



# **Solutions For Sustainable Participation in Urban Management with An Emphasis on Social Approach: A Case Study of Mashhad**

Seyed Sajjad Sadat Hashemi\*

*PhD student, Department of urbanism, Mashhad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran.*

*Submit Date: 29 March 2023, Accepted Date: 21 December 2023*

## **ABSTRACT**

Deciding to choose the right plan for cities has become one of the serious challenges of urban management. The low efficiency of the previously executed projects induced the use of sustainable social participation of citizens as a way to get out of the crises caused by solving urban problems. This study aimed to explore the necessity of citizens' participation in Mashhad by studying urban models. The main goal of this study was to provide solutions for sustainable participation in the urban management of Mashhad. The research population consisted of citizens of Mashhad and the participants were 383 persons. The data in this descriptive-analytical study were collected using library, documentary, and field (questionnaire) methods. The results of the t-test indicated that the participation rate of citizens in Mashhad in urban management was lower than average. Moreover, the participants' economic, physical, mental, and political participation was lower than the average. The regression data also indicated that out of the 8 tested components, only four components including association membership (NGOs), awareness, powerlessness, and socio-economic base were associated with the level of participation.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Participation, Social Participation, Urban Management, Mashhad*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Problem statement**

A city is a set of many elements and factors. People in cities live individually, as a family, or in groups. Urban places are also divided into three categories: (1) public political places, (2) cultural activities, and (3) economic activities. In simpler terms, urban elements, the manner of people's lives, and urban places are accounted for by a model of the city whereby people live individually, as a family, or in groups in public political places and engage in cultural and economic activities. Regulating relationships and skills needed for living in such places are called urban behaviors. In other words, people establish some relations with themselves, places, and activities and develop some skills [17]

Undoubtedly, playing the citizenship role through commenting, providing suggestions, making decisions, and accepting responsibility in related

work fields involves special requirements, the most important of which is the readiness of citizens to do so because involving and participating in decision-making with people who are at very low levels of preparation has been likened to the ignorant alliance. Furthermore, participation is a process in which people are involved voluntarily in handling urban and municipal affairs provided that they have the ability and motivation for effective intervention. Moreover, participation does not refer to a specific case, but participation implies the active participation of people in all aspects of life (Ibid). Therefore, in modern society, it will not be possible to achieve development without social participation because, without this capital, the use of other types of capital will not optimally contribute to the development process [1]

\*Corresponding author: [sajadhashemi56@yahoo.com](mailto:sajadhashemi56@yahoo.com)



Currently, citizens play an important role by participating in urban affairs. Citizens as those who live in the city have the right to participate in city affairs to have a dynamic and stable city. Since people are better aware of the problems of their city and neighborhood than any manager and expert, they can play an important role in creating and developing a sustainable city. Sustainable development is associated with people's participation and focuses on poverty reduction. Participation involves transparency, the openness of the community space, and multi-voicedness in the public domain, and it requires a context where people can be influential in making decisions that affect their destiny. Citizens' participation contributes to growth, enables community members, and induces creativity, leading to the feeling of belonging to open and broad discussions and improving sustainable urban development and urban management [14]

The area explored in this study is Mashhad located in Razavi Khorasan Province. The growing trend of population and urbanization and the emergence of numerous economic, social, and environmental problems in this city followed by the inefficiency of the management and control methods of urban development to solve the urban challenges and problems have created unstable conditions in the city. These problems have in turn led to the development of informal settlements and slums, the physical expansion of the city, increased costs of creating infrastructure, and social and cultural problems, such as the increase in insecurity and crimes, urban vandalism, and an increase in the class gap between the rich and the poor.

To overcome these problems and improve urban management, we have offered some sustainable participation solutions in this study. Citizen participation as a social action is one of the most important factors contributing to achieving sustainable urban development. Social participation is not only collective work, but a type of collective thinking, collective participation, collective decision-making, collective production, and ultimately collective use. which increases citizens' understanding and awareness of issues related to themselves and their mutual need for each other. It also helps to create a better community and empowers the community members to coordinate the actions of individuals to develop and improve valuable collective goods, preconditions for using citizens' potential financial, scientific, and intellectual abilities. As pointed out by many theorists such as Rousseau,

creates better governance, and also increases the opportunities to develop smart policies, and helps sustainable urban development. Furthermore, sustainable development helps to preserve the environment and on the other hand to preserve the social and economic structures of the city [14]

To this end, this study seeks to find out themes that will help to identify the most important factors and solutions for sustainable social participation in urban management in Mashhad. Following the literature, sustainable social participation directly affects the improvement of urban management. Besides, given the impact of sustainable social participation on the performance of urban management, the main objective of the present study is to find some effective solutions for sustainable social participation in the management of the city of Mashhad.

## 1.2 Significance of the study

We start this section with a statement and question: People should be taken into account from a realistic and serious perspective. Why should people be taken into account? Because people are the main and final source of any wealth. If they are neglected, if they are voted into the hands of despot experts and planners, no effort will be fruitful anymore [15]

Since one the important goals of urban management, at the macro level, is the sustainable development of cities. Thus, paying attention to the role of urban management to enhance citizens' participation in urban programs can contribute to the interaction of other organizations in the structure of urban management and as a result, improve sustainable development. Participation is a means to achieve human development goals and an independent value in the development of urban communities. Citizens' stable and active participation in implementing urban projects leads to the successful implementation of the project. Thus, public participation is an important factor this is addressed in this study. Participation in collective life is considered a natural right and has been emphasized in urban management in recent decades. Currently, participation plays a major role in all areas, and citizens, individually and as a group, seek to have control over their destinies. The most important aspect of participation is to provide the necessary

not only do people have the duty to participate in the

community, but the community must also have feedback for individuals so that they can create and sustain the grounds of belonging and fulfilling their obligations[7]. We cannot blame the citizens merely for their fault. Certainly, the institutions in the community have also failed to create the necessary platform for the social participation of the citizens. Furthermore, entrusting the citizens with responsibility requires the spirit of participation and collective work and these requirements have not been yet established in our community. Moreover, public participation should be incorporated into urban planning laws to achieve more favorable outcomes for improving urban management in Mashhad.

### 1.3 Research objectives

**Main objective:** To identify the most important factors and solutions of sustainable social participation for urban management in Mashhad

#### Specific objectives

1. Identifying the most important obstacles to sustainable social participation in urban management in Mashhad.
2. Identifying and evaluating strategies to cope with the obstacles to sustainable social participation in Mashhad.
3. Evaluating the effects of sustainable social participation on urban management in Mashhad
4. Identifying solutions and models for creating platforms for participation and attracting social participation for the urban management in Mashhad

### 1.4 Geographical location

The concentration of population in a few metropolises is the first outcome of the environmental problems that have manifested in various forms of air, water, soil, and noise pollution. From a socioeconomic perspective, the rapid growth of urbanization and the expansion of cities, especially in the big cities and metropolises in Iran, have caused many challenges such as of uses and service facilities in different urban areas[6]

### 1.5 Literature review

Sheibani (2003) defined participation as the process of sharing in decisions that affect life. Although this concept was more or less proposed

The city of Mashhad, the capital of Razavi Khorasan Province, is located in the northeast of Iran, 966 kilometers away from Tehran. Mashhad metropolis is located at a latitude of 36.260462 and a longitude of 59.616755 in Khorasan Razavi Province based on the latest country divisions[6]

Following the 2006-2016 population and housing

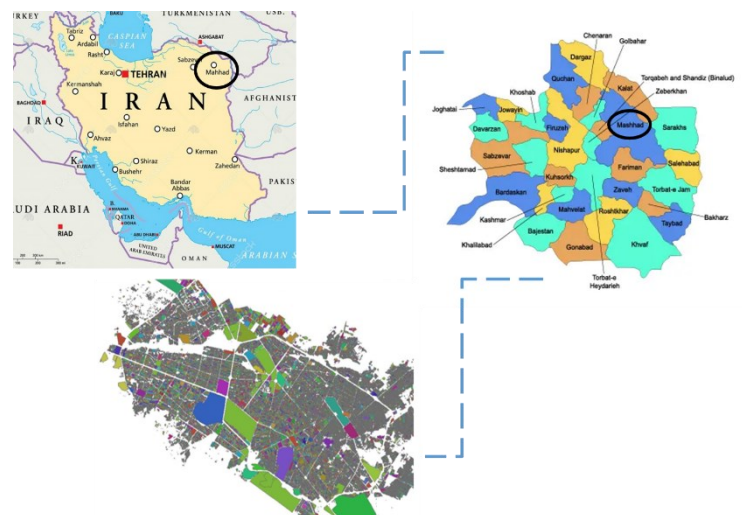


Figure 1. The location of Mashhad

census, the average population growth rate from 2006 to 2011 in the city was 1.7%, reading to 2.8% from 2011 to 2016 due to unplanned and unstable urban development<sup>2</sup>. The neighborhoods in Mashhad have very unfavorable conditions due to 30% marginal dwellers (919,870 persons out of the 3,062,442 population of the city), 17.2% of the population living in worn-out areas (526,779 persons), 60% of residential units not being connected to the sewer network, 83 days of unhealthy weather conditions, and serving as the migration destination of many villagers. These conditions required effective planning and attention (Ibid).

unbalanced distribution and inadequacy of services and facilities, significant differences in land and housing prices and living conditions followed by class differences and social and economic segregation. These social and economic problems have been reflected in the per capita population characteristics

and used by thinkers of the past centuries, it has recently assumed new dimensions in various applications, One of the new dimensions is the social participation of children, which has been raised in recent decades with a reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Social

participation can be addressed to expand and develop capabilities and accept responsibility in economic and social life in connection with citizenship. Education based on citizenship rights and responsibilities is considered a relatively new step toward children's social participation, which can contribute to the development of the community by following participatory programs and projects. Using theoretical approaches and empirical studies, the authors tried to develop a framework to account for the connection between participation and citizenship with a focus on education and experience.

Norouzi and Bakhtiari (2019) addressed a form of rational thinking that can lead to the growth of participation and its mission is to make people participate in their destinies. The development and continuation of participation require establishing many conditions. This study investigated socio-political participation and the factors influencing it in Khodabande, a city in Zanzan Province, from a sociological perspective. The participants were 400 persons aged 30 to 60 living in the city. The data were collected through interviews based on a questionnaire. The findings indicated the level of social-political participation was medium to low in Khodabande.

Rahnama (2012) developed a paradigm of urban management improvement in Mashhad and analyzed the functions, roles, and challenges of the municipal organization, the main executive body of urban management after the establishment of Islamic councils, to respond to citizens' demands and present new solutions for the reconstruction of the municipality under new public governance conditions following a new system of urban management with a focus the interaction of four factors: citizens (individuals and NGOs), city Islamic council, the municipality, and the state, including the legislative, executive, and judicial systems and their affiliations. The study compared the new urban management model in changing environmental and unstable conditions with the traditional and non-dynamic structure of the municipality. The authors developed the dual on a variety of parameters tries to make human activities more meaningful and understandable. City-oriented territories are the product of functional and physical relationships, and the expansion of these relationships leads to the complexity of the perception of each of the spatial phenomena and regional planning. Addressing the concept of city-centered territories in spatial planning contributes to reducing administrative

model of the bureaucratic structure for permanent and daily activities and the temporary project matrix structure for medium-term, temporary, and unstable activities.

Sawadi and Zahidi (2015) conducted a descriptive-analytical study using library and documentary data to address the important role of citizens' culture in urban affairs. This study aimed to investigate the position of citizen participation in urban planning and address the concepts of participation in this field. The results indicated that one of the important components of modern urban society is related to how to realize citizen participation, and this issue has often faced urban planners and managers with a big challenge.

Lahijanlian and Shiabeigi (2015) studied the barriers to citizen social participation in the urban environment. They stated that participation is a comprehensive process in which all people and groups are active and involved. According to Abhoff and Cohen, participation means the involvement of individuals in decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and distribution of the resulting benefits to individuals. According to Terry's theory, all people with a certain share of benefits should have a participation share. This study aimed to assess the barriers to citizens' social participation in the urban environment using SWOT analysis and propose effective solutions for the sustainable improvement of the environment. The data in this survey-descriptive study were collected using questionnaires.

Ziyari et al. (2019) assessed the role of citizens' participation in increasing the success of urban management in the Shiraz metropolis using a quantitative and survey approach. The data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire administered to 242 persons. The sample size was estimated using Cochran's formula.

Ghasemi Akhgari (2022) examined the spatial nature of city-oriented territories in regional planning in the Mashhad metropolis. Spatial planning with a focus

and political restrictions in provincial divisions in defining and recognizing the nature of spatial units.

Jamali Haji Hassan Sofla and Nematollahi Bonab (2021) evaluated the role of citizens and their social participation in achieving goals. Citizen participation as a social action is one of the most important factors contributing to achieving sustainable urban development. Social

participation is not only collective work but a type of collective thinking, collective participation, collective decision-making, collective production, and ultimately collective use, which increases citizens' understanding and awareness of issues related to themselves and mutual need for each other, to create a better community. It helps and strengthens the abilities of a community to coordinate the actions of the members to develop and improve valuable collective works, creates better governance, and also increases the opportunities to develop smart policies and contribute to sustainable urban development. Sustainable development, on one hand, helps to preserve the environment and on the other hand, to preserve the social and economic structures of the city. The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors contributing to expanding citizens' participation in sustainable urban development.

### 1.6 Hypothesis

1. It seems that the level of citizens' participation in urban issues in Mashhad is at a low level.
2. It seems that the strengthening of public institutions and neighborhood councils in Mashhad will improve sustainable participation projects in the urban management process.

### 1.7 Research methodology

This descriptive case study was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach. It employed a set of methods to describe the conditions or phenomena in question. It also used an analytical approach to assess the role of sustainable participation of Mashhad citizens in urban management in different dimensions and evaluate the existing situation. Besides, this study is an applied study in terms of its objectives. It used an analytical/survey/correlation design. The theoretical framework of the study and the research indicators were developed based on a review of the literature to assess the role of citizens and their sustainable social participation in urban management. It also examined the existing conditions using field data and observations. The research population consisted of citizens in Mashhad. The sample size was estimated as 383 persons using Cochran's formula. The questionnaire used to collect the data contained three sections. The first section measured citizens' characteristics and the second section assessed the

dependent variable. Citizen participation was measured in five dimensions: physical participation (5 items), intellectual and subjective participation (5 items), political participation (4 items), economic participation (4 items), and social participation (6 items).

The items in the third section measured the independent variables and their relationships with the dependent variable. The independent variables assessed in this study were socioeconomic base (29 items), association membership (7 items), self-efficacy (6 items), powerlessness (6 items), trust (3 items), cost-benefit (2 items), social awareness (4 items) and satisfaction with urban services (9 items). The questionnaires were administered in different areas of Mashhad, 150 questionnaires were distributed in the city center (Saman District), and the remaining questionnaires were distributed in different neighborhoods including Nodeh, Khaja Rabieh, Ahmadabad, and Sajjad Boulevard. The collected data were analyzed with SPSS software using descriptive and inferential statistics (one-sample t-test and multivariate regression analysis). The items in the questionnaire were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, it was piloted on a random sample of 40 persons in Mashhad and its internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Sustainable participation

Hall believes that the conflict between pragmatic and mainly philosophical views of participation has caused participation to become a multifaceted concept with different meanings over time<sup>10</sup>. Participation is a comprehensive process in which all people and groups are active and involved. According to Abhouf and Couhen, participation means the involvement of individuals in the decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and distribution of the resulting benefits to individuals. According to Terry's theory, all people with a certain share of benefits should have a share in participation<sup>5</sup>. Successful examples of dynamic societies in which people experience life in a qualitative and desirable sense have reached their goal only with the participation of citizens and the institutionalization of citizenship rights [4]. Oxford English Dictionary defines participation as "the act or reality of participating, having or forming a part of something" [8]. In another definition,

participation is “the mental and emotional involvement of individuals in group situations that induces them to help each other to achieve group goals. The idea of citizens' participation in city administration has a long history and dates back to the founding of the city [3].

## 2.2 Conceptualizing participation

Gautri sees participation as a general, integrated, multiple, multi-dimensional, and multicultural processes aiming to bring all people to play a role in all stages of development. Public participation is realized with four main requirements: Ideology of participation (normative dimension), participatory institutions (organizational dimension), sufficient information, and necessary professional materials and capabilities. According to Gautri, the establishment of these requirements leads to institutionalization and stabilization of the process of public participation [9]. Accordingly, the ideology of participation should at least emphasize the fair distribution of income and facilities and self-governing development because, without the fair division of labor and economic power, there will be no possibility of real participation of the lower social classes. Gautri's second requirement is to create institutions for participation, but the common feature of all these institutions is to decentralize power and direct it to the lower social levels. Social organizations such as municipalities, associations, councils, and village cooperatives are institutions that facilitate participation. However, if there is no system for informing, the ideology of participation or cooperative institutions will not be effective. The lack of financial and human

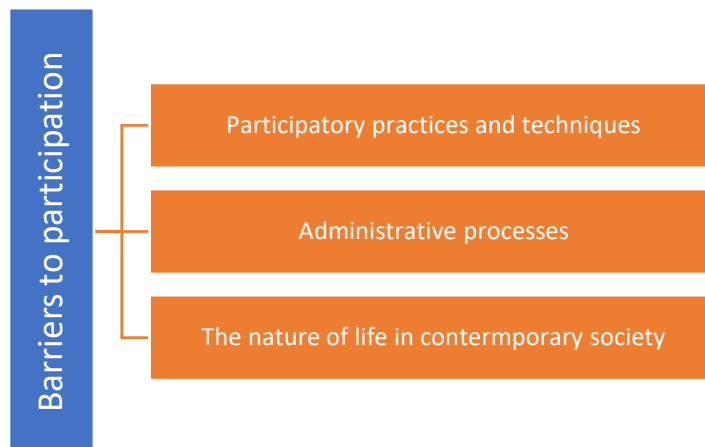
resources, especially among lower social classes, is considered an obstacle to the efficiency of special institutions to guarantee participation. If people don't have access to the financial resources and necessary powers to implement their favorite projects, participation will quickly give way to apathy and the process of social development will face a serious obstacle. Accordingly, it can be argued that “participation is not only one of the goals of social development, but it is part of the process of social development. If people have full participation in making decisions that affect their well-being and also in the implementation of these decisions, social development will be facilitated”. The mobilization of citizens not only fosters the improvement in social conditions but strengthens local social cohesion. Following new approaches to development, spontaneous, active, and organized participation is an effective mechanism for community development. In other words, the strategy behind public participation is freeing people's energy intending to convince them to make decisions and spontaneously implement them [8].

## 2.3 Obstacles to urban participation

The barriers to participation are detailed as follows:

Administrative barriers to participation

- (1) Centralized planning, (2) ineffective mechanisms and distribution, (3) lack of local coordination, (4) ineffective technology used in the intended project, (5) irrelevant content of the project, and (6) lack of local structures [16]:



**Figure 2.** Barriers to participation

## 2.4 Urban management

The term urban management has a wide variety of meanings. However, a summary of the provided definitions of urban management suggests that the urban management system is a broad organization consisting of a system of formal and informal elements and components relevant and effective in various social, economic, and physical domains of urban life to manage, guide, and control the all-round and sustainable development of the city. This system is currently facing many challenges, but now the citizens are demanding to improve the quality of life in all its dimensions. An inclusive society with a dynamic economy, respect for social justice, a stable and at the same time diverse culture, sustainable development, and a safe urban environment for all are among the general demands of the citizens. They want a more open, comprehensive, and efficient urban management system. Thus, it is necessary to face the challenges with new thinking and create a balance between traditional and new approaches. With the departure from the traditional approach, urban management has currently undergone fundamental changes. Besides, cities are managed in such a manner that they can provide the well-being and comfort of their residents. The current urban management system in the world has extensive structures and plays the most important role in the success of all kinds of urban development plans and projects[14].

### 2.5 The role of public participation in urban management

Public participation involves surveying non-governmental organizations and citizens about the main objectives of urban projects and the various stages of preparation, review, and implementation of projects, and their opinions are put into practice in projects if they seem rational[12].

The change in urban management theories contributed to a consensual and ultimately collaborative approach to people's involvement in abiding) to expect the promotion of urban culture and conscious and active participation of citizens?[13]. Principle 100 of Iran's Constitution highlights the role of direct participation of citizens and supervision of the councils for the rapid advancement of social, economic, construction, health, cultural, educational, and other welfare programs. Furthermore, the experience of the councils shows that despite the provisions made in the laws for citizens' participation, this participation has not yet developed objectively and

the decision-making process for projects and programs. Each approach has its characteristics. The rational approach to urban management and planning is goal-oriented and only focuses on the final product and does not pay enough attention to the changes that inevitably occur in various social, economic, cultural, and political domains of society. In consensus management and planning, plans and projects do not have the necessary flexibility due to some political considerations to serve the interests of some influential groups. The detailed approaches are modified based on the planning process so that its product responds to management and planning challenges in urban development[17]. Citizenship and urban management have an active nature and the urban structure has a passive nature. Humans have a citizenry nature and require a civic life, and urban management is responsible for organizing and managing the urban structure[11].

### 2.6 Challenges of citizens' participation in urban management

Studies have indicated that policymakers' views on attracting real participation of citizens and also citizens' tendencies towards participation are reflected at different levels and in different ways. In all existing models, high levels of participation are associated with a more realistic distribution of power, and low levels of participation are only a deceptive display of believing in participation, which in practice does not assign any role to citizens and decisions related to their issues and their environment are taken without their involvement, and as a result, it does not leave an incentive for citizens' participation in the next stages of project implementation and evaluation. Here, this basic question is: Does the structure of urban management and urban governance in practice have the characteristics of desirable urban governance (effective and efficient, transparent, responsive, collaborative, consensus-oriented, fair and law-

experimentally possibly due to weak financial abilities and restricted human resources in the municipalities, or maybe because of the feeling that the city does not belong to the citizens. Besides, city officials do not pay attention to citizens' opinions and other problems have weakened the people's participation in the administration of the city's affairs. Another bitter reality is the lack of sufficient political and social development among the citizens, especially in deprived areas.

The low level of education, age characteristics, restrictions on women, especially in less developed areas, citizens' unawareness of the benefits of participation, etc. are among the factors that contribute greatly to the lack of success. To the extent that citizens have a stronger sense of participation, their participation will increase to the same extent[17].

**2.7 Factors affecting sustainable participation and participation**

Many scholars have addressed the factors affecting participation. From the perspective of social psychology, the feeling of powerlessness that exists in people towards an organization or institution is effective in their actions before that organization. Accordingly, macro-level theories such as those proposed by Karl Marx, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber have addressed the alienation of humans towards their hand-made creations and their feeling of powerlessness against them[12]. The empirical studies in this field (Melvin Seaman, Neil Seaman, and Mary Levin) have considered participation as a function of the same feeling, indicating that the citizens see the municipality as an institution not related to themselves and an independent force against which they have no power and this institution has dominated them[13].

Homans has analyzed participation based on exchange theory. According to this theory, what induces a behavior and makes it stable is the reward

for doing it[12]. He considers behaviors as the outcome of cost-benefit analysis. Participation is institutionalized when the resulting benefits outweigh the expenses. A person participates in doing a task when they receive a reward for it, it is valuable for them, and they pay fewer costs for it[11].

According to Huntington and Nelson, political and social participation is a function of the economic-social development process, which affects the extension of participation in two ways. First, the acquisition of higher social status through social mobility empowers an individual and facilitates the attitude toward their abilities in influencing decision-making. This attitude paves the way for participation in politics and social activities. To this end, social status ultimately affects participation through its impact on feeling powerfulness or feeling powerlessness. Moreover, literacy has a greater effect on participation than other social status variables. The development process also affects participation through organizational factors; A person's membership in groups and organizations (professional and trade unions, advocacy groups, special interests, etc.) increases the possibility of participation in social and political activities. Thus, membership is more important in societies where opportunities for individual mobility are more limited. Various theorists in the field of participation have discussed the factors affecting participation and the tendency for participation, as detailed in Table [1].

**Table 1.** Factors affecting participation

Factors	Impact	Theorist(s)
Powerlessness	Negative	Olsen, Dwight Dean, Seaman, Marx, Alavi Tabar (2000)
Effectiveness	Positive	Albert Bandura and Dahl
Good socioeconomic position	Positive	Inglehart (1994), Axelrod (1950) - Wilson & Mazik (1997), Huntington & Nelson
Awareness/knowledge	Positive	Taleb (1997)
Benefits and rewards	Positive	Rational choice theory (Saeedi, 2003), Homans & Ritzer (2013)
Association membership	Positive	Gomson, Sales, Myron Wiener, Alan Thorne
Social trust	Positive	Giddens, Lohmann, Barber, Driscoll, Inglehart
Satisfaction with urban services	Positive	Grunberg



### 2.8 Strategies and suggestions to improve citizens' participation in metropolitan management

In participatory planning, special attention is paid to the role of power and owners of power (citizens and city officials) in the process of decision-making and metropolitan management. Thus, by taking into account the existing mechanisms, a step can be taken to promote citizens' participation. The communities where there is a spirit of participation will have more success in the development, evolution, and optimal use of its resources and facilities. In line with the objective of the present study, the following solutions are proposed:

- Changing the authoritarian attitude of city officials and empowering citizens.
- Strengthening social trust to achieve development and estimate citizens' participation in urban affairs.
- Creating motivation for collective activities and eliminating deprivation following the requirements for establishing social justice in the city.
- Launching a think tank to take advantage of citizens' intellectual consultations and forming workgroups related to urban affairs.
- Encouraging group activities and creating cooperative slogans by municipalities and providing firm support to the private sector.
- Focusing on group education instead of individual education to promote citizenship culture.
- Participation through civil society and promoting the development
- Hiring young professionals along with experienced professionals for coherent urban planning.

- Criticizing the performance of city officials and supporting the writers and thinkers.

The most fundamental idea underlying participation is the acceptance of the principle of equality of people. accordingly, participation emphasizes three basic values:

- Sharing people in power and authority
- Allowing people to control their destiny
- Creating opportunities for advancement for people at lower social levels [12].

Accordingly, it can be argued that what is extremely important in the sustainable participation of people in social affairs and the improvement of urban management is empathy, consensus, cooperation, and a suitable environment for participation. To attract people's participation in urban affairs, it is necessary to sympathize with and support them in carrying out any task. Besides, providing the opportunity for discussions about the subject matter facilitates reaching a consensus with people and then asking for their cooperation in carrying out that task. This process can lead to better urban management. To provide support, it is necessary to emphasize legitimate needs based on social needs. Raising public awareness about the benefits of participation and using effective mass media and face-to-face

### 3. Data analysis and findings

#### 3.1 Field observation and interview data

The relationship between citizens of Nodeh and Samen neighborhoods in Mashhad with urban institutions

The researcher listed to recorded interviews with the citizens. Then, the most frequent statements were extracted. Afterward, the content of the interviews was analyzed using qualitative content analysis with an interpretive

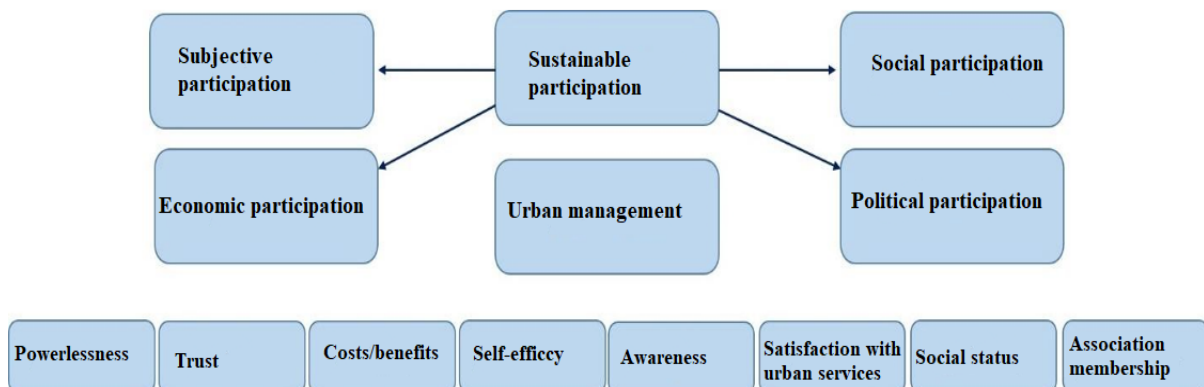


Figure 3. The theoretical framework of the study

into account the field observation, the factors hindering citizens' participation mostly due to their behavioral patterns were extracted and analyzed separately.

An analysis of the content of the interviews conducted in the Nodeh and Samen neighborhoods highlighted the citizens' attitudes toward the decisions and actions taken by Mashhad Municipality. The participants reported a kind of passivity and indifference or were waiting for the fulfillment of the decisions taken by the municipality and urban managers: *"For about ten years, the municipality has decided to reconstruct and renovate the worn-out areas in Nodeh Neighborhood. But the situation is getting worse day by day"*. The residents of the neighborhood do not consider themselves contributors to those decisions

and projects and serve mostly as the obedient audience watching the events and changes. Thus, citizens' expectations from the management institutions are mostly related to the permanent relationship and interaction between the government and Iranian citizens from the past until now, and these expectations can be traced to this one-sided interaction.

### 3.2 Descriptive findings

The participants in this study were 383 persons including 59% men and 41% women. Besides, 56.7% of the participants were married and 44.3% of them were single. The data also indicated 4% of the participants had a Ph.D. degree, 23% of them held a master's degree, 57% of the participants had a bachelor's degree, and 16% of them had lower education. The results also indicated 19% of the respondents were unemployed, 18% were self-employed, 7% were retired, 20.3% were housewives, and 36.7% were public employees.

**Table 2.** The Cronbach's alpha values for the questionnaire items

Indicators	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Physical participation	6	0.76
Subjective participation	5	0.70
Political participation	4	0.80
Economic participation	4	0.71
Social participation	6	0.71
Satisfaction with urban managers and services	7	0.67
Benefits/costs	2	0.80
Powerlessness	6	0.74
Effectiveness	4	0.79
Good socioeconomic position	31	0.71
Awareness/knowledge	5	0.69
Benefits and rewards	6	0.72
Association membership	3	0.74

The Cronbach's alpha values for all variables confirmed the acceptable reliability of the instrument. The corresponding coefficients for all variables were around 0.70 or higher and were acceptable. The data indicated 31% of the respondents were living in Mashhad for less than 5 years, 35.5% were living in the city for 5-10 years,

45.2% for 10-20 years, and 14.3% were living in the city for more than 30 years. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normality of the data. As shown in Table 3, the significance level is greater than 0.05, confirming the normality of the data. Thus, the data can be analyzed using parametric tests.

**Table 3.** The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

Variable	KS	Sig.	Result
Sustainable participation	1.000	0.270	Normal

**Parametric tests**

The tests used for continuous observations (interval variables) are called parametric tests (because the distribution of continuous variables can be measured using the mean, which is one of the parameters of the statistical population, these tests are called parametric). The distribution of the variable should be close to the normal curve. Parametric tests are tests that have high statistical power and the ability to deal with data collected in complex designs. In these tests, the data follow a normal distribution (such as the t-test). Parametric tests (Z, F, and t-test) are based on assumptions about the distribution of the statistical population and the parameters of the statistical population.

*Assessing the level of sustainable participation of citizens*

Hypothesis 1: The level of citizens' participation in urban issues in Mashhad is low.

To test this hypothesis, first, the items related to each construct were combined and analyzed using the t-test. The corresponding values for sustainable physical participation, subjective participation, political participation, economic participation, and social participation are 2.63, 2.74, 2.17, 2.67, and 3.06, respectively. The values less than 3 confirm the hypothesis and show the low level of sustainable participation in Mashhad. The total value for participation is 2.69, which is lower than the average.

**Table 4.** The results of the t-test

Variable	Mean	t-value	df	Sig.	Std. deviation	CI (95%)	
						Upper boundary	Lower boundary
Social participation	3.06	13.792	351	0	0.708	0.5948	0.4462
Economic participation	2.67	4.744	351	0	0.724	0.2592	0.1072
Political participation	2.17	-8.137	351	0	0.747	-0.2463	-0.4033
Subjective participation	2.74	6.755	351	0	0.778	0.3622	0.1987
Physical participation	2.63	1.060	351	0.290	0.791	0.1277	-0.0382
Total participation	2.69	6.153	351	0	0.504	0.2180	0.1125

Regression analysis is one of the widely used methods in socio-economic studies. This method is closely related to correlation and is generally used simultaneously in studies. Regression analysis enables the research to predict changes in the dependent variable through independent variables and determine the contribution of each of the independent variables in explaining the dependent variable. This article is devoted to the overview of regression analysis as one of the most widely used statistical methods.

*Multiple regression analysis (association membership)*

Hypothesis 2: Strengthening the public institutions in Mashhad in sustainable partnership projects will improve the urban management process.

To identify the factors related to the dependent variable, step-by-step regression was used. For this purpose, all the variables that could theoretically affect the dependent variable, i.e. participation, were entered into the regression equation, and then the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable was investigated. According to the results, out of 8 variables assessed in this study, only four variables including association membership, awareness, powerlessness, and

public institutions (the basis for social participation) are related to the level of participation. As shown in the table below, the value of the adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) for association membership is equal to 0.179, indicating that 17.9% of variances in citizen participation can be explained by association membership (membership in institutions). Besides, the beta coefficient of 0.394 means that for an increase of one standard deviation in

This variable, the effect of public participation will increase by 0.394 standard deviations.

In the next step, the awareness variable was entered into the regression model. The value of the adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was increased to 0.278, indicating the 27.8% of variances in participants can be explained by the dependent variables entered into the model. In addition, the standardized regression coefficient (99% CI;  $P < 0.01$ ) was equal to 0.256, indicating

that for an increase of one standard deviation in the awareness variable, its effect on participation will increase by 0.256 standard deviations.

**Table 5.** The results of regression analysis

Variable	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.	R2	F	Sig.
	B	Standard error	$\beta$					
Constant				10.902	0.00			0.00
Association membership	0.972	0.109	0.349	8.819	0.00	0.179	77.552	0.00
Awareness	0.864	0.149	0.253	5.510	0.00	0.271	67.202	0.00
Social status	0.179	0.089	0.097	2.149	0.00	0.316	40.530	0.00
Powerlessness	-0.342	0.093	-0.163	-3.672	0.00	0.302	51.230	0.00

In the third step, the powerlessness variable was entered into the regression equation. The adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) increased to 0.302 with the inclusion of this variable. Besides, since the F value (51.330) is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), the independent variables entered in the equation can explain the changes in the dependent variable. Moreover, the beta coefficient is equal to -0.166 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that as the powerless variable

decreases by one standard deviation, its effect will increase by -0.166 standard deviations. In the fourth step, socioeconomic status was entered into the equation. As a result, the adjusted coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) increased to 0.316, showing that 31.6% of the total variance of the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.

Since the F-value (40.053) is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), the independent variables can predict the changes in participation in urban affairs. Besides, as can be seen in the table above, the most effective variable that affects participation is association membership (creating institutions to support participation). Hence, the hypothesis that creating popular institutions is the most effective measure is confirmed.

**4. Conclusion**

A city is a living being and a dynamic and growing system that has undergone major changes in its growth process. Thus, the development and changes in cities are among the most important

phenomena of recent times. However, urbanization has not always been associated with the development and has had many ups and downs in the development process, leading to many social, economic, and physical problems. For this reason, deciding to choose the most effective design in the cities has become one of the basic challenges of urban management. Hence, choosing a suitable design for the cities and towns in Mashhad has become one of the basic challenges of urban management. The initial urban management projects in the municipalities of Mashhad, despite limited effectiveness and efficiency and gaining a lot of experience in project implementation, in practice could not achieve maximum efficiency in fulfilling the planned cultural development and human participation. The disregard for cultural and social factors in urban management plans, lack of conformity of urban development plans with public needs and desires, implementation of projects without regard to people's scientific needs assessment, and threatening the interests of citizens, low participation of people or one-dimensional participation of people, underestimating the role of people's sustainable social participation, lack of comprehensive field studies have caused these limited projects not to be implemented with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. To this end, managers have resorted to citizens' collective participation, as a way to get out of the deadlock in solving the problems and challenges of Mashhad's urban management. Although sustainable social participation is very important and fundamental, its application is not easily possible. Based on research findings, one of the ways to achieve this is to use the urban management experiences of advanced countries and cities. However, the use of experiences should

not mean imitating them, and this strategy should be implemented with an awareness of the existing contexts in Mashhad. Moreover, the main requirement for the success of participatory programs is the belief of policymakers, planners, and city managers in the positive effect of citizens' sustainable participation in solving urban issues and problems.

## 5. Suggestions and solutions

- Creating specialized education and survey platforms for people's awareness of city affairs in order to improve urban life
- Identifying and organizing non-governmental organization's opinion exchange meetings and defining a targeted mechanism with the city managers and advisors in the direction of the participation of different strata and deciles with the aim of promoting participatory planning and future decisions of the city
- Creating a website and using the platform of virtual space to solicit opinions and establish relationships and move towards electronic municipality to attract people's participation and trust and improve management performance
- Continuity of the sector based on the criteria of social justice by creating motivation for collective activities and removing existing restrictions
- Providing incentives such as reducing municipal fees or applying discounts in order to gain trust for citizens who are more involved in the management of city and neighborhood affairs

## Reference

1. Aghajani, H. & Taghavi, M. (2019). Spatial analysis of sustainable city indicators in Mashhad, *Geographical Studies of Dry Areas*, 10(37), pp. 23-39.
2. Mashhad Statistical Yearbook. The Deputy of Human Capital Planning and Development of Mashhad Municipality with the supervision of Statistics, Analysis, and Performance Evaluation Department, 2017.
3. Ziyari, J., Beikmohammadi, H., & Rezaei Kochi, M. (2019). Investigating the role of citizens' participation in increasing the success of urban management: A case study of Shiraz metropolis. *Urban Research and Planning Quarterly*, 1(83), p. 51-62.
4. Mohseni, R. A. (2004). Social aspects of metropolitan management with emphasis on citizens' participation, *Farda Management Quarterly*, 2(7-8). pp. 83-90.
5. Lahijanian, A. & Shiabeigi, Sh. (2015) Obstacles to citizen social participation in the urban environment using SWOT analysis and providing suitable solutions for the sustainable improvement of the environment. *Environmental Science & Technology*, 17(4), pp. 149-166.
6. Ghasemi, J. & Akhgari, M. (2022). The spatial nature of the city-oriented lands in regional planning in metropolises: A case study of Mashhad metropolis. *The*

- 15th National Conference on Geography and Environment, pp. 1-14.
7. Sheibani, M. (2003). Theoretical issues of children's social participation. *Social Welfare Journal*, 7, pp. 13-30.
8. Ghadiri, L. (2011). Social factors affecting the social participation of students: A case study of students of Shiraz University. Master's thesis: Shiraz University.
9. Nowrozi, F. & Bakhtiari, M. (2009). Social participation and social factors affecting it. *Strategy Quarterly*, 18(53), pp. 269-249.
10. Ghafari, G. & Niazi, M. (2007). *Sociology of participation* (1st edition).
11. Tavasoli, G. A. (1990). *Sociological theories*. Tehran: SAMT Press.
12. Alavi Tabar, A. R. (2000). *Citizen participation patterns in the administration of city affairs (global and Iranian experiences)*. Tehran: Organization of Municipalities in Iran.
13. Hashemian, M., Behravan, H., & Noghani, M. (2013). Factors affecting citizens' participation in Mashhad city administration. *Bi-Quarterly Journal of Social Sciences, Faculty of Literature and Human Sciences, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad*, 1, pp. 173-19
- 14-jamali haji hassan sofla, Eynollah& Nematollahi Bonab, Simindokht(2021). Investigating and evaluating the role of citizens and their social participation in achieving sustainable urban development goals (case study: Tabriz city), *Journal of Urban Environmental Policy*, PP: 95- 112
- 15-Schumacher, EF (1986), *Small is beautiful*, translated by Ali Ramin, Soroush Publications, second edition.
- 16-Manfred, Josef, 2011, *Contextualization an Approach to Improve Participation in Urban Planning Processes*.
- 17- Sawadi, A. & Zahidi, M. (2015). Strategies to increase the role of citizens' participation in the development of metropolitan management. *The International Conference on Modern Research in Civil Engineering, Architecture, and Urban Planning*. Tehran, Iran Broadcasting International Conference Center