Physical-spatial impacts of villagers' participation in implementation of rural development projects with emphasis on government development projects
(Southern Kouhdasht Dehestan of Kouhdasht County)

Darvishi. Hedayatollah¹
MSc, in Geography and Rural Planning, Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

AzizPour. Farhad
Assistant prof, Rural Planning, Kharazi University, Tehran, Iran

Rahmanifar. Fazli. AbdulReza
Assistant prof, Rural Planning, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Beyranvandzadeh. Maryam
PhD Candidate in Geography and Urban Planning, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Received 1 April 2013  Accepted 24 October 2013

1. INTRODUCTION

Village as a "geographical reality" or "local- spatial reality" consists of interrelated components that could be regarded a system. This local- spatial system is not only affected by internal forces and trends within the system, but also is virtually influenced by a set of external forces and trends originated from other local- spatial realities. In the meantime, (physical) development projects are one of the most important factors and forces that affect one of the main aspects of this system i.e. physical- spatial dimensions of rural settlements that have been implemented in rural areas by the government. However, documents of development plans emphasize that, despite the adequate allocation of funds and implementation of a relatively high number of such projects, yet development indicators are not in favorable conditions. In other words, these projects have not adequately promoted socio-economic aspects of rural life.

This situation is influenced by many factors that are often of structural nature or functionality. Evaluation of the role of public participation in preparation, approval and implementation of these projects show that they are of particular importance. In projects that highly emphasized on public participation, the contribution of the various aspects of the project especially to physical-spatial aspects were more stable, and the villagers had higher sense of satisfaction. However, where the role of people was neglected, the contribution of the projects were more unstable and even in some cases they were troublesome for some villagers.

Participation and its effectiveness in promoting sustainable development indicators in different areas of the country depend on socio-economic and spatial-physical conditions

Corresponding Author: hedayat_4@yahoo.com
of the country. Southern Kouhdasht Dehestan as part of the Lorestan province is one of such locations which has its own specific conditions. This rural area in the years following the Iran-Iraq war has received government funding (though limited compared to other areas of the country) to implement some projects such as Rural Conduct plans, rural road network, gas pipeline, electricity, etc. These projects, taking their goals into account, succeeded in some rural areas in producing new space and ameliorating the existing spaces. Rise in the value of buildings and land, easier transportation, the spatial separation of man life from domestic animals, are among the significant changes. Accordingly, this study sought to answer the following questions:

Have villagers contributed to rural development programs and projects? What are the spatial impacts of the villagers' participation in rural development projects?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Participation in the planning is a process of research and dialogue and getting people involved in decision-making and planning process, through which people can express their views to the authorities. Therefore, authorities would gain a far better understanding of the villagers’ needs and can analyze causes and effects of their needs, and make joint and effective decisions. This is of such a high importance that sometimes development is regarded as equivalent to participation. Therefore, to achieve development in general and sustainable rural development in particular, it is necessary to adopt the ways in which public participation is underlined. Accordingly, focus on "local community" is integral to sustainable rural development. Development plan with utter disregard for involvement and effectiveness of their possible users, however, are at best theoretical formulations not in agreement with concrete and empirical reality. Rural settlements as a system have a structure that are not only influenced by inside factors, but also depend on some external factors.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in a descriptive-analytical method. In this method, the researcher first describes the independent and dependent variables and then measures the impact of the variables. Data were collected by library-survey research, interviews and field studies. The study area included 47 rural settlements in southern Kouhdasht (central district of Kouhdasht County). Cochran formula was applied to determine the sample size and the number of households (with respect to the number of projects implemented in the rural areas as the main indicator for selecting the sample society). In this formula, using a confidence level of 95 percent, error rate of 5 percent and the variance of 0.25, the sample size included 10 villages and 324 households. Moreover, t-test and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) were employed to analyze the data.
4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Analysis of variables suggest that rural development projects as an external factor introduced to southern Kouhdasht had favorable physical consequences in its rural areas, which include rise in price of land, renovation of rural pavements and road networks, preventing unauthorized construction, surface water disposal, rehabilitation and renovation of housing facilities (which underline a significant reduction of non-standard housing).

The study results show that focus on structural (socio-economic) capacities of some of the villages in the study area, such as rural participation (affected by factors such as administrative coordination with local agencies, and role of Trustees and the elders) have provided such a context. That is, development projects as an external structural factor consistent with natural characteristics of rural areas had positive effects on the villages and this made them internally sustainable.

It is concluded that planning (preparation, implementation and evaluation) with utter disregard for participation, involvement and influence of the possible users, however, are at best theoretical formulations not in agreement with concrete and empirical realities. According to research findings, in order to promote participation and rural development projects and achieve better results in development projects, the following suggestions are offered:

• To empower rural culture through educational workshops;
• To promote local self-reliance in decision-making processes at the village level;
• To promote and improve the knowledge and responsibility of rural people about development projects;
• To establish civil society institutions and facilities and encourage people to actively participate in these institutions and organizations.

Key words: rural settlement, the role of villager's, AHP model, Lorestan Province.

References (In Persian)


References (in English):

