

**Political participation with emphasis on villages nearby small and large cities:
(Case: Iran, Badrabad and Bidkaneh villages)**

Arezoo Abedinirad¹, Rashed Ahmadi²

¹. M.A. in Rural Geography, University of Kharazmi, Young researchers and elites club, science and research branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran, Email: Arezooabedini66@yahoo.com

². M.A. in Rural Geography, University of Kharazmi, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: People participation in social life has brought about the expansion and continuation of human life and is the harvest of dynamic process in which a person recognizes their true desires and those of society as final and stable product of development. Political participation is an element of political culture and the extent of political development is measured through it which leads to low and high development. Political participation simply is defined as people participation in decision making process which determines their destiny and election and voting are some main forms of this participation. Since political participation in each society is contingent upon society's norms, values, accepted frameworks and election is its prominent manifestation, this article investigates and compares political participation details in two villages, one in Kermanshah and one in Tehran. The aim is to make a comparison between the two villages over their political participation as well as identifies factors influencing this participation at each village. The research method is descriptive-analytical. To gather data, a questionnaire and in-depth interviews were applied. Over 1/3 of the statistical population was sampled randomly. Excel and GIS were used for data analysis. Findings indicate villages' political participation degree in areas such as elections increases from national to regional, and to local levels. We found that political participation is considered a crucial duty and that rural people view election participation as a factor influencing nationwide decision making process (in political, economic, and social areas) and value political participation.

[Abedinirad A. Ahmadi R., **Political participation with emphasis on villages nearby small and large cities: (Case: Iran, Badrabad and Bidkaneh villages)**. *J Am Sci* 2013;9(5s):79-86]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>.

Keywords: Participation; Political participation; Election; Badrabad, Bidkaneh

1. Introduction

The word "participation" literally means to engage and gather for a specific purpose and it conceptually is a complex multifaceted term which each society owns different levels of it (Hashemi, 2010). Participation refers to as informed, innovative, and principled engagement of rural and urban individuals and other social classes in decision-making, planning, activities, and professional local-social associations related to their own areas. It also includes attendance and cooperation in decision-making and political and socio-economic activities of society as a whole (Maleki, 2005). Overall, participation, as a social reality and essence of human societies, originates historically in social life and is considered a process that has changed over time and taken several faces (Taleb & Najafiasl, 2008). Encouraging citizens to participate in different socio-political areas, societies seek to tighten their social and political cohesion as well as their social ties and to prevent social collapse (Hashemi, 2010). Consistently, political participation is one of the most important forms of participation discussed a lot and is a manifestation of people attendance to determine their future and is influenced by social, economic, political, geographical conditions as well as religious

belief and history background (Hafeznia & Kavianirad, 2003). Political participation is referred to all citizens voluntary activities of a society (rural-urban) through which political leaders are directly or indirectly elected and society's general policies and in turn its political development are influenced (Rash, 1997). Political participation can be viewed as having various types and levels. It is influenced by social, economic, political conditions, and religious belief and history background (Pishgahifard & Zohdigoharpour, 2010). The emphasis, in geography, is on part of political participation influenced by environment. Environment is considered a space that surrounds us, shapes social, political, economic, and cultural aspects by its different manifestation, influences all aspects of people social and political life, and is a contributing factor in individual and collective decisions. Elections are a socio-cultural phenomenon and as a political behavior indicate a degree of political participation which each person, according to their political understanding of geographical environment, participates in to provide support, reform, and change and leaves a part of people's will in running affairs to the government (Baeilashki & Pishgahifard, 2008). Voting and participating in elections are the well-known forms of

political participation in democratic societies and voting is the most practical way for citizens to exercise their thoughts and opinions in running public and social affairs (Saiedimami & Abdollah, 2010). Elections as one of the manifestations of people attendance in determining their future and destiny are influenced by two types of factor: individual factor and sociopolitical factor (Parchami, 2006). Since the maximum participation of people in elections provides a base for political officials' self-confidences that they can assume people vote will serve as a supporter for their decisions, a drop in people participation in elections is a crucial problem for governments. It can be stated that in the last decades, trend of election participation reduction, among youths in many countries, especially developed country, has turned out to be a serious problem (movahhed, 2007). Elections are considered one of the pillars forming political structure in democratic systems. The most important political participation tool is to looking at public vote and analyzing citizens' elective actions. The history of elections in Iran, as a tool of people direct participation, can be traced back to 100 years ago and it can strongly be stated that rural people have played an important role in determining the government by participating in elections. Therefore, the present paper only studies political participation and participating or not participating in elections as the basic manifestation of people will and discusses this main question: what are the main factors influencing participating or not participating in elections by rural people and why is so? In this line, in political geography context, the influence of environmental conditions on political participation in the areas being studied. In this article, the extent of political participation- measured by participation in elections- will be investigated in two different areas in environment, population, and distance from the capital, that is, Ravansar city in Kermanshah province and Shahriar city in Tehran Province.

2. Theoretical Bases

That who participates and why what is that have been most addressed. In other words, what cause people to participate and to answer it, many thinkers have passed their opinions highlighting different special factors which eventually, has led to independent certain approaches for explaining political participation.

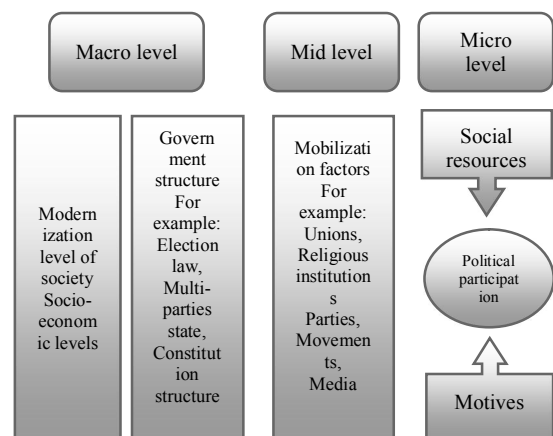
2.1. Social approach to explain political participation

Social approach or sociological expression is considered among main approaches in expressing political participation. Lipset is a prominent theorist

of this approach. He believes that political participation patterns of some countries, such as Germany, Sudan, America, Norway, Finland, and some other countries are similar. In these countries, men more than women, educated people more than less educated people, urban dwellers more than rural dwellers, people over 35-55 more than the younger, the married more than the single, high prestigious people more than lower-prestigious people, and members of organizations more than nonmembers are participating in socio-political processes (Lipset & Doose, 1992). Huntington, Lipset, Omland, and Raba and George Herbert have pointed out the role of the media in raising political knowledge and, as a result, increasing political participation. They argued that socio-economic development based on urbanism, an increase in education, literacy, industrialization, and mass media development is the prerequisite for establishing democracy as well a growing political participation (Hashemi, 2010, 207).

2.2. Psychological approach to political participation

Psychological approach to explaining participation pays more attention to mental and motivational stimulant believes individuals participation is more influenced by motives like idealism, influencing trends and change making, doing duty, and religious or national motives (Monteny & Schtern, 1977). Robert Dahl's psychological approach, which is based on rational choice, has been always used as one of the main models to explain political participation and especially participation in elections. In psychological approach to participation, concepts such as political competence and political trust are important (Saiedimami & Abdollah, 2010).



Noris' theoretical model of political participation
Source: adopted from Saiedimami & Abdollah (2010)

2.3. Behavioral approach to political participation

In the last two decades, spatial behavior approach has been increasingly used in political participation as well as people election behavior or selective group studies. Cerographers take environmental factors into consideration while deciding on political participation and selective behavior. Therefore, political geography studies part of elections which demonstrates the relationship among environment, political participation, and election behaviors (Hafeznia & Kavianirad, 2003). In the 1970s, many studies were carried out on spatial behavior school; mostly about decision-making related areas, election behaviors, information flow, research and learning model of perceptible research with emphasis on natural incidents and mental images. Behavioral geography seeks to discover and understand people mental maps and thereby utilize their perception of place. It studies how people perceive, respond, and eventually influence their settings and thoughtful man is the centerpiece of geographical analysis (Shakoei, 2005). Decision-making analysis is the focus of geography in behavior studies. Everybody makes a decision, but all decisions or all decision-makers don't make the same decisions. The direction of decisions is towards a special goal. Therefore, it is related to individual or collective values of decision-makers. Each decision-maker is faced with resources availability, limitations, obstacles, and conditions which affect the decision-makers freedom of action quality. In other words, decisions will occur in a certain time and spatial context. Therefore, it is necessary, in geographical analysis of phenomena, to fully recognize decisions factors and situations, values and belief accepted by decision-makers (Shakoei, 2005).

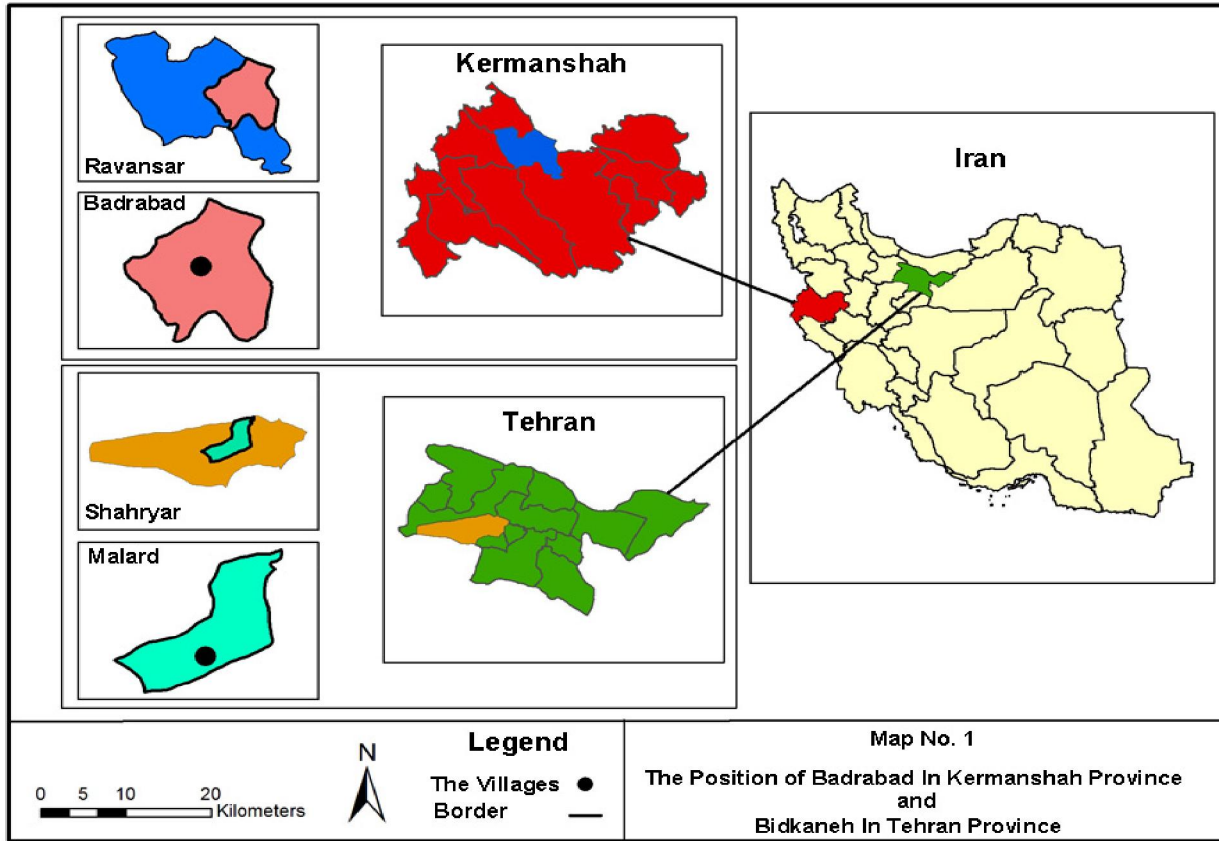
Josef soft land's behavioral classification of environment is as follows:

1. Geographical environment: refers to set of environments that are objective to living creatures and influence living creatures' behavior.
2. Performance environment: is within geographical environment and forms its functional part. This type of environment has impact on man's behavior as either individual or group.
3. Perceived environment: is within performance environment and is the part that humans perceive.
4. Behavioral environment: is part of perceived environment and affects person's behavior and decisions. In this environment, actually, human's behavior is guided and directed.

Finally to figure out human behavior, behaviorism school, which studies the effect of social environment on individual's behavior, seeks causes embedded in social environment and puts effects (or behaviors) in the second place. Distance is, also, a major contributing factor in theories of the school. It means when distance from the center increases, human's knowledge and perception of environment will decrease, although enabling factors of attraction and repulsion (like those in migration affair) may change these situations. With these definitions and review of theories related to political participation, it can be stated that in comparative study of factors influencing political participation between Bidkaneh village (60 km away from Tehran as the center of Iran's political evolution) and Badrabad village (60 km away from Kermanshah as the center of administration in west region of Iran), spatial approach can be used for explanation and provides a proper framework for all discussions of the paper.

3. Introducing Badrabad and Bidkaneh villages

Tehran province located in the center part of Iran consists of 13 cities, 35 towns, 76 rural districts, and 1100 villages and Bidkaneh village located in Mallard rural district, Mallard town, Shahriar city is one of these villages (Iran Statistics Bureau, 2005). The village is located in the longitude 50 degree and 55 minute and in the latitude 35 degree and 38 minute (Iran's villages geographical encyclopedia, 1990, Vol, 37). The village is located in the west of Shahriar city (14 km away) and is 60 km away from Tehran. Its population size is 5640 (Iran Statistics Bureau, 2005).the village is bounded in the north by Ghebchagh village, in the east by Esfandabad and Lomabad villages, in the west by Akhtarabad rural district, and in the south by Hesarshalpoush village (Guide Plan for Bidkaneh village, 2000). On the other side, Kermanshah province with 14 cities and 142 villages is located in the west of Iran and Badrabad village is located in Badr rural district, Ravansar city (Iran Statistics Bureau, 2005). The village is located in the longitude 46 degree and 61 minute and in the latitude 34 degree and 76 minute (The Armed Forces geographical institute, 1993). Its population is 401 persons and the village is bounded in the north by the main road Rvansar-Javanrood-Paveh, in the east by Zirchoubi village, in the west by Benavex, and in the south by farmlands and Sadeghabad village (Ravansar's governorship office, 2011).



Map1. The Position of Case Study's Villages

4. Research Methods

The method is descriptive-analytical. The study has been carried out using library studies and field techniques, such as observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The study is mostly focused on measuring people's opinion living in the two villages towards participation degree, contributing factors to participation or vice versa, and lack of political participation. To collect data, interviews and questionnaires were conducted. The statistical population consists of Bidkaneh village with the population of 5640 located in Mallard rural district and Badrabad village with the population of 401 located in Badrabad rural district (Iran Statistics Bureau, 2005). Using Cochran's sampling formula,

357 questionnaires were distributed and completed. Of this number, according to the size of the villages, 282 persons from Bidkaneh village and 75 persons from Badrabad village with legal age of voting were sampled randomly. Excel and GIS were applied to analyze data obtained.

5. Demographic information of the sample

The statistical population is comprised of two villages in Tehran and Kermanshah with appropriate variety on the subject being studied. The sample was selected in a way to cover at least 30 percent of the statistical population above age of 18 who have participated in one election.

Table1. Demographic background of sample

Village	Gender		Age				Marital Status	
	male	female	18-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50	single	married
Bidkaneh	65%	35%	62%	19%	12%	7%	30%	7%
Badrabad	79%	19%	19%	31%	37%	13%	19%	79%

Based on findings from questionnaires, most of the respondents were male with varied ages. Most of the respondents were between 18-30 in Badrabad village and 30-40 in Bidkaneh village. Over 70% of the sample was made up of married people and 25% and 37% in Bidkaneh and Badrabad villages, respectively, had middle school education, 50% and 19% had diploma, and 10% and 13% had bachelor's degree. 10% and 37% percent people of Bidkaneh and Badrabad villages were, respectively, unemployed, 12% and 33% were farmers, 28% and 19% were housewives, 32% was workers, 15% and 11% were students, and 3% was self-employed.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

To measure the degree of people's participation in elections living in Badrabad village located in Ravansar town which is away from socio-political evolutions and the degree of people's participation in elections living in Bidkaneh village located in Shahriar town which has proximity to the capital city of Iran and is influenced by constant evolution, a questionnaire was conducted and completed. Each item of the questionnaire was analyzed by the findings obtained, library and field studies, and researchers' knowledge. The findings are as follows:

a. Main reasons for participation

Based on findings from the 18 item questionnaire, we found that the main reason for the two villages' people to participate in previous elections is patriotism and nationalism, but there is still a misconception among people that people vote so that their birth certificate is stamped. People of both villages view voting as a religious duty as well as respecting religious rules. Candidates advertisement is another reason influencing the two villages' people and people will have confident in the candidate's mottos and participate more in case he is their relative.

For part of respondents influenced by rumors, especially those with official positions, the reason for participation was fear of not attending in participation. However, self-employed young people less influenced by rumors don't participate only for fear of losing their jobs. This group participates in elections more willingly.

It should be noted that "candidates with higher education degree" factor is a major contributing factor to the two villages' people's participation. As in Bidkaneh and Badrabad villages 75% and 69% of people, respectively, believed that this factor contributes to their participation in elections, based on information obtained from the questionnaire, the

higher degrees candidates have, especially at national level, the more participation will take place.

In response to the question "to what extent have local candidates influenced your participation", most of the respondents selected the choice "high" and believed they are more willing to participate in national-level elections (i.e. presidential election) compared to local-level elections (i.e. village-assistant elections). According to findings, the respondents believe local candidates compared to outsider candidates have more knowledge of the problems surrounding their village and solutions related to these problems.

b. Main reasons for lack of participation

In a question about the impact of economic pressures and social crises on people's participation and lack of participation, nearly 70% of respondents selected the choice "high". While their participation in elections is significant and prominent, but they believe it is useless to think that participation in elections can cease pressures and that there are some other reasons for such participation.

Candidates not keeping their pledges in different elections terms (especially at national level) is another reason for some residents' unwillingness to participate in elections. As respondents believe that by participation they can elect a representative to defend their rights, but in practice, sometimes, it doesn't do them and good and even their benefits may become at risk.

That voting doesn't have any effect on electing the desired candidate is another reason for the two villages' residents' reluctance to participation in elections. 30 percent of the respondents believe that their votes have no effect on elections. In contrast, a large part of the statistical population believes that their votes have been counted in previous elections and these votes have an effect on their national and local future.

c. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with political participation

The degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with participation was measured by a question investigating the result of elections. The results of analysis indicated that people's satisfaction degree with participation was different in age, gender, education, and job and that over half of the statistical population was satisfied with the results.

Type of elections has influence on satisfaction or dissatisfaction. As in some part of Kermanshah, villages' residents participated in Islamic councils elections for intense local and tribal contest and that people participated in presidential elections far less

than Islamic council elections. But in Tehran, people participate more in presidential elections, then in Islamic council elections and the least participation takes place in Islamic house of representative elections and people are most satisfied with presidential elections.

7. Conclusion

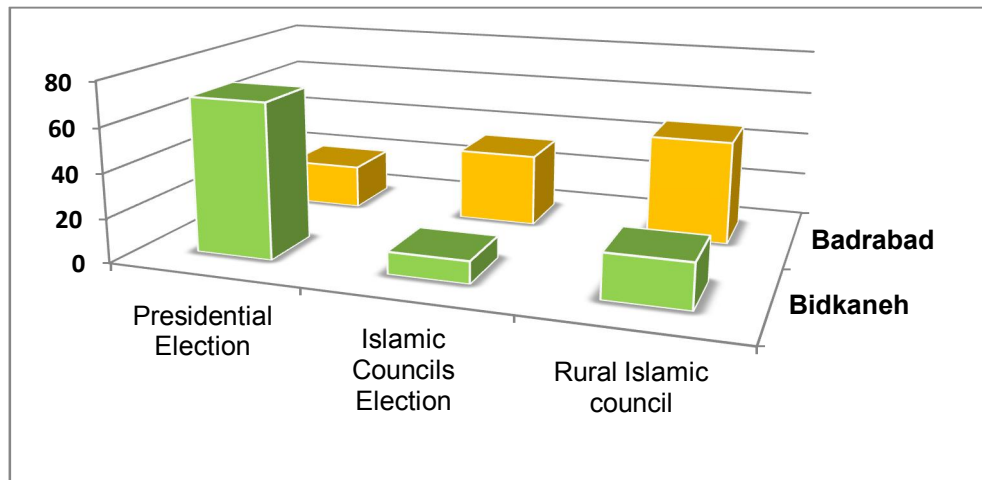
The results of the study conducted through questionnaires and interviews among the rural people that were sampled randomly are as follows:

In the early years of Iran Islamic Revolution, the misconception of voting for stamping birth certificate was dominant over the society, but after consolidation of Islamic Revolution this misconception faded away. But a small spark of this thought can be spotted in rural people. But the prevalence of patriotic and nationalistic thoughts has gained currency to the extent that national and religious duty is expressed as the main reason for participation in previous elections. In fact, the difference in knowledge and awareness levels, cultural differences, motives and thoughts variety act as key factors influencing participation. Other reasons for participation are candidates' pledges, familiarity with candidates, media advertisements and disputations, high education levels of candidates, and having an official job; these indicators have strong or weak effects by proximity to or being away from political centers of the country. Economic pressures, social crises, and least benefits to voters in

the two villages are the factors discouraging them from participation. Economic pressures and lack of motivation for financial growth, actually, are the factors distracting rural people's attention from political participation and pushing them to take position against this national matter.

Part of the findings shows that the idea of people's votes doesn't have any effect either at local or national scale is still dominant which has led to this thought that votes aren't counted and political participation doesn't benefit people. In contrast, a larger number of the population doesn't believe this opportunism and accept encouraging youths to participate in elections and participate in political participation (elections) in a larger scale. It can be said that the attitude regarding the positive effect of vote numbers on rural community's future is a factor encouraging rural residents to political participation or lack of political participation. Finally, people's participation of Badrabad village in local scale (rural Islamic councils) compared to national scale (presidential elections) is falling. The reason can be searched in the dominance of tribal culture, positive and immediate influence of local members, and availability of Islamic council board to serve which altogether have led to people participation expansion; however, Bidkaneh village's residents participate more in national elections (presidential elections) than local elections (Islamic councils elections), because they view this as a national duty.

Diagram1. Question: What is your participation in the electoral cycle?



Supplementary data (Pictures)

Village of Badrabad



Village of Bidkaneh



Corresponding Author:

Arezoo Abedinirad

M.A. in Rural Geography, University of Kharazmi, Young researchers and elits club, science and research branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran, Email: Arezooabedini66@yahoo.com

References

1. Baeilashki, M. and Pishgahifard, Z., 2009. Analyzing Iranian's election behaviors (case: Noshahr and Chalous in the 8th election of Islamic house of representative). *Research Journal of Human Geography*, 3, pp 93.
2. Hashemi, S., Fuladian, M. and Fatemiamin, Z., 2008. Investigation into social and mental factors influencing Tehran's people's participation. *Journal of Political Sciences*, Year 5, Issue 1, pp 201-207.
3. Hafeznia, M. and Kavianirad, M., 2003. *New horizons in political geography*. SAMT Publication, Tehran, Iran.
4. Hashemi, S., and et al, 2009. *Journal of Human Sciences*. Year 1, pp 207
5. *Housing foundation of Islamic Revolution*, 1999. *Guide design for Bidkaneh village in Shahriar city*. Bonyad-e-Maskan Publication, Tehran, Iran.
6. Maleki, A., 2005. Study of mental preparation for political participation among Hamadan's Paiam-e-noor University students. *Paik Noor*, Year 6, Issue 3, pp 4.
7. Lipset, M. and Dooze, R., 1993. *Political sociology*. Translated by Mohammadhossien Farjad, Ghomes Publication, Tehran.
8. Monteni, P., &Ashtern, L., (1987). *New attitude towards policy science*. Translated by Manouchehr Shojaei, Political & International Studies Bureau Publication, Iran, Tehran.
9. Movahhed, M.; Enayat, H. and Purneamat A., 2007. Investigation into the relationship between social capital and female political participation. *Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, special issue on social research, pp 90
10. Parchami, D., 2006. Study of people participation in the 9th presidential election. *Journal of Human Science*, Vol. 53, pp 37.
11. Pishgahifard, Z. & Zohdigoharpour, M., 2009. Study of Middle East women's role and position in political participation. *Quarterly Journal of woman and society*, Vol. 1, pp 30.
12. Rash, M., 1987. *Society and policy*. Translated by Manouchehr Sabouri. SAMT Publication, Tehran, Iran.
13. Saeidimami, K. and Abdolmotaleb, A., 2008. Factors influencing Tehran residents' participation in presidential and city council elections. *Journal of Political Science*. Year 4, pp 111-126.
14. Shakoei, H., 2005. *New thoughts in geography philosophy, environmental philosophy, and geographical schools*. Geography and Cartography Publication, Tehran, Iran.
15. Taleb, M. and Najafiasl, Z., 2008. Lessons from rural participation trends in Iran. *Quarterly Journal of Rural Research*, Period 1, Issue 2, pp 28.
16. The armed forces geographical institute, 1989. *Encyclopedia of Iran's village geography*. Vol. 37, Tehran.
17. The armed forces geographical institute, 1989. *Encyclopedia of Iran's village geography*. Kermanshah. Vol. 46, Tehran.

5/5/2013