

## The Effect of Social Capital on Social Participation among citizens in Behshahr, Iran

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### Abstract

The aim of the present research is to study the effect of social capital on social participation of Behshahr city citizens and for this purpose 367 of the citizens of this city have been selected with the use of simple random sampling method and have responded to social capital and social participation questionnaires. The questionnaires' format validity have been confirmed by three experts in the relevant field and their reliability have been tested with the use of Cronbach's alpha which is equal to 0.92 and 0.87 for social capital and social participation, respectively. Finally, the collected data from the questionnaires were analyzed with the use of two-variable linear regression test and the results indicate that social capital has a significant effect ( $p < 0.01$ ) on social participation of Behshahr city citizens.

**Keywords:** Social capital, social participation, citizens, Behshahr city

### Introduction

Social capital is a set of social indicators for people who are consisted of indicators such as trust, participation and norm. Those individuals who have higher social capital in the society in their social interactions can use the Accumulation of their social capital for facilitation of social relations and decreasing the Transaction costs. It is possible that so many of the positive characteristics variables will be present in people; however, they can only use these variables in an optimized way and with the least expense when they possess high social interactions together with Low opportunity cost and it will only occur when individuals have high social capital so that they can display their latent personality characteristics and can cause positive interaction in the society (Taslimi et al., 2006). Also, social participation is among the most important types of participation. Although all forms of participation have one or another kind of social relationship and hence, they are considered as a Sociological topic; however, there are some domains in social life which distinguishes it from economic, cultural and political subsystem. Such domains are related to the mutual action of social groups with their surrounding environments (Saedi, 2003).

Social participation can be defined as an organized process in which the society members participate with each other in a Conscious, voluntary and collective manner and with consideration of specific and certain goals which lead to sharing the resources of power. The manifestation of this participation is the existence of Participatory institutions such as communities, groups, local organizations and non-public organizations (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2001). Feldman and Assaf (1999) believes that social capital concept in its today context refers to the writings of Hanifan, the then school supervisor of West Virginia. In an article he has published on the importance of participation for improving the outcome of school, he considers social capital to includes some assets which have great importance in the daily life of the people, such as mutual Understanding, camaraderie and friendship, empathy and social relationships among individuals and families who form a social unit.

After a delay of half a century, again Jacob (1961) in his classic work “life and death of big cities of America” has used this term. He explains that compact social networks in the suburban area of the old and mixed city, form a kind of social capital and show more responsibility regarding maintaining cleanliness, reducing street crime and other decisions concerning quality of life (comparing to factors of formal institutions such as the police). Following him in 1970s, Glen Lori, who is a critic, and Ivan Light, who is a Sociologist, use this term for identification of useful social resources and human capital development and description of urban economic problem (Fukuyama, 2001).

Glen Loury, in the domain of economic theories, has used social capital for criticizing the neo-classic ideas and Unfairness of income distribution, the problem of urban economic and development. In Loury’s perspective, social capital is a set of resources embedded in the Nature of family relationships and community organization which is useful for social and cognitive growth of a child or adolescence. Topics related to social capital economic outcomes and family relationships presented by Becker (1975) have been as well effective in the promotion of this concept.

The role of social capital has received attention in communities’ development in the New Institutional Economics literature which seeks to present the condition in which these institutions are creates as well as the effect on them of the system performance and especially in the studies related to information institutions. This can have different social effects. One of the social issues to which the social and civil systems are committed is the citizens’ social participation in their current events that can depend on a number of factors (Bowles, 1999).

Scholars have considered different characteristics for participation which should be considered and are summarized in the following:

So many scholars consider freedom and equality of humans as the main characteristics of participation. In a participatory system, the assumption is that people should have the proper opportunity for affecting policies and achieving public jobs and the government should provide the opportunity of competition based on individual merits and qualifications (Neumann, 2005). Participation is people’s right and more than anything it requires conscious and informed action from their end. Participation is not an invitation and is not something to achieve, but is a kind of empowerment of the weak groups together with granting them with comprehensive power. Participation is a process not a fixed and final product of development. Public participation gains meaning in relation with a kind of political democracy as well as application of social transformation process and a growth that development refers to it (Oakley and Marsden, 1991).

Participation has bilinear outcomes. It is because the actual meaning of participation is that it is not only the masses who suffer, but the community is being deprived from the potential resources which should be at its disposal. If the participation is to be effects, it requires fundamental change in idea and action which should come out from inside the community and should be manifested in sustainable forms which are accepted by the society and the government (Oakley and Marsden, 1991). Although the issue of participation in its broad meaning contains all kinds of individual and group interactions in order to intervene in determination of their and their society’s destination and affecting the decision making processes regarding public matters; however, most of the sources and texts available in participation domain, study it in terms of political participation (Alavi Tabar, 2000). In fact, in its broach definition, participation is defined as the involvement of people in political, social, cultural and economic life of the society which can have useful outcomes. In addition, we should gain an accurate understanding regarding the factors effective on it and considering its importance, unfortunately, no study has been conducted regarding the effect of social capital on social participation of citizens. Therefore, the present research seeks to study the effect of social capital on social participation of the citizens’ of Behshahr city. In line with this aim and for a

better clarification of the topic, we will review some of the empirical works in this field and following it the research methodology, findings and conclusion will be presented.

### **Research background**

Nazarpour and Montazeri Moghaddam (2010) in their work of “social capital and economic development: A case study of social participation in Islam view” have found that the special role of “mosque” in the social life of Islamic communities, unique function of “enjoining good and forbidding wrong” in organizing the system of “public monitoring” as well as the Conscious presence of Muslims in Jihad in Allah's way act in line with the creation, stabilization and improvement of social participation and draw a certain border between the common theory and the social capital theory in Islam's view. Also, social participation resulted from Religious doctrines play a significant role in economic development process through creating security, market and government efficiency, reducing poverty and unemployment. Therefore, the hypothesis indicating to the fact that in case of organizing the social participation through Islam viewpoint, a proper condition will provide for economic development through the abovementioned channels is accepted.

Aghili and Basti (2010) in their study entitled “the impediments of social participation and the ways to improve it in radio”, have found that the type of media, the way of message conveyance in terms of programs, quantitative and qualitative developments and ownership type of radio media have all significant relationship with social participation. Also, domestic radio channels have a positive effect and foreign radio channels have a negative effect on social participation. The presence of the representatives and parties in radio channels, commissioning of local radios and the number and quantity of radio channels are as well among the strategies for improving social participation.

Chenhall et al. (2010) in their work studied the relationship between social capital and control systems in organizations and found that social capital predicts the individual's reaction type to the control systems inside organizations and hence, the efficiency level of the control systems depends on the level of social capital in organizations.

Nan Lin (2008), in his study, found that social capital is the underlying of the formation of organizational networks which is a better predicting tool for the success of working teams in the organization. This paper with the networking approaches seeks to find those variables which lead to the productivity of working teams in organizations, one of the most important of which is the former social networks based on social capital.

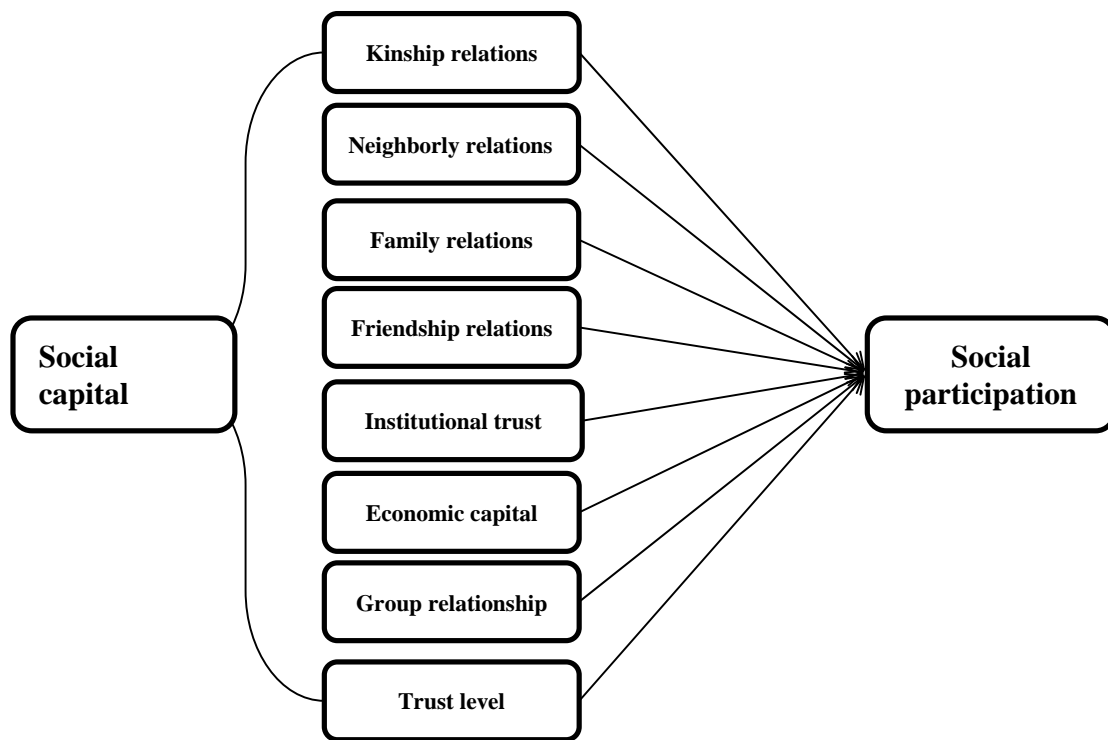
Based on the theoretical principles and the empirical background of the present research the research conceptual model can be present in the form of figure 1,

### **Research methodology**

The present research is an applied research from aim viewpoint and is descriptive from method viewpoint and is a survey research from way of conduct viewpoint.

#### ***Research population and sample***

The population of the present research includes all the citizens of Behshahr city in 2011 with a population over 84,117 in 2011 and from this population the research sample has been selected with the use of simple ransom sampling method. The sample size has been calculated with the motioned formula is equal to 367 people and 400 questionnaires has been distributed among them face to face and has been collected during a time span of 8 weeks. From these 400 questionnaires 381 have been returned from which 376 have been fully completed which were used for the purpose of analysis. The return rate of the completed questionnaires is almost 94% which is a satisfactory rate.



**Figure 1: Research conceptual model**

#### *Data collection instrument*

Questionnaire is one of the most common research tools and is a direct method for collecting research data. A questionnaire is a set of questions that the respondents should provide an answer to them and these answers will form the required data for the researcher. Through the questions of a questionnaire the knowledge, interest and mental attitude of an individual can be studied (Bazargan et al., 2007). In this study the bibliographical methods (such as books, articles, theses and online sites) have been used for the purpose of data collection for the theoretical part of the study and for the purpose of studying the research sample individuals an author-made questionnaire has been used, the format validity of which has been confirmed by three experts in this field and its reliability has been tested with the use of Cronbach's alpha test which is equal to 0.92 and 0.87 for social capital questionnaire and social participation questionnaire, respectively.

#### **Research findings**

Descriptive findings of the present research indicate that 51.1% of the sample individuals are married, 46.6% are single, 1.9% are divorced and 5% have lost their spouse to death. Also, 42.1% of the sample individuals are the head of their families and 57.9% of them have been under the caretaking of another person, from which 10.6% are below 20 years, 52.4% are 20 to 29 years old, 23.5% are between 30 to 39 years old, 10.1% are between 40 to 49 and 3.4% are over 50 years old. In order to study the effect of social capital dimensions on the citizens' social participation, the two-variable linear regression test has been used, the results of which is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Results of the effect of social capital dimensions on citizens' social participation**

Variable	R <sup>2</sup> adj.	Beta	F	P
Quality of kinship relations	0.13	0.359	55.609	.000
Quality of Neighborly relations	0.08	0.292	35.006	.00
Quality of family relations	0.06	0.259	26.940	.000
Quality of friendship relations	0.08	0.280	32.005	.000
Level of trust in family	0.06	0.258	26.921	.000
Economic capital of family	0.04	0.197	15.197	.000
Group relations	0.05	0.240	22.912	.000
Level of trust in family	0.10	0.320	42.868	.000

The results of the two-variable linear regression test indicate that all the dimensions of social capital have a significant and positive effect ( $p < 0.01$ ) on the citizens' social participation. For ranking these factors and understanding the significance of each of these dimensions, Friedman's test was used. Table 2 indicates the results.

**Table 2: Ranking the dimensions of social capital effective on social participation**

Rank	Dimension	Rank average
1	Trust	6.67
2	Economic capital of family	6.61
3	Trust level in family	5.60
4	Group relations	5.15
5	quality of friendship relations	4.42
6	Quality of kinship relations	2.90
7	Quality of family relations	2.34
8	Quality of neighborly relations	2.31

The results of the Friedman's test indicate that the variable of trust with a rank average of 6.67 has the 1<sup>st</sup> rank, economic capital of family with a rank average of 6.61 has the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank, trust level in family with a rank average of 5.60 has the 3<sup>rd</sup> rank, group relations with a rank average of 5.15 has the 4<sup>th</sup> rank, quality of friendship relations with a rank average of 4.42 has the 5<sup>th</sup> rank, quality of kinship relations with a rank average of 2.90 has the 6<sup>th</sup> rank, quality of family relations with a rank average of 2.34 has the 7<sup>th</sup> rank and quality of neighborly relations with a rank average of 2.31 has the last or 8<sup>th</sup> rank.

### Conclusion

Human from the day that has put his food into this world and has started his collective and group life, inevitably had to turn to participation. Therefore, the concept of participation in its general definition has a history equal to the length of the human life history.

Basically, participation in its today's sense, after World War II and in some of the industrial countries of the world, especially those who has been defeated in the war and has suffered great devastation has been started in the domain of economy and today the issue of participation is closely related to the concept of development. Development in its general sense, is a complex, multi-dimensional and planned process which occurs in social, economy, political and cultural life of a society and directs it from its current situation to a desirable one. acceptance of the new concept of

development and trying to realize it, is acceptance of the characteristics of the age of rationality in which rational, accounting and planning action is hidden; such that for regulating the trend of any kind of development, it is necessary to make coordination between the aims and the means to achieve them and make use of all the resources and natural facilities and potential human resources appropriately and all these resources should be valued in their different dimensions (Bayat, 2010).

Currently different development theories emphasize on people's participation and in some cases the third world experts have assumed such a great importance for it that they have considered development equal to participation or have defined participation as the voluntary participation of people in the process of development and so many texts have considered participation as the "missing ring" in the development process. That is a tangible input that can be physically fitted into development projects (Oakley and Marsden, 1991).

There are so many rare national and international planning that one of their important parts will not be social participation and motivation of people. In other words, participation is one of the necessary conditions of development realization in economic, social and political domains which considers the active, innovative and efficient role of people in the development process. In fact, participation is a process which engulfs different types of group and individual interactions for intervening in determination of their own destiny and affecting decision-making in general matters (Mohseni Tabrizi and AghaMohseni, 2010).

Therefore, social participation and motivation in objective dimensions, mostly observes elevating the public life level through creating the desirable and optimized conditions in the domains of reducing removing poverty, nutrition, health, housing, employment, education and how to spend leisure time and therefore it is considered as the necessary preface to social development and social participation and social motivation can be performed in different levels of micro, middle and macro-social and based on different criterion can have different segmentations. Although, the existence of participation on a theoretical and abstract level is so much important and fundamental; however, putting it into practice and implementing it is not easily possible. However, now, after specifying that participation is considered to be an important and fundamental issue in the development process, we can ask what the factors which affect participation are. In different studies conducted in this field, factors such as the dominant social and political conditions in the society, the perspective of the authorities and policy-makers and the spirit of people, past realities and experiences as well as social capital have been considered as being influential on acceptance or non-acceptance or the implementation way of effective participation. The present research in addition to accepting other different factors on creating, improving or weakening social participation, has tried to focus on social capital factor and study its importance among the citizens' of Behshahr city. The results obtained from research data analysis indicate that family social capital has a significant effect ( $p < 0.01$ ) on the citizens' social participation. This finding is consistent with the findings of the previous studies.

Considering the evolutionary trend of participation and the fact that it is placed at the heart of development as a factor, developing the participative spirit among people and promoting the participation culture is a rational thing and even inevitable. Therefore, identification of the effective factors on participation and recognition of the dominant cultural –mental foundations on it for creating more participation is worth giving consideration and attention. One of the effective factors on social participation is the topic of social capital which recently has attracted the attention of the academic circles as a very important factor on development to itself. Therefore, identification of social capital, determining how it affects social participation and probably the ability to realize the potential power of social capital for aiding participation and eventually making the wheels of

development to spin at different levels in the form of creating civil institutions, formation of civil society and development of democracy are of great importance.

Since a significant and positive relationship between the dimensions of social capital and social participations of the citizens has been observed in the present study; therefore, for creating and improving the citizens' social participation each of the social capital dimensions should be increased, so that as a result of that social participation of the citizens will as well be improved. In order to accomplish this goal the following recommendations will be presented:

Creating and improving social networks in the society can improve the social skills of people in social participations of the society.

Taking some measures for establishment of productive and continuous interactions between the institutions and communities (such as Community of environment and clean air, communities of knowledge and science development, Community Sports and Recreation and religious communities and ...) that in one way or another can improve social participation.

Development and improvement of culture based on social trust and civil participation among the general public of the society.

Providing necessary conditions for economic development, this can be done with the aim of solving the economic problems of the society which is considered as the basic stone of creating trust between citizens and citizens and administrative systems.

Using motivational and encouraging public systems for developing people's participation in different fields of political, economic and social such as parades, religious celebration, religious site, mosques, etc.

Financial support from institutions such as family consultation centers, mass medias and all the organizations that are actively working toward educating family institution. These organizations with conveyance and education of the social capital norms (such as democratic relations in the family and avoidance of Despotism) can be effective in creating social capital.

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