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Citizen Participation in Informal Settlements; Potentials & Obstacles–The Case of Iran, Shiraz, Saadi Community

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Abstract**—**In recent years, "Bottom-up Planning Approach" has been widely accepted and expanded from planning theorists. Citizen participation becomes more important in decision-making in informal settlements. Many of previous projects and strategies due to ignorance of citizen participation, have been failed facing with informal settlements and in some cases lead physical expansion of these neighbourhoods. According to recent experiences, the new participatory approach was in somehow successful. This paper focuses on local experiences in Iran. A considerable amount of people live in informal settlements in Iran. With the previous methods, the government could not solve the problems of these settlements. It is time to examine new methods such as empowerment of the local citizens and involve them to solve the current physical, social, and economic problems.

The paper aims to address the previous and new strategies facing with informal settlements, the conditions under which citizens could be involved in planning process, limits and potentials of this process, the main actors and issues and finally motivations that are able to promote citizen participation.

Documentary studies, observation, interview and questionnaire have been used to achieve the above mentioned objectives. Nearly 80 percent of responder in Saadi Community are ready to participate in regularising their neighbourhoods, if pre-conditions of citizen involvement are being provided. These pre-conditions include kind of problem and its severity, the importance of issue, existence of a short-term solution, etc. Moreover, confirmation of dweller's ownership can promote the citizen engagement in participatory projects.

Keywords**—**Bottom-up Planning, Citizen Participation, Informal Settlements, Local Resources.

I. Introduction

DURING last decades, two different planning approaches have been appeared until 1970, "Top-down Planning Approachacceptable and dominant. This approach could not deal with some of problems and questions and after its failure to face with new challenges, the second so-called "Bottom-up Planning" approach mainly in western countries has been appeared. In recent years we can hardly find urban projects without using participatory method. Nowadays the role of citizen participation in planning and decision making is so important that "ability to involve and engage citizens and community dwellers in decision making" is considered as "one of the necessary skills of successful urban planners"[1].

Citizen participation becomes more important in decision making in informal settlements. Many of previous projects and strategies due to ignorance of citizen participation, have been failed facing with informal settlements and in some cases lead physical expansion of these neighbourhoods. Regarding recent experiences, the new participatory approach was in somehow successful. Although there is no informal settlement in European countries with the same characteristics in Iran, but in some of these countries there are neighbourhoods with similar problems [2]. For example, more than 350 neighbourhoods are recognised as "neighbourhoods with special needs" in Germany. In these neighbourhoods, programmes with the title of social city (soziale Stadt) are being provided and executed that focuses on citizen participation in decision making. Moreover similar programmes are in hand in United Kingdom, France, Denmark, Netherlands, Austria and Sweden [3].

However, this article focuses on local experiences in Iran. A considerable amount of people live in informal settlements in Iran. With the previous methods, the government could not solve the problems of these settlements. It is time to examine new methods such as empowerment of the local citizens and involve them to solve the existent physical, social, and economic problems.

Since 50 years, Informal Settlements have been appeared around the periphery of Iranian big cities. Followings are the most important causes of formation of these settlements in Iran:

1. High rate of population growth
2. Rapid urbanisation in Iran particularly after Islamic Revolution (after 1979)
3. Increasingly demand for Housing specially in urban areas
4. Limits of production capacities responding to the new migrants
5. Lack of suitable land with a reasonable price for housing in cities
6. Decrease in accessibility of low-income & partly middle-income groups to housing" was
7. Weak supervision & insufficient control of governmental units on construction

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8. Partly high level urban planning and design standards in cities
9. Provision of growing Potential of informal housing construction

To face with and solve the problems of informal settlements, during last decades, following strategies have been experienced:

1. Absolutely destruction (without giving any right to the dwellers)
2. Destruction & causing to migrate to the previous living or birth place
3. Destruction after allocation of cheap land
4. Destruction after allocation of cheap land & cheap housing materials
5. Destruction after allocation of cheap land & free housing materials
6. Buying & destruction
7. Destruction after transfer of dwellers to the low-price housing specially apartments
8. Obligation to reconstruction & renovation of housing units by owners with acception of their legal right of tenure
9. Connivance, but control of future development
10. Absolutely connivance

Implementation of most of the above programmes not only did not solve the housing problems of low-income citizens, but also resulted in expanding of these regions in all districts of the city [4]. Failure of governments in providing housing for low-income groups resulted in acception of renovation and reconstruction attitude based on "Enabling" informal sector and inhabitants of informal settlements and this approach, in turn, leaded to "Enabling and Regularising Informal Settlements" focussing on all encompassing participation of inhabitants in recent years. To address this goal, Iranian Ministry of Housing and Urban Development approved document of "Strategies for Enabling and Regularising Informal Settlements" in 2004. According to macro goals, guiding principles, and principal policies and strategies of this document, the essential focus of the document lies on the followings:

1. Emphasis on inhabitants' self-help, enabling, and empowering ,in other words *"helping people to help themselves"*,
2. Emphasis on participation of *local* dwellers, representatives, instructors, and organisations, and
3. Emphasis on use of *local* resources and potentials [5]-[6].

II. Case Study: Saadi Community-Shiraz City

"Saadi Community" is located at north-east of Shiraz city and has been developed at two sides of Shiraz-Qarameh road. This area is distinguished from the other districts of Shiraz city with two major particular characteristics as follow:

- At first, existence of Saadi tomb, the national famous poet, at the centre of this area.
- The second one related to the social and physical fabric of the area. in other words, because of centralization of low-income groups mainly migrants, social deviations, weariness and density of the fabric, informal ownership and low quality of environmental and visual conditions, it can be considered as a peripheral or informal settlement [7].

III. Historical Analysis of Saadi Community's Physical Development

Appearance and Physical development of Saadi Community can be categorised in four different historical periods [4]-[7]:

1. Appearance of "Saadi Village" –primary core (By the time of appearance until 1921): Precedency of Saadi community returns to more than 1400 years ago (before Islam). Accessibility to water resources (subterranean canal-Ghanat), natural topography, fertile agricultural land, and location on the road to Shiraz are some of the affecting factors on appearance of this community. Settlement of Saadi_ the national famous poet_ at the centre of this district is of course an important factor to formation and giving publicity to this community.

2. Appearance of secondary core (1921-1966): In this period, regarding natural growth of population and lack of migrants, the community experienced gradual physical development.

3. First period of physical development (1966-1979): In this period, internal (inside the community) and external factors (outside the community) played an important role on rapid expansion of Saadi. Combination of Saadi village to Shiraz city, construction of a wide road between Saadi Community & Shiraz city (easy accessibility of Saadi dwellers to shiraz), high price of housing land in Shiraz and relatively low price of housing land in Saadi and finally possibility of illegal land ownership and housing construction without following the planning & design standards have been some of the internal factors. More over, external factors including rapid urbanisation during 1963-1977 and after land reform, oil export with a high price, physical development of Shiraz city and coverage of surrounding villages have been effective on rapid expansion of Saadi community.

4. Second period of physical development (after Islamic Revolution-1979): Beginning of Islamic Revolution and continue and intensification of migration toward big cities, migration of foreign (Afghan) and Iran-Iraq war migrants to the region, and continue of physical development of Shiraz can be considered as affecting factors on physical development.

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IV. Role of Informal Market in Saadi Physical Development

Presence of informal market in Saadi Community is a point that plays an important role in physical development of this community. More than 74 percent of housing units have no permit to construct, and 84 percent of landlords have no formal deed of sale. High price of land & housing in Shiraz, high planning & design standards & regulations, and presence of endowment land in Saadi are the most important factors affecting appearance of informal market in Saadi Community. This situation resulted in insecurity of tenure and this, in turn, resulted in low quality of housing and fabric.

V. Tendency to Participation in Saadi Community

Although in recent years and mainly after Islamic Revolution, specially in large municipalities (including in Tehran) some participatory projects such as The Safe City Project(Proje-ye Shahr-e Salem), The Mayor-School Plan(Tarhe Shahrdar-Madreseh), The Comprehensive Plan of Green Space(Tarh-e Jame ja Pishgaman-e Fazay-e Sabz), The Safe Neighbourhood Plan(Tarh-e Mahalle-ye Salem) and etc. have been executed, but the experience of citizen participation in regularising spontaneous (specially informal) settlements is new and it can be mentioned that direct citizen participation in these settlements has not already been experienced. Therefore, to examine possibility of citizen participation in informal settlements, *tendency to participation* was the basis of this research.

In recent years, tendency to participation has been studied in Iran. One of the qualified researches[8], in which Shiraz city was included, two groups of theories (Theory of Powerlessness and Theory of Cost-benefit Evaluation) have been used to analyse the tendency of citizens to participation. Following statements as the results of the research [9] can explain tendency or lack of tendency to participation:

1. Feeling of Powerlessness: Decrease in "feeling of powerlessness" results in increase in tendency to participation.
2. Cost-benefit Evaluation: The more the persons evaluate the benefits of participation and the less its costs, the more they will be encouraged to participate.
3. The persons who have more "feeling of powerlessness", they will evaluate the costs of all levels of participation more than its benefits.
4. Education: Increase in education will considerably decrease feeling of powerlessness. The persons with higher level of education evaluate the interests of participation more than its costs.
5. Age: Increase in age decreases feeling of powerlessness, but it will again increase among old persons. In other words, the middle-age persons have the most amount of feeling of powerlessness.
6. Ethnic Groups: Feeling of powerlessness among non-persian ethnics is a little bit more than Persian ethnics. Belonging to the culture of majority (Persian ethnics) increases feeling of powerlessness.
7. Language: The persons whose mother language is non-persian, but speak Farsi, have nearly a more positive image of themselves, comparing with the persons either their mother language or their speaking language is Farsi. In other words, combination with majority's culture results in decrease in feeling of powerlessness.
8. Employment: Labour force in public sector evaluate the benefits of participation more than the others, therefore they have less feeling of powerlessness comparing with the other labour forces.
9. Size of City: It seems that tendency to participation decreases in big cities.
10. Relationships among Neighbours: Increase in traditional and sentimental relationships among neighbours increases tendency to participation.

According to the above statements in one hand, and current situation of the variables in Saadi Community (See Appendix) Possibility and tendency of Participation in this area is evaluated in the following table. Increase in education, belonging to majority's culture and ethnic groups, level of combination with majority's culture and employment in public sector because of the current situation of these variables in Saadi community have negative affect on citizen participation. In other words, these variables can limit citizen participation. On the contrary, increase in traditional relationship with neighbours has a positive role. The variables age and size of the city have no negative or positive affect and can be considered as neutral variables.

Potentials and obstacles of citizen participation in Saadi community are not limited to these variables. There are also other important factors affecting the inhabitants' participation. Two of these important factors are "informal ownership of land and housing" and "organic and irregular physical fabric" of the area.

Informal ownership of land and housing: As mentioned previously, 74 percent of housing units have no permit to construct and 84 percent of inhabitants have no deed of sale. This condition resulted in insecurity of tenure and in turn, this situation can limit the possibility and tendency of inhabitants' involvement in development process of the area.

Organic and irregular physical fabric: Lack of control on construction by municipality and lack of urban plan in this area caused creation of an organic and irregular physical fabric, in which physical plans' implementation partly needs complete destruction of housing units. This situation can lead not only to owners' resistance against some of urban plans, but also to limit their participation. Therefore, any kind of intervention in physical fabric needs special attention to this issue.

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TABLE I
EVALUATION OF VARIABLES AFFECTING PARTICIPATION IN SAADI COMMUNITY

Variables	Current Situation in Saadi Community	Evaluation of the Variables Affecting Participation
Increase in Education	Low level of education, more than 81 percent lower than guide school	Negative (effect on Participation)
Belonging to Majority's Culture & Ethnic Groups	High ratio of Turkish and Afghan migrant population	Negative
Level of Combination with Majority's Culture	Low level of combination (specially for foreign migrant population)	Negative
Employment in Public Sector	Only 20 percent , a large amount of inhabitants have insecure job	Negative
Middle-aging	Mostly with a young age structure, but also presence of considerable middle-age people	Neutral (without any effect)
Increase in Traditional Relationship with Neighbours	In some parts of Saadi Community specially in Fohandeg, Neighbours are relatives and share the same ethnic group and they have strong traditional relationship	Positive
Smallness of City Size	Shiraz is a big city in Iran, but Saadi Community is a relatively separate urban-rural area with small size	Neutral (without any effect)

VI. PRIORITY OF ISSUES REGARDING POSSIBILITY OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

According to the recent studies in Saadi Community [4]-[10], the dwellers have a tendency to participate in issues which meet the essential problems of the community. These issues are classified as follow:

TABLE II
PRIORITY OF ISSUES REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY AND TENDENCY OF SAADI DWELLERS TO PARTICIPATE (BASED ON INTERVIEW AND QUESTIONNAIRE)

Priority	Main Issues	Detailed Issues
1	Environmental Sanitation	a) Waste Water Disposal (Street)
		b) Waste Water Disposal (Housing)
		c) Waste Garbage Disposal
		d) Presence and Density of Polluting Services (Polluting Working Places, ..)
		e) Seasonal River
2	Criminal Behaviour & Social Malaise & Rebellion	Presence of Social Deviator Groups (Hoodlums, Druggers, Fornication,..)
3	Shortage of Urban Services & Facilities	Shortage of Sport & Leisure Grounds
		Shortage of Parks & Green Space
		Shortage of Educational & Health Services
4	Poor Accessibilities & Their Unsuitable Situation	Narrow Streets & Valleys, Organic & insufficient Network,…)
5	Poor Physical Condition	Referred to the Form & Structure of Fabric & low Quality of Housing

The priority of issues in table II shows the main problems of the community from the point of view of the dwellers. Moreover, other issues and problems have been addressed in studies undertaken by Maab Consulting Engineers [7], but the issues mentioned in above table are the problems that the local inhabitants have stronger tendency to participation to organise the community. Table II shows that the inhabitants are more interested in participation in issues that:

Are their essential and day to day problems;
Are sensible and tangible for them; and
Can be regularised and solved in short time.

VII. MAIN ACTORS IN SAADI COMMUNITY

In most of urban planning projects, all of the citizens can not directly participate, but their representatives help planners and authorities to make decisions. Therefore, before each participatory plan or project, the main actors should be recognized. Main actors that have a role in decision- making can be categorised in two existing and possible actors. The possible actors are the groups or agencies which have not been formed till the present time, but because of the importance of these groups, they would have essential role in the case of existence.

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Existing Actors

- Municipality of Shiraz
- Shiraz Islamic Councils
- NGOs
- CBOs
- Local Trusties & Patriarches
- Shiraz University
- Governmental Units
- Stakeholders (Women, Young People, Children, and Poor Dwellers)
- National & Local Enabling Task Forces
- Consulting Engineers
- International Organizations (World Bank, World Health Organization)
- Loan of other Foreign Countries (Present Example: Japan)
- Saadi Parish Council

Possible Actors

- Municipality of Saadi Community
- Local Regularising Task Force

VIII. Conclusion

Despite high rate of poverty and social, economic, cultural, and physical limiting factors on citizen participation in Saadi Community, there are possibilities and potentials of participation. According to a recent survey, more than 69 percent of Saadi inhabitants have tendency to participate in numerous urban plans. And 10 percent of respondents made their participation conditional if the issue of involvement recognised. Therefore nearly 80 percent of the Saadi dwellers are ready to participate in development process if the preliminaries are provided.

As previously mentioned, the environmental and sanitation issues (such as waste water disposal, waste garbage disposal, presence and density of polluting services,…) are the subjects to which the highest possibility and tendency of participation are cited. Moreover, accessibility and solving the problem of road network is an attractive issue to participate for the dwellers.

Another important point to be mentioned, is considering encourager factors for participation. In this area, as discussed above, insecurity of tenure can limit the level of participation. Therefore, confirmation of dwellers' ownership and awarding them the formal deed of sale can logically lead to promote the level of participation.

Generally speaking, regardless of numerous limits and constraints of citizen participation, there are particular issues in which Saadi inhabitants are eager to be involved to solve their essential problems.

Appendix

Current Situation of Saadi Community

1-Physical and Morphological Structures

- Neighbourhoods: This district includes 5 neighbourhoods
- Housing Condition: _Housing area: low (46 percent of housing units smaller than 100 m²)

_ Housing per capita: low (25.5 m.²)

_74 percent of housing units have no permit to construct

_84 percent of landlords have no formal deed of sale

_Price of land and housing is low comparing with other parts of Shiraz city

_Number of households in housing unit: high (1.2 to 1.4)

_Low quality of housing units and materials

- Urban Services and Public Spaces: Considerably low

_Parks and green spaces: per capita 1.3 m.² (despite location of two city wide gardens in this area)

_Health and sanitary: per capita 0.06 m.²

_Sport and leisure: per capita 0.026 m.²

_Public education: per capita 0.92 m.²

- Texture: In Saadi Community these variety of textures can be seen:

_small lots, compacted texture, and organic network

_small lots, compacted texture, and semi-regular network

_small lots, semi-compacted texture, and regular (geometric) network

_Medium lots, semi-compacted texture, and regular (geometric) network

_Medium lots, open texture, and regular (geometric) network

2-Demographic and Social Characteristics

- Demographic Characteristics (1996)[11]:

_Total Population: 52000 inhabitants

_Gross population density: 180-360 population in hectare

_ 15000 Afghan migrants

_Household number: high (4.5-5)

_Sexual ratio: high (105)

_Literary and education: low

_Age Structure: mostly young

- Social Characteristics:

_Predominance of rural migrants

_Afghan migrants

_Presence of Social deviator groups (hoodlums, druggers,)

_Low social status of residents

_Presence of different languages and ethnic Groups (Persian, Afghan, Turkish, …)

_Predominance of Rural Culture

_High ratio of criminal behaviour

3-Economic Characteristics

_High rate of unemployment
_Employment in informal sector
_Insecurity of employment
_Low level of employment in public sector
_Predominance of low-income group
_Low price of land and housing (affected by social and physical characteristics of the area)

4-Environmental Situation

Saadi Community is settled at the slope of mountain, because of it this area has a large amount of environmental potentials. Beautiful landscape, two wide famous gardens, and Saadi Tomb are some of the environmental potentials of this area.

Despite of these natural and historical attractions, Saadi area suffered from a lot of environmental problems. Presence and density of polluting services (such as polluting working places, animal husbandry,...), seasonal river as a place of waste garbage disposal, fluent housing waste water on the streets are some of these problems.

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