Pathology of the Formation of Iranian Local Governance using Constructing Grounded Theory

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Local governance is a comprehensive concept and a continuous process in which the government and citizens govern the affairs of a territory through bilateral interactions. Accordingly, given the accelerated global developments and inefficiency of one-sided and hierarchical relations between central and local governments, centralization and monopolism of central governments are no longer efficient in governing the vast territory of a nation; as a result, there is a need for strategies to offer an effective relation between these two levels so as to facilitate service provision to citizens. In addition, considering the country’s objectives in line with assembling all resources and terminating sole dependency on fossil fuel supplies to achieve sustainable developments, the notions of decentralization followed by government improvement can be advantageous. To this end, the purpose of the present inquiry is to present a pathologic study of national-local relations through the identification of potentials, limitations, contextual factors and strategies on the formation of local government within the Iranian administrative system.

2. Literature Review

Iran’s inclination towards reducing the role of the government in the economy and other vital aspects of the society as well as emphasis on development and the downsizing of the government suggest the influence of global developments on the Iranian bureaucratic system and policymaking. On the other hand, considering rapid environmental changes, the grounds for meeting people’s demands are arranged and the government should modify and update itself accordingly. Therefore, sole reliance on conventional communication mechanisms can no longer meet the needs of today’s society.

Organizations such as the World Bank argue that the position of public decision-making should be as close as possible to the citizens under its influence; particularly, the subsidiarity principle should be taken into account according to which, local governance responsibilities ought to occur locally, unless there are reasons not to allocate such powers. Otes believes that all public services should be provided by the

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authority that controls the minimum geographical region and internalizes the expenses and benefits of these provisions, because local governments have a better understanding of the concerns of local citizens. On the other hand, Miller suggests that local governments and decentralization are closely-connected notions.

In traditional definitions, the word “governance” is synonymous with government and implies “the act or the process of governance”. However, Johnson believes that in the new application, governance is defined as the interference of an extensive spectrum of actors in producing policies; additionally, McLolín defines governance as a process that guarantees a coherent system which involves both the government and the society.

In Iran, the first local management and city administration act was passed in 1907 as “Baladiyah Law” meaning Urban Law”; it was a pattern intended for decentralization in Iran which was dismissed during the Pahlavi era and its centralization policies. Following the Islamic Revolution, despite the fact that a suitable capacity was foreseen for the management of local affairs and the role-playing of publicly-appointed councils within numerous constitutional principles, it was not realized and national affairs continued to be managed by the central government. Moreover, the discussion on relations between the central and local governments in line with the formation of new local governments has resulted in the involvement of constitutional principles regarding national, intergovernmental relations in the subject of central-local coordination. Such a coordination denotes the mutually effective role of the local and central governments to offer better services and democracy improvement; therefore, these elements and relations in local governance require a more comprehensive examination and revision.

3. Method

The present study was conducted using the Constructing Grounded Theory which follows an interpretive, exploratory approach and places an emphasis on emergent phenomena, the definition of their characteristics, and presentation of participants’ definitions of events and situations whilst attempting to expand its tacit meanings and implied principles (Charms, 2014, 32). The participants in this study included 21 experts with working experience. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, documentation, and continues comparisons. Analysis in the grounded theory was conducted through four coding stages including initial, centralized, axial and theoretical, the results of which provided a demonstration of relations between concepts. The reliability of the study was insured through extensive presence at the location and in-depth interactions. The validity of the study was also guaranteed through transparency of the entire research procedures.

4. Results and Discussion

In this study, 749 key expressions were obtained at initial coding, 297 concepts identified from centralized coding, and 30 secondary and 8 main concepts were attained using axial and theoretical coding, respectively. Titles including “the element of lawfulness at the local level” and “citizens’ access and familiarity of modern communication tools” were identified as the only institutional and social potential secondary concepts, respectively. The five secondary concepts of institutional limitations included policy-performance conflicts, legal issues, informal influences, inadequate local-central financial and functional relations, and impractical outsourcing. The five secondary concepts of social limitations included negative policymaking, multitude of interests, pessimistic outlooks, seeking personal benefits, and the absence of collective participation and a merit-based system. Four secondary concepts of political factors involved the government’s monopolist spirit, ineffective implementation of democracy, the influence of governance
5. Conclusion

Given the global experiences and lack of domestic success in providing adequate services to citizens, the Iranian national government is principally determined to surrender its centralized power and resolve institutional and social limitations against the formation of local governance so as to facilitate service provision. Moreover, considering the time-consuming nature of resolving social issues, the necessity to make urgent decisions accordingly and the participation of all actors in local governance is inevitable. On the other hand, there are a number of underlying political and economic factors in this concept that call for unity, solidarity, and the adoption of legal and inherent responsibilities among the three constitutional powers of the state. While institutional strategies are mostly related to the resolution of legal issues, certain social strategies are recommended as agendas including building trust among citizens, their empowerment, and participations so that the formation of local governance in Iran would not be too far-fetched.

Keywords: Decentralization, Local Governance, National-Local Relations, Constructing Grounded Theory

References (In Persian)


**References (In English)**


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