

## **Ethnic Factors and Sustainable Development in Iranian Kurdistan**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to investigate interactions between the Kurds and development agents in the field of sustainable development. The theoretical approach of the research is based on modernization theories. Research methodology is qualitative, with an emphasis on grounded theory. Data was collected through depth interviews, participant observation, document and secondary analysis. In the field of political development, document findings indicate that despite significant increase in participation of Kurdish people in elections, local managers and administrators still have the minimum role in political management of Kurdistan province. With regard to cultural development, results show that promises made to Kurdish people about quantitative and qualitative development of cultural elements, such as education in mother tongue and true representation of ethnic identity in local media, have not become materialized in practice. Among consequences of this situation are 'dissatisfaction with the national media' and 'formation of resistance identity' in Kurdistan.*

**Keywords:** *Kurds; modernization; development; ethnic identity; culture.*

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### **Introduction**

In a society with noticeable ethnic and cultural diversity, participation of ethnic people in development process is a necessity and any disregard for this can expose sustainable development to multiple problems. In this regard, the views of development agents toward the role and position of ethnic groups in different dimensions of development can form the nature of ethnics' reactions and strategies (including resistance/acceptance) about the related policies. The findings of the study 'A survey of Iranians' attitudes and values' (the first and the second wave in 1991 and 1995) reveal that from the first to the second wave, the feeling of ethnic injustice has increased among minorities and opposition to the statement 'In our country all ethnic groups are equal' has increased even among the Farsi-speaking majority. Among the ethnic groups, the Kurds<sup>3</sup> feel the highest feeling of ethnic injustice; the Azeris and Farses (Persians, Persian-speaking people) follow the order with a slight difference. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the feeling of ethnic injustice is relatively common among ethnic groups (Balali, 2010). Another studies suggests the persistence of the feeling of ethnic injustice in TV programs (Tavasoli and Gholipour, 2007). According to their study, the Laks are resistant against Iranian television; regarding the state TV and the representation of Lak people they believe that: The state TV not only lacks attractive programs, it also has not represented the cultural identity of the Laks in many years even once. They think that years of the public TV's silence toward their identity is upsetting and

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<sup>3</sup> Literature on ethnic studies shows that there is no single definition of ethnicity. In this study, given the common aspects in the literature, those Kurdish people were studied who spoke different Kurdish dialects and, according to the common components of ethnicity definitions such as common language and land, believed to have a real or imagined common ancestry with each other. Since the majority of residents of the cities of Kurdistan province, including Bijar, Qorveh, Marivan, Dehgolan, Divandareh, Sarvabad, Saqez, Sanandaj, Kamyaran and Baneh, live in a common land and speak Kurdish, the expressions of ethnicity and local activists are synonymous in this article. The concept of local actors/activists is one of the common concepts in the literature of sustainable development. It can also be said that development plans in Kurdistan have relatively similar outcomes in different cities. Therefore, given their common past, local actors' interpretation of the development condition in Kurdistan is significantly similar.

therefore they resist against this media. There is a positive aspect to this kind of resistance which is looking for and supporting local cultural products. (Ibid: 93-4). Also, the results of Rezaei and Kazemi's (2008) study entitled 'The representation of ethnic minorities in the television series' show that 'the representation of ethnicity reveals an unequal and unfair procedure in depicting minority groups in the society. This method of addressing the roles of ethnicities creates an ambiguous situation that portrays all ethnic groups and minorities as marginal and sometimes negative' (Ibid: 78). Therefore, focusing on ethnic factors in cultural development, promotion of pluralism policies in the reconstruction of national identity, using local workforce at different levels of management and paying attention to local potentials are among the issues that underpin a balanced development in any society. Thus, the following questions could be raised: What is the role of cultural elements of the Kurds in the production of cultural programs in Kurdistan province? How is Kurdish identity represented in the national media? What is the role and status of indigenous and local forces in various levels of management in Kurdistan? To answer the questions, the measures taken in the areas of political, social and cultural development in the province have been studied. The investigation of the consequences of interventions taken by development agents among the people of Kurdistan is another objective of this article. In other words, this paper attempts to study the actions and reactions between the Kurds and development agents in the field of sustainable development; it also tries to examine the consequences of this interaction in its various dimensions. Secondly, what strategies have local actors adopted in relation to management policies? And, finally, what is the structure of the development pattern in Iranian Kurdistan after accepting action/interaction strategies?

### **Theoretical Approach**

In Europe, modernization led to the emergence of developed societies on the basis of the bourgeois system and modern state. But this experience transmitted imperfectly, superficially and ideologically to other countries of the world, specifically to Iran. Non-establishment of the bourgeois system in Iran led to the consolidation of a centralized and powerful state by the process of modernization (Sinaee, 2017: 166). Reza Shah's dominance over power sources since 1925 along with the disability and dispersion of civil society brought about modernization in the military, administrative, political, legal, economic, industrial, cultural, and social spheres, which conformed to the structure and nature of the absolute state. Therefore, prevention of the expansion of participation and the formation of competition by the absolute state made Iran's political sphere an undeveloped one (Alam, 2014: 61). For example, in the social and cultural sphere, Reza Shah established the Organization of Thoughts<sup>1</sup> in 1938 with the aim of identity and cultural homogenization of the society (Moftakhri & Salimi, 2017) based on the tenets of nationalism, antiquarianism and modernity (Safaei, 1986; Sediq, 1957). In fact, education in Iran in the period of Reza Shah became one of the instruments of a project referred to by Deilami as "national identity formation and Iranianship characteristic change" (Deilami Moezzi, 2008: 22). Of course, national identity was part of the social change and a demand of the Constitutionalist intellectuals that Reza Shah was seeking to realize. These intellectuals believed that the first task of the modern state was to educate the nation (Ibid: 22-26). Some scholars, including David Menashri, have attributed the educational changes during Reza Shah's period to the desire of the state to modernize and westernize (Menashri, 1992: 5). The authoritarian modernity of Pahlavism prevented the realization of goals of the reformist movement of constitutionalism about the rule of law, parliament, political participation of people, and independency of groups and social classes. Accordingly, modernizations in the financial, administrative, educational, military, economic and other fields in fact made Reza Shah's absolute state

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<sup>1</sup> In order to understand the tasks of the Organization of Thoughts and the role of state in this Organization, Matin Daftari's remarks in his first speech on Feb. 02, 1939 is noteworthy: "Today's state, i.e. a wise and intelligent state, cannot be indifferent towards the general culture of society. There is a harmful and a beneficial force in the public culture and opinion of a community. The state is bound to fight against those harmful forces and strengthen the beneficial forces in order to provide a national conscience, a strong national will and a spiritual uplift in society. In today's world, the states are bound to destroy all factors that disrupt a society and encourage and foster all those that contribute to intellectual unity. The mere reforms are not enough for a society. The task of the state is not just to do reforms, but to educate people and make them thoughtful so that they understand the meaning of reform, get familiar with reform, know its strength, getting interested in reform.... It was based on this idea that this Organization was formed.... The important role of the Organization of Thoughts is: spiritual struggle to strengthen the spirit of the nation" (Delfani, 1996: 72).

come close to Bonaparte's model (Alam, 2014: 84). Changing clothing and Kashf-e hijab<sup>1</sup> (unveiling) in 1935, forcing government employees to wear Western clothing and wearing a European hat<sup>2</sup> in 1928, the use of Western titles in state departments and sending Iranian students to Europe were among policies that the state used to replace Islamic culture with European culture (Maki, 1995: 157).

The review of development programs in the first and second Pahlavi periods shows that these programs were in line with the traditional theories of modernization, theories that define traditional values as an obstacle to development and have a pessimistic view towards the possibility of the role of traditional and local values in the development process. Therefore, the restoration of traditional values, as a very useful practice, became central to state programs (So, 2007: 81) and the state was considered as the main development agent (Katouzian, 1974; Lambton, 1984). According to these theories, the direction of development is a one-way route towards an American model. In this way, modernization programs in the first and second Pahlavi periods led to a significant underdevelopment in the fields of economy and culture, and induced a dichotomy of values in society. As a result, identity-giving elements transferred from primary groups such as family and tribe to larger groups such as ethnic, national and religious groups. Among the groups and opposition movements that were formed during the first and second Pahlavi periods, the Islamists were able to become the most important source of identity in society and provided the background for the formation of social change, including the Islamic Revolution. Islamism opposed to development in its Western form<sup>3</sup> (Anbari, 2015: 53). During the Pahlavi period, emphasis was placed on the static and negative aspects of traditional values, especially local values. This approach led to the formation of a cultural gap between the modernist minority and the traditionalist majority (Foran, 1993; Keddie & Richard, 2006). But after the Islamic Revolution, the traditional values, especially the Islamic values, were emphasized as a positive factor for development. Therefore, some measures were taken which, in some respects, made the dominant developmental approach closer to new modernization theories (Azkia, 2002; Hooglund, 2009). In new modernization theories, numerous models are assumed for development (Fourie, 2012; Harrison, 2003; Kaya, 2004; Schmidt, 2006). Among different models, that of returning to Islamic values was chosen as the ideal model in Iran. Therefore, after the Islamic Revolution, the rejection of development in its western sense was considered a revolutionary movement, and the concepts of economic development, which were emphasized by the Pahlavi regime, were redefined according to revolutionary values.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that after the Islamic Revolution emphasis was placed on the elimination of deprivation in border regions, the rule of positivist and non-cooperative approaches and centralized, top-down as well as short-term and partial planning in development programs made border regions of Iran, such as Kurdistan, under-developed areas. The continuation of such a situation has made it impossible to exploit all the potential of different ethnicities and public participation in removing barriers to development in Iran.<sup>5</sup> It seems that the dominance of such an approach on development plans in Iran has led to the lack

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<sup>1</sup> One of the reasons for this is the tendency towards nationalism, nation-building, Europeanization and anti-clericalism (Atabaki, 2007: 205-212).

<sup>2</sup> At the same time as the Kashf-e Hijab decree, the "clothes uniformization" plan was also enforced and public officials, all classes of people, even clergymen, were forced to wear suit and "chapeau" hat. Consequently, people protested in some parts of Iran, including Kurdistan (Borzouee, 199: 255-256). The protest movement of the Kurdish Muslims in the Mokryan Region, in particular Mahabad, Piranshahr and Sardasht, was formed under the leadership of a clergyman called "Mullah Khalil", which was later recorded as the "Mullah Khalil Uprising" in Kurdistan history. Mullah Khalil Uprising began in Mahabad in the winter of 1936 after the mandatory decree of Kashf-e Hijab and was soon repressed by Reza Shah military forces (Samadi, 1994: 91).

<sup>3</sup> One of the important goals of the Islamic Revolution was an emphasis on the authenticity of culture, family, collectivism, social justice, poverty eradication and the struggle against Western liberalism and modern nationalism (Keddie & Hooglund, 1986; Milani, 2018; Stempel, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Concepts like the private sector, capital accumulation, capitalism, free markets, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, significant progress has been made after the Islamic Revolution in the social and economic condition of the Iranian society, which can be assessed using objective variables such as educational and health facilities. However, since society is not simply a product of objective variables, it is important to understand people and correctly interpret the state of society. An interpretation that arises from people's expectations and evaluations and ultimately affects their actions in the political, cultural and economic spheres (Abdi, 2016: 109-110).

of sustainable development in border regions, Kurdistan province in particular, despite the efforts made in these areas. The theoretical approach in this study is that the implementation of plans at macro level and insufficient attention to participatory development has made it difficult to achieve sustainable development in Kurdistan. Based on this theoretical approach, it is tried to study the conditions and factors affecting the development process in the Iranian Kurdistan.

### Methodology

Methodology of the study is based on qualitative methods and grounded theory approach. The sampling method was based on purposive and theoretical sampling. Despite the priority of theoretical sampling in the grounded theory, it was first attempted to identify local elites and those with a good understanding of the problems of the Kurdish community through purposive sampling. The purpose of the purposive sampling was to finalize interview questions and determine the extent and scope of observation. Using purposive sampling, it was determined that what should be observed, what to ask and how to study the documents in order to explain the role of ethnic variables in the development process of Kurdistan province. Theoretical sampling was used after purposive sampling. The goal was to identify various dimensions of the changes that took place during the development process in Kurdistan. Accordingly, the focus was on the frequency of words expressing sustainable or unsustainable development. Since the main purpose of the grounded theory is to discover, using the principle of flexibility (Strauss & Corbin 1967; 1994; 1998), samples were chosen in a way to have the most application in the diversification of the various dimensions of development and, consequently, The emergence and development of categories. Therefore, data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously and the results of the initial data analysis were the guide for collecting further data. Thus, sampling went forward based on theoretical relevance with the evolving concepts.

The techniques of in-depth interviews, participant observation and document study<sup>1</sup> were used for data collection. Data collection process is repeated until it reaches the data iteration and theoretical saturation stage. After 40 interviews, I felt I had reached the theoretical saturation stage, but I continued data collection process up to 45th interview to be on the safe side. Collected data was analysed and explained based on the principles of grounded theory in three stages, namely open, axial and selective coding. Analytical comparison and respondent validity techniques were used to validate the results; in this way, it was confirmed that the obtained issues can cover and theoretically explain field data. Table (1) shows the characteristics of the participants in the study.

*Table (1): Characteristics of the participants in the study*

Row	Sex / age	Occupation / education	Row	Sex / age	Occupation / education	Row	Sex / age	Occupation / education
Code 1	Male/41 years	Teacher/ BC	Code 16	Male/40 years	Teacher/ BC	Code 31	Male/25 years	Teacher/ BC
Code 2	Male/62 years	Shoemaker/ retired	Code 17	Male/66 years	Retired/ Diploma	Code 32	Male/27 years	Mechanic/ Diploma
Code 3	Male/43 years	Farmer/ Secondary	Code 18	Male/44 years	Teacher/ MSc	Code 33	Male/32 years	Mechanic/ Diploma
Code 4	Male/36 years	Seller/ Diploma	Code 19	Male/36 years	Journalist/ MSc	Code 34	Female/35 years	Tailor/ Diploma
Code 5	Male/44 years	Worker/ Illiterate	Code 20	Male/20 years	Student	Code 35	Female/33 years	Housekeeper/ Diploma
Code 6	Male/35 years	Farmer/ Secondary	Code 21	Male/22 years	Student	Code 36	Female/44 years	Housekeeper/ secondary
Code 7	Male/40 years	Seller/ BC	Code 22	Male/21 years	Student	Code 37	Female/23 years	Student
Code 8	Male/30 years	Unemployment/ secondary	Code 23	Male/24 years	Illiterate/ BC	Code 38	Female/27 years	Unemployment/ BC

<sup>1</sup> In the document study we emphasized on the analysis of Kurdistan's parliament members regarding development condition in Kurdistan province.

Code 9	Male/38 years	Seller/ BC	Code 24	Male/19 years	Student	Code 39	Female/45 years	Employer/ BC
Code 10	Male/40 years	Employer/ BC	Code 25	Male/29 years	Illiterate/ MSc	Code 40	Female/30 years	Teacher/ MSc
Code 11	Male/39 years	Employer/ BC	Code 26	Male/28 years	Illiterate/ MSc	Code 41	Female/24 years	Student
Code 12	Male/35 years	Tailor/ BC	Code 27	Male/33 years	Seller/ Diploma	Code 42	Female/29 years	Unemployment/ MSc
Code 13	Male/45 years	Worker/ Diploma	Code 28	Male/38 years	Farmer/ Diploma	Code 43	Female/53 years	Housekeeper/ Diploma
Code 14	Male/47 years	Architect/ BC	Code 29	Male/48 years	Animal husbandry/ Diploma	Code 44	Female/55 years	Housekeeper/ illiterate
Code 15	Male/32 years	Butcher/ BC	Code 30	Male/41 years	Chef/ Diploma	Code 45	Female/60 years	Housekeeper/ illiterate

**Findings**

In this study 534 primary concepts, 47 minor categories, 11 major categories and one core category were extracted in different stages of coding in relation to ethnic variations and development condition in Kurdistan province. Based on the principles of grounded theory, the three sources of “literature-derived concepts”, “researcher innovation” and “concepts used by interviewees”, which Strauss and Corbin (1978) refer to as “InVivo Codes”, were used to label the concepts and categories derived from the data. Before presenting the findings, the categories emerged from the data are presented in the form of a paradigm model (Figure 1). In this model, an attempt has been made to arrange the categories emerged from the data in a way that provides, implicitly, an overview of the relationship between the categories. As observed, this paradigm model represents the structural causes and conditions, the interactions between local actors and development agents as well as the consequences of this interactions in Iranian Kurdistan. In the paragraphs to come, the concepts and categories derived from data are explained in relation to the development process and, in particular, the policies about political and cultural management of Kurdistan. The relationship between these concepts are explained as well.

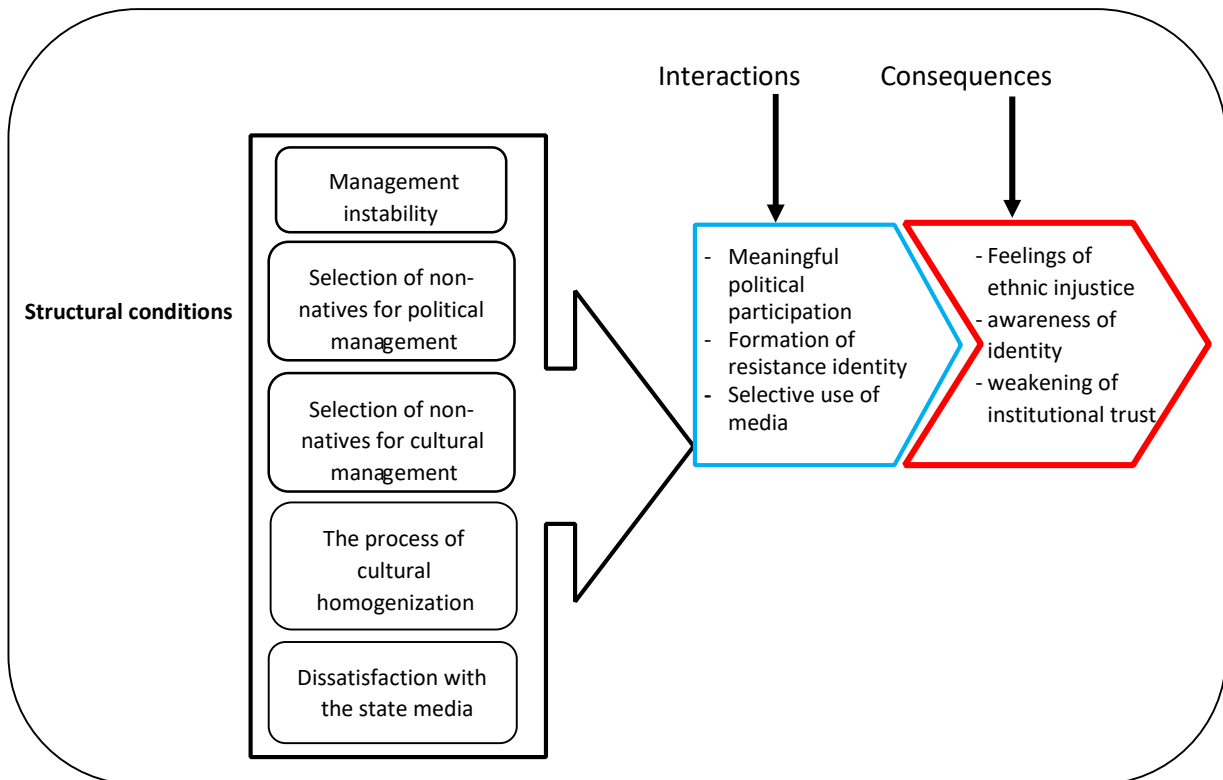


Figure (1): Paradigm model of unsustainable development in Iranian Kurdistan

***Structural conditions******Selection of non-natives for political management***

Table (2) reveals that local forces are not appointed as governor, as the highest political post in Kurdistan. In another view, the above table indicates successive appointment and dismissal of governors in Kurdistan province which shows that the political management does not pay attention to the role of management stability in the process of sustainable development. It can be said that managerial instability is one of the major challenges of the administrative system for sustainable development in Kurdistan; this means that the appointment of executives is subject to political fluctuations at the macro level of management, and that is why the Governor's terms of office is very short. This is contradictory to developmental plans which have a long-term nature. If we differentiate between changes in macro-management levels on the basis of presidential periods<sup>1</sup>, it can be said that after the Islamic Revolution, four administrations have had the presidential office for eight years each. Based on this division, it is expected that a new governor will be appointed every four years in Kurdistan, but Table 2 shows that the average term of office for governors in Kurdistan is less than three years. What is meant by this table is that the negative consequences of management instability in a place like Kurdistan that requires the institutionalization of sustainable development infrastructure is far more significant. As local elites know more about the Kurdish community, they can better use popular mobilization to improve the development process in Kurdistan. Therefore, when the majority of people appointed as governors of Kurdistan are non-indigenous, the probability that the process of sustainable development in Kurdistan will be slower will increase.

In this regard, when Abdulmohammad Zahedi was appointed as the governor of Kurdistan, Omid Karimian, a representative of the people of Marivan and Sarvabad during the ninth term of the Parliament, referring to statement No. 3 of the ethnics and religious sects of Dr. Hassan Rouhani<sup>2</sup>, addressed the president, saying: "In line with your statement No. 3 of the ethnics and religious sects and as the executor of the IRI Constitution, we expected you to use Kurdish and Sunni forces in the cabinet and the provincial government of Kurdistan, but, unfortunately, this important promise was not fulfilled and your Cabinet was formed in the absence of Kurds."

Regarding the performance of the governors of Kurdistan province, the unemployment rate in Kurdistan can be mentioned as one of the most important development indicators. In this regard, the results of Khani and Zarghami (2013) show that the unemployment rate reached from 9% in 1996 to 20.2% in 2006. In this period, the unemployment rate doubled in all male and female age groups both in urban and rural areas (although the increase in unemployment rate was most pronounced among women). The unemployment rate of the youth also increased sharply from 16.5% to 37.6%. From another view, the findings of this study showed very high rates of unemployment among literate people in these years; it grew by 2.6 times and reached from 7% to 18.2% (Khani & Zarghami, 2013: 65).

Part of the results of the National Social Capital Survey<sup>3</sup> in 2014 is related to the assessment of the extent to which institutions are successful in their tasks. The results of this survey show that the assessment of Kurdish people of the performance of planning institutions and centers is not satisfactory,<sup>4</sup> in a way that 15.4% of the respondents rated the success of planning institutions and institutions very low, 37.3% rated it low, 32% rated it moderate, and 13.9% rated it high, and 1.5% rated it very high.

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the first 2 years after the Revolution.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan Rouhani, as the candidate for the eleventh presidency, issued a statement entitled "The rights of ethnic groups, religions and religious sects". Paragraph 3 of this statement has that: Appointing competent local forces in management positions in different parts of the country and supporting the empowerment and transfer of local and regional executive affairs to them in the form of public policies of the government (<http://rouhani.ir>).

<sup>3</sup> Although the purpose of this survey is not direct investigation of the status of underdevelopment and its dimensions in Kurdistan province, it has studied indicators that indirectly play an important role in understanding such status in the province.

<sup>4</sup> In this survey, the perception of institutional success was evaluated by raising this question: "in every society, there is a set of institutions that do some particular tasks. In your opinion, how much success have the mentioned institutions had in fulfilling their duties?" Here are the results of Kurdish people's assessment of the success rate of the institutions that are relevant to the discussion of this article. These institutions include: Planning centers and public institutions (government). These institutions are ones that the general public has some objective and subjective perceptions about them.

Percentage distribution of respondents in the whole country shows that 9.9% of respondents rated the success of institutions and planning centers very low, 27.7% rated it low, 44.2% moderate, 16.2% high, and 2.1% rated it very high (Ghaffari, 2015: 93-94). Comparison of the results obtained for Kurdistan province with those of the whole country shows that institutions and planning centers in Kurdistan province have been less successful. The results of this survey about Kurdish people’s evaluation of the government in doing its tasks show that 17.1% of the respondents think that the government’s success has been very low, 26.3% rated it low, 36.3% rated it moderate, 16.3% rated it high and 3.9% rated it very high. These figures for respondents across the country indicate that 12% of respondents rated the government’s success very low, 23.9% rated it low, 40.7% rated it moderate, 19.7% rated it high and 3.7% rated it very high (Ibid: 82). Here too, the comparison of the results of respondents’ assessment of the state’s success in Kurdistan province with the results of the whole country indicates that the state organizations should be more attentive in their duties and pay more attention to the people of Kurdistan province. The results of the National Survey of Social Capital in 2014 regarding Kurdish people’s perception of the success of various institutions in their duties can help development agents understand the people’s attitudes toward the performance of these institutions in Kurdistan and, with regard to the knowledge gained, it should be tried to make better plans for improving the performance of these institutions.<sup>1</sup>

*Table (2): The list of governors of Kurdistan province since the Revolution*

No.	Name & Surname	Period		Local / Non local
1	Ebrahim Younesi	21 March 1979	15 July 1979	Local
2	Mohammad Rashid Shakib	15 July 1979	24 December 1979	Non local
3	Hossein Shah-Ovaysi	24 December 1979	21 March 1980	Non local
4	Mohammad Ali Mehrasa	21 March 1980	19 January 1981	Non local
5	Naser Arastu-Irani	19 January 1981	24 August 1981	Non local
6	Alireza Shaykh-Atar	24 August 1981	12 December 1981	Local
7	Mohammad Hossein Asgharnya	12 December 1981	1 December 1984	Non local
8	Alireza Tabesh	1 December 1984	1 March 1989	Non local
9	Abdol Hossein Bagherzadeh	1 March 1989	3 November 1989	Non local
10	Hamid haji-Abdolwahab	3 November 1989	2 October 1993	Non local
11	Hassan Zahree	2 October 1993	13 October 1993	Non local
12	Mohammad Reza Rahimi	13 October 1993	26 September 1997	Local
13	Abdollahi Ramazanzadeh	26 September 1997	2 October 2001	Local
14	Asadollah Razani	2 October 2001	5 January 2006	Non local
15	Esmail Najar	5 January 2006	6 July 2010	Non local
16	Alireza Shahbazi	6 July 2010	March 2013	Non local
17	Abdol Mohammad Zahedi	30 December 2013	14 October 2017	Non local
18	Bahman Moradnya	14 October 2017	Up to now	Local

*Selection of non-natives for cultural management and Management instability*

Tables (3) and (4) also indicate minimal usage of local or indigenous forces followed by ‘management instability’ regarding the office of President of the University of Kurdistan, as one of the main institutions responsible for social and cultural development in the society. Obviously, in such circumstances cultural planning based on local components would be minimized. Earlier it was pointed

<sup>1</sup> The elimination of deprivation in border regions has always been a concern for governments in Iran. The need for dealing with this issue in the program and policy announced by the 12<sup>th</sup> government, Dr. Rouhani’s administration, is stated as follows: “The Iranian population is a mixture of ethnic and religious groups with different viewpoints and tastes. Our women and men do not live in the same way. Not everyone has the same impression of culture, art and life style. This difference and diversity must be recognized and protected. Our ethnic groups have always been Iranians who have lived in the territory of this land and have worked to protect it. Kurds, Baluchs, Arabs, Turks, Lurs, Turkmens and other ethnic groups are all Iranians. The development process of the country has been such that the central parts have developed and the border provinces of the country have remained underdeveloped. Balanced and equitable economic, social and political development must be realized throughout the country, and less-favored groups should benefit from this development” (<http://media.president.ir>).

out that short-term planning is one of the most important features of development programs in Iran. In this regard, it is important to compare the office terms of the chancellors of Stanford, Harvard and Michigan universities with those in Iran. Statistics from the top three universities in the world show that 48 chancellors in total have managed these universities for 464 academic years. While statistics from six Iranian universities indicate that 121 chancellors have been changed during 332 academic years. Comparing the average terms of office of chancellors in Iranian universities, which is less than 3 years, with that of top three global universities, which is about 10 years, indicates a lack of management stability in Iran's administrative system. Recent studies have referred to top-down planning and short-term programs as the most serious development management problems in Iran. On the cultural implications of the center-oriented planning system, one can refer to the results of Ziari's study (2000) entitled "Measuring the degree of cultural development of Iranian provinces". Based on the results of this study, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Khuzestan, Bushehr, Hormozgan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Ilam and Sistan-Baluchistan provinces are among the deprived provinces in terms of cultural facilities. The factors affecting cultural inequality in Iranian provinces include lack of equal opportunities in resources, the presence of a center-oriented planning system, and the application of "Center-Periphery" development model (Ibid: 91).

*Table (3): The list of the University of Kurdistan's presidents since the Revolution\**

No.	Name & Surname	Period		Degree of Education	Local / Non local
1	Mostafa Khoram del	1979	1984	Ph.D.	Local
2	Moghadas Jafari	1984	1989	Ph.D.	Non local
3	Issa Nakhaee	1989	1990	Ph.D.	Non local
4	Ali Akbar Mohseni	1990	1991	M.A.	Non local
5	Ahmad Nasr Esfahani	1991	1992	Ph.D.	Non local
6	Ali Akbar Rajabi	1992	1994	Ph.D.	Non local
7	Yahya Yasrebi	1994	1995	Ph.D.	Non local
8	Mohammad Taghi Khalaj	1995	1998	Graduated in Seminary	Non local
9	Issa Nakhaee	1998	2003	Ph.D.	Non local
10	Abdol Hamid Shaybani	2003	2005	Ph.D.	Non local
11	Gholam Hossein Karimi Doostan	2005	1010	Ph.D.	Local
12	Jahanshir Amini	2010	2015	Ph.D.	Local
13	Fardin Akhlaghian Tab	2015	Cont	Ph.D.	Local

Source: University of Kurdistan website (<http://www.uok.ac.ir/fa/presidency/president/previous-presidents.aspx>)<sup>1</sup>

*Table (4): A comparison of the replacement of university presidents inside and outside the country*

No.	University	The Term of Office	The Number of Presidents
1	Stanford	124 Year	11
2	Harvard	148 Year	18
3	Michigan	192 Year	19
4	Tehran	75 Year	31
5	Sanati Sharif	44 Year	31
6	Amirkabir	53 Year	21
7	Khaje Nasir Toosi	79 Year	12
8	Ferdowsi	51 Year	15
9	Kurdistan	30 Year	11

Source: Mehr News Agency ([www.mehrnews.com](http://www.mehrnews.com))

#### *The process of cultural homogenization and dissatisfaction with the state media*

Based on the findings, cultural homogenization process induced a kind of dissatisfaction with the state media. In relation to this, the Kurdish people believe that 'Iran's state TV does not realistically display the Kurdish culture and television programs are not equally distributed among ethnic minorities.' Most interviewees were dissatisfied with the excessive representation of the Farses in Iranian state television.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the University of Kurdistan was a college of the Razi University until 1991.



This concern is related to Thomas's model (2004) regarding 'the homogenization of national identity' in which the main goal of the state media is transformation and concealment of ethnic specific identities (Thomas & Nain, 2004). In this model, the state media does not allow ethnic diversity to challenge the sanctity and dignity of the dominant ethnic identity. It seems that Iranian television is also representing a symbolic national community. A process that Hall calls 'systematic distorted representation' (Hall, 1997).

For Gramsci, the use of a tool such as media can provide the basis for cultural hegemony. A hegemony that reproduces itself through its impact on people's living experience. Gramsci, on the other hand, believes that this cultural hegemony does not necessarily follow the will of the ruling structure, because social and cultural changes are the result of an accumulation process, the result of which is not necessarily the control of society by governing structures. In Gramsci's view, human actors can change this process and replace them with alternative structures by resisting the governing structures (Johnson, 1979; Lears, 1985). In line with this, with an emphasis on the interaction of media and social conditions, Raymond Williams believes that the pressure imposed by the media on actors results from the passivity and inability of actors to reject the dominant media. Williams believes that if the passivity and inability continues, not only does mass culture undergo major changes but also minority culture is equally possible to change (Williams, 1977, 1983). The findings of this study show how activists<sup>1</sup> in Kurdistan have become active by selective media content consumption and have taken the opportunity from the media to change their culture. Another part of the findings suggests the lack of satisfaction with the state media. This dissatisfaction has prevented cultural integration in Kurdistan. Following Williams, it can be said that the process of homogenization has led to some resistance by the activists. This resistance has been affected by the Kurdish experience of the faint reproduction of their ethnic culture in the media.

*The interactions between Kurdish people and central governments in the course of cultural and political development*

*Meaningful political participation.* Table (5) shows that Kurdish people have a significant inclination toward social and political changes through participation in a democratic process. Based upon studies conducted over the recent decade on the electoral participation of people in Kurdistan province in twelve presidential elections show that the participation of the Kurds has had an increasing trend until the seventh presidential election, but after four years the trend began to decline. This trend indicates that Kurdish people prefer to pursue their demands within the framework of the constitution; and the downward trend of participation reflects the fact that the seventh and eighth governments have failed to fulfil the demands of Kurdish people. The above table indicate a 25.5% decline in the participation of Kurdish people (in Kurdistan province) in elections from the seventh to eighth presidential elections. The downward trend of participation continued so that in the ninth presidential election the participation fell by 41.67%, as compared to the seventh presidential election (Ghaffari & Kaviani, 2011). With the advent of moderation discourse by Hassan Rouhani and the support of Mohammad Khatami<sup>2</sup>, as the leader of the Iranian reform movement, of the moderation discourse, the hope for pursuing the demands of the Kurdish community rose once again through the presidential election. The significant increase in the participation of the people of Kurdistan in the tenth and eleventh presidential elections indicates that they are demanding the dominance of reformist approaches in the structure of executive administration of the country, but, unfortunately, they did not receive the expected response from Rouhani administration.

In this regard, Jalal Jalalizadeh<sup>3</sup>, a former member of the parliament (May 27, 2000 to May 26, 2004), in his interview about the consequences of Mr. Rouhani's visit to Kurdistan on July 26, 2015, states:

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<sup>2</sup> Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, the reformist politician, clergyman and scholar, was the fifth Iranian president for two rounds from 1997 to 2005. Khatami is known as the leader of reform movement in Iran. In 2009, Newsweek magazine mentioned Mohammad Khatami as the fourth most powerful figure in present Iran.

<sup>3</sup> Jalal Jalalizadeh is one of the well-known reformist figures in Iran; he is one of the leaders of the reformist movement in Kurdistan, the secretary of the coordination council of Kurdish reformists, the former Kurdish, Sunni MP of Sanandaj,

“This trip did not satisfy the political, cultural and social activists. People were expecting him to make satisfactory promises in his speeches. Especially since 73% of the people of Kurdistan voted for Rouhani and expected him, as a lawyer, to be able to put an end to the injustices against the Kurdish people over years. The demands of minorities from the central government are legitimate and reasonable. The enforcement of the Constitution is their main demand. Failure to enforce the law is a weakness for which the government and the president himself, as the main executor of the Constitution, are responsible. The first duty of the president is enforcing the constitution. One of the expectations of the people of Kurdistan is the enforcement of the fifteenth<sup>1</sup> and nineteenth<sup>2</sup> principles of the Constitution. This is a legitimate natural demand. This is especially the case in a province that has voted largely for Rouhani.... About underdevelopment in Kurdistan, he says: “The Kurdish regions suffer from doubled deprivation and underdevelopment in the economic, political, social and cultural domains. The government has so far failed to fulfill its promise regarding these areas.” In terms of economy, Rouhani could announce Baneh and Marivan as economic regions. He could appoint Sunni people to management positions to enhance political participation. Unfortunately, none of these cases has been realized as anticipated (www.roozonline.com).

On the other hand, Khaled Tukhi, a political activist in Saqez and a moderate political figure in Kurdistan, has another view. He says: “First of all, it must be said that Rouhani’s administration inherits many problems that should not be overlooked while analyzing and evaluating its performance; therefore, we must wait patiently for objective changes. But this does not mean to stop criticizing and protesting to the shortcomings.” He adds, “With regard to cultural demands, the foundation of the field of Kurdish Language and Literature in the University of Kurdistan and launching of the Kurdish branch of the IRNA News Agency were positive actions in line with the demands of Kurdish people. Paying attention to infrastructure, though incomplete, avoiding demagogic behavior, and paying attention to Kurdish identity beyond Kurdistan province and even Iran are, in my opinion, good and promising points about Mr. Rouhani’s administration.” However, Tavakoli adds: “There are many problems in Kurdistan. The security perspective is still decisive. There are inefficiencies in appointments, dismissals and allocation of appropriate funds. There is still no definite program for the development of Kurdistan, and these programs cannot resolve backwardness in the province” (http://www.roozonline.com).

According to Mehr News Agency, in the session of August 8, 2017 in the Parliament, Mohsen Biglari, representative of the people of Saqez and Baneh, referring to Rouhani’s promises in his speech, said: According to the promises made at the presidential campaign, Sunnis and the people of Kurdistan expected to see Sunni and Kurdish elites in the cabinet, but, unfortunately, there was not even a single Sunni or Kurdish minister in the cabinet. At least, we expect that Kurdish and Sunni elites be used as vice ministers. We also expect the presence of women in the cabinet (http://www.mehrnews.com).

**Table (5): The electoral participation of the people of Kurdistan in the twelve presidential elections**

No.	Elections	Date	People who could vote	Number of votes	Participation percentage
1	1st election	January 25, 1980	460775	59100	12.83
2	2nd election	July 24, 1981	486931	212884	43.72
3	3rd election	October 2, 1981	486931	235980	48.46
4	4th election	August 16, 1985	543780	280451	51.57
5	5th election	July 28, 1989	607256	356323	58.68

Divandareh and Kamyaran in the Sixth Majlis (Parliament), and the only member of the Sunni Central Council of the Islamic Iranian Participation Front and the Iranian National Unity Party.

<sup>1</sup> According to the principle 15 of the Constitution, the official language of Iran is Persian. Official texts and correspondence, and textbooks should be written in Persian, but the use of local and ethnic languages is allowed in the press and mass media and teaching the literature of the ethnic groups is allowed in schools along with the Persian language (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Chapter 3: Rights of the Nation, Principle 15).

<sup>2</sup> According to the principle 19 of the Constitution, the people of Iran enjoy equal rights, regardless of the tribe or ethnic group to which they belong. Color, race, language, and other such considerations shall not be grounds for special privileges (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, second chapter: Language, writing, date and official flag of the country, Principle 18).

6	6th election	June 11, 1993	694687	381790	54.96
7	7th election	May 23, 1997	781048	617351	79.04
8	8th election	June 8, 2001	910364	486596	53.45
9	9th election	June 17, 2005	1032306	257643	37.37
10	10th election	June 12, 2009	943818	610756	60
11	11th election	June 14, 2013	1082317	671037	62
12	12th election	May 19, 2017	1176333	694037	59

Source: Kurdistan Province Governor Generalship (<http://www.ostan-kd.ir/Default.aspx?TabID=133>); Ghaffari and Kaviani (2011)

*Formation of resistance identity*

‘Formation of resistance identity’ is one of the strategies adopted by the actors in Kurdistan, as part of the Kurdish community, to deal with the dominant identity-making channel in cyberspace. Popp (2006) refers to mass media as a key source of identity-making channels in which the phenomenon of ‘identity-making’ occurs. Table (6) presents the use of mass media by the studied individuals as well as their level of resistance to the programs broadcast in this media. As shown in the above table, Kurdish people not only have a low inclination toward using the public programs in Iran, including national television and radio, but also resist to use these programs in a meaningful way. They believe that public programs do not represent the true Kurdish identity; they increasingly display fewer elements of the local culture on the one hand and more elements of the dominant culture on the other hand, in a way that they try to integrate the local culture into the dominant one. Thus, the Kurdish people are inclined to use the media that represents their cultural elements. Bourdieu (1991, 1992) refers to language as symbolic representation and a means to continue social power. In this regard, the people of Kurdistan are not even optimistic about the programs broadcast from Sanandaj TV and radio centre and believe that ‘These programs have distorted the original Kurdish language and culture in a soft manner, and producers and executives of this media tend to use Farsi words instead of Kurdish ones.’ Accordingly, Kurdish people are more inclined and less resistant to the Kurdish programs broadcast from satellite media.

Following Rahnema (1997), it can be said that the media that has entered Kurdistan is a “dangerous present” because, to the people of Kurdistan, it is trying to take everything meaningful, encouraging and identity-giving from the Kurds. In this regard, according to the Mehr News Agency, in the public meeting of the Parliament on August 8, 2017, Mohsen Biglari, the representative of the people of Saqez and Baneh, criticizing the performance of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, said: “Sometimes some films are made about Kurds and Kurdistan that do not convey a right message to the people. We expect the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance to resolve this problem” (<http://www.mehrnews.com>).

*Selective use of media*

Table (6) reports the use of mass media by Kurdish people and the level of trust to various channels.

**Table (6): The use of mass media and trust to them**

Media	The use of mass media				
	Very high	High	Average	Low	Very low
Iranian Channels			*		
trust				*	
Kurdish Channels Catellite	*				
trust	*				
Persian Channels Catellite		*			
trust			*		
Sanandaj TV			*		
trust			*		
BBC			*		
trust		*			
VOA			*		
trust		*			

Persian Radio			*		
trust				*	
Sanandaj Radio		*			
trust				*	
Kurdish Websites		*			
trust		*			
Persian Websites			*		
trust	*				
Facebook				*	
trust	*				

Also, regarding the role of cultural values of Kurdistan in reproducing the national culture, Salar Moradi, the representative of the people of Sanandaj in the tenth Parliament, argued that Kurdistan was called a cultural province by the Supreme Leader with the aim of achieving and defining the status and contribution of the province in/to the national culture. He believes that “the characteristics, requirements and cultural values of Kurdistan are such that can contribute to the formation of the national culture.” He further added: “The person chosen as the head of the Kurdish cultural activities does not know the cultural conditions and concerns of the province and, thus, he cannot manage this area properly” (<http://www.farsnews.com>).

*Consequences: feelings of ethnic injustice, awareness of identity and weakening of institutional trust*

This part of the research findings indicate that people of Kurdistan deem public programs, including the state television and radio, as the means of distributing ‘identity planning’ among ethnic and cultural minorities. That is why they significantly stand up against the use of these programs. They believe that public programs do not represent the true identity of the Kurds; they increasingly display fewer elements of the local culture on the one hand and, on the other hand, more elements of the dominant culture, in a way that they try to integrate the local culture into the dominant one. Thus, the Kurdish people are inclined to use the media that represents their cultural elements. In this regard, the people of Kurdistan are not even optimistic about the programs broadcast from Sanandaj TV and radio center and believe that ‘these programs have distorted the original Kurdish language and culture in a soft manner, and producers and executives of this media tend to use Farsi words instead of Kurdish ones.’ Therefore, the use of Kurdish programs broadcast from satellite media face the least resistance from Kurdish people who try to ‘establish their identity in the media space’.

In this regard, Salar Moradi, a representative of the people of Sanandaj in the tenth Parliament, criticized the Iranian state television for its inappropriate depiction of some Kurdish figures. According to the political correspondent of Ana News Agency, in an oral note to the head of the state television organization, Salar Moradi stated: Recently, in some films broadcasted by the state television, an irrational and unkind image of the Kurds is presented. He goes on to say: Some characters who play the role of Kurds are trying to present a violent and irrational image of the people of this area, an issue that is a subject of protest among the people of Kurdistan. He expressed hope that this process would be corrected, and the real and cultural image of the people of this area will be displayed (<http://www.ana.ir>). On the other hand, increasing prevalence of Farsi-language foreign media in general and Kurdish-language media in particular indicate ‘the meaningful transfer of identity-making sources from domestic media to foreign media’. This process is especially the case with the Kurds who have the least involvement in managing the programs of the state media. In this regard, emphasizing the mechanisms of representation based on ‘cultural differences’ and avoiding cultural particularism, Kurdish-language media are trying to provide the Kurds with other options. The findings of this study indicate that this mechanism has challenged the exclusive role of the government and the national media in the field of information communications and that Kurdish-language media have achieved considerable success in the reconstruction and stabilization of Kurdish identity. From the conducted interviews it can be concluded that ‘the feeling of ethnic injustice’ in the state media has encouraged the Kurdish people to welcome cross-border media, especially satellite channels; this has promoted ‘identity awareness’

among the people. On this subject, Table (7) illustrates the involvement and trust of the Kurdish people to the news broadcast in the media they use.

**Table (7): The level of involvement and trust in following the news**

News	Iran's news	Middle East news	Kurdistan news
Level of involvement	High	High	Very high
Level of trust	Low	Moderate	High

Source: the field data obtained from interviews and observations.

The cultural changes that are taking place in Kurdistan are similar to the concepts proposed by Williams, i.e. the dominant and emerging elements (Williams, 1977). Following Williams, it can be said that some media commentators in Iran have defined the cultural elements common among the Persians as the dominant elements in Iran's culture. The elements that are tried to be protected by the media. A protection that intensifies when the dominant elements collide with emerging elements<sup>1</sup>. The elements that from the viewpoint of some development agents in Iran are apart from the dominant culture. In Williams's view, the dominant culture reacts to emerging elements and seeks to integrate them into itself. Here, one can refer to Williams's concept of cultural materialism (Williams, 1977, 1983). Based on this concept, the dominant culture in Iran can be considered as a structure-related culture, a structure that, through hegemony, seeks to prevent changes induced by an emerging culture. In Williams's view, it is in such a situation that the role of culture in relation to materialism becomes significant. A role that cannot be understood merely as a superstructure of economic factors, but as a cultural issue that has a decisive implication for other matters.

### Conclusion

The research findings showed that the political and cultural development of Kurdistan province suffered from management instability. The persistence of such a situation in the administrative system of Kurdistan will result in managers' lack of enough motivation for long-term planning. Moreover, when an organization's management changes, most of the plans developed by previous executives are dissolved, and the resources and manpower of that organization are directed towards implementation of programs that are developed by the new manager. The implications of such a management system include the dominance of short-term planning for development and the loss of time and potential opportunities for sustainable development. Obviously, the persistence of this process, along with insufficient use of the experience and knowledge of local elites, will slow down the development process. Therefore, it is suggested to use a participatory development model in order to pave the development path in Kurdistan, while avoiding subsequent appointment and dismissal of managers. In the participatory development model, members of the population participate actively in the process of development. In this model, local elites and managers can play an effective role in strengthening local culture and integrating it with development programs.

Various studies show that the media has an effective role in enhancing or weakening local culture (Anderson, 2006; Appadurai, 1996; Gillespie, 2002; Morley & Robins, 2002). In this regard, the findings showed that the people of Kurdistan are not satisfied enough with media programs and do not consider the persistence of these programs to be consistent with strengthening of their ethnic culture. The formation of such an attitude has made many activists not only active towards such a situation but it has also made them be consciously inclined to use the programs that reproduce their ethnic culture. Based on Gramsci's approach, it can be said that media consumers in Kurdistan are resisting the structure dominated over media programs and are seeking to change the current conditions by turning to the media outside Iran. With regard to this, the interviewees emphasized that there were no suitable conditions for the reproduction of local elements in Kurdistan. The current situation has led to an increasing inclination of Kurdish people towards "symbolic representation of cultural elements" in the social networks. It is

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the majority of media directors in Iran do not believe that the cultural elements of the Persians should dominate the cultural elements of other ethnic groups. These groups of managers believe that adopting such an approach is contradictory to the participatory patterns of development, and it is necessary to emphasize the logical participation of all cultures in media programs.

the outcome of such measures that people increasingly tend to “share their cultural elements in the cyberspace”. It is suggested that the current situation, wanted or unwanted, should not proceed in such a way that the Kurdish people feel to be against a dominant culture. A culture that deals with their ethnic components as emerging elements and seeks to integrate them into itself (Williams, 1977, 1983). Obviously, the persistence of this situation is contradictory to the national interests of Iran. Accordingly, it can be said that the success of media in Kurdistan depends on cooperative programs, programs that lead to the participation of local people and elites in the process of sustainable development by enhancing local culture. Programs whose ultimate outcome is to enhance cultural convergence and, consequently, endogenous and participatory development in Iran.

The post-development thinkers criticize insufficient attention to traditional values and local actors as an anti-development approach and believe that this approach works as a powerful mechanism for the cultural, social, political and economic transformation and engineering in local societies. Since development plans in Iran are inspired by the traditional and new modernization theories, the post-development paradigm can thus be helpful in analysing the development trend in Kurdistan, because it has a strong relationship with the unsuccessful experiences of development programs in Third World countries. Critics of the development paradigm went so far as what developmentalists called development they described as undeveloped and backward (Anbari & Piri, 2016: 88). Post-development discourse in its new forms with an emphasis on social and people-oriented approach to development, has criticized the cultural, economic, philosophical and political bases of development. In its opposition to these bases, as a form of cultural transformation, it has chosen pursue of people-oriented patterns as an approach to development (Ahmadi & Baydollahkhani, 2013: 47).

The findings showed that the approach emerged from the modernization theories, both traditional and new, has always sought to see the positive dimension of development in a top-down manner, i.e. to see the widespread and purposive social change and ignore the negative dimension that is non-participation of local actors in the development process. The result of implementing this model of development is the emergence of new forms of distrust, and social and cultural exclusion in Kurdistan. Studies show that we are not limited to single specific model of development, such as a top-down model. Rather, we can have a large number of development models. Obtaining a model that is in line with the needs of a particular community, such as Kurdistan, requires adherence to people-centered models (Rahnema & Bawtree: 1997; Illich: 1997; Grillo; 1997; Arce & Long: 2000). A model aimed at empowering people, a model in which governments have a greater role to play in facilitating rather than acting. Therefore, it is suggested that obstacles to people’s participation in the development process should be identified and resolved. Participatory development strategy should also be emphasized over other development strategies.

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