

## Relationship between civic engagement and level of people's participation in local government

\* Seyed Hamid Mohammadi, \*\* Sharifah Norazizan, \*\*\* Zahid Emby

\* Department of Social and Development Sciences, Faculty of Human Ecology, Putra University, Malaysia

Tel: 60-17-2118806 E-mail: [hmd\\_mohamadi@yahoo.com](mailto:hmd_mohamadi@yahoo.com)

\*\* Department of Social and Development Sciences, Faculty of Human Ecology, Putra University, Malaysia

E-mail: [sharifah@putra.upm.edu.my](mailto:sharifah@putra.upm.edu.my)

\*\*\* Department of Social and Development Sciences, Faculty of Human Ecology, Putra University, Malaysia

E-mail: [Zahid@putra.upm.edu.my](mailto:Zahid@putra.upm.edu.my)

**Abstract:** This paper attempts to identify the relationship between civic engagements of local people 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. The analysis of data uses Pearson correlation to determine the relationship between variables involved. The findings reveal that two levels of participation (tokenism and citizen-power) have positive and significant relationship with civic engagement, while there is no significant relationship between non-participation level and civic engagement. The findings of the study imply that those respondents who engage more in civic activities would participate in high level of participation in local government.

[Seyed Hamid Mohammadi, Sharifah Norazizan, Zahid Emby. **Relationship between civic engagement and level of people's participation in local government.** Journal of American Science 2011;7(5):52-59]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>.

**Keywords:** civic engagement; people's participation; local government

### 1. Introduction

A number of studies in recent years have examined the relationship between civic engagement and participation in local government. Many researchers concluded if local people more engage in social activities or community matters, it is more likely that they participate in local government affairs more actively (Putnam. 2000, Zlatareva. 2008). Parnell et.al (2002) argues that civic engagement contributes to enable the people to participate in local government activities and that presents a potential development resource for local government. A lot of studies on relationship between civic engagement 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 civic engagement and participation in local engagement in Iran. In point of case, local communities in Torbat, Iran have been never been studied of such. Thus there is limited understanding of the relationship between engagement in civic activities and participation in local government and also has never done any study here about level of people's participation in local government affairs.

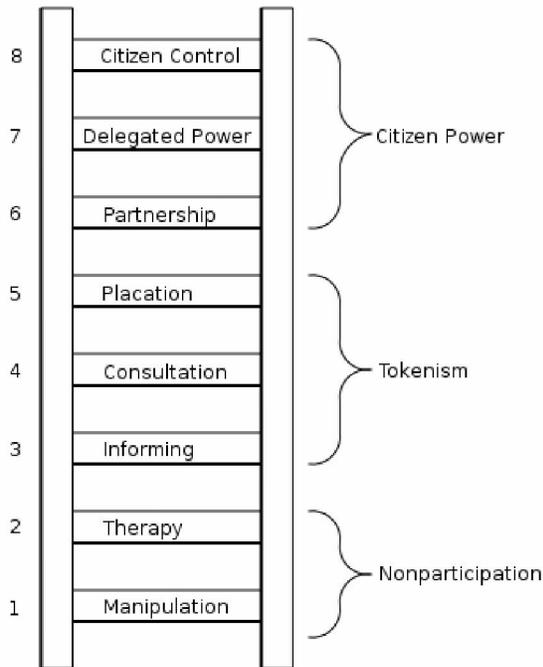
### 2. Literature Review

Participation of citizens in decision-making can produce more efficient and effective. 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 (Aref et al, 2009). 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 scholar such as; Pretty (1995), Oakley (1991), Johnson (1982), and Wandersman (1987), provided a typology of participation, but the most suitable typology that is adopted to urban issues is Arnstein's ladder (Mohammadi et, al. 2010) Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (1969), is the most well-know continuum of citizen participation which frames participation in terms of citizen power. According to her; 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,..." according to her study, citizens are considered as an integral part of governance process and their participation is essential for community. This ladder has eight rung 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 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 (Arstein 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 issue and they obtain the majority of decision-making seats.



**Figure 1: Arnsteins' Ladder of Citizen Participation**

*manipulation* stage (stage 1). It is bottom range of participation, that people are placed on rubber stamp advisory committees or advisory boards for the express purpose of 'educating' them or engineering their support (Arstein 1969).

Second stage is *Therapy* (stage 2). Therapy, as Amstein (1969) noted, a type of participation that is presented in the form of a small group, masked as citizen participation. It is on the lowest rung of participation because it is both dishonest and arrogant (Arstein 1969).

In stage 3 (*informing*), authorities inform citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and options can be the most important first step toward legitimate citizen participation. However, too frequently the emphasis is placed on a one-way flow of information (Arstein 1969).

In 4 stage (*consultation*) people be invited to give their suggestions, this rung of the ladder is still a sham since it offers no assurance that citizen concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The

most frequent methods used for consulting people are attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings, and public hearings (Arstein 1969).

*Placation* is stage 5 that citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent (Arstein 1969).

At the rung of *partnership* (range 6), power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power-holders. They agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses (Arstein 1969).

In range 7 (*delegated power*), Citizen participation under this rung consists of negotiations between citizens and authorities that result in citizens having partial decision making authority over a particular plan, program or project. The citizens gain various delegated power arrangements sometimes as a result of demands (Arstein 1969).

The highest level of ladder citizen participation is *citizen power* (range 8). in this range people have the degree of power (or control) which guarantees that participants or residents can govern a programme (Arstein 1969).

Lowndes et al. (2001) point out, local government networks, public demands, and corporation strategy are as factors that affect public participation in local government (Lowndes et al., 2001). As well as Putnam (2000) have indicated to social capital – especial civic engagement - as a main factor that affect on citizens participation in local government. This study focus on the relationship between civic engagement as a key component of social capital and participation in local government.

Civic engagement refers to the ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future. Civic engagement is seen as means of building social capital. The concept of social capital has been popularized by so many authors, but very often of them has focused on individual or some groups as the unit of analysis. Although, these views about social capital is useful for social capital theorists, but Putnam offered more useful and practical views of social capital. Putnam thought of social capital as a resource, which is resulted from peoples' social connections. Putnam (1993a), made an important role to the social capital discuss by exploring the nature of social capital at the community level. Community level social capital can not be measured merely as an aggregation of individual networks. Community level social capital resides in groups and the networks among them (Woolcock, 1998). Strong community level social capital creates the civic infrastructure, which supports formal and informal processes of decision making and public involvement (Potapchuck et al., 1997).

Putnam (1993) defines social capital as those features of social life that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives. Unlike physical or human capital, it is not the property of individuals or institutions. Rather it is produced 'in the spaces between people' and affects their ability to associate with one another, particularly outside immediate and intimate relationships. Like other forms of capital, it is productive but differs 'in that it is self reinforcing and cumulative' (Putnam 1993:38). Its depletion is more likely to occur through under-rather than over-use.

The concept of social capital has three main components which have been acknowledged by social capital theorists. These key components are; networks of civic engagement', 'norms of generalized reciprocity' and 'relations of social trust'. (Knack and Keefer, 1997, Fukuyama, 1995, and

Putnam, 1993). According to Putnam (1993) the establishment of these components is as a precondition for effective government. Social capital in this study is used as manifestation of participation between citizens with each other and also with local government. And, although social capital is elaborated by three component, but, Putnam (2000, p.19) states, the core notion of social capital is networks of civic engagement, which influence productivity of individuals and groups. He argues, without network of civic engagement, individuals become more isolated and lose the expectation that working for their communities.

The mention of civic engagement is very board and there is no consensus about its definition (Gibson, 2000). Different authors define civic engagement in different ways, based on their views and interests. Some authors like; Diller (2001) and Hollister (2002) defined civic engagement in limited way, which only include engagement in formal activities, ig; participation in political activities, or participation to make change in civil society. Whereas, a number of authors find it in a board way, which encompass both formal and informal activities, these authors are such as; Putnam (2000), and Micheal Della (2004).

Putnam's definition includes informal social activities (visits with friends, card games) as well as formal activities (committee service), community and political participation. Michael Della (2004) also defined civic engagement in broad way. He asserts the term of civic engagement encompass a with range of activities of different types. According to him "Civic engagement is individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem, or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting".

According to Zlatareva (2008), civic engagement is about participation, empowerment and partnership. It is about how citizens organize for collective action and interact with national and local level state institutions but also non-state actors such as NGOs and the private sector, and how they articulate their interests and exercise control over decisions that affect their lives. UNDP (2002) defines civic engagement as "a process, not an event that closely involves people in the economic social, cultural and political processes that affect their

lives."It entails ensuring people's involvement in decision-making, and enhancing their enjoyment of the shared benefits from the development process.

Zlatareva (2008), argue Civic engagement requires active citizenship - meaning citizens who are willing to participate in decision-making and to share the responsibility with government and other actors. When citizens perceive themselves as actors and active participants, rather than passive beneficiaries of services, they are more able to assert their citizenship through participation in shaping the policies that have an impact on their lives and by demanding accountability.

Main contribution to civic engagement has been to create: safe space for participation by playing the role of mediator between citizens and local authorities, by motivating and creating suitable environment for people to participate at the local level, and by identifying the necessary changes required for the local governments (Zlatareva, 2008). As well as the major outcome of civic engagement has been to help people overcome some of the key barriers to participation - mistrust, apathy and skepticism - and to demonstrate the value of participation. By developing people's abilities to engage, by opening up space for their involvement, by providing access to information, by mobilizing them for collective action (Zlatareva, 2008). Putnam (2000) states, whatever people more engage in social activities, it is more likely that they more participate in local government activities. This is because, civic engagement as a main component of social capital, enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives at the local level. According to him the stock of social capital in a region for example as measured by the density of citizens' participation in community organizations (choral societies, soccer leagues, pottery clubs, and the like) turned out to be the best predictor of local performance.

People are the real capital of societies. Civic engagement implies that living together is not a passive exercise; in societies people must actively contribute to the common welfare of each other. Citizens, especially poorest social sectors must be empowered to participate effectively in decision-making processes. UNICEF (2008) point out civic engagement programs often empower people to make positive contributions to their societies and to change their own lives in the process.

Although the above statements assert, people participation is affected by civic engagement, but it must be mentioned people participation also plays a crucial role in promoting civic engagement as main element of social capital as well as in development of local government. Zlatareva (2008)

believes civic engagement is being foster by enhancing citizen's involvement in public dialogues and decision-making and by strengthening the participation of the poorest groups in policy processes. UNDP (2006) identify the effective role of participation of poorest social sectors, women, youth, and indigenous people. Mobilizing civic engagement among these groups is a basic foundation for strengthening their voice in the policymaking process. participation of people in local community activities, put them in the position that being connected to other sectors and engage in new social networks.

### 3. Methodology

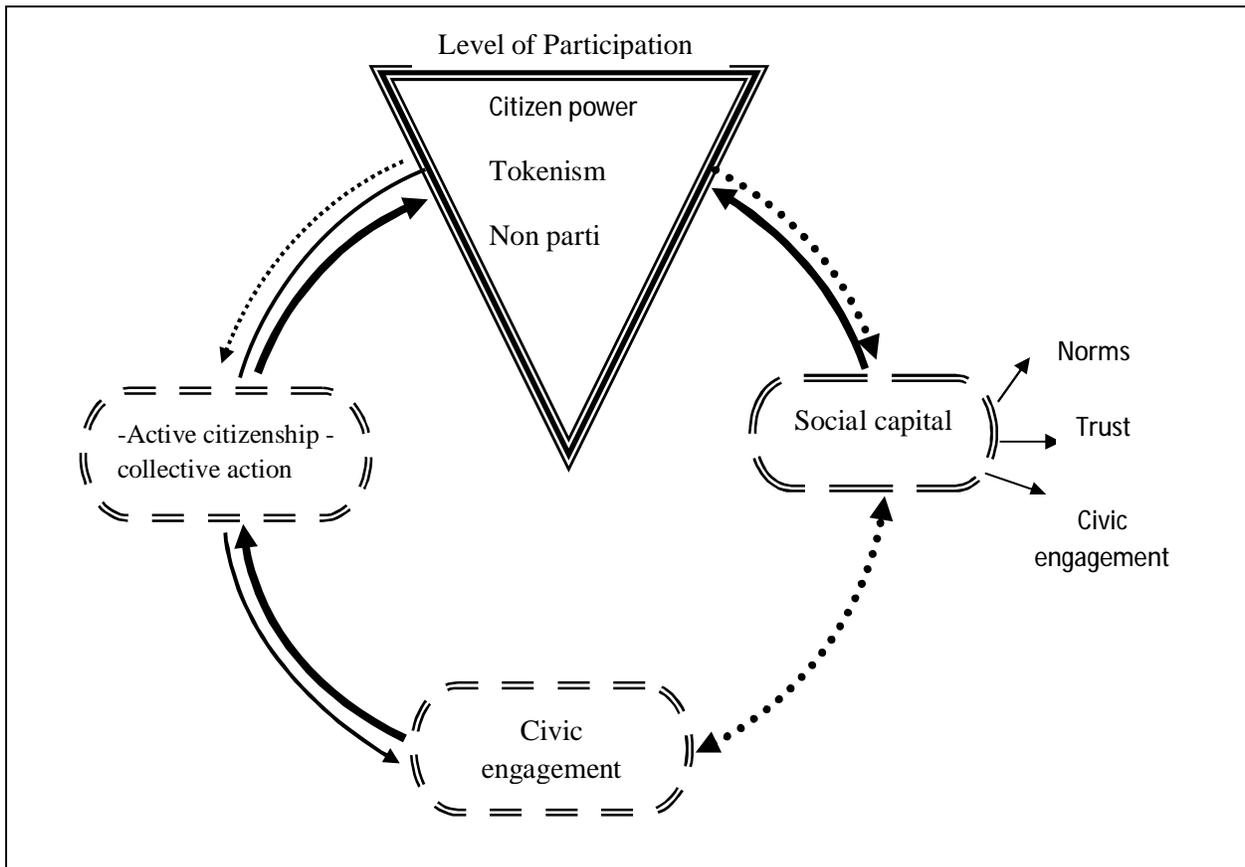
This study is based on quantitative method. Quantitative methods use standardized measures that fit divers' opinion and experiences into predetermined response categories (Hopkins, 2000). The advantage of the quantitative technique is that it measures the reaction of a great many people against a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This allows the researcher to give a broad, generalized set of findings (Patton, 1987). Quantitative measures are brief, and easily aggregated for analysis. They are systematic, standardized, and easily presented in short space and period of time. 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 findings of this paper are drawn from 400 questionnaires carried out with citizens of Torbat-Heydarieh. Torbat Heydarieh is located in the east north of Iran in Khorasan Razavi province; it is 1005km far from Tehran (capital of Iran). 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 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 above years who live in Torbat Hedarieh. Ten questions were developed based on the literature review of the measurement of civic engagement. The respondents were asked to insure these questions which were constructed to gauge their engagement in civic activities. 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 civic engagement 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 civic engagement 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. According to George & Mallery (2002) if the coefficient of the skewness and kurtosis falls between -0.5 and +0.5 inclusive, then the distribution appears to be relatively symmetric 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.



**Figure 2; Cycle of engagement in civic activities, social capital and level of participation**

#### 4. Result and Discussion

As mentioned above, the main objective of the study is to determine the relationship between civic engagement 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 civic engagement is relatively moderate ( $M = 24.35$ ,  $SD = 4.91$ ). It implies the majority of citizen engage in civic activities relatively moderate.

The second analysis for this paper focuses on the relationships between civic engagement and the level of participation based on Arnstein ladder. The results of the analysis are shown in table 2. The relationship between them were investigated using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Based on the person product moment correlation results (table 4.17) 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 Davis (1971), there was not significant relationship between civic engagement and non-participation level of participation ( $r = .026$ ,  $N = 400$ ,  $P = .601$ ). While, the relationship between civic engagement and tokenism level of participation shows a positive and low linear relationship ( $r = .203$ ,  $N = 400$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ). Also the correlation between civic engagement with citizen-power level of

participation was found to be statistically significant ( $r = 120$ ,  $N = 400$ ,  $P = .016$ ).

When comparing the nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen-power levels of participation with civic engagement, table 2 shows no significant relationship between civic engagements with non-participation level of participation. However civic engagement has weak positive and significant relationship with tokenism and citizen-power levels of participation. According to Parnell et.al (2002) engagement to civic activities enables people to participate in local government activities and that presents a potential development resource for local government. The findings of this study are supported with Knack (2002), which believe civic engagement can lead to better local government performance, through enabling local people to participate in election and especially other modes of citizen voice, that cause local government be accountable to local people (Kneek, 2002).

Based on results of this study, table 2 revealed, although there was a relationship between civic engagement and levels of participation, their relationship is at the “low association”. It depends on the socio-cultura context of Iran, because people in Iran are more interested in participating in uncivil activities rather than civil activities. In other words, people are more interested participating in religious, charity, and sports activities than participating in local government, NGOs, and politica parties. As well as they have not had enough experience interact collectively with local government. Sharma (2009) argue civic engagement is not related to the interaction of an individual citizen with governing but rather the interaction of a collection of individuals.

This results is supported by study that has been conducted by Wilson (1999), he conclude people would prefer to take part in social activities such as sporting events, religion ceremonies, or trade union gathering than attend public meeting about community-based issues. He argued/elaborated people will mobilize over issues that they can visualize, that affect them in an immediate way.

**Table 1: 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
Engagement in civic activities	24.35	4.91

**Table 2 : Correlation Matrix Analysis of Engagement in civic activities and Levels of people Participation ( n = 400)**

Variable	X	Y <sub>1</sub>	Y <sub>2</sub>	Y <sub>3</sub>
X- Engagement in civic activities	1.00			
Y <sub>1</sub> - Non-Participation level	.026	1.00		
Y <sub>2</sub> - Tokenism level	.203**	.418**	1.00	
Y <sub>3</sub> - Citizen-Power level	.120*	-.491**	.493**	1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

## 5. Conclusion

This study endeavored to investigate the relationship between civic engagement 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, - based on Arnstein's ladder of participation - there is no correlation between civic engagement and non-participation level. Whereas, there is positive correlation between civic engagement and levels of tokenism and citizen-power. Thus it could be concluded that, more engagement in civic activities, may make possible that citizens more participate in local government matters. In other words, if citizens engage in formal or in-formal activities, such as; sports and religious programmes and attending public meeting, it is more likely that they be able to involve in decision-making process, exercise their priorities, and discuss with local government about their problems. Therefore the result of this study indicates main recommendation, that is; focus on measures which involve citizens more in civic activities. The findings of this study have an implication on understanding the role of engagement in civic activities in participation in local government.

## Reference:

Aref, Fariborz and Redzuan, Ma'rof, (2009). Community Leaders' Perceptions toward Tourism Impacts and Level of Community Capacity Building in Tourism Development. *Journal of Sustainable Development*. Vol 2. No3.

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.

Ary, D., Jacobs, C., & Rezavieh, A. (1996). *Introduction to research in education* (5 ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Ashley, C., & Roe, D. (1998). *Enhancing Community Involvement in Wildlife Tourism: Issues and Challenges*, 11.

Diller, E. C. (2001). *Citizens in service: The challenge of delivering civic engagement training to national service programs*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service.

Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and internet surveys: the tailored design method*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Fukuyama, F., 1995. *Trust*. Free Press, New York.

George, & Mallery, P (2002). *SPSS for window step by step: a simple guide and reference 11.0 update*. USA: ALLYN& Bacon

Gibson, C. (2000). *From inspiration to participation: A review of perspectives on youth civic engagement.* New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Hollister, R. (2002). *Lives of active citizenship*. Inaugural talk, John DiBiaggio Chair in Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University.

Hopkins G. Will, (2000). *Measures of Reliability in Sports Medicine and Science*. *Sports Med* 2000 Jul; 30 (1): 1-15

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2004). *Education Research: Quantitative and qualitative and mixed approaches*. London: Pearson.

Knack, Stephen, and Philip Keefer. (1997). "Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Crosscountry Investigation," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112(4), 1251-1288.

Knack, S. (2002) 'Social Capital and the Quality of Government: Evidence from the States', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol 46, no 4, 772-85.

Lowndes, V., L. Pratchett and G. Stoker. (2001), b. *Trends in public participation: part 2 – Citizens' perspectives*, *Public Administration*, Vol.79 No.2, 2001. (445-455).

Michael, Della (2004). Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation and Citizen Engagement: A Review of the Empirical Literature Annual Review of Political Science 7.

Mohammadi, S, Hamid. Sharifah Norazizan. Nobaya Ahmad (2010). Citizens' Attitude toward's Local Government and Citizen's Participation in Local Government. Journal of American Science vol 6. No, 11.

Oakley, p. (1991). Project with People: the Practice of Participation in Rural Development. Geneva: ILO.

Parnell, S., Pieterse, E., Swilling, M. and Wooldridge, D., 2002, Democratising Local Government: the South African Experiment, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press.

Patton, Micheal Quinn (1987). How to use qualitative methods in evaluation, California: sage publication Ltd.

Pretty, Jules et al. (1995). A Trainer's Guide for Participatory Learning and Action, IIED Participation Methodology Series. IIED, London.

Potapchuck, W., Crocker, J., Schechter, W., Boogaard, D., 1997. Building community: Exploring the role of social capital and local government. Program for Community Problem Solving, Washington, DC.

Putnam, Robert D. (1993). Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Putnam, Robert D. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon and Schuster: New York.

Sharma, Bhvana (2009) Voice, Accountabilty and Civic Engagement A Conceptual Overview. United Nations Development Programme, Oslo Governance Centre, Democratic Governance Group, Bureau for Development Policy.

Shin, Yongseok, (2004). Collaboration and Power Relations among Stakeholder a community festival: The case of the Andong Mask Dance Festival, South Korea. University Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

UNDP Evaluation Office(2002), Democratic Governance Practice Area, "Civic Engagement", Essentials.

UNICEH (2008) Young People's Civic Engagement in East Asia and the Pacific. A regional study conducted by Innovations in Civic Participation

Wandersman, A., Florin, P., Friedmann, R., & Meier, R. (1987). Who participates, who does not, and why? An analysis of voluntary neighborhood organizations in the united states and israel. Sociological Forum, 2(3), 534-555.

Wilson, David (1999). Exploring the Limits of Public Participation in Local Government. Journal of Parliamentary Affairs. Vol, 52. No, 2. PP 246-259.

Woolcock, M., 1998. Social capital and economic development: Towards a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. Theory and Society, forthcoming.

Zlatareva, Maria 2008. Promoting Civic Engagement in a Post- Totalitarian and EU Accession Context. A Case from Bulgaria.

11/1/2010