

Relationship Between citizen's Perception and Level of Participation in Local Government

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Abstract—This paper attempts to examine the relationship between citizen's perception of participation and level of their participation in local government of Torbat-Heydarieh, Iran. The paper is based on the study carried out among 400 citizens of Torbat-Heydarieh. A quantitative research methodology was designed for this research. The analysis of data uses Pearson correlation to determine the relationship between variables involved. The findings reveal that there were no significant relationship between citizen's perception of participation and levels of participation in local government (level of non-participation $r = -.037$, $p = .457$; level of tokenism $r = .051$, $p = .305$; and level of citizen-power $r = .038$, $p = .452$).

Keywords- *Citizen's perception, Citizen participation, Local government.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of studies in recent years examined the relationship between citizen's perception and participation in local government. Many researchers concluded the perception of citizens has effect on level of their participation in local government [1, 2, 3, 4, and 5]. Indeed, if local people have a positive perception toward participation, it is more likely that they participate in local government affairs more actively. References [6] and [7], argue that a better understanding of citizen perception toward participation is essential in providing the grounds for public to participate in local government [6 and 7]. A lot of studies on relationship between citizen perception and participation in local government have been conducted. All these studies are

performed by western researchers. Thus, the relevance of the findings in the Iranian context may not be fitting. To date, very little research has examined about the relationship between citizen perception and participation in local engagement in Iran. In point of case, local communities in Torbat-Heydarieh, Iran have been never been studied of such. Thus there is limited understanding of the relationship between citizen perception and participation in local government and also has never done any study here about level of people's participation in local government affairs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Participation of citizens can produce more efficient and effective in local organizations. Citizen participation is an important factor for successful and prosperity of local government, as well as their participation promote the quality of good governance. Without community participation, there are obviously no accountability, no development, and no program [8]. Reference [9] describe community participation as a spectrum from passive to active involvement to full local participation, where there is active community participation and venture ownership [9]. Meanwhile, some scholar such as; references [10], [11], and [12] provided a typology of participation [10, 11, and 12]. Even though, the most suitable typology that is adopted to urban issues is Arnstein's ladder [13]. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), is the most well-know continuum of citizen participation which frames participation in terms of citizen power. Reference [14] states participation is "the redistribution of power that enables the have-not

citizens, presently excluded from the politics and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated,...” [14]. According to her participation of citizens is essential for community. This ladder has eight rung and each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens’ participation. The eight rungs are categorized into three categorize. The bottom rungs of the ladder are manipulation and therapy. These two rungs describe level of non-participation, which the real

objective is not to enable people to participate in planning, but to enable powerholders to educate the participants. The next grouping encompasses three degrees of tokenism; informing, consultation, and placation. In this level citizens may indeed hear or be heard, but under these conditions they lack power to influence decisions [14]. It is the illusion of a voice without the voice itself. The highest level of ladder is citizen-power, which include; partnership, delegated power and citizen control. In this level citizen control all issue and they obtain the majority of decision-making seats.

TABLE I LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

Levels	Comments
level of citizen-power	Citizen control: People have the degree of power which guarantees that participants or residents can govern a program. Delegated power: citizens Citizen participation is performed through negotiations between citizens and authorities, this results in positive role the citizens played in partial decision making with the authority over a particular plan or project. Partnership: power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power-holders.
level of Tokenism	Plaction: is a stage that citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent. Consultation: people are invited to give their suggestions, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since no assurance is offered. Concerns and ideas of citizens will not be taken into consideration Informing authorities inform citizens of their rights, However, more emphasis is put on a one-way flow of information.
level of Non-participation	Therapy: With respect to group therapy, masked as citizen participation, should be on the lowest rung of the ladder because it is both dishonest and arrogant. Manipulation: Based on so-called citizen participation, people are placed on rubber stamp advisory committees.

Source: [14]

References [6] and [7] point out, local government networks, public demands, attitude toward local government and corporation strategy are as factors that affect public participation in local government [6 and 7]. In this way, reference [15] have indicated to perception as a main factor that affect on citizen’s participation in local government as well. This study focuses on the relationship between citizen’s perception toward participation and the level of their participation in local government [15].

Many researchers view participation as a means to achieve the goals. Reference [15] expound participation could be an instrument by which citizens can achieve their policy goals. Citizens have to participate and achieve the benefits of such goals. Reference [15] Emphasizing the importance of the perception of participation in their early studies, concluded that participation has a symbolic benefit that may be more important than its instrumental role. They argue participation itself may not be so important as the sense on the part of citizens that they could participate and have an impact if they wanted to. “Citizen opinions then are affected not as much by their own participation but from their perception of the broader institutional setting in which participation could occur” [15]. On the other word, citizens’ perceptions of participation opportunities are strongly based to their evaluation of policy and performance of government. This suggests that if local officials diminish the opportunities for participation, citizen support of decisions and the legitimacy of government may well decrease. “It seems that

officials are damned if they do encourage participation and damned if they do not [15].

Reference [3] argues, the enthusiasm or reluctance of citizens, for participation in local government matters is relative and strongly dependent upon to their perception of participation [3]. He added, the investigation of citizen’s perception toward participation is valuable because it gives a unique perspective of their perception. References [16] and [17] mention to negative perception to local government as unfavorable for participation [16 and 17]. Reference [6] has stated one of the most important hinders of citizen participation in local government is their perception about lack of council response to consultation [6]. Reference [7] pointed out, people be deterred from participation because of a perception that council, “wouldn’t do anything”. They added such view or perceptions are often based on their experience. Citizens feel that, the members of local government prepare to listen to peoples’ opinion but they do what they want [7].

Reference [7] states the perception of local authorities is also determining the scale participation of people. Because they can play an important role in encouraging or hindering of citizens to participate in local government matters. They have indicated that many members of local government perceive that people – particularly those who are traditionally excluded from political participation – are somewhat reluctant to enhance participation. For such perception, it is even more difficult to justify the participation initiative [7]. Reference [2] mentions that from

the perspective of government officials and institutions, citizen participation can be a nuisance because it may disrupt established routines. It is a challenge to incorporate citizen participation into ongoing operations [2].

In his study, reference [3] noted that generally citizens are viewed by local government as occasionally selfish with their focus limited to short-term personal gains rather than long-term community interests. He mentioned that there is a past viewpoint in which citizens are considered as incompetent in public decision making [3].

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on quantitative method. Quantitative methods use standardized measures that fit divers' opinion and experiences into predetermined response categories [18]. Quantitative methods are systematic, standardized, and easily for analysis, as well as they are presented in short space and period of time [19]. The study used survey design in which questionnaire was used to collect the data. Questionnaires are well-established methods of collecting data within social science research [20]. Questionnaire survey is a useful tool of research that are related to community participation [21]. A questionnaire is a data instrument that each respondent fills out as part of participating in research study [22].

The findings of this paper are drawn from 400 questionnaires carried out with citizens of Torbat-Heydariyeh. Torbat Heydariyeh is located in the east north of Iran in Khorasan Razavi province; it is 1005 km far from Tehran (Capital of Iran). In this study Cluster Sampling was used. This is a type of random sample that use multi stages and is often used to cover wide geographic areas. Cluster sampling was chosen because it can select a proxy for community that they represent the voice of people. The population of this research will be all of the residents include men and women and 17 years old and above who live in Torbat Hedariyeh. Eight questions were developed based on the literature review of the measurement of citizen's perception. The respondents were asked to insure these questions which were constructed to gauge their perception toward participation. The questionnaire was piloted tested to have its content validated by several reviewers of Persian background. Statements of civic engagement were tested for their validity using Cronbach's alpha. The respondents in pilot study had diverse demographic characteristics, especially with regards to community.

To test the proposed objective, this research was used statistical statics such as Pearson correlation and descriptive statistic. Pearson correlation was employed to measure the degree of relationship between variables involved (the citizen's perception and levels of participation). Pearson correlation statistic is a statistical technique to measure the strength of the association that exist between two quantitative variables [23]. In statistics, correlation (often measured as a correlation coefficient) points to the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables that has been determined randomly [8]. And, Descriptive analysis was employed to determine level of people participation. In this study participation is a composite

variable, consisting of three level, namely, nonparticipation (5 items), tokenism (7 items), and citizen power (9 items). The study used Likert-scale to measure every item. In the analysis, the citizen perception was correlated with the three levels of participation in order to determine the strength of their relationships. Meanwhile, means and standard deviations are the descriptive statistics that were used to describe the basic features of these variables. To assess the normality of the distribution of the data, the skewness and kurtosis of each variable were also examined. Reference [24] if the coefficient of the skewness and kurtosis falls between -0.5 and +0.5 inclusive, then the distribution appears to be relatively symmetric [24], which in this study skewness of non-participation was -.312 and Kurtosis -.447, skewness of tokenism was .303 and Kurtosis -.118, and skewness of citizen-power was -.577 and Kurtosis -.325.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, the main objective of the study is to determine the relationship between citizen's perception and level of participation. Pearson correlation was used to identify these relationships. Table 2 shows the findings of the study in relations to means and standard deviations of studied variables. For the three variables related to level of participation (nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen power), the data reveals that generally, the mean scores of nonparticipation level is higher than tokenism and citizen-power. This is reflected by the means of every level – nonparticipation level ($M = 20.26$, $SD = 3.12$), tokenism level ($M = 17.27$, $SD = 3.93$), citizen-power level ($M = 15.91$, $SD = 4.8$). These findings imply that participation in nonparticipation level is more frequent than tokenism and citizen-power. Moreover, the standard deviations show that there are relatively small deviations (differences) between respondents (citizens) in terms of their participation in each level. Meanwhile, the mean of citizen's perception is relatively at high ($M = 31$, $SD = 4.81$). It implies the majority of citizen have a positive perception toward participation.

The second analysis for this paper focuses on the relationships between citizen's perception and the level of participation based on Arnstein ladder. The results of the analysis are shown in table 3. The relationship between them were investigated using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Based on the person product moment correlation results (table 3) and the magnitude of association guidelines (0.70 to 0.99 = very strong association, 0.50 to 0.69 = substantial association, 0.30 to 0.49 = moderate association, 0.10 to 0.29 = low association and 0.01 to 0.10 = negligible association) suggested by [25], there was not significant relationship between perception toward participation with non-participation level of participation ($r = -.037$, $N = 400$, $P = .457$). For an alpha level of .05, the correlation between perception and tokenism level of participation was found to be not statistically significant ($r = .051$, $N = 400$, $P = .305$). The table 3 also illustrated that perception toward participation has no significant relationship with citizen-power level of participation ($r = .038$, $N = 400$, $P = .452$). On the other word, there were

not significant relationship between citizen's perception and levels of participation.

Although, the descriptive findings showed positive perception of respondents toward participation in social activities (M= 31, SD= 4.81) there is no significant relationship between perception and levels of participation. The results show local people are willing and interested to participate in local government, moreover they believe their participation in local government, improve their own ability and skills as well as promote the local government efficiency. But this mere factor is not enough for participation in local government, rather the other factors, are as determinant as well.

Based on literature review, this article can be concluded that the perception of members of local government is influential on people participation. When they do not have positive perception and are reluctant to involve citizen's participation, they will not be accountable and responsive to citizen's demand. Reference [7] state when citizens feel local government pay no attention to their opinions, their participation sentiments will be affected. Indeed, the previous experiences of local people and their perceptions of local government are important in their participation. If people recognize that the councilors consider their participation and take their opinions into account, it's more likely to participate in highest degree. But, if councilors pay no attention, people will not participate, although they have positive perception toward participation. This statement is supported by some researchers that indicated, the perception of both citizens and local government are determining in the extension of people participation in local government matters [16 and 17]. Reference [3] indicates some experiences and perception about local government, affect the rating of citizen participation. Reference [6] argued a negative perception to local government as unfavorable for participation.

The findings of this study supported the previous studies in terms of citizens perception toward participation in local government. The findings also are consistent with the past studies that have been concluded by references [7 and 26]. Most of these studies evaluated citizens perception toward local government and the role of citizen perception in participation.

TABLE II MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF THE STUDIED VARIABLES

Variables	Means	Standard Deviation
Level of nonparticipation	20.26	3.12
Level of tokenism	17.22	3.93
Level of citizen-power	15.91	4.8
Citizen's perception toward participation	31	4.81

TABLE III CORRELATION MATRIX ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION AND LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION (N = 400)

Variable	X	Y ₁	Y ₂	Y ₃
X- Perception toward participation	1.00			
Y ₁ - Non-Participation level	-.037	1.00		
Y ₂ - Tokenism level	.051	.418**	1.00	
Y ₃ - Citizen-Power level	.038	-.491**	.493**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

V. CONCLUSION

This study endeavored to investigate the relationship between citizen's perception and level of people participation in local government, based on the findings of the questionnaire carried out in Torbat-Hehdarieh city. Participation of citizens is a focal point for promoting the efficiency of local government programs. The efficiency of local government programs is ensured when citizens are involved in policy formulations. From the findings of this study, it is found that, there are no correlation between citizen's perception and levels of participation (non-participation, tokenism, and citizen-power). Thus, it could be concluded that, only if positive perception of citizens toward participation was not enough, the perception of members of local government would be important as well. If members of local government do not respond to citizen's demands, participation is not probable.

As participation in local government depend on two groups of stakeholders – citizens and councilors – it is important that the perception of members of local government tends to be considered. Because they play a main role in the extension of people's participation. References [7 and 16] state the perception of members of local government about citizen's participation often is different from citizen's perception toward participation. Hence, consideration about their perception is needed. Therefore, the result of this study indicates a main recommendation: besides the positive perception of citizens toward participation, focus on perception of local authorities also is important. The findings of this study have an implication on understanding the role of citizen's perception as well as the role of councilor's perception in participation in local government.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors wish to thank referees who greatly their patronage comments.

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