UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SHORA IN SEYYEDABAD, IRAN

AMIR HOSSEIN ZOMORRODIAN

FEM 2015 5

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH *SHORA* IN SEYYEDABAD, IRAN

By

AMIR HOSSEIN ZOMORRODIAN

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Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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May 2015

Chairman : Associate Prof Sarjit Singh Darshan Singh, PhD
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The core idea of this thesis is to illustrate the role of *Shora* (local name for Community Based Organization in Iran) in order to develop and to enhance participation and empowerment in Seyyedabad community. In this respect, the study reviews participation in *Shora* activities, sense of community, perception about costs, benefits and leadership of *Shora* and empowerment of community members. The idea of the interrelation between these variables has been extracted from Zimmerman's "theory of empowerment" and two extended theories, including McMillan and Chavis' "sense of community" and "social exchange theory".

This research employs the use of the mixed method design (the explanatory design). The qualitative results of the study indicated three main functions for *Shora* including developmental programs, providing courses and routine issues. The qualitative results also illustrated five different types of participation processes in Seyyedabad, namely elite participation, representative participation, workforce donation, mass participation and attending classes. The quantitative results revealed all of the variables and sub-variables extracted from the conceptual framework, including perceived leadership, perceived benefits, perceived costs, sense of membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection evinced a significant relationship with community members' participation in *Shora* activities. Moreover, participation in *Shora* activities and sense of community had a significant relationship with the empowerment of community members.

Furthermore, according to the results of the regression model variables namely sex, marital status, age, perception of *Shora* and community members' sense of community predict 44 percent of participation in *Shora* activities. In addition, variables namely ethnicity, education, sense of community and participation in *Shora* predict 57 percent of the empowerment of community members.

Finally, the combination of the results of the two phases of the research illustrates the fact that the *Shora* organization acts almost properly in order to enhance participation and empowerment of community members; however, there is a controversy lying here. Even though community members have a high perception of

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Shora and a high sense of community and these two variables encourage participation, community members only have the opportunity to involve in lower types of participation. These types of participation have limited effect on empowering them and this fact is the main reason for the inadequate empowerment within community members.

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Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENYERTAAN KOMUNITI DAN PENDAYAUPAYAAN MELALUI *SHORA* DI SEYYEDABAD, IRAN

Oleh

AMIR HOSSEIN ZOMORRODIAN

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Idea utama tesis ini ialah untuk meneliti peranan Shora (nama tempatan bagi Organisasi berdasarkan Komuniti di Iran) supaya ianya dapat membangun dan meningkatkan penyertaan dan meperkasakan komuniti Seyyedabad. Berhubung ini, penyertaan di dalam Shora, rasa kekitaan komuniti, persepsi tentang kos, manfaat dan kepimpinan Shora, dan memperkasakan komuniti, telah dikaji. Idea tentang hubungkait di antara pembolehubah tersebut dipetik dari 'teori perkasaan' Zimmerman, dan dua teori lanjutan termasuk McMillan dan Chavis, iaitu 'perasaan komuniti' dan 'teori pertukaran sosial'.

Kajian ini menggunakan rekabentuk kaedah campuran (mixed method design), iaitu rekabentuk penjelasan. Hasil kualitatif kajian ini menunjukkan tiga fungsi utama Shora termasuk rancangan pembangunan, mengadakan kursus, dan isu-isu rutin. Hasil kualitatif juga memaparkan lima jenis proses penyertaan di Seyyedabad, iaitu: penyertaan golongan elit, penyertaan wakil, sumbangan derma tenaga kerja, menghadiri kelas, dan penyertaan beramai-ramai.

Hasil kuantitatif menunjukkan kesemua pembolehubah dan sub-pembolehubah yang dipetik dari rangka kerja konseptual, termasuk kepimpinan dilihat, kebaikan dilihat, kos dilihat, rasa keahlian, pengaruh, memenuhi keperluan, dan pengaitan emosi, telah menghasilkan hubungan signifikan dengan penyertaan ahli kominiti di dalam aktiviti Shora. Lagipun penyertaan dalam aktiviti Shora dan perasaan kekitaan komuniti mempunyai kaitan signifikan dengan memperkasakan ahli-ahli komuniti.

Menurut hasil 'model regression', pembolehubah, termasuk jantina, taraf perkahwinan, umur, persepsi tentang Shora, dan perasaan kekitaan ahli komuniti, mendapati 44% penyertaan mereka dalam aktiviti Shora. Tambahan pula, pembolehubah, termasuk aspek etnik, pendidikan, perasaan kekitaan komuniti dan penyertaan dalam Shora mendapati 57% daripada perkasaan ahli komuniti.

Akhir sekali, kombinasi hasil kedua fasa kajian menjelaskan hakikat bahawa organisasi Shora berfungsi dengan sempurna bagi meningkatkan penyertaan dan memperkasakan ahli komuniti, namun di sini terdapat suatu kontroversi. Walaupun

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ahli komuniti mempunyai persepsi yang tinggi mengenai Shora dan juga perasaan kekitaan komuniti tinggi, dan kedua pembolehubah menggalakkan penyertan, ahli komuniti hanya memperolehi peluang melibatkan diri dalam penyertaan jenis tahap rendah sahaja. Penyertaan sebegini mempunyai kesan terhad untuk memperkasakan mereka dan hahikat ini menjadi sebab utama kepincangan dalam memperkasakan ahli komuniti.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 31 July 2015 to conduct the final examination of Shabnam Hamdi on her thesis entitled "Applying Human Resource Development Strategies to Innovation Speed in Malaysian Biotechnology Industry" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the research, statement of the problem, intent and aim of the research, research questions, research objectives, research hypothesis, definition of terms and organization of the research are presented in this chapter.

1.1 Background to the Research

The 1979 Iranian revolution against the Shah (the ruler of Iran at that particular time) was staged with the aims of giving the citizenry more control over their lives, developing the country and gaining the right of participation in all social and political issues. In those days, the enthusiasm toward participation and the extent to which the citizenry possessed autonomy over its affairs was limited by the extent to which lawmakers included *Shora* (the Persian name for an elected community based organization) as a means for people to become actively involved in the governance of their country in the new constitution of Iran ("Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran," 1979). However, articles related to the establishment of the *Shora* organization were abandoned due to the crisis which took place in the aftermath of the revolution along with an eight-year war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988).

The second wave of interest in participation and citizen empowerment emerged in 1997 after the eighth presidential election. Khatami's Government was formed in 1997, whereupon the first election of Islamic *Shora* was held on March, 17th, 1999. This election was welcomed by a significant number of people in the country. More than 40 thousand constituencies were held and finally two hundred thousand people were elected as officials of cities and villages of the country, acting as representatives of *Shora*.

Moreover, against the backdrop of the new milieu of long term state programs ("Islamic Republic of Iran's Twenty Years Viewpoint Document ", 2006) and fourth and fifth state development plans (2005, 2010), *Shora* rose to prominence as the main pillar of community development programs and a significant means through which participation and empowerment of community members could be enhanced. From this new milieu sprang forth a new *Shora*, one which took the reins in terms of initiating, ratifying, planning, sponsoring conducting and operating developmental programs in communities ("Rules and Regulation of Rural and Urban Islamic *Shora* in Iran," 1998). In addition, *Shora* was put in charge of tackling such social bugbears as poverty, powerlessness, lack of fair education, inaccessibility to facilities such as clean drinking water, toilets, healthcare and inefficiency of production methods in Iran's rural communities ("Rules and Regulation of Rural and Urban Islamic *Shora* in Iran," 1998).

In addition to the establishment of developmental programs, increasing participation in community activities is another responsibility of *Shora*. The enhancement of the

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level of citizen participation through *Shora* is consider so essential that Khatami (Iran's president at that time) deemed this enhancement one of the most important achievements of his presidency (Raveshnasi, 2005). In fact, participation through *Shora* is highly significant for two main reasons: it is considered both as a means and an end.

Participation in *Shora* is considered an end for the reason that community members are able to express their point of view, acquire material and nonmaterial benefits, plan developmental programs and implement programs to facilitate their own community. In effect, it is through participation that members of the community can actively contribute to the decision-making process and management of the development programs which are given back to the local community member themselves.

On the other hand, participation in *Shora* activities is considered as a means in that it mediates the empowerment of community members. According to Zimmerman (1995b), involvement in CBO meetings (which would be *Shora* in this particular case) leads to enhanced knowledge and acquisition of information on the socio-political environment, while contributing to the decision making process leads to increased self-esteem and feelings of efficiency among participants. In addition, participation in *Shora* activities is a method of opening doors to participants to become involved in a wider range of socio-political issues within society. In other words, participation in CBO (in our case *Shora*) is a means to three achievements, namely knowledge and information, self-esteem and efficiency, and greater involvement in the socio-political issues of society, which were identified by (Zimmerman, 1995b) as the main components of empowerment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The establishment of *Shora* aimed to enhance participation and empowerment especially in rural areas of Iran; however, there is some evidence indicating that *Shora* organizations encounter serious challenges to function properly in the context of Iranian society (Azkia & Ghaffari, 2003, 2007; Khazraei & Kalhornia, 2006; Rostampoor, Yegane, & Heidari, 2010). These challenges can be categorized in three main subjects as follows; inappropriate perception about *Shora* among community members (Rostampoor, et al., 2010), inadequate participation of community members in *Shora* activities (Azkia & Ghaffari, 2003, 2007) and the low level of empowerment within community members (Khazraei & Kalhornia, 2006).

The first challenge is the fact that community members seem to be dissatisfied with the *Shora* organization in Iran. Research carried out among 22 communities in Iran's rural areas revealed dissatisfaction and low perception of the *Shora* organization among community members (Rostampoor, et al., 2010). It can be a major problem that Iranian rural communities perceive *Shora* as an incompetent organization.

Moreover, although it is among the fundamental duties of *Shora* organization to encourage participation of community members in the development programs it conducts, there is other research focusing on the condition of community

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participation that indicate limited enhancement of community participation in common activities (Azkia & Ghaffari, 2003, 2007).

Finally, empowerment of community members is considered as the most important side goal of establishment of *Shora*. However, after one decade of founding *Shora* Organization, the enhancement of empowerment within community members has not been effectively achieved, as there is evidence which seems to suggest a poor sense of empowerment among community members (Khazraei & Kalhornia, 2006).

The literature of community development approach explains that these three problems are interrelated. In other words, it is suggested that the problem of the dysfunction of *Shora* in Iran has a complex nature. The problem consisted of a network of relationship between inappropriate perception about *Shora*, inadequate participation of community members and their low level of empowerment. In addition, socio-demographic factors, such as a low level of education and inadequate income in a rural community (Ghasemi, 2006; Langroodi & Sakhaei, 2008; Mirtorabi, Hejazi, & Hoseini, 2010) and "sense of community" have proven to effect community participation and empowerment of community members (Hughey, Peterson, Lowe, & Oprescu, 2008; Peterson & Reid, 2003).

However, the reason for choosing Seyyedabad community for the research is the reports that *Shora* leaders provided for government administrations indicating the obstacles between *Shora* and community members in terms of such issues as perception, function and participation (*Report of Seyedabad Shora for the Golestan Province Administration*, 2006). Although the results of a study in Seyyedabad cannot be generalized to all *Shora* organizations, it can shed light on a very small part of the enormous family of rural district councils in Iran.

1.3 Intent and Aim of the Research

The research mainly intends to provide some solutions in order to improve functions of *Shora* organization in the context of the Iranian society. In addition, the findings of this research aim to find how to enhance participation and empowerment particularly in rural communities of Iran. In order to achieve this purpose, the research provides a clear framework to show how these social phenomena are affected by each other and by other variables.

Furthermore, this research helps to find a comprehensive understanding of problems facing *Shora* organization in Iran. Delivering a clear and comprehensive model of these complex and interrelated problems can facilitate other researchers and policymakers to find effective solutions to mobilize and functionalize the *Shora* organization as the engine of community development plans in Iran.

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1.4 Research Questions

The main questions of this study can be categorized as follows;

1. How does *Shora* organization function in the context of Seyyedabad community?
2. How does *Shora* shape the process of community participation in the environment of Seyyedabad?
3. How do community members perceive *Shora* organization in Seyyedabd?
4. What is the level of sense of community, participation in *Shora* activities and empowerment in Seyyedabad community?
5. Is there any relationship between socio-demographic factors, perception of *Shora*, sense of community and participation in *Shora* activities in Seyyedabad community?
6. Is there any relationship between socio demographic factors, sense of community and empowerment in Seyyedabad community?
7. Is there any relationship between the participation of community members in *Shora* activities and their empowerment in Seyyedabad community?
8. Does community participation mediate between socio-demographic factors, perception of *Shora*, sense of community and empowerment in Seyyedabad community?

1.5 Research Objectives

This research has eight main objectives as follows;

1. To describe Seyyedabad community's *Shora* and the function of *Shora* within the community.
2. To explain the process of community participation through *Shora* organization.
3. To determine perception of Seyyedabad community members toward *Shora* organization.
4. To determine the level of sense of community, participation in *Shora* activities and empowerment among the respondents in Seyyedabad community.
5. To analyze the relationship between socio-demographic factors, perception of *Shora*, sense of community, and participation in *Shora* activities among Seyyedabad community.
6. To analyze the relationship between socio-demographic factors, sense of community and empowerment in Seyyedabad community.
7. To analyze the relationship between participation in *Shora* activities and empowerment among Seyyedabad community.
8. To investigate whether or not community participation mediates between socio-demographic factors, perception of *Shora*, sense of community and empowerment in Seyyedabad.

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1.6 Research Hypothesis

Objectives five, six and seven of this research deal with inferential relations; thus, they are hypothesized as the following statements;

Hypothesis 1: There is a difference between community members' sex, marital status, ethnicity, job and their participation in *Shora* activities in the Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 2: There is relationship between community member's age, income, education and their participation in *Shora* activities in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between community members' perceptions of *Shora* and their participation in *Shora* activities in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between community members' sense of community and their participation in *Shora* activities in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 5: There is a difference between community members' sex, marital status, ethnicity, job and their empowerment in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 6: There is relationship between community members' age, income, education and their empowerment in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 7: There is a relationship between community members' sense of community and their empowerment in Seyyedabad.
Hypothesis 8: There is a relationship between community members' participation in *Shora* activities and their empowerment in Seyyedabad.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Empowerment: Psychological Empowerment (PE) is defined as the outcome and process by which individuals achieve more control over lives, efficacy, and social justice (Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011; Fawcett et al., 1995; Maton & Salem, 1995; Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004; Rappaport, 1987; Speer, 2000) and a critical understanding of their political and social environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992).

For the purpose of this research, empowerment is used to refer to psychological empowerment and is considered an outcome and aggregate of intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral components (Speer, 2000; Zimmerman, et al., 1992). Intrapersonal component is defined as "how people think about themselves" and in this research is measured by twelve questions adapted from Peterson's (2006) scale. Interactional component is defined as the "understanding people gained about their sociopolitical issues in their committee" and is measured by six questions adapted from Speer's (2000) scale. Behavioral component is defined as actions taken to influence the environment and is measured by five questions adapted from Speer and Peterson's (2000) scale. All of the questions are designed in five Likert type items.

Community Participation: Community Participation (CP) is defined as the "social process of involving in informal or formal actions, projects and/or discussions to bring about a planned improvement or enhancement in community life" (Rich, Edelstein, Hailman, & Wandersman, 1995, p. 658) through community based organization.

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In this study, community participation (also called as participation in *Shora* activities) is defined as combination of participation in *Shora* meetings, period of cooperating with *Shora*, contribution in discussions about *Shora* and community, participation in decision making process, donating workforce and position in *Shora* organization. These subscales are questioned via twelve questions in the five item Likert and adapted from Christens, Peterson et al. (2011) consistent with Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988).

Sense of Community: Sense of Community (SOC) is defined as a "feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met by their commitment to be together" (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

For all intents and purposes of this research, sense of community is measured as the sum of four subscales; group membership, influence, fulfillment of needs and emotional connection. Membership is defined as a feeling of belonging and a sense of mattering and influence, which are manifested as making a difference to a group. Fulfillment of needs is defined as a feeling that members' needs are met by resources from groups and emotional connections; in essence, it involves a shared commitment and belief. All of these subscales are measured using twelve Likert type question scales (three questions for each subscale) designed by Peterson and Speer et al (2006).

Perception of Community Based Organization (*Shora*): For all intents and purposes of this research, perception of CBO (*Shora*) is considered to be a combination of perceived leadership, perceived costs and perceived benefits. Perceived leadership is the image of *Shora* leadership among community members as measured by eight questions. Perceived costs and perceived benefits are perception about the costs or benefits of contributing to *Shora* activities among community members as measured by twelve questions. All of these questions are in five item Likert types and adapted from Metzger, Alexander and Weiner (2005) scale.

Community Based Organization: Community Based Organization (CBO) is defined as a "public or private nonprofit organization that represents a specific population, community, or segment of a community and provides educational, social, health, or other services to individuals in that community" (Griffith et al., 2010, p. 32).

***Shora*:** *Shora* is a legal and formal type of public CBO in Iran whose leaders are elected by community members ("Rules and Regulation of Rural and Urban Islamic *Shora* in Iran," 1998). Increasing community members' participation and empowerment and conducting development programs are among the responsibilities of *Shora*.

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1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This research is presented in five chapters. Chapter one includes the background of the research, statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, conceptual and operational definition of terms and organization of the research. Chapter two is divided into two main parts; the first part focuses on the previous studies related to concepts of the research and the second part of chapter two is dedicated to the concepts and theories of the study. These theories explain how the various concepts of the research are interrelated. At the end of the chapter, two conceptual frameworks of the study are presented.

Chapter three deals with research methodology; in first section of this chapter, research design, target population and unit of analysis, the researcher explained the complete path of the study. Other sections of chapter three include sampling design for quantitative phase, development of questionnaire, quantitative analysis procedures, sampling design for qualitative phase, development of interview guide, qualitative analysis procedures and techniques of combination. Chapter four and five are dedicated to the results of the research and discussion and recommendations. In chapter four, the researcher examined each of the research objectives one by one. Some objectives are divided into a few hypotheses, all of which were statistically tested by the researcher. At the end of this chapter, the researcher conducted a path analysis to provide a complete picture of the way in which research variables are interrelated to each other. Finally, in chapter five of the study, some recommendations for policy makers, managerial board and other researchers are provided.

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