

Policy Implications of Participation Field Rules in Arbaeen Foot Pilgrimage

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Abstract: With an aim of understanding participation rules in Arbaeen pilgrimage and its policy implications, this project studies participation in Arbaeen pilgrimage especially the service providers and helpers (Mukebdars and Khadems in Persian) who provide the pilgrims with food and accommodation service and other needed services, have the most involvement in the ritual, and prepare the ground for almost all other kinds of participation in the pilgrimage. Population of the study is limited to Iranian pilgrims. At the first step, we explored theoretical and conceptual aspects of the event and reviewed the available literature on collective participation to comprehend the phenomenon. Using the notion of “social field” in sociology literature, we classified Arbaeen collective participation field into three groups of visible, semi-hidden, and hidden. In the second step, after collecting qualitative data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the Iranian Mukebdars, we described in detail dimensions and elements of “participation flow” and “participation ground”. Finally, we offered the recommendations for policy makers in regard to design and management of crowd participation plans according to the application-oriented aspects of this model.

Keywords: field, collective participation, Arbaeen pilgrimage, policy making.

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Statement of the Problem

The humanities have always been concerned with classifying social events and phenomena in order for discovering a pattern to study future and feed the policy and decision makers with proper advices. Arbaeen ritual is among such events that owe their existence to Shia culture. This phenomenon though interwoven with Islamic civilization ecosystem is recently turning into a mega social-cultural event that cannot be taken for granted and its possible lessons and capacities are hard to overlook. In addition, this event that on the surface is just a ritual commemorating an epic story of far past, in fact belongs to the very contemporary human and with its futuristic nature establishes new future social and cultural trends. The reason for this lies in its remarkable role in enhancing the soft power of Shia world through revival of religious identity of Shia and expanding the symbolic and social resources of the Shia nations.

In recent years, numerous changes have occurred in distribution pattern and extent of involvement of the participants including the Mukebdars, caravaneers (people in charge of the pilgrim’s caravans), the foot and motorized pilgrims which indicate a range of social and cultural implications, impacts and influences affecting the Islamic and non-Islamic communities.

This phenomenon has been influential in shaping the emerging social relations in different nations and has led to stable international communities. All through the routes of this pilgrimage volunteers build huge tents and shelters –Mukebs- to offer their free services including accommodation and food to the pilgrims. Recognizing the roles of collective participation field in Arbaeen pilgrimage and its policy implications can be of significant value for the social managers and planners as they can build on lessons learned from Arbaeen to devise solutions for social issues. The present study hence considers participation in Arbaeen ritual in terms of its management implications especially the activism of Mukebdars and Khadems having the highest level and largest area of participation. The sample population of this project contains the Iranian pilgrims frequently taking part in Arbaeen pilgrimage and performing a kind of serving role for the other pilgrims.

Study Background

There are plenty of essays and research projects on Arbaeen pilgrimage (e.g. Pooyafar 2017 and 2018,

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Razavi Zadeh 2017, Amin 2017, Doroodian 2018, Angooti 2018, Faraji et al. 2017, and Christia 2016) yet; none of them has approached the subject considering its management implications. However, the only work that has examined the subject in managerial terms is Mojtaba Hussein's (2018) which explores this ritual in the light of tourism management. This essay studies the motivations and experience of the foot-pilgrims of Karbala through phenomenological approach and Shia worldview. Findings of this study show that the stimuli for participating in Arbaeen is rooted in the "constant concern and expectation for assembly" and the element of "Umma" which are of management implications for future planning and policy making.

Theoretical Literature Review

Multiple theories have been developed on participation regarding management considerations that explain participation as the permissible degree of involvement of individuals in their destiny. The relation of state and public participation therefore has been debated in the literature. James Midgley, for instance, dealt with the relation of states and public participation and categorized four types of participation in accordance to the approaches of the states: 1. Anti-participatory mode: the advocates of this approach support oppressing public participation. The states then do not allow community participation and engagement in policy making as it may result in conflict with the macro-social/economic objectives. 2. Manipulated mode of participation: the state supports participation of local communities to fulfill its hidden intentions. In this approach the state manipulates public participation to realize its plans including controlling local movements and assemblies and taking benefit of participation attractions to achieve social and political legitimacy. 3. Incremental mode of participation: the states employ double standards dealing with public participation; while authorities formally advocate it, they would not make any practical attempt to contribute realization of real participation of people. 4. Genuine mode of participation: the states genuinely support social participation through creating mechanisms for effective social contribution in all areas. The states are committed to co-ordinate and arrange participatory activities using tools like training, empowerment, and capacity building (Habibi and Saidi Rezvani 18:2005).

Arnstein (1969) holds that participation is essentially associated to power distribution. Accordingly, participation without re-distribution of power is an absurd and disappointing process for the powerless. Her eight-rung participation ladder begins with manipulation and ends in citizen control implying that people are part of the power relations. Considering Arnstein's ladder, the quality and status of citizen participation fall under three categories: Non-Participation, Tokenism, Citizen Power.

Davidson (1998) devised his Wheel of Participation to elaborate on citizen participation. This wheel introduces non-preferential different degrees for participation. In this approach decision making is a continual interaction between the state and citizens. Davidson's wheel metaphor offers a non-linear model that distinguishes levels of participation under four quadrants of information, consultation, participation, and empowerment.

Nonetheless, recent scholars posit that all participatory theories actually acknowledge the hierarchical nature of participation and the fact that citizens are endowed with it by the state. They then recommend the notion of partnership instead of participation. The involvement theory suggests that citizens and the state are partners that work together. The state and citizens as two partners with shared resources and definite rights and authorities co-operate in all of the tasks in a co-ordinated and collaborative way. The affairs beyond citizens' power are handled by the state while people deal with social challenges through NGOs and other forms of community institutions (Keshtkar and Rahimi, 47:2015).

Collective Participation Field in Arbaeen

In Bourdieu's work field is defined as structured environments of positions in which the characteristics of each agent are determined by their positions in these environments and field can be analyzed regardless of the personal traits of the agents occupying the positions (1993:72). In other words, field is a setting and environment where a special type of stable relation between social actors is formed within a historical process. The actors in the field internalize field and attain habitus based on their position in the field and their acts. Habitus actually represents the actor's style or disposition in the field and is indication of a logic-oriented integration that is not usually conscious: "As structured products which a

structuring structure produces through retranslation according to the specific logic of the different fields, all the practices and products of a given agent are objectively orchestrated, without deliberate pursuit of coherence.”(Bourdieu, 1984: 172 and 173, 241 and 242).

All human beings and the things associated to them are composed of visible layers, semi-hidden layers, and hidden layers. Social fields including Arbaeen, hence, are of three different layers that can be defined considering the degree of their manifestation (Fartookzadeh and Vaziri, 2014, quoted by Rezaeean and Bayramzadeh, 2016: 36-38):

1. Visible layer or play flow: where the acts of social actors are observed and the issues emerge and their symptoms are displayed. This layer contains representations, achievements, consequences, events, and the reality of actors' acts and behaviors. Types of the participants and their relations in Arbaeen pilgrimage can be investigated in this layer.
2. The semi-hidden layer or playground: includes objectified structures, strategies, and rules making behaviors of the former layer. These rules and structures hidden in the context of the play are stable agreements and institutional concealed frameworks in which the social processes are shaped. Within this layer the rules and structures creating an environment of encouragement and discouragement provide the actors with opportunities and bottlenecks. The actors adapt their behavior to the encouraging and discouraging environment that results in social outcomes.
3. Hidden layer: the cognitive system includes ideas, schemas, mental frameworks, narratives, and meta-narratives of the stakeholders. Dominating and balancing mechanisms of ideas are of high importance in this layer. Beliefs and assumptions are in constant conflict in the cognitive system of society till balance is established.

The visible layer and types of participants' relations can be recognized at the first glance at the experience of Arbaeen pilgrimage. Digging deeper in our observation we unveil the semi-hidden layer of this participation field where there are interaction networks, roles, institutions, and patron institutions as well as association of participation with cultural factors including Mukebdars and Mukebs (temporary tents or buildings used to serve the pilgrims) and range of institutions like Hie'ats (Persian,-a type of religious congregation commemorating religious figures especially Imam Hussein) directly involved in serving pilgrims.

Ultimate objective of all these social innovations and efforts is to meet the needs of pilgrims effectively. The reasons behind social and semantic cohesion in collective participation which joins the actors and grants them collective identity are another aspect of collective participation model that is not easily perceivable. Understanding this notion requires going beyond reality and form and reaching for semantics. In other words, we need to elicit meaning of participation from participants and quest the common meaning underlying collective identity in the hidden layer. Therefore, this latter layer of Arbaeen participation field is not covered by the present article.

Methodology

Considering nature of subject and objectives of this study qualitative approach was employed. Targeted sampling was performed in order for selecting the interviewees among Mukebdars and Khadems. A combination of thematic analysis and ideal typing methods was adopted to analyze the interviews since thematic analysis method is quite suitable for recognition of the patterns of qualitative data (Aabedi Jafari and et.al 2011: 151). Methodology scholars like Braun and Clarke (2006) believe that where clarification is not desired, commitment to principles such as those of data driven theory won't be necessary. In addition, patterns should be abstracted to the level that they are applicable for other realities and, hence, development of an ideal sample will be rewarding. It is because the ideal sample or the ideal type is the pattern that puts together the relationships and events of social/historical life through constructing a logical entity that by means of it the social reality can be understood and studied better and more comprehensively. Ideal sample yields an integrated analysis emphasizing one or several characteristics and merging them into the structural reality. This structure in its original form can be experimentally found everywhere in the reality, yet there is significance difference between the ideas presented in it and the experimental reality. The ideal sample is a logical representation of a phenomenon resulted from enhancing some of its characteristics. Weber wrote on this: “an ideal sample is formed by one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by synthesis of several fragmented, diffuse

phenomena sometimes present in abundance and occasionally rare and are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified thought construct.” (2004:19).

17 semi-structured interviews with Arbaeen participants especially those with experiences more than mere pilgrimage were conducted; table 1 presents the properties of the interviewees. Variety is also considered as Mukebs where Khadems offer their services are of different kinds including medical Mukebs, Persian-Iraqi Mukebs, student Mukebs, Mukebs with a lady in charge, and a press Mukeb.

Table 1: Interviewees properties

	Number of interviewees	
Gender	Female	5
	Male	12
Age	Young (18-35)	7
	Middle-aged (35-50)	4
	Old (over 50)	6
Education	Higher education	8
	Seminary education	3
	High school diploma or less	6
Place of residence	Tehran	11
	Other cities	3

Coding was performed using MaxQDA10; first semantic units were extracted from interviews and then through a three-phase coding process including level of abstraction the results were produced and displayed in a table like table 2.

Table 2: Sample coding

Start	End	Semantic phase	Coding 1	Coding 2	Coding 3
00.00.000	00.37.079	M.A. 37 years old, principles of Islamic jurisprudence	Middle aged, member of seminary	Age and education	Context information
00.50.471	01.14.334	Volunteer weekly and annual work in Hie'at	North Khorassan social-religious actor	activity	Context information
01.20.125	01.35.085	Founding the Asshab Khorassani Mukeb	High level of engagement	Degree of participation	Context information
01.35.085	01.51.644	Cooperating since 2016	3 years of cooperation	Duration of participation	Context information
03.26.549	03.40.454	Since 2012 Arbaeen has become part of our life	High level of engagement	Degree of participation	Context information
4.37.158	04.55.078	It has changed and enhanced the extent and depth of communication	Arbaeen a platform for increasing direct communication among nations	Ground for actors' relations	Participation flow

Participation Flow

Participation flow of Arbaeen covers a number of components and aspects; following includes only those related to the subject and objectives of this study.

Actors' relation environment

The relation environment in Arbaeen participation flow indicates that there is a significant space for interaction with deep and affectionate empathy that is far from any sort of privileged or discriminatory manner. This humane atmosphere of Arbaeen participation is then so apt to cultural integration. The strong unflinching emotional links between the host and guest actors and their inclination for learning the language of each other for better inter-cultural communication are indicative of this friendly and warm environment, “the Iraqis and we keep in touch just like relatives and when they come to Shiraz on medical travel, first they pay a visit to us” (A.M 30 years old). Such intimate and friendly relations with great empathy originate from a common purpose: “we have developed such a friendship with the Iraqis that leaving them would upset us” (Sh. 45 years old). This shared purpose canopies the relation environment and shapes a novel community where all the social classifications like economic/social position are marginalized and sometimes even become meaningless “there among Iraqi people we feel

at home, they are perfect in hospitality and the nationality of the pilgrims doesn't matter for them" (M.S 35 years old).

Supportive Environment

Arbaeen participation leads to a unique supportive environment built on spiritual resources. The actors do not confine support for each other to their predefined roles and seize any opportunity to offer their voluntary services to others: "Iraqis practice surpasses many of the established norms of hospitality and this is the dominant atmosphere" (M.M 35 years old). Willingness to give up one's assets rooted in a strong selflessness and lack of sense of ownership is present everywhere: "as there is no sense of ownership, when something is not needed they simply donate it. Sense of donation and collaboration is everywhere in Arbaeen" (M.A 37 years old). Enthusiastic will to serve others eliminates the need for monitoring the operations and behaviors of Khadems since all of them act with high value-based self-control.

General Environment of Action

The general environment of action in Arbaeen is overwhelmed with passionate emotions; that is innocence, friendship, empathy and general sense of fraternity dominate the entire environment. Having shared purpose gives them a high sense of belonging and motivates them to co-operate more willingly. Cultural policy in Arbaeen is pluralistic acknowledging and appreciating differences. Pluralism of Arbaeen produces multiple positive impacts like providing the ground for involvement of various religious and political sects as well as creating the opportunity for personal fulfillment of individuals due to having a high level of freedom of action and fast effective socialization because of availability of several options. Arbaeen is also a short opportunity to go beyond routine life and experience a sort of ideal, utopian life with some features of the age of Reappearance¹. Extensive engagement with great enthusiasm of individuals makes them quite ready to experience a rare spiritual life: "I've been wearing Hijab for 5 years, Imam Hussein changed my thoughts, I owe him... my relation with my husband was not good, he had a car accident two months ago. I prayed a lot, I had a dream that God sent him back to me... and now we both take part in Arbaeen pilgrimage." (Jahan, 25 years old). "Many of the ladies who accompany us decided to wear Hijab after they had some dreams and then they have become influential in their families." (S.A. 22 years old). Above all, a shade of particularism under the generalism generated from Islam is observed in Arbaeen environment. That is; though national elements contradicting Islamic ideology are submerged in the shadow of Islamic identity, those national values in line with Islam are intensified and spotlighted as prestigious in the new social arena.

Moral Order of Action

Cornerstone of society is norms and norms are resulted from four social needs: peaceful coexistence, co-operation, reciprocal understanding, and co-ordination. These needs are foundations for moral order. Any society which succeeds to meet them will maintain moral order; in other words, it will be able to form a community. Content analysis of the interviews reveals that not only does Arbaeen environment fulfill these needs decently; it also denies the common moral order of the contemporary communities. Some of its factors denying moral order of other communities are covered in the following sections.

1. **Rejecting Instrumental Rationality:** Actors in Arbaeen ritual do not follow the common sense calculations and spend their wealth without economic consideration. Our interviewees have witnessed many examples of this rejection of purposive rationality: "for instance, an Iraqi Khadem sold his house to pay for the costs of serving Arbaeen pilgrims" (Sh. 45 years old), "a host slaughters his sheep to provide a kebab dish (liver) for his Arbaeen guests" (H.P, 36 years old). Arbaeen pilgrims and Khadems are very willing to ignore their interests for sake of experiencing the spirituality of this ritual.
2. **Rejecting Social Stratification:** Arbaeen environment disregards social positions and participation in this event is encouraged not by social factors like number of or status of participants but the spiritual atmosphere which is dominant and stimulates the participation flow: "if number of people was less

¹ When the 12th Imam, Al-Mahdi, reappears as the savior of mankind (Shia doctrine)

than this we still would take part in Arbaeen. People have perceived the blessings of Arbaeen in their lives and so they join it.” (K. 53 years old).

3. **Rejecting Purposiveness:** As we mentioned earlier dutifulness of the Arbaeen actors is strengthened with neglecting the significance of number of participants; that is the actors never fail to do their duties. Everyone does their best to do something, no matter how small it is, so that they can have their name printed as a participant of Arbaeen by the Holy Existence: “Arbaeen is to serve Ahl al-Bayt (the prophet’s family)... we have to contribute somehow.” (J.F. 60 years old).
4. **Rejecting Emotionalism:** Among factors affecting one’s individual decision making in life is extreme sentimentalism that impacts people’s selective perception in their individual actions. It means that individuals are more dependent on their emotions and personal feeling than other factors when making decisions. However, the Arbaeen interviewees frequently condemned emotionalism and emphasized the priority of religious duty over personal emotions and interest: “Arbaeen is an opportunity to be responsible and I just can’t act according to my own taste or interest.” (M.A. 37 years old).
5. **Rejecting Welfare Seeking:** Concept of tourism and even the very modern life are interwoven with comfort and welfare as the most desired elements. Yet, these elements are abandoned intentionally by the participants of Arbaeen with deep internal satisfaction and without being forced by external dynamics. The actors actually choose to do the walk using the hardest path while there are more comfortable options and shortcuts for them; unfulfillment of their personal needs would not bother them at all: “few of personal needs are met during Arbaeen walk but people are happy. There no one cares for their personal needs; if they do, they will have hard times there.” (A.H. 29 years old).
6. **Rejecting Political Propaganda:** Political activism or any effort to encourage or convince audience politically or advocate for any political figure of different nations is not tolerated in Arbaeen and sometimes such actions may be rejected using minor violence; for example the posters of the religious leaders of certain groups are torn off if people bring them to the walk: “there we have neither flag of Iran nor of Iraq.” (Sh. 45 years old).

The following figure summaries what discussed above:

Participation Ground

Arbaeen participation ground contains unwritten explicit and implicit rules, dominant norms, and some hidden non-predetermined plans some of which are considered in the following sections.

Characteristics of Participation in the community institution of Mukeb

Complete understanding of Arbaeen participation ground is bound to considering special regulations and unique factors required for participation in Mukeb institution. The most important characteristics of Mukebs are manifested in type of task assignment, features of support entity, and structure of services they offer as well as their model of human resource management.

Task assignment approach

The process of task assignment in Mukebs is simple and based on needs of the pilgrims. Most of Khadems are well informed about the whole process and there is no behind-the-curtain or secret decision making. There is also no definite duty list for Khadems; hence, the situation is more ready for volunteer and committed contribution which means maximum use of the facilities: “people distribute tasks among them without being told and work with commitment.” (M.A. 37 years old). “our Khadems do not care that much about shifts or rest, we always should remind them that they need to take a break.” (K. 53 years old).

Support entity

Working in Mukebs though does not conform to the normal institutional regulations like certain hierarchical structure and predefined tasks; there is a rich history of similar services and volunteer networks that provides Khadems with appropriate experiences they need for fulfilling their roles in Mukebs. It seems that without fully exploiting such experiences, coming down from institutions like

Hie'ats¹ and the tribal life in past years, Mukeb institution would not succeed to work effectively: "those who are used to working in Hie'ats and serving at religious rituals in Iran, are capable of performing Khadem responsibilities pretty well there (Iraq) as they already have the spirit... to work as a Khadem is more common among the Iraqis; even their little ones work as Khadems." (M.M. 30 years old).

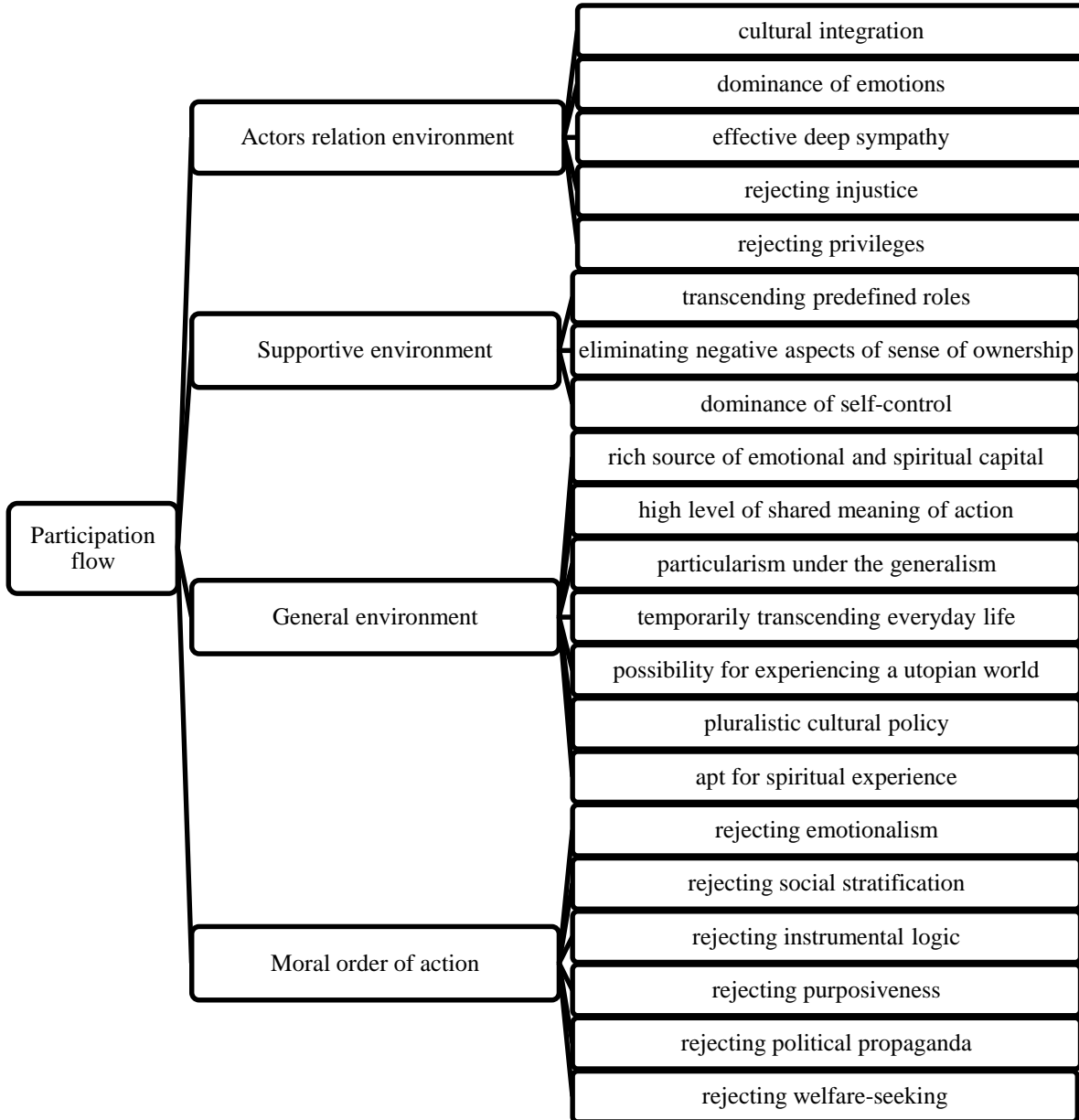


Figure 1: Participation flow

Service structure

Arbaeen services are presented based on special patterns and structure in terms of service model and behavior of the servants. Behavior pattern of Khadems is more extroverted and humanist than introverted or pragmatic. Here, the actions are driven by internal motives and great enthusiasm that denote sheer willingness for offering service without expecting others' appreciation or gratitude; this quality makes the actor to be more than a pilgrim. Yet, it does not end here; actors are seeking for meaning in their actions and believe that their service is morally true only when it is not tainted with

¹ religious groups commemorating the religious figures especially Imam Hussein

hypocrisy (no expectations), so they practice self-denial: “foot pilgrimage and serving the pilgrims are the same. What Imam Hussein approves of is good. Serving the pilgrims decently is laboring and the Benevolent will reward the laborers. Who knows, perhaps our pilgrimage is insincere” (H.P. 36 years old). “Hospitality of the Iraqi friends was really beautiful; honest and with self-denial” (Sh. 45 years old). “The Iraqis do not act courteously out of habit but there is a kind of wisdom behind their hospitality which is unbelievable.” (M.A 37 years old).

Nature of activities and type of distributing work tasks are determined according to needs of the pilgrims; however, the physical structure of Mukebs is also tailored to the demands of the pilgrims. The largest part of Mukeb is for rest and the remainder is arranged considering other needs of the pilgrims and Khadems capacity for providing services: from bathing and washing facilities to food and drink buffets, health booth, prayer room, and etc.

An important point to remember is that there is a high flexibility in serving the pilgrims regarding regulations of Mukebs; almost every pilgrim is accepted in Mukebs with no limitation but Khadems do not enjoy much flexibility neither in terms of competencies required for being recruited as Khadem nor conforming to regulations. In fact, there is no single behavior structure or trend, instead, depending on different situations Mukebs demand for certain kind of behavior appropriate to that situation: “we already announced that we would close Mukeb on Arbaeen Day but since some of the luggage and belongings of the pilgrims were left we kept our Mukeb active one more day.” (M.M. 35 years old).

Human resource management

Human resource management of Mukebs includes several mechanisms; education is one of them. To an outside observer, people who decide to serve as Khadem may seem to receive no education and everything is done on a trial-and-error basis. On the contrary, the interviews with Khadems showed that most of Khadems before joining Arbaeen field had attempted to experience long foot pilgrimage, participant observation, and acquirement of local culture and even imitation learning from it in order for understanding the field and the required behavior and culture to serve as Khadem or establish their own Mukeb: “7 years ago, still such walk was not the trend, then we in a group of 15 or 16 guys initiated the walk to Karbala, when got there, we said next year we would build a Mukeb, God willing. But, studying our Iraqi friends’ hospitality, we got scared that we may mess up. The next year, again we went on foot-pilgrimage and we were determined to observe and consider Mukebs professionally and learn from them.” (Sh. 45 years old).

There is no specific institution devoted to mentoring pilgrims and Khadems; Mukebdars do not consider it necessary to provide any education for their crew. Nevertheless, great deal of learning happens at work; this kind of learning in Iraqi Mukebs provides kids with opportunities to develop their skills for serving as Khadem from early years of life.

“We served at Iraqi Mukebs and then built our own Mukeb.” (R. 55 years old)

“Manager of the Iraqi Mukeb is head of the family and starts mentoring his children to be Khadem from early years of life”. (Q. 50 years old).

Apart from training, there are some regulations that permanently exalt Khadems in terms of ethics, practice, and spirituality so that their thoughts and actions are highly matched. Plus this, dominance of structure over agency and its oppression are restricted through separate ethical/ training plans for khadems to personally experience the spiritual state which they have been deprived of due to involvement in service. It means that both the action of serving and development of Khadem at service are important and distinctive plans are defined for them: “Mukebs provide training plans for their members.” (A.M. 30 years old).

The regulations helping actors to keep their role as Khadem and making them to be content with performing this role are also of the same weight. Satisfaction is achieved when Khadems find out others do not consider their actions as part of their responsibilities. Hierarchical attitude or discriminative manner in treating Khadems impacts their decision for continuing their service or quitting it.

“sometimes there was hierarchical approach in Mukebs...Khadems won’t say ‘we don’t do certain jobs’ yet they did not clean bathrooms and having some connections would help them with such tasks... even some ladies would say that they wanted to serve Iranians only... thus, I told them I preferred to just participate in the walk for the next year.” (M.M. 35 years old).

Selecting Khadems is either a network process; they may be recommended by acquaintances/friends, or they may be chosen from members of Hie'ats or other charity/friend/social groups. Occasionally, there may be a public call for Khadem role which is usually for assigning second layer roles including some marginal light duties. First layer Khadems, however, are selected purposefully and based on trust. Apart from being volunteers, the criteria for selecting Khadems include appropriate skills and strength required for performing the assigned obligations. Volunteers' past records of serving in Hei'ats or other groups are also checked out to evaluate their competencies.

"there is a kind of acquaintance in the central core of Mukebs and there people have some old connections from past. But the second layer is made up of a variety of people." (Q. 50 years old).

"we have a challenge to work in the kitchen during the first 10 days of Muharram." (Sh. 45 years old).

Different principles regulate management of Khadems' performance such as process-oriented approach which implies that duties allocated to individuals compose a whole process for meeting certain needs of pilgrims. As every Khadem delivers the A to Z of their services, they are able to use the facilities most efficiently and have a sense of high responsibility and obligation. This also requires appointing multi-functional workforce (Khadems) in order to advance the entire process and fulfill duties more effectively. Another factor increasing sense of responsibility and obligation in Khadems is concurrence of action and reward. Khadems gain their reward (finding approval of Imam (peace be up on him)) as soon as they intend to perform services; this spiritual reward brings them deep contentment. Reliving and narrating the spiritual experiences constantly results in reproduction of and reinforcing the significance of the rewards and prevents doubting existence or howness of the reward.

"Here, everything is done from the heart even when there is structure; the most important concern is that all tasks are completed. The effect is immediate, the very moment you do the service you feel getting closer to Seyed Al-Shohada (Imam Hussein)." (Q. 50 years old).

Another characteristic of Khadems' performance is a sort of convergence of the nature of phenomenon (dominance of subjectivity over objectivity) and type of management and mechanisms adopted to create commitment and advance the operations. Such mechanisms are of soft and cultural nature as hard and obligatory mechanisms are non-functional in Arbaeen participation field and sometimes even dysfunctional: "we suggested preparing an album for Khadems with a profile of their experiences. It is not possible to conduct selection process during Arbaeen ritual." (Q. 50 years old).

Arbaeen participation field includes no backup service yet operations are performed conveniently as a dynamic mechanism compensates for inefficiencies; thanks to multi-functionality of Khadems. In fact, inefficiency of one Khadem is compensated with using other Khadems' capacities and relying on a process-oriented approach in management of operations. This provides an opportunity that not only does support Khadems but empowers them. This way, while Khadems learn at work the process of operations are also run unceasingly.

"since motivations are spiritual, when someone fails to perform their task, there is a mechanism of support: others both teach them and assist them with the task." (V. 40 years old).

An important principle in assigning Khadems to duties and tasks is the proportion of tasks with interests and liking of Khadems. That is, Khadems choose to serve in the areas with the most affinity to their previous experiences. The more Mukeb manager takes into account this point, Khadems will work with more satisfaction and stronger sense of belonging to the group.

"I liked prayer shift because I myself made some changes to it (to prevent any delay due to changing clothes and finding shoes) also we arranged a new part in Mukeb for children which was not pre-defined; someone who was interested to the task accepted to do it." (M.M. 35 years old).

In Arbaeen field there are a few disagreements or tensions among Khadems or Khadems and pilgrims as personal interest or personal concerns have no place here. Rare cases of disagreement or argument can be easily resolved by mediation of the Mukeb manager-because of his/her popularity among Khadems- or the elder ones through reminding them of the divine master (Imam Hussein) of the field. Requirement of respecting Imam Hussein and his pilgrims gains such importance that Khadems who may not bear the least contempt or offence in the ordinary life would swallow all disrespectful behavior of pilgrims or even being physically hurt by them just through oppressing their ego and practicing self-denial: "sometimes pilgrims behavior gets really rude as they expect a lot and they may even beat us.

Among palm trees we trust in Imam and calm down. Sisters say ‘you are usually so serious and firm, we can’t believe this is you in Karbala’.” (K. 53 years old).

Khadems’ Criteria for Choosing Mukebs

Khadems decide to co-operate with certain Mukebs considering factors like managers’ moral virtues including being careful not to bother other people with their activities. Type of services that Mukebs provide and degree of their cultural impact are also influential in Khadems’ decision. The manager’s attitude toward Islamic beliefs and national and international issues is another consideration for Khadems to decide whether or not to co-operate with Mukebs: “my top priority is that it should have some features like having concern for not disturbing others, avoiding long and meaningless programs, and the outlook of the people working in Mukeb is also important for me.” (M.M. 35 years old).

Financial Regulations

Mukebs finance is dominated by three principles: 1. capacity building and exploiting unknown capacities and unconventional methods for attracting investments. 2. relying on donations and other volunteer financial contributions. 3. need-orientation; allocation of budget to Mukebs of a tribe is based on their needs, size and/or amount of their members’ contributions to the tribe’s Arbaeen budget.

“Iraqis maintain a fund called “Arbaeen fund” and devote a part of their annual income to it as Imam Hussein’s share. As Arbaeen approaches, all members of the tribe contribute their savings without mentioning the amount; nobody knows the amount of others’ contributions. This way those who have contributed 1 thousand Toomans feel that they have participated in the fundraising and people who have contributed large amounts do not expect special appreciation.” (Q. 50 years old).

Quality Improvement Mechanism

Mukeb managers hold meetings to share experiences and best practices with each other so that they can upgrade their services while a strong synergy is achieved through exchange of knowledge and experience. Since Mukebs have a flexible structure which is a result of their temporary status and their components are related to the type of services they deliver, new plans can be readily integrated into their structures without facing any special structural or spatial barriers: “Mukebdars annually attend some common meetings ...we adopted the Tebrizi Mukebdars’ idea of mobile kitchen.” (M.A. 37 years old).

Extra-Institutional Characteristics

Arbaeen field has some competition regulations that go beyond the institution of Mukeb and indicate a new kind of competition rejecting the previous ones. This new competition format directs benefits of competition to service recipients than the actors –service providers-: competition to offer more and better services. Arbaeen field condemns benefit-seeking and hence casts a shadow over the conventional forms of competition and culturally marginalizes them. This new type of competition has its own properties like pursuing obscurity and refusing any exhibition of personal or group capacities and skills. This competition results in provision of the desired service to pilgrims and showing deep concern for their needs and likings.

“Everywhere there is a positive competition and we will resent that pilgrims not liking our service or leaving our Mukeb for another one; we feel regretful. Iraqis also have the same sense of competition ... Such competition leads to more efforts and there is no show-off as this is such a terrible sin that no one dares to fall into it.” (M.A. 37 years old).

Security is yet another extra-institutional consideration which traditionally tribes are responsible for it. Public safety however is ensured by the authorities.

“Security system in Iraq is mostly tribal and if someone appears as a threat to their Mukebs they will fend them off. They struggle hard to secure the entire path. As the tribes are linked with family ties and know each other they co-operate closely in providing security. Iran acts in the hidden layers of security.” (Q. 50 years old)

Dominant Norms

The most significant moral norms regarding personal behavior in Arbaeen field include polite and respectful behavior, avoiding arrogance and selfishness, showing generosity, choosing belief-in

God/Islam- in preference to proficiency, and positive personal traits are preferred to factors like age and gender: “volunteer work environment is transparent and therefore people are remarkably polite there.” (M.A. 37 years old).

Obedying head of the clan and following remarks of faith leaders are also dominant norms in terms of religious authority:

“based on Ayatollah Sisstani’s Fatwa¹ saying ‘during the last ten days of Safar let’s just say hello and avoid staying’, people’s behavior has changed.” (J.F 60 years old).

Socially speaking, the following norms are prevalent: rejecting welfarism and prosperous services, fighting against any form of role inequality in doing different tasks in Mukebs, deconstructing conventional regulations, expenditure planning or service development, promoting and conforming to volunteer spirit of action, rejecting any sort of inviting or ordering people to participate in Arbaeen pilgrimage, and the inclination for multi-national work.

“Khadems though were not responsible in kitchen used to work in kitchen for couple of hours just to develop their personality and prevent the sense of hierarchy”. (A.H. 29 years old).

“previous year we invited six physicians from Lebanon in an effort to offer a multi-national service. We also exhibited the photos of the “defenders of holy shrines” from Axis of Resistance countries.” (S.A. 22 years old).

Management Characteristics

Effectively scheduling different tasks stands among main management characteristics of Arbaeen field. Active year-round fundraising which helps people to be constantly connected to the phenomenon of Arbaeen, describing detailed duties of the first layer Khadems (the most important members in Mukebs) throughout the year, and long term preparations before the ritual are all part of Arbaeen management process. A key fact is that Khadems believe in no superiority over the pilgrims; and therefore, they put needs of the pilgrims first—unlike their usual practice in non-Arbaeen occasions- and arrange their meetings for the period when there is no or few number of pilgrims.

“From dawn prayer to late night at 12 p.m. we were up and when there were no more pilgrims we used to gather for meeting to review and analyze the events and misdoings of that day.” (A.H 29 years old)

Mukebdars usually use soft ways for recruiting and mentoring Khadems. Using pilgrims album instead of application form (already mentioned in this study), resolving conflicts between Khadems by reminding them of moral virtues, and defining punishment as losing the blessing of service for pilgrims are some of the soft methods adopted by Mukebdars in recruitment.

“People are punished with not being allowed to accompany us next year; we replace them with other persons.” (Sh. 45 years old).

They also manage to have the highest harmony with the local environment through exploiting local capacities. As the locals are reluctant to co-operate at other times and on matters other than Arbaeen, managers (Mukebdars) attempt to make adjustments to duration and type of relationship with the Iraqi Khadems taking into account their expectations.

Yet another marvel of Arbaeen field is juxtaposition of individualism and cultural structuralism. That is, it finds some way to link structure to agency. Individualism is so prevalent in Mukebs that when some of the Khadems are replaced, approach of the Mukebs undergoes almost dramatic changes. However, there is a hidden fundamental cultural structure in Mukebs that ensures principles of priority of pilgrims’ needs and rejection of extreme specialization in the changing environment: “at the beginning we initiated the work in a friendly atmosphere, from a time on when number of applications for cooperation surged, we used other criteria that changed the original purpose. Some of the fellows devoted less time, some new persons joined us that did not support the original purpose. We have no skilled scaffold builder yet. Nature of many tasks were changed and shifted from cultural to service.” (A.H. 29 years old).

¹Fatwa, in Islam, a formal ruling or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified legal scholar. Fatwas are usually issued in response to questions from individuals or Islamic courts.

Hidden Plan

Like any other collective social phenomena, behaviors against the mainstream flow can be perceived in Arbaeen pilgrimage as well; few individuals may take advantage of the situation to seek their own benefits or act inconsiderately. Such misbehaviors are referred to as “free riding” in management studies. Arbaeen field hosts a range of different participants from religious tourists with poor understanding of the objectives of Arbaeen to those intending to promote their own religious sect or people attempting to further the Arab-Persian or Shia-Sunni schism. These people propagandizing and advancing their hidden intentions however are submerged by the dominant flow in Arbaeen.

Other unplanned events include contextualization of related culture and skills; e.g. working in Mukebs while trains Khadems with new skills enhances their confidence and strength to tolerate hard conditions and take part in other similar situations like volunteer work (Jihadi)¹ for eliminating deprivation: “I usually don’t work without being appreciated but this experience helps you to practice working without any expectation for a while. You get convinced that you can do something and if you want you can go on... After Arbaeen people develop the required skills and confidence to help others.” (M.M. 35 years old).

Though culture of the first layer Khadems is fairly adjustable with middle age lifestyle, Arbaeen is dominant with youths, yet another unplanned characteristic of this event. Statistic from interviews with Mukebdars and pilgrims proves this fact –young people outnumber the middle-aged ones- and thus it’s worth a separate investigation to detect the reasons behind it. The changes that occur in the way services offered are also unplanned and result of prioritizing pilgrims’ needs and interests, different types of pilgrims, and increasing number of international pilgrims. For instance, Iranian pilgrims’ great concern with personal hygiene has restricted the traditional way of serving tea and coffee in recent years, though it was initially promoted as a symbolic performance during Arbaeen.

Boosting sympathy and strong sense of solidarity among Islamic nations through stressing the notion of “common enemy” is also an unplanned achievement of Arbaeen walk which is mainly pioneered by Iranians and appreciation of local traditions and treating local participants with great respect have been influential in improving this sympathy.

We sum up the section on Participation flow in Arbaeen pilgrimage through the following illustration.

Summing up and Conclusion

Studying Arbaeen collective participation field opens new horizons and uncovers valuable lessons useful for similar convergent phenomena. Some of the findings of our study are as follows.

Participatory measures should be based on internal rather than external benevolence and they need a competitive and inspiring field for action and activism with dramatic and symbolic qualities. This way the Mukebdars’ perpetual challenge of reducing the gap between action and its reward is removed and the simultaneous presence of these two (action and reward) in the supernatural invisible world replaces the challenge.

A significant element in preventing sense of injustice is downgrading and marginalizing the hierarchical point of view while designing alternative processes based on acceptance with mutual respect instead of submission, circulating volunteer tasks, and adopting different roles in different situations; here it is necessary to avoid whatever arises sense of unfairness. This fact gains more importance when there is a sort of dualism, gap, or sense of “otherness” between those seeking participation and those receiving it. Exploiting local capacities and respecting and acknowledging the local culture can be very helpful to harmonize such a situation.

It is essential to abandon out-put oriented evaluation or any policy boasting about results. Multi-cultural and pluralistic policy in line with general values and principles can pave the way for self-actualization of the actors via providing a number of different options to act freely.

¹ Jihadi: Persian term for volunteer religious groups offering different free service to poor people.

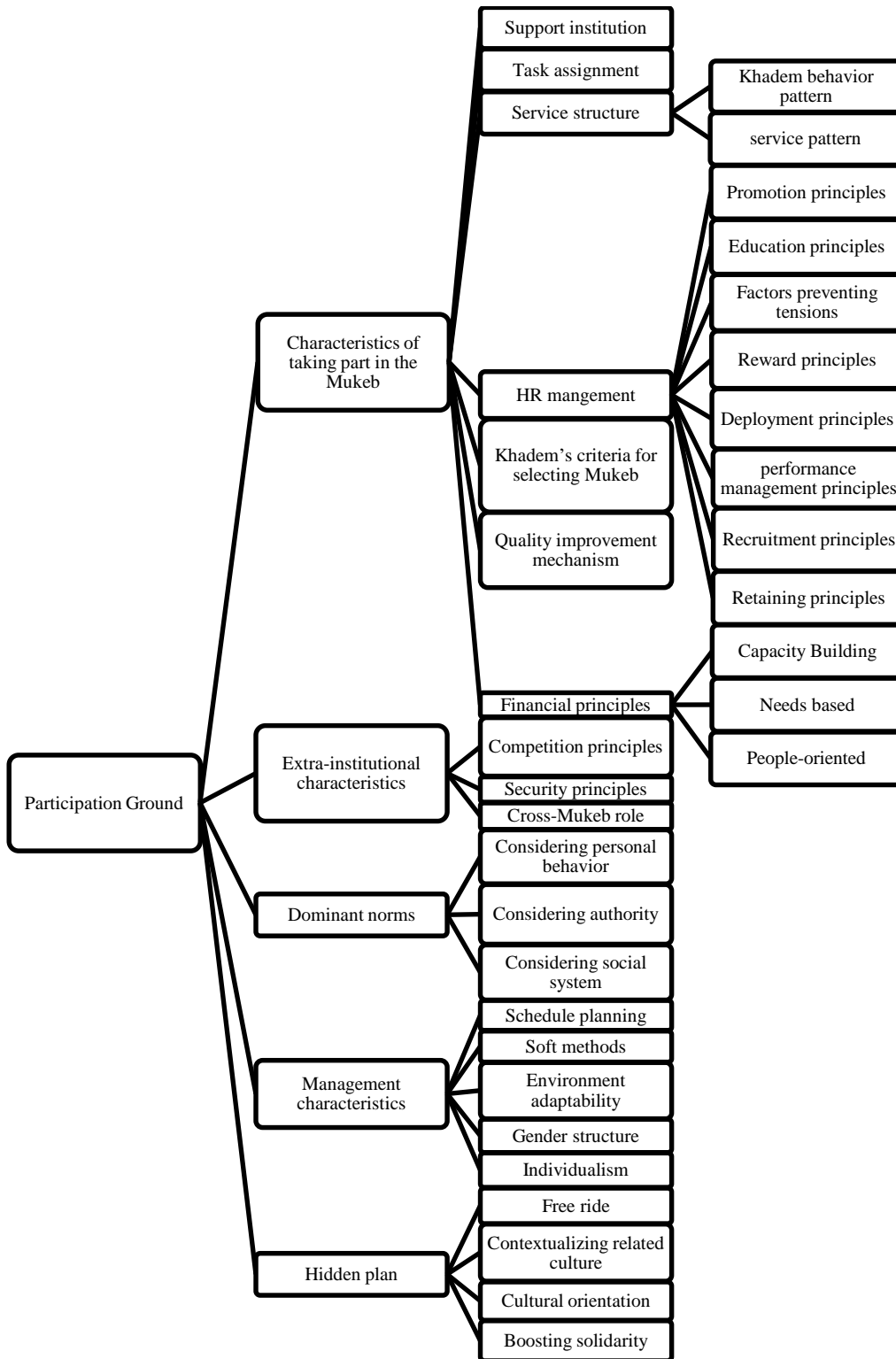


Figure 2: Participation ground

Regarding policy making and implementation, we can take benefit of the dualism of particularism/universalism by giving credit to particularism under universalism and consequently benefiting both ends of the spectrum rather falling on either of the ends. For instance, the national identity can be highlighted and enhanced through and within the Islamic identity.

The only path to increase participation is not to follow the international indicators originated from modern dominant models. On the contrary, taking distance from modernism especially when it comes

to morality can be more fruitful in encouraging people to participation. Treating actors with humble patience, for example, and dealing with their mistakes with utmost flexibility is more persuasive than any other promoting policy in attracting people. Another example is replacement of the system of rewarding with supportive approach and empowerment relying on floating circulation of volunteers.

Regarding policies for social programs requiring participation of people, it is really important to attribute the subject of participation to “social prestige” or “elite figures of the reference groups” so that participation gains honor for the actors and no longer is simply taken as a sort of favor or duty.

Preventing politicization and designing behaviors with no political bias is a core requirement in planning to motivate people with diverse backgrounds to participate in the event.

Local traditional NGOs with a long history of participatory activities are much more successful in directing collective participation than huge newly-established organizations which do not directly involve in the process and only try to manage everything bureaucratically.

Supportive and sympathetic attitude in a step by step training and mentoring process based on simultaneous observation and participation works far better than expensive workshops and formal training programs. Besides, training and educating should go hand in hand and instrumentalism should be disallowed so that the result is not emphasized but the development, desire, and strength of the actor are the most-highlighted. .

The control tool for every phenomenon should be proportional to its nature. Soft phenomenon can be controlled by soft mechanisms; hard and cold tools would not work with them. Extreme specialism prevents actor from perceiving the entirety of the participatory event and paralyzes the normal flow of works. Training multi-functional workforces and keeping all the required procedures and measures - from the input stage to output stage- transparent for every single process meeting certain needs are two factors that can significantly increase the effectiveness and sense of responsibility toward the result of action.

Recruitment process in Mukebs denotes that separate designs are used for different layers of volunteers with different degrees of seriousness and even different criteria. This approach has prevented giving way to exclusivism while helped to retain the desired values.

In people-oriented measures and plans, distribution of resources should be based on demands while sources can be supplied using the capacities of people; the hidden and even unconventional capacities should be identified. Government then should avoid ruling in such situations, but it can be more effective by facilitating the processes keeping in line with the characteristics of participation field and the social and cultural context.

Transcending the structure/agency dualism is another wonder of Arbaeen. It means neither are the individual and their interests sacrificed to structure, nor extreme individualism leads to dominance of personal taste. This has been achieved through commitment to inviolable principles and values rooted in fundamental structures of society and the mindset of the actors.

Adopting severe measures to banish conflicting and unharmonious flows would not yield any result. Fortifying the mainstream flow however can counteract these incompatible flows and cause their automatic fall-off and disappearance of their effects consequently. Hidden plans unintended yet helpful should not be taken for granted as they contain valuable elements effective for increasing participation. We also should take benefit from transcending ethnic, national, and tribal identity and try to create a spiritual workplace.

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