Application of neighborhoods council associations in sustainable urban management based on citizen participation

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Abstract

The development of urban management approaches based on sustainability has been growing recently. Concept of citizen participation is one of important criteria for the collaborative management and social science theorists have emphasized on citizen participation as the main representative of the democratic systems legitimacy. Thus, enabling citizens to participate in urban management lead to increasing citizenship satisfaction. This will put citizens in a situation to have the ability to change the urban environment based on their satisfaction; on the other hand city managers engage citizen’s ideas in decision making process and it is obviously affective on their programs. In sustainable urban management system based on participation, citizens not only judge the result of city managers and administer activities, but also involve in the processes of decision making. The following research is going to explain the Neighborhoods council associations in which citizens can participate in urban management resulting in improvement of their quality of life. Regarding this point, Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods of Tehran is selected for case study and needed information is obtained from statistics and information of organizations affiliated to Tehran Municipality and also people's opinions.

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1. Introduction

The management of cities and towns is a complex and ongoing process that touches the lives of many individuals and organisations. The objective of managing urban areas in a sustainable way requires the involvement of all of the people and organizations whose lives and interests are affected. Urban management knowledge in order to achieve comprehensive and sustainable urban development needs
citizen’s participation. Therefore, participatory approaches of urban management has emphasized on participatory attitude to encourage some kind of “bottom-up” management approach and to enable community monitor development actions. In this research, it is going to introduce Neighborhoods council associations in Tehran as the intervening chain between people and urban management and review its influence on the promotion of the quality of life and the level of citizen satisfaction in Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods.

2. Theoretical framework

There is no general principle for urban management concept and the main meaning of this term is very confusing. It is mentioned that urban management doesn’t have a specific definition and content. [11] According to the tastes, perception of people and also political-social demands of different eras have different meanings. We can still see these differences in meaning and concept in the recent era.

The World Bank defines urban management as a quasi-commercial activity for governments. Urban management is sometimes considered as a tool for implementing the urban policies, which means urban managing science.

As a definition urban management as an effort for coordinating and integrating the public and private actions for overcoming problems that urban residents encounter, and creating more competitive, fairer and more stable cities.(Van Dijk) Modern urban management is defined as the process of implementing, coordinating and assessing the integrated strategies with city’s authorities’ help, by considering the private section objectives and citizen’s benefit, in a political framework that in higher levels of government, is being edited for approaching the sustainable economic development potential. [12]

2.1. Participation approach in Urban Management

Citizen participation is one of the core values of democracy. Democratization means an increase in citizen participation in public affairs. [5] In fact, citizen participation plays a critical role in building healthy communities by creating more empowered constituencies who can leverage greater and more equal access to available resources. [10]

In urban management, participation has two meanings, the first meaning of participation concept, can be considered cooperation between private sectors and municipality. In this kind of cooperation, the private sector which acts according to the market rules, in order to get economical profits and by receiving service cost that presents, cooperates with municipality and, hence, in performing duties, helps the municipality. Municipality monitors the activity of this section and giving part of duties to the private section does not mean that the municipality is not responsible toward the quality of the presenting services. The second concept of the participation emerges in the cooperation of community sector with municipality. This sector has other names such as social sector or private non-profit sector. [9]

In the recent two decades, many organizations and institutes that intervene urban management and planning at global levels, have emphasized on promoting the participation view for encouraging a kind of management and planning approach “Bottom-up” and enabling community in order to monitor development actions and had considered to make decision in solving urban problems based on local communities to fulfill the necessary conditions for citizen’s welfare. From 1990, urban development approach, has experienced an important revolution in its paradigm; learning from previous experiences and “top-down” conventional view, would give a pattern that lies on the approach different from the past, and that is “down to up” approach; shift from a prescriptive view to the participative one based on government-oriented solutions for problem solving methods with emphasis on civic society is one of the features of new development pattern, which has fundamental emphasis on the role of people, local
communities and civic society. [6]

According to the capacity and power of citizens, the urban management should be on the basis of the principles that in fact create the fundament of this structure. These principles can be listed as follows:

- Principles of urban civility and citizens’ education
- Principles of continuous poll from citizens
- Principles of codified rules for informing and guiding citizens
- Principles of gaining trust of public and private sector
- Principles of verifying and revising the actions which have been done. [8]

2.2. Participation and Sustainable Development

The 1980s is mentioned as the economic development decade with new attitudes, proposing approaches for sustainable development, environment protection and participation. The last decade of the 20th century is also called the decade of human development and necessity of applying and institutionalizing public participation in the process of sustainable development. [2]

Accordingly, in order to achieve sustainable development based on public participation, the followings are considered:

- Public participation is the fundamental condition for implementing sustainable development.
- Circumstances in which participation will have the required efficiency are numerous.
- Sustainable development must be completely consistent with people’s real needs and demands.
- Information, communications, education and cultural promotion are considered as principles of participation and development.
- In addition to government political will, other legal tools and social institutions which complements traditional parliamentary and administrative processes and also some required features for public participation must exist. [1]

Transition from the traditional approach, caused changes in the views towards urban management issues and these changes led to considering links, solidarity and cooperation that have important roles in improving the quality of life. Thus, sustainable development is associated with human development and a new viewpoint to development is discussed. In this regard three concepts of security, justice and participation are significant.

2.3. Sustainable Urban Management and it’s indicators

With an estimated 50% of the world’s population living in cities, cities have become the engines of modern society and the centres of economic, political, social and cultural activity. Now, cities are spreading out in all directions, consuming farms and open spaces lying in their path. In the face of rapid growth, public services like water supply, sewerage disposal and power generation have been hard pressed to keep pace with the demand. In this context, sustainable urban management is not only an imperative in improving the quality of the urban environment, but a prerequisite for securing a healthy living environment for urban citizens. Sustainable Urban Management is focused on environmental protection, social equity and cohesion and economic prosperity. Sustainable Urban Management seeks to balance objectives and interests in the unique setting of local politics, partnerships, problems, and priorities. Each town, city, and neighbourhood is unique, with differing characteristics. Sustainable Urban Management is based on sustainable development principles and addresses key urban area problems. It translates city wide ambitions into locally relevant and understood actions that make a difference! It demonstrates that Sustainable Urban Management is not an abstractly defined concept, but a set of principles to inspire choices in the local realm. [3] Relation between concepts mentioned in theoretical
framework, is shown in the following figure.

![Diagram of relation between concepts](image)

**Fig. 1. View of relation between concepts**

### 3. Research methodology and scope

This experimental study is mainly based on primary data obtained from questionnaire and sample survey. With introducing Neighborhoods council association as public participation approach in sustainable urban management, its effects on sustainability would be reviewed based on how much the Neighborhoods council associations could have affected citizens’ quality of life.

Geographic scope of this research is Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods in the northwest of Tehran. Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods with the population of 5100 and 4200 (based on 2006 census) with joined and ongoing texture are located in region 1 of Tehran and on Alborz foothills in the northwest of the city. These Neighborhoods that are considered one of the ancient villages of Shemiran and inhabitancy history in Evin goes to 3000 years back, today have joined the metropolis texture as a result of Tehran’s expansion and growth. From administrative and political view, Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods are considered within their old area matching the former textures.

Evin’s good agricultural lands and good natural position led to various governmental organizations including agencies related to agriculture, university, hospital, etc. to be built in parts of the neighbourhood in the course of years. These organizations that are responsible for various social and economic tasks, affected the lives of the neighbourhood residents such as creating jobs in low administrative levels for some of the neighbourhood residents. [7]

Darakeh neighbourhood according to its special geographical position welcomes many tourists especially on weekends. Due to lack of proper public transportation, tourists’ traffic roar is a problem for neighbourhood residents. Connection and coherence between Evin and Darakeh residents has such strength since long time ago that despite the separation of these Neighborhoods, everyone calls it “EvinDarakeh”. [4]

### 4. Structure of Urban Management in Tehran

Urban management structure in Iran is similar to such structures of other cities of the world in many
aspects. This similarity not only does entail countries that are similar to us in terms of governance and social and cultural context but also includes the cities of western countries. Two institutions in all these countries create the main pillars of urban management structure. First, City Council and the second is municipality which is the head of the executive pyramid of the city. City Council’s members would be elected by people and City Council would select the mayor which is responsible for Council’s affairs. [8]

The point that should be noted here is that urban management structure in Iran is a new phenomenon and since it is inexperienced, the burden of urban management has been on the government for a long time. The formation of Islamic City Councils in 2000 with the government’s monitor and intervention was a significant step for populating urban management.

4.1. Neighborhoods council associations in Tehran

Now, one of the obvious examples of participation in the management of Tehran is Neighborhoods council associations in Neighborhoods. To strengthen Neighborhoods council associations means to strengthen public participation, to strengthen sense of social belongings to gain secure environment devoid of social anomalies, benefiting from all ideas and expertise, benefiting from reliable persons’ experiences in managing city affairs, monitoring development and effective communication between residents of neighbourhood and urban managers such as municipality, City Council of Tehran and other executive agencies, etc. In most regions of Tehran it is tried to provide appropriate context for practical participation of citizens in various fields with benefit from principle of being neighbourhood-oriented and citizen-oriented.

In statute of Neighborhoods council associations approved by City Council of Tehran, mentioned formation of Neighborhoods council associations in order to achieve and execute the law of Councils and to strengthen the participation of Tehran citizens in organizing urban affairs and gaining their real cooperation in promoting quality of life of citizens.

5. Finding results

Results obtained based on the research conducted on the determined parameters and using a questionnaire filled by 200 people of the Evin and Darakeh neighbourhood, which includes nearly 2 percent of the total population, shows the influence of Neighborhoods council associations’ performance on citizens’ quality of life. Interviewee’s characteristics are shown in table 2. Interviewees were randomly selected and interviews took place during 10 days at different times and locations. Statistical society’s characteristics are shown in the table below.

**Table 1. characteristics of statistical society**

| Characteristics | Age | Sex | Education |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----------|
| Per cent        | 15-30 | 31-45 | Over 45 | Male | Female | Under Diploma | Diploma | Bachelor | Master and Higher |
|                 | 45% | 37% | 18% | 46% | 54% | 12% | 46% | 37% | 5% |

In the mentioned questionnaire, numeric range is 1 to 9 that is related to each one of indices that shows Neighborhoods council associations performance after its establishment in Evin neighbourhood. On this basis, 5 is the middle of the range and means no effect and consequently 5 to 9 means positive effect and 1 to 5 means negative effect. Another point is that the weight of each of the indices is considered fixed. The average related to each of the indices and in macro level related to each of the fields of sustainability, represents the influence of Neighborhoods council associations performance on the urban quality of life.
In table 3 the results obtained from each index are shown.

Table 2. Results obtained from each index

| Field      | Index                                      | Level of influence average | Level of satisfaction average | Overall influence average |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Environment| Urban ecology                              | +0.7                       | 5.7                           | +0.7                      |
|            | Water management                           | +0.2                       | 5.2                           |                           |
|            | Waste management                           | -0.2                       | 4.8                           |                           |
| Economy    | Capacity building for sustainable development | +0.2                       | 5.2                           | +0.2                      |
|            | Finance                                    | -0.3                       | 4.7                           |                           |
|            | Employment creation                        | -0.1                       | 4.9                           |                           |
|            | Education                                  | +0.4                       | 5.4                           |                           |
| Social     | Security                                   | +0.8                       | 5.8                           | +2.4                      |
|            | Urban health                               | +0.5                       | 5.5                           |                           |
|            | Gender justice                             | +0.1                       | 5.1                           |                           |
|            | Hope to the future                         | +0.6                       | 5.6                           |                           |
|            | Satisfaction                               | +0.4                       | 5.4                           |                           |

In this research it is found that Neighborhoods council association establishment in Evin and Darakeh Neighborhoods as one of the instance of participation in sustainable urban management of Tehran, caused quality of life promotion in environmental, economic and social fields. It is obvious from the results that influence in social field is higher than others and this difference can be interpreted as, since Neighborhoods council associations have specific and limited authority domains, influences on environmental and economic fields which are more focused on executive measures are less than influences on social field. Also based on the obtained results, the most influence is for security index with +20 percent in social field and the least influence is for finance index with -7.5 percent in economic field.

In general, it can be concluded that when the management is based on citizen participation and citizens contribute in decision making and the actions done by management institutions, citizens’ satisfaction from authorities increases and also more appropriate planning and measures of authorities would be performed.

6. Conclusion

City councils establishment in Iran is an important step moving from a centralized system to a decentralized planning system and urban management based on citizen’s participation. Concurrent with city council establishment, Neighborhoods council associations also were established in order to citizens be in contact with their representatives directly. Neighborhoods council association is the most public institution that implements social participation in the lowest levels.

Reliance on public institutions and getting citizens comments lead to finding the most basic and important problems from citizens’ idea. Neighborhoods council association links between citizens and urban managers who enhance citizen’s satisfaction at each scale from micro to macro (neighbourhood, district, region and city) by performing of urban projects step by step. In fact, Tehran's City Council has formed Neighborhoods council associations to encourage broad participation of citizens in urban affairs, particularly in urban utilities. This institution facilitates local influence directly on the municipality activities affects. Neighborhoods council associations as interactional and complementary ring of City Council should be considered for full realization and movement toward decentralization of macro systems of planning and management.
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