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## **City Size and Socio-Economic Participation of Citizens: Iranian Case Study**

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### **Abstract:**

*City size is one of the most important and influential variables in city life. From urban planning perspective, the effect of city size on social communication is worth to be considered. This study applied a self-made questionnaire and descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate socio-economic participation of citizens in Qom (large city), Kashan (medium-sized city), and Noushadad (small-sized city).*

*The sample size in Qom and Kashan was 300 and in Noushadad was 200. The results showed that citizens' participation in socio-economic activities is significantly related to city size. So, social and economic participation rate was more in Qom compared to Kashan and Noushadad.*

**Keywords:** *City size, Participation, Central Iran, Qom, Kashan, Noushadad*

### **1. Introduction**

City size has been considered as one of the most influential variables in city life (Mouritzen, 1989). A large number of studies have been considered the effect of city size on social relations and communications, using various ranges of theories from determinism to theories that deny the effect (Sedighi Sarvestani, 1990).

Urban planners have been considered city size along with the culture, living style, tradition and geographic environment. Since expansion of a city has caused various problems such as overcrowding, pollution, traffic, criminal issues, and poverty, finding the optimum city size is one of the most important issues for urban planners (Oliver, 2000). Moreover, urban planners are interested to evaluate the effect of city size and number of citizens on social relationships, the nature of the effects and how these effects lead to citizens' behavioural changes. For example, Zimmel in analyzing social interaction, evaluated size along other variables such as distance, situation, capacity, self-involvement, and symmetry. According to Zimmel, group size imposes a special structure on a group by increasing the numbers of actions (Louin, 2001). Therefore, urban planning focuses on the influence of city size on social interactions (Imani Jajarm, 2001).

Today, social participation is the main factor in cultural, social and economic development in societies, especially in developing societies like Iran. In development theories, people's participations have been considered as a prerequisite for successful plans to improve people's social life and society development.

Social participation is an interaction between an actor and the social environment in order to achieve the preset goals. People's participations in such an interaction is an informed and voluntary participation with specific defined goals that would engage them in social resources (Ghaffari, 2001). However, by urbanization growth and consequently changes in participation patterns, there is a need for revising the concept of social participation and submitting a proper pattern according to current citizen's needs (Nasiri, 1989). This need is more urgent in developing countries like Iran, as neither participation and its different dimensions nor factors reinforcing or weakening participation are defined clearly (Mohseni&Jarollahi, 2002). This study tried to analyze the relationship between the city size and socio-economic participations. For this purpose, three cities have been studied: Qom with 882,386 population as a metropolis, Kashan with 302,672 population as a medium-sized city and Noushadad with 10,476 population as a small one.

## 2. Literature Review

Citizens' participation has a long and rich history. It has been emerged in different dimensions of human social life since ancient Greece period (Louin, 2001). Despite existence of social participation in communities since old ages, the words "collaboration and partnership" were brought up during the late 1950s. Social participation has been considered as a factor for development since 1970, due to shortcomings of previous approaches for development and their negative consequences (Abedi Sarvestani, 2006).

Social participation has been considered as a social fact in human's life and is a process that has been evolved during the time. The idea of social participation came from "democracy" that has a long history itself. Currently, based on humans' roles in different fields of social life, participation in its various dimensions- social, economic, cultural and political has been considered extensively.

Participation is defined as sharing something and taking advantages of that or participating in a group (Tavasoli, 2003). If participation considered as a tool for developing human's ability in making decisions and acting thoughtfully, it could be used by people to overcome their problems without relying on official organizations (Papoly Yazdi, 2002). Max Weber believes that participation is an action that happens in relation to other people's actions. Based on his opinion, to understand a social act, motivations and social factors are needed to be searched. People's behaviors can be predicted based on a frame of rules, people's habits, social believes and values that cause specific behaviors. Based on this viewpoint, people's actions can be controlled or varied by reward and punishment principles. In other words, each person tries to get the rewards and avoids the punishments (Alafian, 2000). Based on the Weber's theory, there is a relationship between satisfaction of city services and social participation. Accordingly, people with more satisfaction of city services, would engage more in social activities. In his study, Daniel Lame reevaluated the relationship between participation and social and living variables such as residential area, education, socio-economic status, age, religion and rate of using media in six middle-east countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Iran) (Ghasemi, 2004). He considered participation as one of the important variables in development and modernity, and believed that factors lead to participation are: mental preparation, urbanization, education and not being traditional (Lerner, 1995). In other words, Lerner believed that potential for development exists in societies with high political and social participations. Totally, Lerner emphasized on participation as one of the modernity factors (Azkia, 2001).

In 1969, Einstein explained citizens' participation using a ladder with eight stairs which shows three levels of participation (Figure 1).

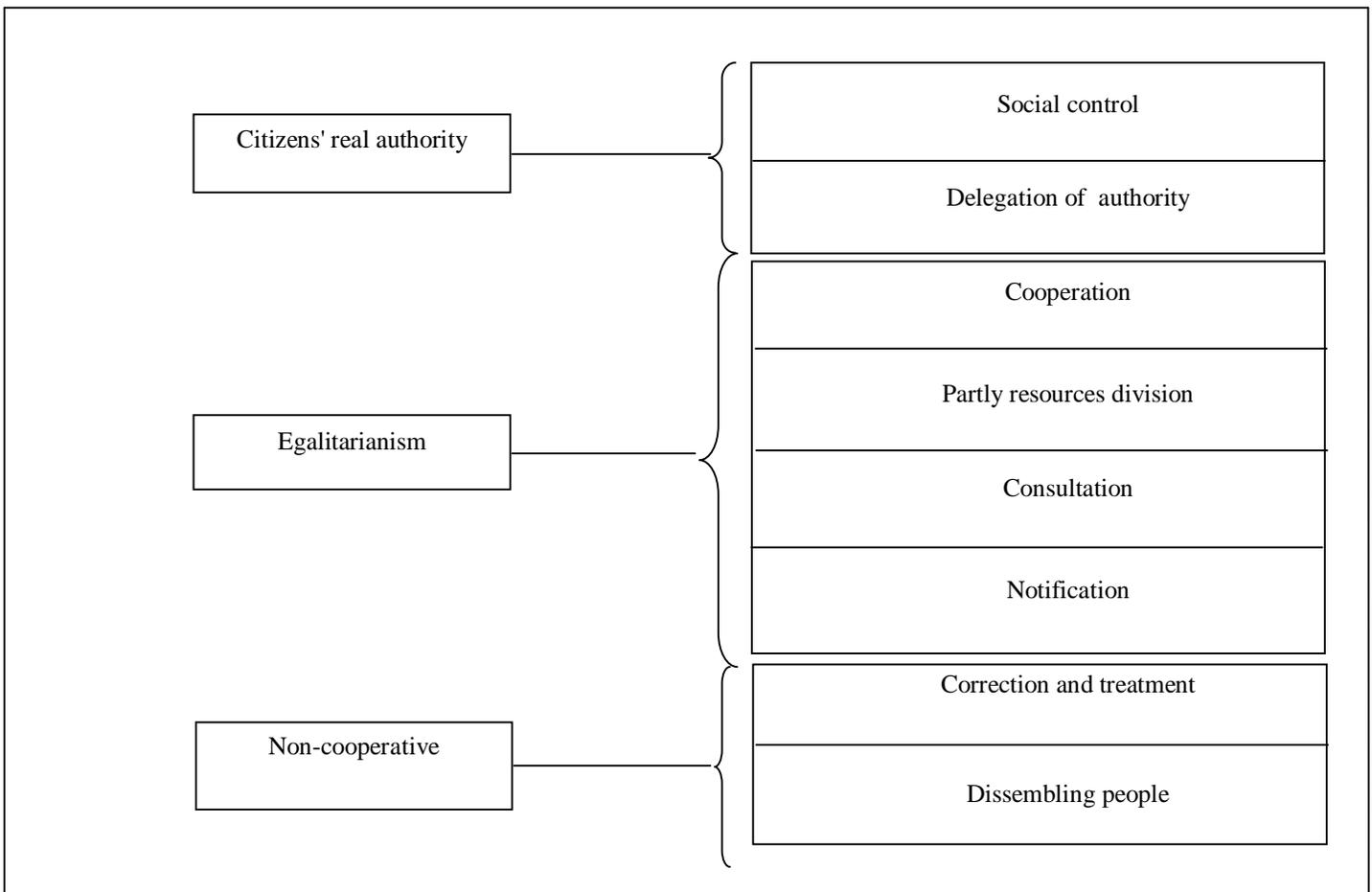


Figure 1: Ladder of citizens' participation

Oliver's research (2000) showed that citizens of large cities rarely contact with local government and attend or vote in local or organizational integrated meetings. Harvey (1997) believed that the smaller a city, the easier to achieve social purposes. Therefore, people believe in advantages of small city size claim that in large cities, citizens lose their personal relationships, and due to no social links, people become socially isolated (Writh, 2011). But subsequent studies by Turner, Louis, and Margin have shown that in fact, most concerns related to social isolation among large cities' citizens, especially those who are the poorest, cannot be proved experimentally (Payne, 1993). Indeed, the system of a city such a metropolis, an average-sized city or a small one, fringes and villages can make diverse participations in social and economic affairs based on individuals' characteristics (Kriesi, 1998).

Kelleher and Lowery (2009) in their research, considering participation rate in 25 small and large cities claimed that city size has a significant relationship with participation rate. The result showed that participation, particularly political participation decreases in small cities. Dahl and Taft (1973) believed that the more dynamic and eligible a city, the more citizens tend to participate. Of course, this is more tangible in small cities. Gerald and Putnam (1999) in their study, considering citizens' participation in voluntary associations and organizations in the U.S during a century, concluded that in small cities, these organizations are more active and dynamic in comparison to larger regions in northeast and west of America. An important aspect of city size effect was reduction of social involvement in different dimensions such as participation in social justice and identity, cultural, political, social and economic aspects.

One of the important social issues is that by increasing city size and destroying formal social networks, social capitals, that are necessary for facilitating social interactions, will be destroyed. Overall, in evaluating city size and social considerations, according to many sociologists, expansion of social life in large cities leads to complexity, fragmentation and degradation of social relations.

Although living in metropolises results in individual freedom, extensive isolation makes civic cultural participation vulnerable. This issue is known as social capital erosion in new theoretical debates by some sociologists such as Coleman and Putnam (Wall, Ferrazzi, & Schryer, 1998).

### 3. Research Hypothesis

There is a relationship between social and economic participation of citizens and city size.

### 4. Research Method

A sample of Qom, Kashan, and Noushabad citizens were asked to answer a questionnaire regarding their social and economic participations (Table 1). After gathering data using questionnaires, data were processed with descriptive statistical methods (frequency distribution tables) and inferential statistics (ANOVA) in SPSS according to variables' measurement. To analyze the social and economic indicators, it is necessary to gather data using Cochran method. Sample volume in two cities of Qom and Kashan was 300 and in Noushabad was 200.

#### 4.1. Defining Concepts

**Participation:** According to Hall (1988), conflicts between pragmatic and philosophical viewpoints make participation a polyhedral concept in a way that by emphasizing on each aspect, a different definition is achieved. Participation is a mental and emotional conflict between people in group situations which motivates them to help each other to reach the group's aims (Nasiri, 1989). Gaotri (1986) believes that participation is a multicultural, dimensional, integrated, public, and social process which aims to make people taking part in all development stages.

**City Size:** City size like the city itself or even more does not have a short and clear definition. Different factors affecting the city size such as total population, city economic power, physical size of a city, and density (Zebardast, 2003). Lynch (1997) by focusing on total population as the main influential indicator in city size, explained that based on general agreement influential indicator in city size is the number of inhabitants, not the number of workers or infrastructural size and/or money value of production. Reiner and Par (1980) considered "population" as the main indicator of city size. According to them, city size refers to the number of inhabitants in the defined geographic area (Zebardast, 2003).

According to the above discussion, there is no clear definition of metropolis, average-sized and small-sized cities. For this reason, minimum and maximum thresholds are used for identifying these cities.

**Metropolis:** The concept of metropolis is retrieved from the shape of industrial cities in the 20th century (Montgomery, Stren, Cohen, & Reed, 2003). Sykora (1996) believed that becoming a metropolis needs moving and fighting for having a prominent place in the hierarchy of regional and city system. This process is beyond the city growth quantitatively in its classical concept. In fact, this process is the qualitative focus of activities that converts metropolis to a center of competitions with other centers to reinforce its status. Finally, it can be deduced that cities with 500,000 population are considered as large cities or metropolis.

**Average-sized city:** Hardoy and Satterthwait (1986) defined average-sized cities as those with the population of 20,000 or more. In 1970s, Data redefined average-sized cities as cities with 20,000-100,000 population in France (Tofigh, 2001). In Germany, cities with 20,000-100,000 population, in Soviet Union cities with 50,000-100,000 population, in Africa cities with 20,000-50,000 population and in Asia cities with 20,000-25000 population are considered as average-sized cities. In Iran, average-sized cities have 50,000-500,000 population (Mohammad Zadeh Titkanloo, 2001).

**Small city:** Hardoy and Satterthwait (1986) defined small cities as cities with 5,000-20,000 population. In Iran, debates about small cities started in national land use planning scheme in which small city is defined as a local center in the fifth level of city system hierarchy. Moreover, small city should be created in isolated small and marginal areas as a link to convey influence of upper level city

centers. Area of the influence in small cities is less than 20 kilometers. In 1362 budget amendment in Iran, small cities were defined as areas with less than 20,000 population (Arjmandnia, 1995).

#### 4.2. Validity and Reliability

To evaluate the reliability of this research, Cronbach's coefficient was used. In fact, Cronbach's alpha shows the internal integration and compatibility of the variables. In this research, this coefficient was 0.82 which shows that enough precision has been used to establish reliable structures and items that are used for measuring the variables have internal correlation.

Evaluated questions and items related to social and economic participations along with the reliability of the results are presented in Table 1.

Participation	Dimension	Questions and Items	Chronbach alpha	Total alpha
	Social participation		Taking part in Parent Teacher Association (PTA)	81%
		Taking part in charity associations		
		Taking part in religious ceremonies		
		Taking part in rallies		
		Cooperation with neighbours in funerals and weddings		
		Cooperation with city council		
		Going to stadium for watching sports' matches		
Economic participation		Taking part in supportive associations such as helping poor and elderly people	83%	82%
		Helping in providing stuff for females who want to get married		
		Taking part in local fund loans		
		Taking part in charity gala		
		Helping in making public buildings such as mosques and schools		
	Cooperation with municipal for protecting and keeping green places, paying taxes on time			

Table 1: Items related to social and economic participations and test reliability

#### 5. Data Analyses

Among all the subjects in Qom, only 36% have low participation in social activities while around 2/3 of people participate in social activities largely. Base on the findings related to the percentage and number of participants in social activities and by using central tendency measures such as mean, it was found that about 64% of respondents participate in social affairs. Others, barely or sometimes participate in groups, associations or organizations.

On the other hand, among the subjects, only 10.7% of people have low participation in economic activities; while, approximately 5/6 of people have good participation. Based on the findings related to the percentage and number of participants in economic activities and by calculating central tendency measures, it became clear that about 89% of respondents participate in economic activities. Others, barely or sometimes participate in groups, associations or organizations (Table 2).

The Number of participations in Kashan and Noushabad is also presented in Table 2.

Rate	Economic Participation			Social Participation			Total Participation		
	Qom	Kashan	Noushabad	Qom	Kashan	Noushabad	Qom	Kashan	Noushabad
Very low	2	29.3	27	6.7	14	19.5	4	21	23
low	8.7	49.3	45	29.3	54	49	22	58.3	52.5
Medium	32	18.7	24	30.3	28	28	30.7	19	22
High	44	2.3	5.3	25.3	3.7	2.5	35	1.3	2.5
Very high	13.3	0.3	5	8.3	0.3	1	8.3	0.3	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 2: Participation rate in social and economic activities in Qom, Kashan and Noushabad

#### 6. Analytical Results

Respondents were asked to rank their participation in a scale of 0-20. Respondents were categorized based on the level of participation (zero show no participation, the rank of 1-6 is presented by 1, 7-11 is presented by 2, 12-16 is presented by 3 and 17-20 is presented by 4) and compared. The results showed that there is a significant difference in participation rank in cities with different sizes (Table 3).

Description		Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Significant level
Total participation	Inter-group	2	265.882	132.941	189.368	0.000
	Intra-group	797	559.513	0.702		
	total	799	825.395			
Total economic participation	Inter-group	2	474.150	237.075	337.574	0.000
	Intra-group	797	559.725	0.702		
	Total	799	1033.875			
Total social participation	Inter-group	2	118.417	59.208	74.246	0.000
	intra-group	797	635.578	0.797		
	total	799	753.995			

Table 3: One way analysis of variance of participation rate based on the city size

Based on Fisher Least Significant Difference (LSD test) (Table 4), average participation in Qom, Kashan and Noushabad has significant differences. The LSD calculates the smallest significant between two means. It makes direct comparisons between two means from two individual groups. A significant difference is not found among the citizens of Kashan and Noushabad. Therefore, it can be concluded that the larger a city, the more social and economic participation.

City 1	City 2	Mean Difference	Standard Error	Significant Level	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Qom	Kashan	1.20*	0.068	0.000	1.07	1.33
	Noushabad	1.18*	0.076	0.000	1.03	1.33
Kashan	Qom	-1.20*	0.068	0.000	-1/.33	-1.07
	Noushabad	-0.02	0.076	0.760	-0.17	0.13
Noushabad	Qom	-1.18*	0.076	0.000	-1.33	-1.03
	Kashan	0.02	0.076	0.760	-0.13	0.17

Table 4: LSD test

## 7. Conclusions

City size has been considered as one of the most influential variables in city life and it has attracted many philosophers' and scientists' attentions.

Urban programmers have also paid attention to city size along the culture, living style, tradition and geographic environment and one of their most important considerations is to figure out the optimum size of a city.

Based on the results of this study, it was found that average economic participation rate among citizens in Qom was 3.58% and social participation was 2.99%. In the average-sized city (Kashan), average economic participation rate among citizens was 2.02% and social participation was 2.22%. In the small-sized city (Noushabad), average economic participation rate among citizens was 2.05% and social participation was 2.16%.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that participation in large cities differs from average-sized and small-sized cities. This significant difference has not been identified among the citizens in small and average-sized cities. Finally, it can be concluded that the smaller a city, the less social and economic participation in citizens.

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