peaceful life”, Ramin said, “although we are coming there with nothing, since the government raided our home and seized all of our valuables (most importantly deeds to our homes), we can no longer stand this state of constant terror” (Erdbrink, 2018f, para. 4). When the two sons and their mother tried to leave the country, the mother was refused to leave “and her passport was seized” (ibid). The two sons were allowed to board (ibid).

A few weeks after the arrest of the activists and the death of Seyed Emami, another three environmental activists were arrested, according to Vreeken (2018).

Some of the interviewees knew Seyed Emami (interview with Mehrdad & Omid). The environmental activists who are still outside the prison are restricted by the authorities to talk, especially with foreign channels, says Mehrdad, who has been a volunteer at an environmental NGO as well, the future is very insecure because nobody knows where this will lead to (February, 2018). Some of the friends of the people who are arrested have started a procedure trying to get them out. “These people that are arrested are my close friends. My wife and I were crying last night, but again today I am here and I am very hopeful and started working without being disappointed or being hopeless” (Omid, February, 2018).

The opinions about the arrests and death are divided in parliament.

The hardliners have found new strength, analysts say, their anti-Western position bolstered by growing threats from President Trump, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and Mohammed bin Salman, the young crown prince of Saudi Arabia. ‘The pillars of our revolution are under attack more than ever, so it’s natural for the intelligence unit of the Guards to get involved ...’, [states] a hard-line analyst. (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 11)

Some of the members of parliament expressed their disbelief and accuse the hardliners from “distracting the attention from the main problems” (Erdbrink, 2018e, para. 10). Rouhani has asked for the investigation into prison deaths that happened in the first months of 2018 (Aljaazera, 2018). Which was denied by other authorities.

Seyed Emami:

was an unexpected target of the hard-liners. Softspoken, he always preferred to cooperate rather than challenge the authorities. ... he had always stood out for his liberal, pragmatic approach, believing in gradual change and individual responsibility for making it happen. (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 12)

“He urged his fellow Iranians to work within the system to build the country they desired, despite setbacks they might experience” (ibid). His death has everything to do with drought, animals going extinct and the dangers the climate change brings to Iran, according to Erdbrink (2018e). Not only danger for humans and animals, but also for the regime of Iran (ibid). At the end of May 2018, the authorities declared that they had not found anything suspicious in the case of Seyed Emami and the other activists that had been arrested, “they were no spies” (Erdbrink, 2018h, para. 12).

The story of Seyed Emami shows the insecurity of the red line. Seyed Emami was always transparent about what he was doing towards the authorities and he preferred to cooperate rather than challenge them. However, he got arrested and later died in prison suggesting that he had crossed a red line. Since nobody understood why he got arrested, the uncertainty increased and people stopped many of their activities (Mehrdad, February, 2018). Interviews done before the arrest of Seyed Emami state, that talking about the environment is not a threat (several interviews⁴⁴), the space is open and there is no fear to criticize – “they do not arrest you” (Alborz, January, 2018). Until the red lines are crossed, apparently. Then the people were a bit less open to talk about environment; “if you connect it to political issues, then there is a problem” (interview with Alborz, Ester, & Gulshan). Since the arrest and death of Seyed Emami, people active in environment have been more reluctant to talk about their involvement in the environment, especially with foreigners – being accused of spying.

The next part will go more in-depth on the way space is negotiated at local level in the environmental field.

⁴⁴ Interviews with Alborz, Banu, Ester, Gulshan, and Ciro.

6.5 Power Cube: Negotiating Environmental Space

This part will connect the theoretical framework of Gaventa to the data just described. It will first touch upon boundaries, after which the three dimensions of the Power Cube – spaces, power, and places – are discussed.

Boundaries or ‘Red Lines’

The negotiation for space is determined by the boundaries that define the space. According to Gaventa, the boundaries define what is possible within them, who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests. The interviewees have referred to these boundaries as ‘red lines’, which are most of the time unclear but are able to be moved back and forth by the participants within the space and the government who is setting the boundaries. According to Swinkels (2016), who has done research on Iran two years ago, “the red line is negotiated and pushed back by practices ..., while at the same time, the red line constrains and dominates” (p. 33), “it is shaped by laws, symbols and actions; the morality police, ... cultural norms and by the ... arrests of ... journalists” (p. 25). It is interesting to see, that the interviewees of Swinkels’ research have also described the boundaries as red line, even though it was a different group of people.

The red lines for environment have been pushed by the activities of the people over the last years, more is possible now and less is taboo or dangerous to talk about. As described before, it is, for example, now possible to talk about water and dams, while before this could have caused some problems. Environmental activities have, thus, stretched the boundaries. The environmental activities are practised as much as possible by the interviewees within these boundaries. However, as examples like Madani and Seyed Emami show, one can never be sure where the real place of the red line is. These are two examples that show the unclarified character of the red lines. Madani was working in the system of the authorities, he was part of it and Seyed Emami was always transparent and preferred to cooperate with the authorities instead of challenging them. However, both got arrested in the first months of 2018 and Seyed Emami even died in prison. This suggests that they had crossed the red line which was unclear for them or which they tried to push further. The space for environment is, thus, smaller and the boundaries are faster to be crossed than what was expected by the people. A misbalance between the perceived space and the actual space defined by the authorities resulted in conflict. As a response to this realization of misbalance and uncertainty, people in the environmental field are holding back and act more careful than before the events happened. They are afraid to take action because the boundaries are not clear.

The negotiation for the boundaries or red lines has been described above in individual actions in the environmental field. More space for environment has been created via media platforms and the activities of the people and the NGOs, but also from within the government, for example by the action Madani tried to take. However, the authorities are fighting against the extension of space and the red lines, as well. One example is the imprisonment of Seyed Emami. The authorities scare the people by this action (interview with Roya & Thomas); “so out of fear, you do not want to do anything” (Roya, February, 2018). By these activities the authorities want to show their control and tighten the red lines limiting the space. People with similar activities as Seyed Emami feel that they have to be careful by what they are doing and thus are limited in their liberty of movement and expression. However, the two sons of Seyed Emami are fighting against these restrictions by speaking out in public about what happened to their father and pressing the authorities to be transparent about what has happened now and with other prisoners as well.

There are, thus, two movements seen in the environmental field as a reaction to the death of Seyed Emami; holding back and fighting back. As mentioned before, on the one hand, the interviewees are afraid to act because they do not want to go to prison and therefore they keep quiet until the boundaries are clearer again. On the other hand, some people are fighting back, like the sons of Seyed Emami or the interviewees who are trying to get other environmentalists out of prison. The realization of this uncertainty make some accept the new space and the uncertainty of the red lines, while others do not accept another limitation of their freedoms. Holding back and fighting back happens at the same time, it depends on every individual person and his or her situation which direction he or she chooses to take.

It does not mean that the individual pushing the boundaries further also increases the space, it depends on the reaction of the government where the red lines will be. At this moment, it seems that due to the measurements taken by the government – not releasing the environmentalist who are still in prison and arresting Madani – that no more space is given in by the authorities. However, again the conflict within the government is seen; the hardliners against the reformists. It will be interesting to see which governmental body has the longest breath and the most power in the end; at this moment, it seems that the hardliners have a stronger finger in the pie, and are therefore deciding what the boundaries are.

Spaces

It can be argued that many issues in Iran take place in closed spaces, due to the urge of control by the government bodies;

“The Iranian authorities are all paranoia, who do not want to share power. It is only for two years now that other people than the ones from the system are allowed to be on billboards, this shows who could be famous until that point for 36 years. Also the television is all covered with clerics, the economy is for 80% owned by the state. NGOs can become a threat to this power. Why environmental NGOs? Yeh, maybe because there were too many environmental NGOs, maybe because they will be a threat to the system. If you are only concerned with surviving of your own power, you will never share it any way. Because everything is about sharing power, all solutions include the sharing of power. In fact, it is a very insecure system, insecure about itself. Everything is seen as a threat, everything can turn against you, and every foreigner is seen as a spy.”

Thomas (March, 2018)

The government wants the full authority to act and make decisions without the involvement of any other agency. This is maybe also why NGOs are not fully accepted by the authorities as they are perceived by the governmental bodies as a threat to their power. NGOs want to open up these spaces by inviting the public and making them aware of the issues. “The ability of authoritarian regimes to manage civil society is a short-term strategy, because without popular legitimacy spaces of activism inevitably will be opened and potentially challenge the ruling elites” (Kamel Al-Sayyid as cited in Aarts & Cavatorta, 2013, p. 16). Many interviewees state, therefore, that progress is reached by finding different strategies that are softer and stay inside the red lines, and do not act against the government (interview with Banu & Ciro). This is possible in the invited spaces of Gaventa.

The invited spaces in Iran are, for example, the possibility of citizens to advice the government on certain issues, like the environment – via a website, the assignment of Madani in the decision-making process about environment, or the creation of awareness by using the religious institutions –, are ways space is opened; acting from within the set boundaries but influencing beliefs and behaviour. The authorities invite the people to participate via the website to advice and criticise the policy making. By doing so, it is possible for the people to influence the decision-making process from within the official boundaries – set by the authorities. The relationship between the government and the citizens is influenced and the distance between the two is lessened by this invitation. The NGOs are seen as the link between the society and the government, and, as mentioned before, some of the activities of the NGOs have led to more attention for the environmental issues, according to the interviewees. However, since NGOs are not totally accepted – as can be seen with the example of the death of Seyed Emami – the space is not so open as was expected by the people.

The third type of space Gaventa talks about is the created space or claimed spaces. These spaces emerge out of sets of common concerns or identifications which are possible to share and form groups around through social media. Especially platforms like Telegram, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are used to share ideas, organise activities and form groups around certain topics or issues. These spaces are created in order to “change power relations from outside the boundaries of official decision-making spaces” (Swinkels, 2016, p. 31). Environment is such an example; the space for environment is a claimed or created space in which like-minded people join together around environmental concerns. Media is used as a platform to organise and promote ideas and activities without the involvement of the authorities. This might be ideas against the government, like protests, as well as activities that are neither against nor with the authorities.

The activities of Seyed Emami were also expected to create space from inside the boundaries, not acting against the set order. For years he had claimed these spaces and expanded them pushing the boundaries little by little, until he crossed one. Although still nobody knows exactly why he got arrested and died, it was clear that the red lines were different than expected and thus also the created space for environmental activities. Also the interviewees expected the space to be wider before the death of Seyed Emami, while after it became clear that the boundaries were on another place than expected. This also shows that the assumption made in chapter 1, that the topic of environment was expected to be not so politically sensitive and quite safe to talk about, was false. From one day to another, it became clear that environment was actually a political topic. This was also a surprise for the interviewed; in the beginning of the fieldwork the interviewed said, only money and time were limitations of the environmental field, while six weeks later they were afraid to talk and act. This is an example of the creation of space in the field of environment. Interestingly, the government took back its control in this space and by doing so they shifted the created space to a closer space. The future will show whether the space that was created will fully become a close space or that other actors than the government will hold some power and influence in the environmental space. At this moment, it seems that the government is fighting back and prevents the space that was created to expand.

Forms of Power

The conflict within the authorities, between the chosen and un-chosen bodies of the government, is also interesting to discuss in the light of power. As mentioned before, the rhetoric of Rouhani’s office complies with the demand of the people and would, thus, suggest that the authorities care about environment. However, the

hidden power of Gaventa plays an important role here. This power is not directly visible but determines in the end what is going to happen. The un-chosen “fundamentalists – who think we should care about the revolution’s values and the religion – have more power than the reformists in the government and can stop all projects concerning environment” (Dilshad, January, 2018). Because of this power, people cannot easily reach their hopes and desires, according to Roya, because “the government ignores it, since they do not benefit from such changes” (February, 2018). Although it are the chosen bodies of the government that speak to the people and fight for their demands, it seems that it are the un-chosen bodies who decide in the end what is going to happen or not. However, the office of Rouhani is blamed for the failure and not keeping his promises. Madani’s story shows the conflict between the two powers in the government; on the one hand, the authorities who invited Madani to come back, and at the other hand, the authorities that arrested him several times. The first one being a visible power and the later a hidden power. It were the formal authorities who invited Madani to come back, it was visible to all what was happening. However, it ended for Madani with actions behind the screens.

The visible power is present in the set rules and structures, the formal procedures of decision making and the institutions and authorities that are invited to participate. The policy making process concerning environment is far from democratic, official structures like the banks, the international sanctions and the low incentive to invest in renewable energy due to the low gas and oil prices are all influencing the agenda of the government and do not take into account the needs and rights of the people or the survival of the planet. It are the authorities of Iran that decide and who make the policies. They do not include, for example, the NGOs in the process, the NGOs play along for appearances’ sake. The authorities do not care about the environment enough to take action. No action is taken, it seems, because of the two governmental bodies holding each other back, this makes the course of the authorities unclear and the authorities too passive to deal with the situation. The visible power wants to improve the situation, while the hidden power is blocking that. The visible power also makes part of the red lines visible. But, as explained before, one can never be sure whether that is the real place of the red line, because other powers are also influencing it.

The third form of power of Gaventa that is present in Iran is the invisible power. Invisible power shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries and influences how individuals think, their beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo. The way religion is used by the authorities to shape the beliefs and behaviour of people is an example of this power. In the Qur’an environment plays an important role, however the interpretation differs. The authorities interpret the Qur’an, as mentioned before, that environment is something humans can use for their own benefits. This believe is shaped by the government and religious leaders influencing the behaviour of the people. Slowly some of the authorities – like Rouhani’s office – is changing this interpretation to humans as stewards for the environment. The way the government interprets the Qur’an on environment is, thus, an invisible power that influences people’s behaviour and beliefs.

Invisible power is also used by the government of Iran in the rhetoric of blaming the USA, the UK and Israel for many of the Iranian problems. In the streets in the country posters and paintings depict all the bad things these countries have done to the world and Iran in the past years (see pictures next page). This kind of rhetoric make Iran a victim of the actions of other countries. By using such rhetoric, the way people think about their place in the world and their beliefs about other countries as well as their own is influenced, and probably also affects their behaviour and actions.



Paintings in the streets and metro of Tehran portraying USA, the UK and Israel as the enemy

Blaming the USA for the problems and disasters in Iran has led to some theories. Some people believe that the USA uses HAARP (High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program)⁴⁵ to destroy Iran; “HAARP is a high-power, high-frequency transmitter used for study of ionosphere” (Tehran Times, 2017, para. 1). It has been linked to many disasters that happened in Iran and elsewhere. For example, the earthquakes and the lack of rain are considered to be caused by HAARP and thus the USA (Thomas, March, 2018);

“For all we know it is caused by HAARP, who knows. However, there is no prove that it is. It is very interesting to see that so many people believe this. In a country where false news is owned by the state, you will always think and doubt about what has been told in the news. Of course people are looking for logical explanations. So, if HAARP is turned off, we do not have a water problem anymore? Yeh, I mean....”

Thomas (March, 2018)

Theories like HAARP show the involvement of the USA in disasters in Iran, as is believed by people, and influence the psychological and ideological boundaries of the people.

Awareness creation is also a form of invisible power, the government as well as NGOs and people provide information and knowledge, spreading their ideas about the situation via media. Media is an important platform to spread one’s beliefs and ideas. By the use of television, newspapers and radio the authorities and religious institutions provide the information they want to spread about the environment and other issues, influencing the beliefs and behaviour of people. The government can also limit the information flow of topics they do not want to become public. However, the new generation is mainly focused on social media and therefore has more access to other news and ideas than the ones the government is providing. Besides, most households have satellite TV and are thus also receiving international channels. This affects the influence the government has on the information that is provided to its citizens, which results in less influence of the authorities on the behaviour and

⁴⁵ HAARP “was initiated as an ionospheric research program jointly funded by the US Air Force, US Navy, the University of Alaska Fairbank and the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)”, all agencies from the USA (Tehran Times, 2017, para. 1).

the beliefs of the people. Due to the current media, the invisible power is not monopolized by the authorities any more but is shared by all actors that have access to media.

The three powers, as described by Gaventa, are present in the Iranian society. The hidden and the visible power touch upon the conflict between the chosen and non-chosen bodies of the government and make it difficult to clearly define where the boundaries are in the environmental field and others. The invisible power is more involved with the psychological and ideological boundaries of people and can be used by any actor through social media for example. Overall, it is the government who sets the boundaries and demarcates how big the space is and who can participate.

Places

In this research the focus is on bottom-up initiatives concerning the environment. In this chapter these activities have been discussed. Most of the activities start at local level in everyday life, for example; influencing friends and family, studying environmental topics, and encouraging people to use a sweater instead of the heating. These are all activities which influence people's daily behaviour, their opinions and voices about the environment. However, the local space and behaviour of the people depend on national rules, beliefs and enforcement and is influenced by the global level. Concerning this research, the authorities in Iran act, for example, mainly in the national space setting the structure and the legal system which can force people to behave in a certain way and influence the activities taken concerning environment. The arrest and death of Seyed Emami is a move from the national authorities limiting the space at local level. The international sanctions and the social media are influences from the global level affecting the daily lives of people. How people can and want to act in the local level depends, thus, on the national and the global levels.

The red lines are constantly under construction and the space within it, therefore, as well. The space for environmental activities was experienced by the interviewed bigger before the death of Seyed Emami than after. After what happened, people realized that the space was smaller than expected and tried to adapt to this new space with the new red lines. This was a period of uncertainty, which is probably still going on. The negotiation for space in the environmental field is an ongoing process. Only the future can tell what will happen.



7 Environment and Broader Change

The last part has discussed local activities in environment, the red lines and two events that have happened which influence the environmental field. It showed that, before the death of Seyed Emami, it was experienced by the interviewees that more was possible concerning environmental activities over the last years or decades compared to after his death. This chapter zooms out to see how negotiation of space takes place at national level and whether the negotiation of space in the environmental field opens space in other domains as well. Besides, it discusses the perspective on political and social change based on the narratives of the interviewed.

7.1 National Political and Social Change

The last chapter focused on the negotiation of space in the environmental field. In this part, the way space is demanded at a national level will be addressed. The protests in January and the protests against the forced hijab will be discussed to show movements taking place in Iran at national level demanding for change.

7.1.1 January Protests

At the end of December 2017 and the beginning of January 2018 anti-government protests across the entire country took place, these protests are the “largest and most significant Iranian protests since the Green Movement”, according to Daghighaleh and Salime (2018, para. 1). The conservative clerics and hardliners are considered to be behind the start of the protests, since they wanted to “undermine” president Rouhani (ibid). However, the protests spread so rapidly that the hardliners could not control them anymore and the people also turned against them (ibid). The protests were an expression of frustrations towards the authorities as a whole; economic factors, like “poverty, inflation and unemployment” – youth unemployment being 25 percent⁴⁶ – (Torfeh, 2018, para. 10), corruption, and water shortage are mentioned as reasons for the protests (Thomas, March, 2018). The main drive was the overall dissatisfaction of the young Iranians with the governmental institutions (Daghighaleh & Salime, 2018).

Rivalry between the hardliners and the reformists of the state is well noticed during the protest in January 2018. Mehdi Karroubi – a reformist in the Iranian government – accused Khamenei from causing the “political, economic, cultural and social” problems in the country (Torfeh, 2018, para. 2). More ambiguous is the letter from former president Ahmadinejad, who is a hardliner, and is now also accusing Khamenei for oppressing the people of Iran (ibid).

About 25 people died and almost 4,000 were arrested, some committed suicide, according to the authorities, however, many Iranians have questioned this statement (Erdbrink, 2018a). “President Rouhani, who has defended the right of peaceful protest, on Sunday appeared to lend support to the doubters of such claims. ... [He] called upon the establishment to listen to the protesters, not demean them” (para. 10). The country has calmed down

⁴⁶ With 28 percent of 80 million people between the 15 and 30 years old, this means that almost 6 million people are ‘youth unemployed’ (CIA, n.d.).

again, but the people do not know what is going to happen. Iran's political history has been one of fluctuating events and presidencies, constantly showing the tension between the clerics and hardliners, and the moderate reformists.

7.1.2 Hijab

On a softer scale, silent movements have occurred of which the protest against the forced hijab is a good example. Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and writer living in New York, has started a movement against the forced hijab; "Iranian law in place since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 stipulates all women – Iranian or foreign, Muslim or non-Muslim – must be fully veiled in public at all times" (Special Broadcasting Service [SBS], 2018, para. 3). Every Wednesday, women post photos and videos on social media wearing a white hijab, the so-called White Wednesday (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/whitewednesdays/>) (see picture). White is chosen because it is the opposite colour of what the Iranian authorities prefer to be worn; black (Alinejad as cited in De Zeeuw, 2017). According to Alinejad, women want to decide themselves whether they wear a hijab or not, social media unites them and makes the movement spread over the country (ibid), Alinejad has more than one million followers on Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/masih_alinejad/). Besides, videos and photos of women not wearing a hijab at all are posted on the Facebook and Instagram page 'My Stealthy Freedom' (see picture) (Alinejad as cited in De Zeeuw, 2017; <https://www.facebook.com/StealthyFreedom/>).



White Wednesday Instagram page (left). My Stealthy Freedom Instagram post (31st of January 2018) (right).

Since the end of December 2017, the movement has become more active and publicly; women take off their hijab in the middle of a busy public area, like a street, a square or a park. They climb to a higher point, in order to stick out of the crowd. They put their hijab on a stick, so that everyone can see it. The pictures made of this statement are spread on social media (see picture) (De Volkskrant, 2018). According to Zadeh and Sulaiman (2010), "a street constitutes a significant part of open public space and is the most important symbol of public realm" (p. 433). In Iran this public space is not only used for transportation or moving from A to B, it is also used for many kinds of protests; protest against the forced hijab is one example. Already more than 30 women have been arrested since the end of December 2017 because of removing their hijab. Although most are released, one girl has gotten two years of prison (SBS, 2018).

The protest had already started the last years; women and girls wear their hijab loose and it is possible to see some hair (Erdbrink, 2018b; SBS, 2018; De Volkskrant, 2018). Also in cars the hijab is already draped over the shoulders instead of covering the whole hair (ibid) (see picture section 5.2.1). Some progress has been made by the women; the authorities announced in the end of December 2017 that women not complying with the clothing requirements are not directly fined or arrested by the morality police anymore (De Volkskrant, 2018; Women in the World [WITW], 2017). Instead, they will “be forced to attend Islam education classes” (WITW, 2017, para. 2). However, the women with the hijab on the sticks are undermining the authorities and therefore they are arrested (De Volkskrant, 2018).

The issues with the hijab are just an example of the lack of equality between men and women in the Iranian society, women still do not have the same rights as men concerning inheritance and divorce rights, and the authorities are not trying to improve that (De Zeeuw, 2017).

The January protests and the protests against the forced hijab are examples of current activities happening at national level demanding for change. The events are included in the research to show that change is demanded in other sectors as well as the environmental field and as an example of how the boundaries are pushed further by the society.

7.1.3 Perceptions on Political and Social Change

The two events are a good illustration for the opinions of the interviewees about how social change should take place. At the one hand, gradual change is seen as the way to increase the freedoms, and at the other hand, rapid change is demanded. The protest in January follow the last path to change, while the hijab is a softer and more silent movement choosing gradual change. As mentioned in the methodology, this difference is also seen between the interviewees;

“When I was young I thought the government had to change fundamentally, but now I think that progress is made with hard work and slowly.”

Ciro – who has participated in the 1979 revolution (January, 2018)

“A revolution is the best way to improve the situation, because at this moment the government is not working well; they assign their own people and the distance between the government and the people is growing.”

Roya – a 22-years old bachelor student in Tehran (February, 2018)

These statements show the difference between the perspectives of two different generations; one who has experienced the revolution of the last century and one that is a little older than 20 years. Roya and Soraya argue, that a revolution is better; to destroy everything and then build it again ‘new’ (February, 2018). However, the interviewees who are in their sixties – having experienced the revolution – argue for a step-by-step change (several interviews⁴⁷). Also Seyed Emami wanted to change things in cooperation with the authorities rather than challenging them; he believed in gradual change. Not all people born after the revolution argue for rapid change,

⁴⁷ Interviews with Alborz, Ciro, Nasim, and Omid.

Parvaneh and Banu – 32 and 31 years old respectively – say, progress should go step-by-step and that participation is necessary instead of waiting for change:

“They [the young people] think they cannot change anything, but they do not even try themselves. Change yourself, your family, but don’t have the intention to change others because it will not work. It is a natural process; force does not work. Changing the environment, for example, might change the society in the end.”

Parvaneh (February, 2018)

Moreover, Thomas argues, that for a revolution there is need for ideology, like it was the case forty years ago during the revolution;

“There were communists, Islamic Marxists, the clerics, there were all kinds of organised groups, and that is now not the case. I think that the young people want change very badly, but everyone here has learned to make a consideration between becoming a dissident of the government with all the consequences or keeping quiet.”

Thomas (March, 2018)

It is, thus, very unlikely, according to Thomas, that a revolution will take place. For the moment, there are protests and demonstrations, but there has not been one big movement supported by the majority of the people, like in the 70s. Some accept the space, while others do not accept the limitation of their freedoms. For example, some people follow the rules of the hijab and are not taking part in the protests, others unite and go into the streets to fight against the government or are slowly loosening their hijab more and more. Holding back and fighting back happens at the same time, it depends on every individual person and his or her situation which direction he or she chooses to take.

According to Erdbrink (as cited in De Zeeuw, 2017), the middle class of Iran is already expanding the borders of space for years, not only with the actions against the forced hijab but also by giving parties and drinking alcohol. The enforcement of the obligatory hijab and the prohibition of drinking alcohol and giving parties by the state has become weaker and weaker (ibid); “the zeal of the country’s morality police has declined in the past two decades” (SBS, 2018, para. 5). This is especially noticeable on social media, where people are posting videos and photos without hijab, with ‘inappropriate clothing⁴⁸’, drinking or partying (De Zeeuw, 2017). It can also be seen in the way the hijabs are worn by the women; loosely draped, not covering all hair (Ciro, January, 2018). It is probably also due to the social media that the enforcement of such rules has been weakened (ibid). It is difficult to control the media; it takes much effort and time, besides, people will always find another way to communicate via the internet, for example by using VPN⁴⁹ connections.

There are thus different opinions about the way social change has to happen or will happen among the interviewees, ranging from step-by-step change from within the society to a disruptive revolution taking down everything at once. At this moment, both are seen at national level as well; step-by-step changing the rules about

⁴⁸ Inappropriate clothing is when the skin is seen, except for the hands, feet and face; when the forms of the body can be seen, so long, wide shirts or manteaux are necessary to cover the hips and butt. And of course the hijab (based on informal conversations and own experience).

⁴⁹ Virtual Private Network; a way to get passed the blocking systems of the authorities and, thus, being able to have full access to the internet.

the hijab and disruptive protests leading to death and imprisonment. Moreover, the borders of the spaces are already slowly pushed further by drinking alcohol and partying.

7.2 Power Cube: Negotiating National Change

The negotiation for the boundaries or red lines has been described in the last chapter in the environmental field. In this part the negotiation will be discussed based on the national movements mentioned.

The protests in January and the protests against the forced hijab are examples of the creation of space at national level outside the field of environment; the space is claimed by the people against the power holders and emerge out of a set of common concerns. The dissatisfaction and the hunger for change of the people has erupted into several protests at societal level, the two biggest of the last years being the Green Movement⁵⁰ in 2009 and the January protests. These events show that the people are not happy with the amount of freedom and space they have under the regimes of last decades. The authorities are fighting against the extension of space and the red lines. One example is the restriction of the media, as mentioned in chapter 6, newspapers have been closed down, journalists have been imprisoned, Telegram is blocked, other social media and websites have limited accessibility, and television is state owned. All these actions limit the space of expression and the exchange of information for the citizens and try to push back the red lines.

It does not mean that the protests pushing the boundaries further also increase the space, it depends on the reaction of the government where the red lines will be. At this moment, it seems that due to the measurements taken by the government – like the restriction of social media and the arrests of the protesters – that no space is given in by the authorities. The protesters are demanding rapid change, but the authorities are trying to keep their control and power.

Some people argue that step-by-step movements are more effective in the end, than protests and revolutions. One example of slow change discussed here is the movement against the forced hijab. This movement is already taking place for years, joined by extending the border by drinking alcohol and partying. Although some people provoke the authorities by going into the streets without hijab and asking attention for their case, there is a majority of women slightly stretching the rules of the hijab. This can be observed in the metro, in the houses, cars and also in the streets; where the hijab is either covering a part of the hair or not covering it at all. The authorities are fighting back and arresting the women when they are in the streets asking for attention, however, no enforcement is taking place in the houses, cars or metros. Moreover, the engagement of the morality police with what and how girls and women are wearing their cloths and hijab has decreased. This suggests, that the silent movement might have some influence on the boundaries in which the people act.

This difference between the January protests and the movement against the forced hijab can be analysed zooming into the way they deal with the boundaries. The January protests are clearly outside the boundaries acting against the authorities, while the hijab movement tries to push the boundaries further away from within and not necessarily against the authorities. This complies with the ideas of the interviewed about the way social change

⁵⁰ The Green Movement, as mentioned in chapter 4, were demonstrations driven by the youth against the fraud and repression that took place during the re-election of Ahmadinejad in 2009. They demanded more freedom. Almost 100 people died and a few thousand were arrested.

should be reached; some argue for a revolution and others are more for a step-by-step approach. Gaventa (2006) states, that to challenge power in all the spaces, levels and forms one “need[s] to search not for one solution, but to build multiple, linked strategies and in different sequences, depending on the starting point in any given context” (p. 31). This seems to suggest, that the movement against the forced hijab might be more effective than the January protests, since all kinds of actions are taken. At local and national level Instagram is used, there are protests in the streets, the rules of the hijab are stretched in the metro and at home. Globally they are getting attention for their case through (social) media; it has been in the newspapers in the Netherlands, in the New York Times, the Guardian and probably more, and some posts on Instagram are translated into English. Moreover, Iranian living abroad take part in the movement. At all these places and levels, a different approach is used to cross the message and expand the borders to create more freedom of choice. This is opposite to the way the January protests try to cross their message; people going into the street demanding change.

In both cases the boundaries are quite clear; one knows what is possible and what not. This makes it easier to calculate the possible consequences of the actions and therefore the risks that people are willing to take or not. This differs from the boundaries of the environmental space, which appeared to be more instable and undefinable.

Also the conflict within the government is seen in these examples. The hardliners arresting many of the protesters and women not wearing the hijab, while the reformists are asking for a slightly more democratic way of dealing with the situation. Besides, it was Rouhani’s government that limited the engagement of the morality police. This duality in the government could possibly change the society, Ciro states; “there are conflicts between the two governmental bodies and that is good for the society, because when two elephants fight, the ground is changed, but when two elephants are working together they will destroy a village” (January, 2018). It will be interesting to see which governmental body has the longest breath and the most power in the end; at this moment, it seems that the hardliners have a stronger finger in the pie, and are therefore deciding what the boundaries are.

Hence, space is created and the boundaries are questioned at national level as well. The January protests and the movement against the forced hijab are examples of that. Although they both demand for more freedom and want to expand the space, the way they act are different; disruptive protests or step-by-step.

7.3 Environment and Broader Change

The negotiation of space in other domains than the environmental field can be triggered by the discussion about the environment, state several interviewees (several interviews⁵¹). They see a bigger significance to their environmental actions:

“People start to talk about environment and criticize the government because of this, and little by little they also started to talk about freedom, forced education, so it opens space.”

Gulshan (February, 2018)

⁵¹ Interviews with Banu, Firuz, Gulshan, Omid, Roya, and Soraya.

“We hope that the environmental actions will change the society. We feel the amount of people and the deep ideas are rising. I have good hope. We do not believe to change the regime. We have hope, we cannot do it by ourselves, but we do what we can.”

Omid (February, 2018)

Talking about the environment is seen as “an exercise for talking with people, for critical thinking and it is an excuse to talk about other things” (Firuz, January, 2018). All topics are linked and connected (Banu, January, 2018). However, in February 2018 the atmosphere of the environmental field changed. It showed that the environmental domain is still not open to all and everything and that people still have to be cautious about what they do and say. Although nobody really knows why Seyed Emami and the other environmentalists got arrested, according to the official statement coming from the government, they were spying for foreign countries and thus being involved in politics. According to Thomas, a more plausible reason for the arrests is the fear of the authorities of sharing their power and, thus, losing it little by little (March, 2018). Environment is, thus, related to politics, and when you connect things to political issues, then there is a problem, several interviewees⁵² argue.

The death of Seyed Emami is “feeding into a growing anger and disaffection in Iran over a system many fear will never be changed. Those feelings erupted in the January protests and the protests against the forced hijab (Erdbrink, 2018d, para. 16). But, although most of the interviews state that discussions in the environmental domain trigger negotiation of space in other fields, the interviewees did not act upon this. Moreover, after it became clear that acting in the environmental field was related to politics, activities became even less. Discussing about the environmental issues may, thus, increase the criticism in other areas as well, but the interviewees did not act upon this. Moreover, the group of people involved and concerned with the environment is small. The environmental field can therefore be seen as a playing ground for critical thinking and discussion, however, the impact on national level or in other domains is still small.

Environmental activities thus reflect on and engage with broader political and social change, but although people involved with the environment would like to see a bigger significance of their actions, this does not really happen. People concerned with the environment do not act upon making broader political and social change, even though they like to, and the group involved is too small to really impact the society.

⁵² Interviews with Firuz, Omid, Alborz, Ester, and Gulshan.



8 Discussion and Conclusions

Previously, the broader political and social dynamics, the environmental setting, and the way environmental space is negotiated in the Iranian society have been discussed and analysed. In this chapter, the analyses will be discussed and linked to the questions on which the research is based. Meanwhile, some findings not necessarily related to the questions will be discussed. Next to that, limitations of the research will be reflected on. The chapter will finish with a conclusion.

8.1 Answering the Questions

I started this research wondering about how citizens living in a society ruled by an authoritarian regime could expand their freedoms by participating in environmental activities. I wanted to investigate whether the space which could be created in the environmental field would also lead to more freedoms in other fields. In order to do so, I went to Tehran to gather data on the viewpoints, perspectives and opinions of citizens from Tehran about the environmental situation in the country, the space available to act in and the social change that occurs from the negotiation of space by environmental activities. After describing the broader political and social changes that happened in Iran the last decades, the political and social setting concerning environment, the way the Tehrani negotiate for space while participating in environmental activities, and how change is demanded at national level were addressed mainly based on the narratives of the interviewed. The information gathered was assessed using the theory of Spiral Dynamics and the Power Cube. The four separate analyses will be compared and discussed in this chapter, and although more research is necessary to provide a complete picture about the environmental situation, and political and social change in Iran, I tried to give an answer to my research questions.

The first sub question of this research discusses the broader political and social change in Iran that happened the last decades. This is elaborated on in chapter 4. In order to answer this question, some information about the period of the Shah, the revolution, and the Islamic Republic has been given. Based on the guidelines Spiral Dynamics provides, transitions are seen from a dominant and self-indulgent regime to a regime valuing moral and obedience, and from a moral and obedient society to one valuing self-expression and rationality. The political system of the Shah was a typical dominant and self-indulgent system, however, it wanted to impose elements based on self-expression and rationality on the society. Because the society was not yet ready for such a system and had dominant moral and obedient values, they overthrew the regime of the Shah and installed a new government based on these elements; the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since that time – the revolution – the society included little by little more self-expressive and rational elements, but kept moral and obedience as their dominant level. However, the last decades it seems that a transition is taking place to a society valuing self-expression and rationality more.

Based on the analysis done using Spiral Dynamics, the conflicts that arose and are rising due to the mismatch between the authorities and the people, can be understood by the interaction of the two. The society consists of individuals and has to deal with the circumstances, in this case the political system and authorities. The revolution

was caused by the authorities who were imposing self-expressive and rational values, while the society still valued moral and obedience. Currently, the regime is based on moral and obedient elements, while the society is transiting from these elements to more self-expressive and rational ones. In both cases the authorities and the people do not match. That is in essence not a problem, as long as they interact and adapt to each other. However, in neither case one of them was or is adapting and this led and is leading to a clash between the two. In the 70s, this resulted in the revolution and the deposition of the Shah; the society made the regime adapt to their level of development. Now, it is not yet clear whether the society or the authorities will adapt, by force or by will.

There is another aspect as well changing which can influence the direction of the transition; the government does not seem to have one direction anymore. Before it was possible to speak of the dominant and self-indulgent regime of the Shah or the moral regime of the ayatollahs, however, nowadays, the division between the two governmental bodies seems to be growing, both taking a different direction. The un-chosen bodies like to stick to the moral and obedience level of development, while the chosen ones incline towards including self-expressive and rational elements as well, which suggests a possible transition towards this later level. If that is the case and the dominance of the self-expressive and rational level is increased within the authorities, it is possible that it will be the authorities adapting to the society by their own will. This is a reoccurring conflict, which will be addressed in the two other sub question as well, although from a different perspective.

The second sub question addresses the political and social setting of the environmental field based on the perspective from the interviewed; in other words, a local or bottom-up perspective. This is discussed in chapter 5. In order to answer this question, some information is given about the political involvement in the environment, the perspective of the interviewed on the environmental problems and responsibility, and the connection between the Islam and environment, since the Islam has such an influential role in Iran. Based on the framework of Spiral Dynamics, two main trends can be observed; the rhetoric of the authorities concerning environment is different than the actions, and the majority of the people does not care enough about the environment yet.

Although the hardliners have a dominant moral level of development, it seems that slowly they are including self-expressive and rational elements to their rhetoric as well. Following the same reasoning, it seems that the reformists, being more in favour of self-expression and rationality, have included some elements from the harmony and balance level of development as well, at least in their rhetoric. This could suggest that the authorities as well are transiting to another level of development. Since there is a division in the government, this means that one is maybe transiting from a moral to a more rational level and the other from a rational to a more balanced level of development. This does not comply with the findings for the first sub question and the actions of the authorities; where the hardliners are moral and the reformists are more in favour for self-expression and rationality. The contradiction can be explained by using Spiral Dynamics approach, in which a distinction is made between the dominant and the peripheral levels of development; the first sub question focused on the dominant levels, while the focus on environment gives an inside to a peripheral level of development. However, the fact that the peripheral levels are present, implies that a transition towards a more complex level of development is possible. The division between the two governmental bodies, also suggests that the authorities as a whole are changing from totally in favour of moral and obedience to somewhat more self-expressive and rational. Even if this transition is taking place, it is going too slow for the people, due to which conflict arise and faster change is demanded.

At the same time, analysing the setting of the environmental field, shows that there is just a minority of the people aware and caring about the environment. This means that just a minority of the Iranian population includes, is transiting to, or has a dominant level of development valuing harmony and balance. The majority is still in the transition from moral and obedient elements to self-expressive and rational ones. For the sake of environment, it is important that the minority including balance and harmony elements gets some space in the self-expressive and rational or moral and obedient society, otherwise, environmental degradation will become worse including all consequences. This findings touches upon the third sub question where the space for the improvement of the environment is discussed.

The last sub question discusses how the citizens from Tehran negotiate for space in Iran, while participating in environmental activities. This is addressed in chapter 6. In order to answer this question some information is given about the local activities in which the interviewees take part, the use of the media in the environmental field and in Iran, the space that is available for environmental activities, and the action that is taken by the authorities in the environmental field. Based on the Power Cube, the boundaries, spaces, forms of power, and places in the field of environment in Iran are analysed.

Overall, it is the government who sets the boundaries and demarcates how big the space is and who can participate. The 'red lines' are constantly under construction and the space within it therefore as well. The space for environmental activities was experienced by the interviewees bigger before the death of Seyed Emami than after. People realized that the space was smaller than expected and tried to adapt to this new space with the new red lines; they kept quiet, holding back from what they normally would do. At the same time, some people did not accept these 'new' limitations and are fighting back, which can result in getting arrested or being followed closely by the authorities. It depends on the individual and his or her situation what direction he or she chooses.

Most of the space in Iran are closed spaces, in which the government can have full authority and decide what will happen without the inclusion of other actors. However, slowly there are some signs in which the government invites citizens or organisations to participate and give advice on certain topics. At the same time, more and more groups of people are claiming their space, especially by using media platforms to share ideas and organise activities. The environmental field is such a space in which like-minded people act and try to improve the environmental situation. However, lately, it seems that the government got involved in this space and is taking over the authority, turning the created space into a more closed space. The reason why this change has happened is unclear for most of the interviewed, but one of the interviewed states, that it is maybe because the authorities do not want to share their power and they might experience the NGOs in the environmental field as a threat to their monopoly on power. By closing the space, the government regains control and might feel more secure.

The forms of power help to analyse the conflict between the two governmental bodies from a different perspective; the un-chosen body has a hidden power, while the chosen ones have a visible power. It seems that the hidden power is stronger than the visible one, since little progressive action is taken by the government. The strive between these two powers makes it difficult to define where the boundaries in the environmental field and other spaces are, and it does not give a clear depiction of the course the government as a whole is taking. The psychological and ideological beliefs of people are steered by the invisible power which is used by any actor, including the government, NGOs or individuals. This power can influence people at a more unconscious level through social media, for example.

The activities took mainly place at local level, however, how the people can and want to act depends on the national and the global levels. For example, as has been discussed in chapter 4, the technological developments the world is experiencing influence the information available for the Iranian people as well. The global place changes and influences the beliefs and ideas, knowledge and skills of the Iranian citizens. This research, however, focusses on the way space is negotiated starting from a local level. Based on the findings, the local activities influence the local and national place in Iran, but the global place of the Power Cube does not seem to be influenced yet by the environmental activities taking place at local level in Iran.

The three sub questions together form the answer to the main research question; how the activities at local level concerning environment reflect on and engage with the broader political and social change in Iran. Chapter 7 zooms out of the environmental field and discusses change on a national level and how the activities in the environmental field might open other spaces. This information assists the analyses of the three sub questions in answering the main question.

According to several interviewees, the activities concerning environment engage with the broader political and social change since it learns people to criticise and discuss. Discussing about the environmental issues might therefore develop critical thinking and bring people together with the same ideas and beliefs, criticizing other domains as well. Moreover, since everything is connected, an event happening in the environmental field might fuel the dissatisfaction at national level. The environmental field functions, thus, as a playing ground or example of space creation for elements which do not belong to the dominant level of development of the regime and the people yet.

Apparently, it is possible to create space for environment but there is always a risk in it. Although environment appeared to be political after all, topics like the hijab and ‘more freedom’ are riskier and more political. Because there are clear rules about the hijab and the limitations of the freedoms in the law and ideologies of the country. Contesting these rules involves conflict by definition, since one is contesting the regulations of the country. So far there are no such rules for environment, and if there are, they are not lived up to, neither by the people nor the authorities. Demanding action in this field is, thus, not necessarily contesting the rules, but pointing at the weaknesses and failures of the regime. In other words, the boundaries of the environmental field are vaguer and more unclear than the ones from the space in which the hijab is negotiated or the freedoms the people participating in the January protests are fighting for. Moreover, the majority of the people is not yet concerned about the environment enough to take action, while there are many people – also publicly – taking part in the movement against the forced hijab or are demanding more freedoms. The effect and consequences of the actions in the environmental field are therefore smaller than the movements happening at national level. Since the movements at national level gain more publicity and are known among many, the authorities put more effort in silencing these movements, or setting examples, than in the field of environment. Taking part in the movement against the forced hijab or the January protests is therefore riskier and more politically sensitive than taking action in the environmental field.

The environmental domain might thus function as a playing ground for critical thinking and discussion, a big impact on the national situation has not been observed. It fuels the dissatisfaction with the national government, but because the group of people involved with environment is small, little effect is seen at national level. Although, people involved with environmental activities do like to see a bigger significance of their actions, they do not

really act upon this. People acting in the environmental domain are expanding their freedoms for environmental activities, however, the space they create in the environmental field does not necessarily lead to more freedoms in other fields.

8.2 Discussion

Based on the findings of the research and my own observations, some issues, questions or observations will be discussed in this section.

Gradual or Revolutionary Change

The January protests and the movement against the forced hijab show that change is demanded and negotiated for in other areas than in the environmental field and at national level as well. However, there is disagreement about how the social change should happen, according to the interviewees; gradually or revolutionary. The January protests and the movement against the forced hijab are examples of the two ways of change that are taking place; the January protests are demanding for revolutionary change, while the movement against the forced hijab is more gradually. Some state, that a revolution is not possible to occur, since a common ideology and leading figure is missing. This is also supported by some trends that have been observed, like drinking alcohol and giving parties. These softer movements seem to expand and push the boundaries further and further. Following this reasoning, gradual change seems more plausible for the extension of freedoms.

The 1979 revolution is an example of disruptive change that did not turn out to be the change that was wished for by many. Although the majority of the people back then, many of the interviewed, and some people I talked with in informal conversations took part in the revolution, just few are happy with the end result. However, many also state that the revolution and the period after was necessary to go through to realize that this is not the wished society people want to live in. This can be connected to the Spiral Dynamics theory, which argues that it is necessary to go through all former levels of development. The revolution happened because the Shah wanted to skip one level and the society was not there yet. Therefore, a transition was made from a fairly modern society – from a current perspective – to a quite conservative one making sure that before developing further all former levels had been included and gone through. However, some of the people in Iran had already transited through this more ‘conservative’ stadium and wanted to embrace the modern society without the ruling of the Shah, they either left the country or they waited and started to open the space little by little. These are mainly the people who argue that gradual change is more effective than revolutionary change.

Moreover, the people who have never experienced the time of the Shah have formed a kind of illusion about a perfect period of the Shah; being modern without having to wear ‘appropriate’ cloths and hijab. Many of these people argue for revolutionary change, destroying the current government, because they do not see any change happening with the current system ruling the country. With a population with a media age of 29,5 and almost 40 percent younger than 25, the majority of the population belongs to this groups that has never experienced the period of the Shah, the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. This does not mean that they all want revolutionary change, but it means that they grew up with different experiences and ideas than the former generation. This influences their vision and the way they will deal with issues.

Generations

The difference between the generations is also seen in the religiosity of the country; a trend is observed towards a more secular society. According to some of the interviewed, more and more people, especially young people, are becoming less or not religious. One aspect that has caused this secularization is the behaviour of the government. Many associate the Islam with the authorities of Iran, since lately more and more people are dissatisfied with the ruling of the system, a 'negative' connotation appears with the Islam as well. Moreover, a transition from moral and obedient to self-expressive and rational values is observed in the society of Iran. The ordered and tidied character of the moral and obedient 'we' society, is becoming oppressive to some of the people, due to which a desire for a focus on the self-expressive and rational 'I' emerges; to emancipate and aim for own wealth, success and status. Part of this transition, is questioning religion and reacting against the ruling authorities.

Change is Inevitable

According to Van Leijden and Zuiker (2007), history shows that a society does not have the choice to adapt or not, when it does not adapt, it will slowly vanish. The Shah, for example, did not adapt to the society's demands and was overthrown by the people. Connecting this to the changes in Iran concerning social media and information flows, it can be argued that when the authorities do not adapt to these new developments and trends, they will slowly lose their power and in the end they will disappear. This is also supported by Kamel Al-Sayyid, who states that "without popular legitimacy spaces of activism inevitably will be opened and potentially challenge the ruling elites" (as cited in Aarts & Cavatorta, 2013, p. 16). The authorities can, thus, decide to develop with the society, but it seems that just a part of the authorities is willing to take in new ideas and beliefs, causing the transition of the authorities going too slow for the people, leading to protests and conflicts.

Eye Opener

This thesis addresses the space available for local involvement in a country ruled by an authoritarian regime. It is clear from what has been described that the Iranian government can be classified as an authoritarian system; the rulers seek to maintain their own control by limiting mass participating. As has been explained in the introduction, to maintain the power the military, patronage and the media are used (Hague & Harrop, 2007). In chapter 4, it has been explained that Khamenei directs the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps providing them access to many sectors in the society and therewith providing them control and power. Although just some of the interviewed have mentioned corruption, according to a research done by Transparency International (2017), the perceived corruption of the public sector by the citizens is high. Both the military and patronage control mechanisms seem to be used by the authorities and work quite well. Media, however, is not owned by the government alone any more. Although the government still owns most of the newspapers, television and radio, a broad range of social media is used by everyone who has access to the internet. Moreover, with the arrival of the 'illegal' satellites, all kind of television channels are possible to be received by the people. This suggests that the authorities are slowly losing their grip on one of the control mechanisms; media. As a response, they are trying to limit the accessibility of social media, but it seems that all their efforts are in vain.

Losing the control over the media influences the people, since they have access to all information and beliefs there is available on the internet and television. It has been discussed that this change in the global world influences

the people in the Iranian society. The beliefs, norms, values and visions of the Iranians are affected by the contact with the world which might affect their ideas about freedoms and rights. The improvement of technology and access to internet might be one of the reasons why the Iranians are demanding for more freedoms and are transiting to another level of development. This phenomenon is not bound to the Iranian society solely; it is applicable for all human beings. Also in Europe people are affected by what is available on the internet; it might open eyes and make people aware of what is going on in the rest of the world. Access to the internet and social media can therefore be key for changing a society and demanding for more freedoms and rights.

Another aspect that influences the visions and beliefs of the Iranian society is the brain drain and the increasing education level of the country, especially among women. Every year 150,000 people leave the country to seek fortune and follow their ambitions elsewhere, many leaving behind friends and family. The people living abroad are living in other societies exposed to other norms and values. The interaction with this 'new' society influences their visions and beliefs and since they have many family and friends in Iran, the Iranian people living in Iran get information about other societies as well. Moreover, some of the students come back after a few months or years, taking with them their experiences and observations. The interaction of the Iranian people with their family and friends abroad, having their own experiences abroad, and the access to social media and internet provide them with other perspectives and ideas and habits, all influencing their visions and beliefs. And all these trends do not seem to be controlled by the authorities anymore.

Expanding Freedoms

The research focused on how citizens ruled by an authoritarian regime could expand their freedoms, so that their rights and opportunities could increase and thus their agency. Weakening the control of the authoritarian regime might increase the space in which one can act. In other words, it might increase the social, political and economic rights and opportunities. Expanding the rights and opportunities affects the capabilities of persons and the capacity of individuals to shape the circumstance in which they live and would like to live. As a result, the increased agency of people might lead to movements or activities which expand the overall freedoms of the country.

The continuous interaction between the individual capacity and societal opportunities and rights are constantly influencing each other. Spiral Dynamics shows how these two interact and why they do so. The spaces of Gavena address how this interaction is going and what the relation is between the two. For example, in the case of closed spaces, which is mostly the case in societies with authoritarian regimes, the people of the society try to open these spaces and interaction with the authorities might be harsh. When the interaction takes place in invited spaces, it is probably softer than in the closed spaces. Claimed or created spaces appear when the authorities do not pay attention to a certain issue, like environmental degradation in Iran. In these cases, the people of the society take charge and as long as it is not experienced as a threat to the authorities they will leave it like that.

In the case of the created environmental space in Iran, it has been experienced by the authorities as a threat and it turned out to be more closed than was perceived. The borders of the spaces are, therefore, not always clear or appear to be on a different place than expected.

While researching this topic, I came across some gaps and questions beyond the scope of this thesis. First of all, there appears to be very limited literature on environmental activism in authoritarian regimes, especially

focusing on individual activism. It would be interesting to see how environmental activism is reflecting on and engaging with broader change in other societies as well. In this way, activists can learn from each other and collectively try to expand the space and attention there is for environmental issues.

Secondly, it is interesting to see that the dynamics going on in the domain of environment are similar to the creation of space for civil society by women as researched by Swinkels (2016). How is this going in other domains in Iran? Is the approach different or similar?

Moreover, since the dynamics of the Iranian society are changing with a rapid pace, it is necessary to keep on investigating to stay up to date. Only the future knows what will come.

8.3 Reflection on the Theoretical Framework

During the research I came across some limitations of the theories used. In this part I would like to elaborate briefly on these issues.

First of all, it should be stressed that the theory of Spiral Dynamics and the Power Cube are simplified ways to look at and analyse more complex social structures. They are used as tools to provide a framework for the data gathered. The different levels of development and the dimensions of the Power Cube are predetermined depictions. In reality, however, more nuances exist; the society is more complex than just the political or social setting and thus the demarcation given in this research of the levels of development might be more complex as well, and the negotiation of space is also more complex than the dimensions of the Power Cube.

Secondly, the levels of development and the dimensions of the Power Cube are not defined in an exact way in the literature available; the descriptions leave space for interpretation, and are therefore not easily to be used as ‘strict’ indicators for analysing the data. The results are therefore based on the interpretation of the theoretical framework as well as the interpretation of the data gathered.

Another issue that has to be taken into account is that the descriptions are incomplete. The political and social setting and dynamics depend on more aspects and the negotiation of space is more complex than have been described. For example, what is exactly happening between the two bodies of the government is not known, and the private sector or other environmental issues have not been discussed. These are not included in this research because they are beyond the scope of this research and thus little information has been gathered about these topics or because it was simply impossible to get to know what is really happening. What has been described in this thesis is the perspective and opinion of the interviewed, my observations, and literature and newspapers about the environmental situation. More research is needed to discuss and investigate more in detail what is going on.

Moreover, the Power Cube of Gaventa is a model used for analysing the interaction between governments and the civil society. The three spaces discuss the role of the government in it and how the civil society can get involved or participate. However, I think that not all the spaces in a society can be defined by the role of the government and the civil society in it. For example, the private sector can as well be part of these spaces, but they are not mentioned by Gaventa, or visible power can be controlled by other institutions than the official authorities.

As already mentioned in the theoretical chapter, Gaventa states, that change is only possible when all places are addressed; “when they are able to link demands for opening previously closed spaces with people’s action in

their own spaces; to span across local and global action and to challenge visible, hidden and invisible power simultaneously” (2006, p. 30). I think that the example of Iran shows that that is not necessary the case. Although the global place influences the local and national arena, change demanded at local level might influence and open space at national level, but I do not see it happen at global level as well. Therefore, I think that change is also possible when closed spaces are opened at local and national level only.

However, I agree with the theory that all powers have to be challenged in order to change. The invisible power is already challenged and opened, now able to be used by all actors. However, the conflict between the hidden and visible power limits progress in the country. As has been explained before, in order to really change the situation, the hidden power has to be challenged as well, since now it is the visible power that is opening up, but the hidden power is trying to keep control. All powers have thus to be challenged in order to change the situation.

Moreover, this research has only focused on the political and social change and used Spiral Dynamics for analysing that. Due to this the Iranian society is labelled a certain colour of the spiral. However, a society is way more complex than just the political and social aspects. It could therefore be that the demarcation of the society would be different when other aspects are studied. To give a complete picture using Spiral Dynamics needs, therefore, extensive research in all aspects of the society. Since that is beyond the scope of the research I have only focused on political and social change. Classifying the society in terms of the levels of development might therefore be more colourful or consist of different colours than is done now.

Although Beck and Cowan state that Spiral Dynamics is not a linear path, it seems to me the case. The levels of development have a hierarchical order and one can develop up and down this hierarchy. However, it seems that development will always follow this order and everyone or every society will develop through all these stages at a certain point. As they state, it is necessary to have developed through all former levels in order to have a stable base for the next one. This suggests that it is linear but that it includes the former levels, this is what they call evolutionary. I would therefore argue that it is a linear and evolutionary approach.

It is also important to mention that Spiral Dynamics is not an approach that will predict the future. However, by using this model it is possible to touch upon the current dynamics noticed in the society and discuss and analyse why certain tension exist and how they possibly will develop. It is thus not only usable for looking back, but it is very applicable to analyse the current situation as well.

Despite the limitations of the theoretical framework it has been useful for giving the data gathered structure and helped to analyse the information.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed and linked the analyses and questions on which this research is based. It has shown that the 1979 revolution in Iran has been a turning point in history for the country; the regime changed from dominant and self-indulgent to moral and obedience complying with the needs of the people. It seems that during the last decades the society has started to include self-expressive and rational elements suggesting a transition from the moral and obedience level of development to the self-expressive one. This change is also seen in the government where part of the authorities is transiting towards more self-expression and rationality, while other

parts are still dominantly based on moral and obedience. It is possible that the near future will be another turning point in Iranian history in terms of Spiral Dynamics.

Concerning environment, it is just a small group that is concerned and involved with the improvement of the environment. This complies with other dynamics seen in the society; a transition from favouring moral and obedience to more self-expressive and rational. Caring for the environment is part of the harmony and balance level of development and just a minority has included these elements. These people are trying to push the boundaries further in a moral/self-expressive society ruled by moral authorities. By doing so they create space for elements which are not yet desired by the majority of the population and by the authorities. Until recently, this environmental space seemed claimed by the people being able to act in it as long as they did not fight against the authorities, however, also here a turning point is seen; the boundaries have become unclear and no one knows what is possible within the space. It seems that the control over the space is taken by the authorities, due to which the space is closing again. However, the authorities have not a clear vision and direction. Confusing the people what is possible and not.

The environmental field functions as an example and playing ground for the creation of space for elements which do not belong to the dominant level of development of the regime and the people. It is therefore a starting point to criticise other issues that are more political. Activities at local level in the field of environment engage therefore with the broader political and social dynamics in the society. However, the impact of the environmental field on national level is limited due to the small amount of people involved with environment and the lacking action of the interviewees outside the environmental domain. The environmental field is thus a starting point for triggering change, but it does not really trigger change itself.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview List

Reference Name ⁵³	Background Information	Interview Date, Length & Type	# for R. ⁵⁴
Alborz	Male, 65 years	20-01-2018 & 06-02-2018, recorded	1
Banu	Female, 31 years	26-01-2018, notes, translator	2
Ester	Female, 28-38 years	26-01-2018, notes, translator	3
Ciro	Male, 58-73 years	27-01-2018 & 29-01-2018, recorded	4
Dilshad	Male, 26 years	28-01-2018, notes	5
Firuz	Male, 38-58 years	29-01-2018, notes	6
Gulshan	Female, 28-38 years	04-02-2018, recorded	7
Havva	Female, 49 years	06-02-2018, recorded, translator	8
Omid	Male, 67 years	13-02-2018, 27 min, recorded	9
Jafar	Male, 38-58 years	13-02-2018, 21 min, recorded	10
Kamran	Male, 48 years	13-02-2018, 16 min, recorded	11
Laleh	Female, 28-38 years	14-02-2018, 23 min, recorded	12
Mehrdad	Male, 28-38 years	15-02-2018, not recorded, face-to-face	13
Nasim	Male, 58-73 years	17-02-2018, 49 min, recorded, translator	14
Parvaneh	Female, 32 years	18-02-2018, 46 min, recorded	15
Roya	Female, 22 years	18-02-2018, 36 min, recorded	16
Soraya	Female, 22 years	18-02-2018, 36 min, recorded	17
Taraneh	Female, 18 years	19-02-2018, by email	18
Thomas	Male, 42 years	06-03-2018, 67 min, recorded	19
Zohreh	Female, 29 years	16-03-2018, 37 min, recorded	20

⁵³ This name is used as reference in the paper.

⁵⁴ Number for researcher. This is irrelevant for reader.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

- What is your name, age, and occupation?
.....
- What is your connection to air pollution (AP) or solid waste (SW)?
- In what way do you work on AP/SW?

- Hardware/Physical
 - Do you think that there is a problem concerning AP/SW in Tehran/Iran, and what is this problem?
 - What are the effects of AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - What are the causes for this problem?
 - What do you think are the potential solutions for AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - Is there already some progress towards these solutions, if so, in what way? / What is the impact of the process so far?

- Actors
 - How are the governmental actors involved?
 - What is the responsibility of the governmental actors?
 - What policies are applicable for AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - Are you influenced by the governmental actors?
 - How is the business sector involved?
 - What is the responsibility of the business sector?
 - What is the responsibility of the civil society?
 - What is the responsibility of the citizens?
 - What is the relation between you and the other actors involved?

- Motivation and activities
 - To what needs are you responding concerning AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - How are you responding to these needs?
 - What are your goals concerning AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - How are you achieving these goals?
 - What kind of activities are you involved in concerning AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?
 - Why these activities?

- Limitation and opportunities
 - What are the main obstacles and/or limitations experienced in achieving your goal?
 - How do you deal with these obstacles and/or limitations?
 - What are the main possibilities and/or opportunities experienced in achieving your goal?
 - Does religion influence your activities?
 - Do you have freedom to operate and talk publicly about your ideas and activities?
 - Is it possible to speak publicly about AP/SW in Tehran/Iran?

- Change
 - What is the impact of your actions?
 - In what way do your actions influence the society?
 - What do you want to establish in the society?
 - How do you perceive the future of the society in Iran?
 - In what ways do you contribute to that?
 - What norms and behaviour is important to reach this future?
 - Do your activities contribute to change in the society, if so, in what way?
 - Do your activities create space for discussion in the society, if so, in what way?