

Citizens' Attitude toward's Local Government and Citizen's Participation in Local Government

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to describe the citizen's attitude toward local government and its relationship with level of participation. Participation in local government issues, requires a favorable attitude towards local government, councilors and councils' performance in terms of efficiency. The paper is based on the study of citizens' attitude towards local government, which was carried out in Torbat Hedarieh city, Iran. The analysis of data uses Pearson correlation to determine the relationship between variables involved. The findings revealed that two level of ladder participation (Tokenism and Citizen-power) have positive and significant relationship with attitude, while Non-participation level of ladder participation has negatively significant relationship with attitude. The findings of the study imply that those respondents who have positive attitude toward local government, councilors and council performance, would have the higher tendency to be actively involved in higher levels of participation, whereas who have negative attitude toward local government, would put less effort in higher levels of participation.

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1. Introduction

There is consensus among scholars, which attitude toward local government is regarded as effective factor to people's participation in local government. Some scholars generally agree that positive attitude toward local government encourage citizens participation in council matters (Kosecik & Sagbas, 2004, Suzanne et al, 2007). As local governments become increasingly important in citizens' everyday lives, the investigation of public attitude toward local government is vital for success of future council programs and reforms. Without regular and systematic analysis of public attitude, viable local government policies will become more difficult to design and implement in the future.

The development of local government is ensure people's involvement in local government matters, thus, promoting people's participation in local government is important. Aldashev (2003) considers participation as a social behavior, and Rishi (2003) added attitude as a central element in social behaviors and argued that attitude is imperative for making change of the behaviors. According to Rishi (2003) social actions of people or their personal program are directed by their attitudes, if the attitude of people is positive toward an event or an action, it is more likely, that they divert their behavior in more meaningful way (Rishi, 2003). Similarly, if local people have positive attitude towards local government, it is more likely that they support the local government issues as well as participating more

in local government matters. Thus, understanding the citizen attitude can help to access the degree/level of citizen participation in council issues. The main objective of this study is to describe the relationship of citizen's attitude toward local government and level of people's participation in local government, on the basis of social exchange theory. The paper attempts to establish a relationship between social exchange theory, attitude of citizens and level of people's participation. This research is important because up to present moment, there has been very little research or discussion focusing upon the attitude toward local government and its relationship with level of participation in council matters. And also in this study, the participation of people in local government is linked with theory of social exchange. The theory of social exchange has been given only limited attention in participation in local government literature, even though it has been extensively used in other areas such as; tourism (Aref, et al, 2009), and agriculture (Bagherian, et al, 2009).

2. Literature Review

Citizen participation is considered as an important factor for successful and prosperity of local government. Citizen's participation in local government produce more efficiency in programs as well as promote good governance (Lowndes et al, 2001, According to Aref et al, (2009), without community participation, there are obviously no accountability, no development, and no program. Ashley & Roe, (1998) describe community participation as a spectrum from passive to active involvement to full local participation, where there is active community participation and venture ownership. Meanwhile, some scholars such as; Pretty (1995), Oakley (1991), Johnson (1982), and Wandersman (1987), provided a typology of participation, but the most suitable typology adopted in urban issues is Arnstein ladder. According to Arnstein; participation is a process that enables "have-nots" citizens, those who are excluded from decision-making process, to be included in future. It is the strategy that have-notes involve in sharing-information, and join to set priorities and goals. The Arnstein's ladder has eight rungs and each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the plan and/or program. The eight rungs are categorized into three categories. 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 power-holders to educate the participants. The following categorization involves three levels 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 (Arnstein 1969). 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 issues and win the majority of decision-making seats.

Today's, Local government are well placed to play a crucial role in enhancing citizen's participation and enabling local communities to participate in decision-making process (Mariana, 2008).

Local government is an essential component of administrative systems of all modern societies, which look for the improvement of public services and provide the situation for reaching/achievement good governance values at local level (Kosecik and Sagbas, 2004). Local government provides opportunities for public participation, and ensures effective and efficient public service delivery (Stoker, 1996: 6). Public participation at local level is achieved only if local people have an interest in local government affairs. The efficiency and effectiveness of local government is ensured when local people or citizens participate in the decision-making process of local government and keep local government under control (Kosecik and Sagbas, 2004, Jerry and David 1996). Local government will make better decisions and will have greater impact on their communities, when they increase the frequency, diversity and level of engagement of local people. Citizen involvement in local government will produce more public-preference decision making on part of administrators and better appreciation by the larger community among the public (Stivers 1990, Oldfield 1990, Box 1998).

These attitudes about the benefits of participation in local government are evaluated by citizens. The evaluation of the benefits and costs of local government by citizens link this study with social exchange theory.

This theory asserts that people develop attitudes toward others and things based on the benefits they could obtain while those activities assuming to increase benefits will be positive support and activities assuming to be costly will tend to be perceived negatively (Napier & Napier, 1991). Social exchange theory argues that all human relations are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis. For social exchange when the costs and benefits of a relationship are equal, the relationship is defined as equitable. The concept of equity is fundamental in social exchange theory.

In Homans' (1958) view, who is the initiator of the theory, the social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods and also non-material goods, this can be symbols of approval or prestige. Blau,

(1964) also notes that individuals can also enter into and maintain relationships, they can satisfy their own interest as long as they are sure that the benefits outweigh the costs.

Tbale 1: level of citizen participation in local government

Levels	Types	Characteristics
Citizen-power	Citizen control	This range is the highest level. Citizens have the degree of power (or control) which guarantees the participation in governing a program from citizens (Arnstein, 1969).
	Delegated power	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 (Arnstein, 1969).
	Partnership	power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power-holders (Arnstein, 1969).
Tokenism	Placation	<i>Placation</i> is a stage that citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent (Arnstein, 1969).
	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 (Arnstein, 1969).
	Informing	authorities inform citizens of their rights, However, more emphasis is put on a one-way flow of information (Arnstein, 1969).
Nonparticipation	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 (Arnstein, 1969).
	Manipulation	Based on so-called citizen participation, people are placed on rubber stamp advisory committees (Arnstein, 1969).

Source: Sherry Arnstein, 1969.

Prekumar and Ramamurthy (1995) declared, social exchange theory has been used by some researchers as a theoretical framework to investigate the community relationships that are not based on the economical aspects, rather than they are based on non-economical aspects, such as power, trust, interdependency, and the like. Therefore, this theory is not only for exploration of the economic relations, rather it can be used for exploration of non-economic and social relationships. Prekumar and Ramamurthy (1995) stated social exchange theory provides the base for the study of relationships between groups

and organizations in community (Prekumar and Ramamurthy 1995, p. 306). According to social exchange theory, the outcomes of an collective/organization's behavior will be related to the responsive behavior of the other participants within the relationship (Son et al. 2000). The main issue of this viewpoint is that the relationship between community groups does not necessarily need to be directly related to any economic outcomes (Hallen et al. 1991, Humphreys et al. 2001). Humphreys et al. (2001) postulate that social exchange theory is a appropriate base for studying

non-profit relationships. So, in terms of people's participation in local government, the social exchange theory is adopted to investigate the social aspects of relationships between citizens and local government. According to Ledingham (2001) Citizens tended to participate in local government, when they perceive that local government is providing benefits for local people, acting in the best interest of local people, and dedicating resources to support matters of importance of citizens in the exchange relationship between people and local government. He added Citizens expect mutual interactions with local government, they seek a balance between social costs of interaction with their local government. Ledingham and Bruning (2001) concluded: "To be effective, relationships need to be seen as mutually beneficial, based on mutual interest between an organization and its significant publics". People cannot be expected to present positive attitude toward local government if the benefits and costs of local government is not equal for them.

An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event- this is often referred to as the attitude object (Bagherian, et al., 2009). Attitudes are generally viewed as a kind of disposition toward various aspects of the world including persons, events and subjects. It has been generally believed that attitude change is necessary before other behavioral modifications can be effected (Zainuddin, 1977).

Kosecik & Sagbas (2004) found that there is a relationship between citizens' attitude toward local government and level of participation in local government affairs. Stevenson (2007) found that people with positive attitude toward local government are more likely to participate in local government. Rishi (2003) outlined that understanding of attitudes is one of the central concerns in social life and is relatively crucial in bringing the desired change in the behavior. Collective and personal actions of people are directed by their attitudes. Attitudes make it possible to predict and control the behavior, which ultimately is useful to implement program successfully. Kosecik & Sagbas (2004) in

their study found, public attitude affects public participation and that is an essential element for increasing participation in local government. The positive attitude toward local government can make local people more active and eager to participate in activities that are related to local government. According to Hiskey and Seligson (2003) there is link between performance of local government and citizen attitude, he demonstrates as a first step, performance of local government affect citizen attitude toward council. It is unlikely that performance of local government affect citizen attitude but does not influence their level of participation (Hiskey and Seligson, 2003). Aspden and Brich (2005) demonstrated that there are a number of factors and issues that affect the publics' attitude towards participation in local affairs and decision-making. Their demonstration consist of the; citizen interest and understanding of local government, citizens satisfaction for their involvement, citizen trust to local government and its members, and previous experience of voluntary participation (Aspden and Brich, 2005). A better understanding of citizen attitude is necessary if councilors are to address the very real problems of apathy of citizens that hinder public participation, and if they are maximize the impact and effectiveness of participation (Lowndes, et.al, 2001). Public attitude toward local government might differ according to certain variables such as, age sex, education, occupation, and income (Kosecik & Sagbas, 2004). These variables have considerable influence in citizen attitude toward local government and consequently in their participation in council affairs.

According to the above figure, the social exchange theory is used to illustrate that citizens assess their interaction and cooperation with local government based on benefits and costs that its brings to them. Participation occurs when the cost of participation is low and the benefit of participation is high, and consequently it makes positive attitude toward participation in local government. But if the costs outweigh the likely benefits, no interest to participation.

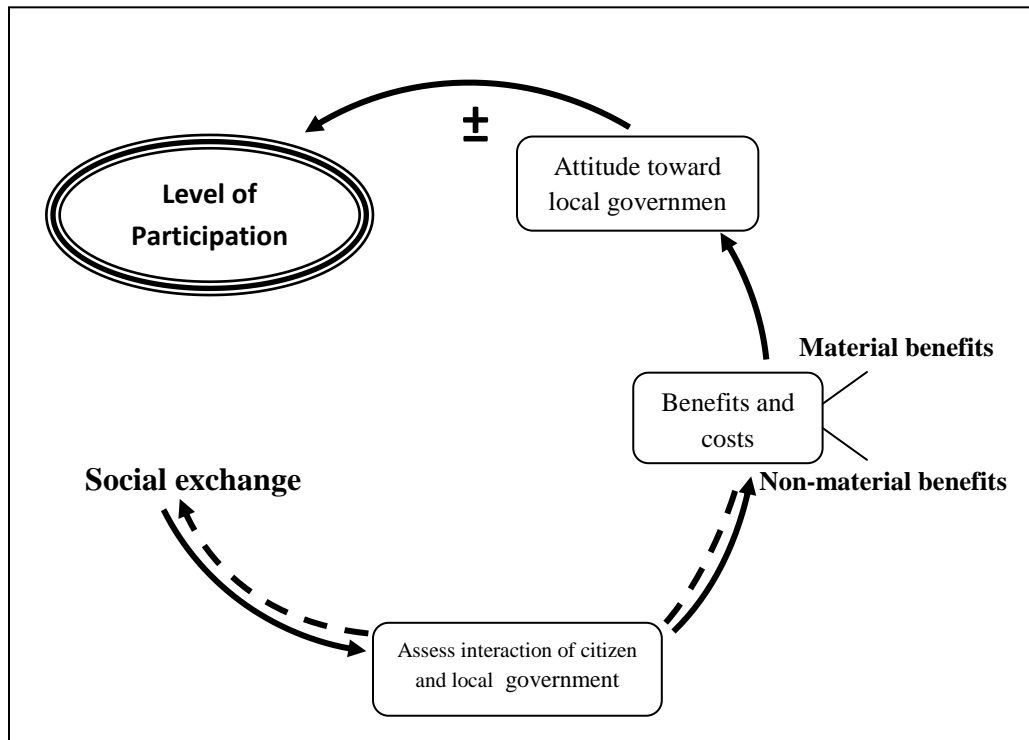


Figure 1; Cycle of social exchange theory, attitude toward local government and level of participation

3. Research Design

The study was carried out on 400 citizens in Torbat Heydariyeh. Torbat Heydariyeh is located in the east north of Iran in Khorasan Razavi province; it is 1005km far from Tehran (capital of Iran). In Iran, the size of council range is between five and fifteen depending on population. Since the population of Torbat Heydariyeh is less than 200'000, so, the members of local government are seven (the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran). In some big cities, local government has established neighborhood councils due to increase in public participation for achievement of its targets. Neighborhood councils are subset of local government, which try to close the members of local government to local people and recognize their problems. In Iran among the cities with less than 200,000 populations, Torbat Hedariyeh was the first city that established neighborhood council, for increasing public participation and improving the issues. According to Ghanizadeh (1999) "in Iran, neighborhood councils by attraction of public participation have could given assistance to local government in executive issues".

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 (Dillman, 2000). Questionnaire survey is a useful tool of research that are related to community participation (Shin, 2004). A questionnaire is a data instrument that each respondent fills out as part of participating in research study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The respondents were 400 citizens, where each citizen as respondents was chosen randomly.

In this study Cluster Sampling was used. This is type of random sample that use multi stages and is often used to cover wide geographic areas. Cluster sampling was chosen because we believe through that, we can select a proxy for community that they represent the voice of people. The population of this research will be all of the inhabitants include men and women and 17 above years who live in Torbat Hedariyeh. Eleven questions were developed based on the literature review of the measurement of attitude toward local government. The respondents were asked to insure these questions which were constructed to gauge their attitude

toward local government, councilors and its efficiency. The questionnaire was piloted tested to have its content validated by several reviewers of Persian background. Statements for citizen attitude 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 attitude toward local government and levels of participation). Pearson correlation statistic is a statistical technique to measure the strength of the association that exist between two quantitative variables (Ary et al., 1996). 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 (Aref and Redzuan, 2009). 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 attitude 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.

4. Result and Discussion

As have been mentioned above, the main objective of the study is to determine the relationship between citizens' attitude toward local government and level of participation. Pearson correlation was used to identify these relationships. Table 1 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 reveal 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 citizens' attitude in regard to local government is relatively moderate ($M = 27.03$, $SD = 7.90$). It implies the majority of citizen have relatively moderate attitude toward local government, councilors and its performances.

The second analysis for this paper focuses on the relationships between the attitude toward local government and the level of participation based on Arnstein ladder. The results of the analysis are shown in table 2. The correlation between citizen attitude and nonparticipation level is found to be negatively significant ($r = -.414$, $N = 400$, $P = 0.000$). Meanwhile, the correlation between citizen attitude and the level of tokenism is found to be positively significant ($r = .323$, $N = 400$, $P = 0.000$), as well as the correlation between citizen attitude and citizen power is positive and significant ($r = .385$, $N = 400$, $P = 0.000$).

When comparing the nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen-power levels of participation with attitude toward local government descriptively, Non-participation level has a negative relationship with attitude. - Since this level is unrealistic and superficial and its real objective is not to enable citizens to participate in planning (Arnstein, 19969), this relationship is understandable. Because whatever attitude towards local government is positive, Participation will be increased. And it can surpass non-participation level to reach higher levels, i.e Tokenism and Citizen-Power - . However, Tokenism and Citizen-Power levels have positive relationship with attitude. It confirmed the assumption that participation will be increased when the attitude of local people be positive toward local government, its efficiency, and its services (Aspden and Brich, 2005).

The findings from this study supported the previews studied in terms of citizen attitude toward local government and their participation in local government. The findings also are consistent with the past studied that have been concluded by Stevenson (2007) and Suzanne et al (2007). Most of these studies evaluated citizen attitude toward the local government and services that are provided by it, and the role of citizen attitude in participation.

In addition study indicated that those people who had positive attitude toward program more likely to participate in program. These findings also are consistent with results of Rishi (2003), Shahroudi and Chizari (2008), Vicente (2008) and Asadi *et al.* (2009) in their research that found significant

relationship between attitude and level of participation.

Table 2: 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
Attitude toward local government	27.03	7.90

Table 3: Correlation Matrix Analysis of Attitude toward Local government and Levels of Participation (n=400)

Variable	X	Y ₁	Y ₂	Y ₃
X- Attitude toward local government	1.00			
Y ₁ - Non-Participation level	-.414**	1.00		
Y ₂ - Tokenism level	.323**	.418**	1.00	
Y ₃ - Citizen-Power level	.385**	-.491**	.493**	1.00

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

5. Conclusion

By using social exchange theory framework, this paper attempts to illustrate the relationship between attitude towards local government and the level of participation. This theory helps to create a clear understanding about the relationship between perceived attitude and support for local government matters.

This study aimed at examining citizen attitude to local government and its relationship with level of participation, based on the findings of the questionnaire carried out in Torbat Hedarieh city, Iran. The basic argument about this study was that citizen's participation is the most important part of local government, which enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of council issues. The efficiency of the performance of local government is ensured if citizens participate in decision-making process and hold local government accountable. If citizens are not interested in local government and remain passive, it is not expected that the responsibilities of local government to the citizens will be undertaken.

From the study, it is found that there is linear relationship between level of participation and citizen attitude. It can be concluded that, if citizen attitude toward local government is positive, it is more likely that citizens are willing to participate in council affairs. Also, according to literature and other researches, attitude is one of the most important and effective factors for participation in local

government, which play a significant role in encouraging citizens to participate. Therefore the result of this study indicates main recommendation, that is; focus on measures which are believed to improve citizen attitudes to local government. The findings of this study have an implication on understanding the role of attitude in participation in local government. It is suggested that the good performance of local government make a positive attitude toward local government among citizens or local people. Consequently local government can receive a support from local communities. As, local government is important to citizens in daily lives, positive attitude toward local government can encourage them to engage in council issues. However the creation of such attitude toward local government in Iran has always been challenged, because, people would rather consider local government as a governmental organ than public and non-governmental organ, level of public knowledge about the functions of local government, and lack of efficient and expertise among councilors.

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