

# **Investigation on the Collaborative and Consensus-Centered Approach in Urban Management (Case Study: Piranshahr City)**

By

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## **Abstract**

*The goal of this study is to determine the effects of citizens' collaboration and consensus on urban management from people's viewpoints. This subject is discussed from the viewpoint that claims the effective control of citizens over the activities which rendered by urban managers is a legitimate right of any citizens and urban governance must be practiced in the presence of people and having already achieved an agreement on the role of citizens on controlling the government or in exact wording, the government of people and with people in practical level. Therefore, the present research aims at answering the question that asks if the citizens' collaboration and consensus has any statistically significant effects on the decisions of urban managers in their urban governance. The research method of present study is survey and the data was collected by distributing questionnaires among 382 subjects, selected at random from 8 blocks of Piranshahr City. The results showed that from the viewpoints of respondents, increase in the participation of citizens and consensus on urban policy making and planning will have significant effects on improving the efficiency of urban management. In addition, the results showed that all members of socio-demographic subgroups emphasized on the effects of such indexes. Furthermore; the results showed that people in the eight blocks of the city had different understanding of the effects of collaboration and consensus on the process of urban management.*

**Keywords:** *Urban, management, participation, collaboration, consensus, citizen*

## **1. Introduction**

By accepting the principal that in urban societies, where participation is carried out through conscious process of distributing power and scarce resources and through providing opportunity for lower classes of the society in improving their life status (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2004:290), in modern time, citizens' participation is no longer an option or even a citizenship right; rather, it is a need in practice. "It is necessary to specify the vast varieties of goals, structures and participation strategies of citizens, as there are evidences, showing that various types of participation are suitable in addressing different subjects and functions" (Rothman et al., 2004:92; Burke, 1979: 111; Tropman, 1987).

Since there are different forms of participation in Iran and various goals are expected from collaboration, it is not strange that there is no agreement on the consequences of participation, which creates deep changes in all aspects of the society. Of course, the urban management area is not excluded from those changes and there are already many laws which have been passed in connection with municipalities and the relevant organizations in such an extent that in first step, many actions have taken place in changing the procedures of urban management and the process of developing and adopting urban plans for engaging civil and council entities in urban executive programs. On the other hand, the loophole found in few last decades in the process of studying and adopting urban development plan is the empty seat of people in the arena of reviewing and adopting plans, reluctance of authorities in exposing their plans to public view, excluding people's opinions and in short, full denial of the role of people in the process of reviewing and adopting comprehensive plans. On the basis of this assumption, after the Iranian revolution, the city council substituted city association; council is the physical embodiment of democracy that engages mass population and is one of the first social entities. One of the major reasons in formation of this entity was to attract the cooperation of community on a common goal. Presently, most countries

view city council as one of the most important foundations of urban management and many governments assign the duty of legislation and policymaking in local level to city councils. Establishment and formation of city councils provide necessary grounds for popular participation in urban management and decision making (Hanachi, 2004: 150).

Despite large physical development, mainly affected by flood of immigrants in the recent decades, Piranshahr City has experienced several structural and social changes, and managing this city has shown the vitality of cooperation between governmental and people-based entities. Nevertheless, as one of the new cities of Iran with many political and economic sensitivity issues in its borderlines, Piranshahr; too, has been suffering from lack of integrity in urban management and serious divergence among social actors, groups of population that have been pushed to margin and their absence in the process of making decisions related to the urban affairs; which in turn leads to the citizens' dissatisfaction. On this basis, the present research tries to study some of the most important factors that are effective on urban management in Piranshahr city.

Collaborative management has been the context of a major part of management and urban planning new literature. Nevertheless, excessive attention to citizens' collaboration in running the city has received high prestige as much that today, citizens' participation is considered as a key approach in good governance of a city and it is necessary to focus on aiming at "seeking management and consensus of local entities with urban managers" on the conformity of collaborative management with changes in management centralism paradigm and its effects on the betterment of urban management system. Therefore; the present research seeks to answer the question of whether or not the executive process of urban plans and the performance of urban managers are affected by popular participation and consensus or collective agreement; and provide an answer from the perspective of urban planning and social science with emphasize on collaborative management approach in the blocks of Piranshahr city.

## **2. Research literature**

The research history indicates that establishment of efficient urban management is possible solely through participation of people in the arena of urban plans execution and co-consensus between managerial entities and citizens. Ahmadi et al. (2000) in a research titled "Paradigm of Citizenship Rights in Social Collaboration in City Blocks" while emphasizing on the agenda of exercising social collaboration plans in the city blocks of Tehran and analysis of its contents; believe that the realization of sustained collaboration in society as the perfect manifestation of citizenship law by concluding that it is only the instructions of social collaborations in the city blocks of Tehran that could serve as the legal opportunities and obstacles before social participation policies in urban blocks. Ahmadpour et al. (2009) in another research, studied the office of block participation: A Model for Restoration of Urban Blocks and the Realization of Collaborative Management. In their opinion, poor block identity is the source of the abundant problems noticeable in the Iranian cities; which also serves as one of the reasons of absence of citizens' participation. They concluded that restoration of block identity and citizens' participation has been effective in the improvement of current situation of the cities in our country and see the two as the basic and essential factors in the improvement of urban management. Panahi et al. (2011) in another research studied the adaptation of clause 16-2, appendix number 4 of Comprehensive Plan of Tehran City with the topic of organizing the citizens' participation in running city affairs by adopting block-core approach. They see this resolution as the legal basis of expanding citizenship collaboration in the municipality of Tehran. They also showed that the activities which have been done in municipality of Tehran reveal the serious commitment of municipality of Tehran in facilitating citizens' participation in running urban affairs. Dadras (2002) in a research under the topic of analyzing the role of urban managers' decisions in urban structure, studied the process of planning managements and urban projects in different periods and concluded that the city should be run through collaboration of people and making planning from down to up and measures must be taken to prevent local abnormalities.

Rahnama (2009) in a research titled "Paradigms of Improvement of Urban Management with Emphasis on Mashhad City" analyzed the duty, role and challenges faced by the executive entities of urban management and deemed their responsiveness to citizens and presenting new cores for reconstruction of executive entities, particularly municipality a necessity. He emphasized on the interaction of the four factors of citizens, Islamic city councils, municipality and government. In his view, the traditional structure of municipality is not able to meet the habitants' demands and based on this hypothesis, rejects the traditional duty-centered model and reinforces adoption of collaboration-based process. In this respect, the city Islamic council; too, should take steps towards up-dating its structure and organization and establishing permanent and effective relations with the citizens and other urban management organizations.

### **3. Theoretical backgrounds**

Participation means close engagement of people in economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. The degree of individuals' participation in a democratic society is determined by their demands and meritocracy criteria (Zokaei, 2000: 9). More participation means a series of principles rather than an ideology; participation means learning to respect, listening to other ideas, feelings and knowledge of people who used to be our "target" in past; that is, transparency of our intentions to interfere in the life of all people; in another word, being cautious on decentralization and empowering, management of larger resources and giving more responsibilities to less powerful people. It could be rephrased as dividing knowledge and specialty. In short, participation in the showing straightforward and frank behaviors, risk taking and trusting others (Blackburn and Holland, 1998: 170).

Many studies have already been carried out on participation in different levels. Skeffington in Britain has defined participation as: "We understand participation as the act of having shares in developing policies and suggestions". It is obvious that providing information by local authorities and the chance of criticizing and interpreting information is a major part of the process of participation; though it is not the whole story.

In addition to just words, participation also includes acting and a full participation appears only in a place where public could undertake an active role in the process of planning (Oosthuizen, 1984: 206). When participation is considered as the process of empowerment based on the three values of giving people a share of power and authority, allowing for people's supervision and control over their destiny and reopening the path of progress before lower classes of the society; the outcome will be facilitation in hearing other voices, the feeling of ownership, eliminating margin habitants, empowering less able people and breaking the culture of silence (Toosi, 2001: 8).

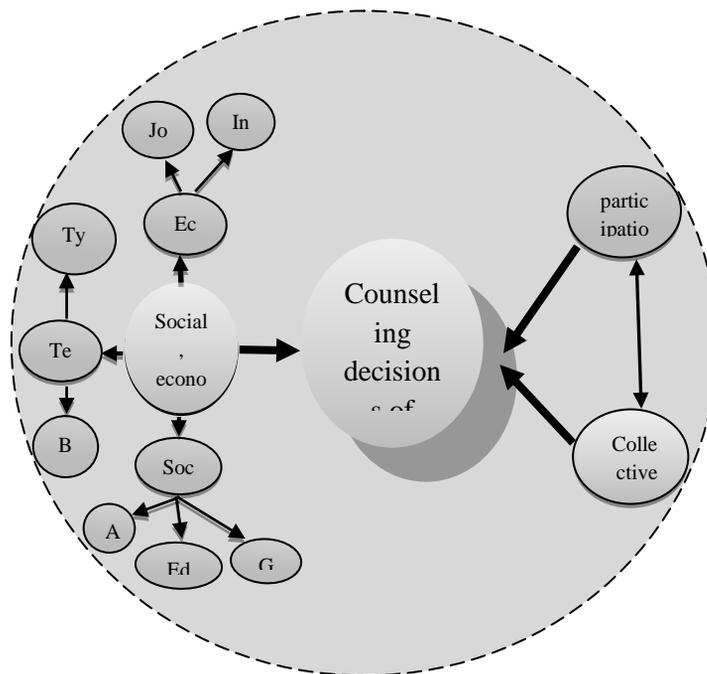
As one of the major objectives of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in providing people's participation and engagement in all affairs of the country, the establishment of popular Islamic councils became the focal point in line with the policy of decentralization and assigning local affairs to people. Principles three, seven, one hundred and one, one hundred and two, one hundred and three, one hundred and five and one hundred and six of the Iranian constitution have discussed the topic of councils and have made it clearly possible to run the affairs of the country by relying on public opinions (Iranian constitution, 1999). By virtue of principle one hundred of the Constitution, fast progress in social, economic, development, health, cultural and educational plans and other welfare affairs take place through people's collaboration with respect to the local requirements in running the affairs of any given village, district, town, city or province whose members are elected by the people of the same place. The law has determined the qualification of voters, candidates, the limits and scope of duties, authorizations, manner of election, supervision of the mentioned council and their hierarchies that should be performed through observing the principles of national unity, territorial sovereignty, the system of Islamic Republic of Iran and subordination to the central government (Ghrobani, 1993: 24).

Some experts believe participation as to be the tool of development and some others see the principle of people's collaboration equal with the development. The economic changes in the few recent years in Iran under the topic of privatization were a justification in creating the grounds of more economic and social participation of people. Until then, development would take place unilaterally. A plan would be presented by the governmental entities and the concept of popular collaboration was restricted in mere acceptance of executives' plan and opinions. The conscious participation of people on the basis of willful decision could lead to the reinforcement of correlation and improvement of cooperation spirit and subsequently, to active engagement of people in all levels of development which would not receive some attentions in precedent practices (Research and Development Consultant Engineers, 2006: 7).

Today, instead of theory of participation, it is the opinion of partnership that prevails. In this theory, emphasis is made on participation in decision making, management and policy making. Based on this approach, government and people should work shoulder to shoulder in coordination with each other in all affairs related to the development and running the national and local affairs like two partners that have common benefits with certain rights and authorizations (Matouf, 1999: 51).

The actual attribute of this idea could be found in small and large cities of capitalism and socialist world. In this type of urban management, a powerful, independent and popular management govern the city. People participate in the process of urban planning and city is built in line with their demands (Smith, 1973: 276).

Another approach in urban management is consensus. Based on this approach, there are several actors and groups with different benefits in an urban society. The duty of good city governance is to mediate among various viewpoints and interests in the district or urban region in order to achieve an extensive agreement on the best interest of the individuals in the society. This requires the existence of common relations and efforts among different governmental and private sectors and citizens, specially NGOs and social entities that work in the scope of the city (Barakpour, 2002: 502).



**Figure 1. The conceptual model of the research**

#### 4. Method and materials

In the present research, necessary data was collected, in addition to literature review, by employing surveying method and its specific tool; that is, questionnaire. The statistical society of study is the city of Piranshahr. According to the Iranian census of 2011, population of Iranshahr was 70722. The size of the sample was determined by using Cochran formula and assuming the highest dispersion of variables subject of study ( $P=0.5$ ,  $Q=0.5$ ), probable precision of 0.05 and the confidence interval of 95 percent. By using those conditions, the number 382 was obtained as the size of the sample. In time of the study, Piranshahr had 15 blocks, 8 of which were chosen at random and 382 questionnaires were distributed proportion to the population of each block. In this research, the council decisions of urban managers were taken as dependent variable and the two variables of participation and consensus were measured as dependent variables through items in Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each one of the mentioned indexes were obtained as 0.63, 0.71 and 0.81; respectively, showing internal consistency and acceptable validity of those indexes. Of course, in addition to the two variables of participation and consensus, the effects of social-economic and textural variables of residneital ownership, type of activity, level of education, number of residence years, amount of income and gender were also considered.

#### 5. Results

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the relations between urban decisions of urban managers and the two indexes of participation and consensus. The results showed that each one of the variables of participation and consensus had statistically significant relationship with the variable of managers' council decisions. In addition, the direction of the relationship is straight. That is, from the viewpoint of respondents, more participation of people and larger consensus has positive effects on the decisions and performance of urban managers and would lead to its effectiveness and efficiency.

**Table 1. The correlation coefficient between the urban decisions of urban managers and the two indexes of participation and consensus**

	Value	Sig
Participation	0.417	0.000
Consensus	0.386	0.000

As it is observed in table 1, analysis of the bivariate relationship showed that each one of the two variables of citizens' collaboration and consensus have statistically significant effects on urban management. On the other hand, Table 2 shows that both variables have simultaneously statistically significant effect on urban management. In addition, each one of the two variables significantly affects the dependent variable through controlling the effect of the second variable; however, the Beta coefficients reveal that the effect of the citizens' participation variable was 10 percent higher than the variable of consensus. In another word, a considerable part of changes in urban management is explained through citizens' participation variable.

**Table 2. The regression analysis of the effects of citizens' participation and consensus on the decisions of urban managers**

	ANOVA		Coefficients		
	F	Sig	Beta	t	Sig
Participation			0.347	4.107	0.000
Consensus	9.616	0.000	0.233	2.694	0.038
Constant				10.35	0.044

Since a considerable percentage of changes in urban management variable is explained through the variable of citizens' participation, the role of each one of the collaboration items are studied. Table 3 reveals that all items have statistically significant effects in explaining the changes in urban management variable. However, the coefficient of items effects was not the same. Some of the items have larger effects coefficient and some others have smaller effects coefficient. In this respect, the largest Beta values were related to two items "If the existence of councils increase the degree of citizens' collaboration" and "the image of citizens on practical participation" respectively, and the smallest values of Beta coefficient were related to the "participation in plans" and "individual decisions are better than collective decisions" items.

**Table 3. The regression analysis of the effects of each one of the items of citizens' participation on the decisions of urban managers**

	Coefficients		
	Beta	t	Sig
Does the council increase participation of citizens?	0.315	26.25	0.000
Individual decisions are better than collective decisions.	0.241	21.34	0.000
The citizens and managers interactions improves urban management	0.258	23.86	0.000
Participation in events anniversaries	0.263	23.66	0.000
Participation in projects	0.221	20.95	0.000
Participation in block affairs	0.256	22.61	0.000
Citizen's assumption on practical participation	0.292	27.56	0.000

Now that we observed that from the viewpoint of respondents, citizens' participation had statistically significant effects on the decisions of urban managers, a question would be raised as whether or not in the blocks subject of study that had different socio-economic and body textures, the respondents have evaluated the effects of citizens' participation in a significant form. To answer this question, the Kruskal Wallis non-parametric test was used.

**Table 4. Ranking the effects of citizens' participation on the decisions of urban managers in the blocks subject of study**

Code of block in comprehensive plan	Name of the block	N	Mean Rank	Rank
11	Zargatan	49	157.48	8
12	Farmandari	60	206.3	4
14	Farhangian	44	190.64	6
21	Bazarche	60	156.5	7
22	Azadi	47	213.3	2
23	Saheli	38	218.88	1
32	Kohnekhan	46	211.36	3
42	Jaddeh-Sardasht	42	195.57	5
Total		382		
<b>Kruskal Wallis H</b>		<b><math>\chi^2 = 17.29</math></b>	<b>d. f = 7</b>	<b>Sig = 0.016</b>

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As it is shown in table 4, the mean ranks among the blocks subject of study differed and such difference is statistically significant. On the other hand, the largest mean ranks related to Saheli and Azadi blocks; respectively, and the smallest mean ranks related to Zargtan and Bazarche blocks; respectively.

Another part is related to the results of evaluation of social-demographic sub-groups on the effect of citizens' participation and consensus on urban management and planning. Evaluation of the respondents' viewpoints on the effects of participation and consensus on the decisions and performance of urban managers as per the variables of type of residential ownership, type of activities, level of education, number of residence years and amount of income has been carried out by employing analysis of variance and as per the gender via *t* test.

**Table 5. Analysis of variance of urban management as per the socio-economic and textural variables**

		Mean	Std. Error	F	Sig.
Residential Ownership	Private, apartment	17.50	0.32	2.34	.062
	Private, villa type	16.20	0.36		
	Rented, villa type	15.8	0.51		
	Rented, apartment	14.7	0.78		
	Endowed, apartment	17.41	0.69		
Type of activities	School student	16.24	0.61	1.84	.098
	Univeristy student	17.86	0.39		
	Housewife	15.95	0.96		
	Unemployed	16.21	0.56		
	Employed	16.29	0.31		
	With income without employment	14.5	2.20		
Education	Illiterate	17.25	0.84	.995	.421
	elementary school	15.93	1.25		
	Junior high school	16.86	0.40		
	High school	16.71	0.36		
	Associate degree	17.08	0.42		
	Graduate and postgraduate	17.7	0.57		
Years of residence	1-4	16.15	0.32	2.007	.071
	5-9	16.98	0.40		
	10-14	18.14	0.43		
	15-19	17.18	0.67		
	+20	16.27	0.94		
Income/ Tumans	Under 200 thousands	16.33	0.62	.539	.707
	201 to 400 thousands	16.97	0.45		
	401to 800 thousands	16.97	0.38		
	801 thousands to 1000000	16.30	0.43		
	Higher 1000000	16.87	0.50		

**Table 6. Distribution of the mean of the quality of evaluating the effect of participation on urban management as per gender**

Sex	Mean	Std. Error
Female	16.69	0.27
Male	16.75	0.32

**Table 7. The examine of difference in the mean of the quality of evaluating the effect of participation on urban managers between women and men**

Test	Value	d.f	Sig	Confidence Interval
Levene	1.55	-	0.214	-
t	-0.155	380	0.877	0.009 -1.29

Of course, although people do not show expertise view on problems and difficulties, this study showed that the people's viewpoint contains realities that are the requirement of living in today world. Tables 2 and 4 show that evaluating the viewpoint of respondents on the effects of participation and consensus on decisions and performance of urban managers has no statistically significant difference in terms of the variables of type of residential housing ownership, type of activity, level of education, number of residence years, amount of income and gender. These finding mean that from the viewpoint of all social-demographic sub-groups subject of study, the participation of citizens and consensus in running urban affairs is an important and undeniable reality and affects urban management. Therefore, essentially, the basic framework of urban management and planning should be founded on the needs, participation and agreement/consensus of all citizens.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

In the modern world, collaboration in improving decision making process, promoting the legitimacy of political system and empowering people is not an option or even citizenship right, but a need in practice. Engagement of citizens in policy making, defining the goals, making urban and local plans operational, and using their capabilities, exclusively in the template of citizenship-centered approach encourage citizens to become effective in the improvement of their living environment and their social world; and in this regards, benefit from all its local capacities. Nevertheless, although in macro level, the approach of urban management is a down-to-up management approach, due to the prolongation of such process and socio-economic and textural changes in the cities along with little experiences of local councils in Iran due to their young age, implementing collaborative management and conveying the expectation of citizens to authorities have always been facing problems.

Based on this, the present research plans to provide a scientific definition on some of the most important socio-economic and textural determinants particularly citizens' participation and consensus. Therefore, the importance of this research lies in its ability to emphasize on the basic place of citizenship-centered approach based on the two categories of citizens' collaboration in policy making and city management through a participative view in urban planning.

Using local capacities in urban management is possible only through exercising a democratic and integrated city management and the initial steps have been already taken in Iran; although there are obstacles in this path. Hence; providing a scientific basis for policy making interventions and structural-institutional transformation requires preforming a scientific analysis on their grounds and effective factors. In the present research, the role of citizens' participation and consensus of actors that affect urban management have been studied in search of such cognition.

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The results of bivariate analysis showed that the two variables of citizens' participation/collaboration and consensus are among the factors that have effects on council decisions and performance of urban managers. In another word, respondents believed that more collaboration of people and larger consensus/collective agreement would lead to the improvement of policy making, planning and management of urban managers. In addition, the results showed that not only the simultaneous effects of citizens' collaboration and consensus on urban management is significant, but also, by controlling the effects of consensus, participation and by controlling the effects of participation, consensus has significant effects on urban management. On the other hand, the regression coefficients reveal that the variable of citizens' participation affects urban management in a larger degree. Therefore, the collective and independent effects of each one of the items of participation were tested to show which dimensions of participation were more important in explaining urban management. The results showed that the simultaneous and independent effects of all items of participation variable on the quality of urban management were significant; however, the coefficients of the items' effects differed; that is, the two items "If the existence of council could increase the degree of citizens' participation" and "the image of citizens on practical participation" had the largest effects coefficient; respectively and the two items "participation in plans" and "individual decisions are better than collective decisions" has the smallest effectiveness coefficient.

In addition, since the research environment contained highly variable socio-economic and physical textures, the effects of citizens' participation on urban management were studied as per the blocks subject of study. The results showed that the mean ranks of evaluation given by respondents on the effects of participation on urban management was not the same in all blocks and the differences are statistically significant, as the largest mean rank was observed in Sahel and Azadi blocks and the least mean rank was observed in Zargtan and Bazarche blocks.

Another part of the results was related to evaluate the viewpoints of socio-demographic sub-groups on the effects of participation of citizens and consensus on urban management and planning. The results showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the respondents' belief on the effects of participation and consensus on the urban managers' decisions and performance as per the concerned variables. In another word, the members of all socio-demographic sub-groups subject of study admitted the basic effects of citizens' participation and consensus in running urban affairs.

Another part of the findings that was in agreement with the results of surveying data was the results of field observations. The field observations contain interesting and noteworthy points on the indexes that are effective in urban management. The field observation showed that people frequently pointed out the importance of participation and consensus indexes as the indexes in optimized management of the city. From people's views, if those indexes have a larger share in urban management, and if they are executed efficiently and practically, they could certainly contribute to the improvement of people participation in running the city and the feeling of attachment and higher commitment, and subsequently, general welfare and comfort of citizens. People do believe that the overall participation of all governmental, public and civil entities and they themselves would improve the transparency in urban management and leads to the higher effectiveness and efficiency of management and optimized management of the city through providing confidence and trust between people and authorities.

In general, the findings of the research showed that active participation of citizens in urban management and consensus of actors that could affect urban life are among the basic pre-requisites of benefiting from local capacities and achieving a democratic and integrated urban management. On the other hand, the findings are supported by previous researches (Ahmadi et al, 2000; Ahmadpour te al., 2009; Panahi et al, 2011; Dadras, 2002; Rahnama, 2009).

In conclusion, it is suggested to conduct similar studies in different places of Iran with respect to the variation and differences in the entity and physical textures of various parts of Iran to improve validity of the results obtained from this research and making those results applicable.

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