

**INITIATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITHIN  
GREATER TEHRAN MUNICIPALITY: ATTITUDES,  
THEORY AND PRACTICE**

by

Shole M. Ebrahimi  
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 2005

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**APPROVAL**

**Name:** Shole M. Ebrahimi

**Degree:** Master of Urban Studies

**Title of Project:** Initiation of Public Participation within Greater Tehran Municipality: Attitudes, Theory and Practice

**Examining Committee:**

**Chair:** Dr. Peter V. Hall

---

**Dr. Karen Ferguson**  
Senior Supervisor  
Associate Professor, Urban Studies Program and  
Department of History  
Simon Fraser University

---

**Dr. Patrick J. Smith**  
Supervisor  
Professor, Department of Political Science  
Simon Fraser University

---

**Dr. Derryl MacLean**  
External Examiner  
Associate Professor, Department of History  
Director, Centre for the Comparative Study of Muslim  
Societies and Cultures  
Simon Fraser University

**Date Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_



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## **Abstract**

This study examines the growing interest in public participation at the local municipal level in Tehran, the capital of Iran. This research paper utilizes a qualitative case study to evaluate a participatory project called ‘Nezarate Hamegani-Center 1888’. First, the study reviews public participation patterns in Iran and focuses on existing foundations of participatory actions in Iranian history as fundamentals to the creation of Center 1888 in 2005. Second, it analyzes the development of Centre 1888, and its qualities and missing elements. As the study demonstrates that the local Iranian officials created Center 1888 to enhance the city management of Tehran’s municipality, it articulates that the project designers failed the consideration of fundamentals for devising an effective participatory project. Further, this study addresses the existing problems within Center 1888 and identifies a number of recommendations which could help improve the center’s objectives and should be considered for conducting future participatory projects.

Key Words: city planning • public participation • evaluation • local municipality • Tehran

# **Dedication**

To My Parents

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## **Abbreviations**

Center 1888	Nezarate Hamegain
DPD	Disciplinary Police Department
GTM	Greater Tehran Municipality
IAP2	International Association For Public Participation
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LRQA	Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Limited (in London)
Nezarate Hamegani	Public Supervision/Monitoring
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
US	United States
WUF III	Third World Urban Forum

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

The early years of the Islamic Republic of Iran were largely consumed by establishing and stabilizing the new regime not by enhancing pluralism and the development of a civil society, as had been the major demand of the 1979 anti-Shah revolutionaries, but rather it was done by suppressing opposition groups and controlling the economic and social matters that enhanced the establishment of an authoritarian state (Hoodfar, 1995, para.1). As opposed to the former Pahlavi regime, where the nation was encouraged to be de-politicized, the Islamic regime felt that to control both the economy and society, it needed to mobilize the public by a top-down approach in order to get support for its ideological and socio-political visions (Richards, 1995). However, a number of major incidents challenged the state authorities to demonstrate some tendencies toward public engagement in their governing method. Included in these were the collapse of oil prices, the growing population of the country, and the flow of people to the urban areas, all of which resulted in a growth of new problems in transportation, traffic, garbage disposal, drug addiction, pollution and extensive housing development in the remaining green zones (Karshenas, 1990). In addition, the end of the war with Iraq in 1988, and the need for reconstruction and renewed economic growth in order to meet the needs of the rapidly growing population, brought to the fore several proposals for decentralization of economic, fiscal, administrative and political functions, and for privatizing economic sectors (Tajbakhsh, 2000).

When in Tehran, the national capital of Iran for more than 200 years, urban problems started to become unavoidable, the local government demonstrated its concerns over these problems by considering approaches toward public participation methods, quoting from Islamic literature, including the Koran and Hadis books, that citizen participation is essential for state affairs. Tehran's local government hoped that the formation of projects that required public participation could unravel challenges that the city was facing, improve the city's situation, and secure the reputation of the municipality and the city collectively. After all, with 14 million urban dwellers, called by the United Nations as "one of the largest metropolitan areas of the world" and the most populated city in the region, Tehran's reputation as the greatest cultural and political center in Asia was at risk (Un-Habitat, 2003). Observer and urban planner Ali Madanipour has pointed out that the uniqueness and the prominence of this city (Tehran), especially to the Middle East region, were at risk due to the rapid urbanization pattern and its accompanying problems (Madanipour, 1998).

In 1997, urban practitioners within Tehran's local government paid more attention to the decentralization trend and integrated it with existing citizen demands for public participation, and designed projects such as 'Share Ravan' and 'Family Policing', projects aiming to promote attentive driving in the city and on the highways. 'Family Mayor', a project in which one child in each home becomes a mayor promoting activities such as recycling and energy saving within the home was also initiated in district 10 and later was followed by other districts in Tehran (City of Tehran, 2006a). Consequently, the mayor of Tehran proposed 'Tarhe Jahadi 137', called Terminal 137, and 'Tarhe

Nezarate Hamegani’, meaning ‘call for public participation in monitoring’, in 2000 and in 2005.

Center 1888 has been designed to oversee the activities of Terminal 137, and to receive citizen’s concerns in relation to the municipality’s performance (Terminal 137, 2000). Since its implementation in 2006, Center 1888 is responsible to communicate with citizens of Tehran to ensure their satisfaction regarding the speed and the quality of municipal activities. One of the center’s important promises asserted in its objectives is to receive people’s points of view and suggestions regarding the city’s affairs, the municipality’s management method, and its managers (Center 1888, 2005a). Since its creation, the publicity around this center has been significant compared to other past and current projects in Tehran’s municipality. This significance is demonstrated in efforts that the municipality has put to publicize Center 1888 through a number of international conferences in cities such as Istanbul, Toronto, Vancouver and Melbourne. In numerous interviews, presentations and public speeches, Tehran’s mayor has called this move “an innovation with a revolutionary measure that offers appropriate civic services to people in Tehran” (City of Tehran, 2006a, p. 57). Being one of the most important projects since the current mayor took the office in 2005, I selected Center 1888 as the case study for this research.

## **1. 2 Research Questions**

Taking a qualitative approach and using the cultural and historical context of public participation in Iran, this research paper sets out to examine the factors that initiated the creation of Center 1888 within the local municipality of Tehran. Further, this study has used Center 1888 as a case study model to evaluate the current form of the

center's proceedings and to find out if its activities are consistent with its public participatory objectives. Given that the design of Center 1888 was based on a top-down approach, as is often the practice of policy design in "countries in transition"<sup>1</sup>, the questions reflected in this study are:

1. What initiated the shift toward public participation in Tehran's urban management system leading to the creation of Center 1888?
2. To what extent and in what form/s does Center 1888 proceed and/or foster participation?

These questions are essential as they open grounds for more discussion on this important project and build basic measures that should be considered when designing such projects. The answers to these questions should provide a building block for further systematic research and a collective collaboration for the improvement of current projects and the development of future aspects of any participatory projects in the municipality of Tehran.

Given that there is a growing interest in public participation within Tehran's local government, the primary objective of this research is to demonstrate the importance of public participation in the design process as an imperative consideration for Tehran due to its rising social and environmental problems. Considering that current urban practitioners are faced with challenging questions of what can be achieved to improve Tehran's liveability, the study has also tried to bring together current research and theory relevant to public participation to identify barriers that prevent public participating within the Center 1888. In addition, by bringing ideas, methods and theories from the literature

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<sup>1</sup> As opposed to "Developing" or "Third World", this term is used currently by many international agencies and within scholarly works, especially in economic section.

about public participation, this research is intended to assist the Center 1888 project in its development, and to contribute to fundamental improvements in this practice, as well as policy formulation at the level of the local municipality.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Definition, the Importance and the Challenge of Public Participation in Urban Planning**

Drawing from the ‘theory of communication’<sup>21</sup>, Ortwin Renn, Thomas Webler and Peter M. Wiedemann note that the existing problems of rapid urbanization have challenged many democratic governments as well as many governments within “countries in transition” in the area of a need for direct citizen participation (Renn, Webler and Wiedemann, 1995). At the same time, there are problems finding an exact definition for public participation or creating an effective working participatory project. Many studies demonstrate that the challenges of public participation in liberal democratic societies like Canada, the UK and the US, where citizen-based organizations and associations work collaboratively with the state, is the existence of differing understandings of participation (Cohen, J. L. & Arato, A., 1992; Diamond, 1999; Innes & Booher, 2004). Many social scientists indicate that these different understandings are due to factors such as diverse population, religion or ethnicity, and/or the geo-political and socio-economic uniqueness of each society (Atlee, 2003). Webler and Renn argue that administrators, citizens, stakeholders, and experts often have differences in understanding participation (Webler & Renn, 1995). They state that although “all desire participation, but for quite different reasons, they may have different ideas about what it is and how the process should be conducted” (Wbler & Renn, 1995, p. 2). Despite the different

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Habbermass (2002)

definitions of public participation at the present time, it is a significant practice and its importance is promoted and exercised by international bodies like the United Nations (2007) and in many cases led by multilateral institutions like the World Bank (1996) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In 2001, the OECD reported:

Engaging citizens in policymaking is a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap wider sources of information, perspectives, and potential solutions, and improves the quality of the decisions reached (OECD, 2001, p.11).

Around the world, many urban planners view public participation as an important solution to the increase of problems created by urbanization over last few decades. For example, a group of delegates in the 2006 World Urban Forum identified a set of problems about urbanization, which are particular to 'countries in transition'. These problems include the lack of: political will; information and experiences; use of traditional knowledge; adequate policies, laws and regulations; monitoring and; appropriate science and technology (UN-Habitat, 2006a). They further identified a set of solutions for effective urban governance including partnership between all stakeholders in a society, development of a shared social vision, and resource-sharing, asserting that the success for development in these countries is possible through creating sustainable policies and projects through efficient and effective public participation (UN-Habitat, 2006a).

Although the literature on public participation contains of no clarified definition, in general terms, participation is used more or less to mean a process by which



individuals and groups come together to communicate, interact, exchange information and provide input around a particular set of issues, problems, or decisions, and take part in the decision-making process to one degree or another. The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) defines public participation as a process in which the public has a say in the decision making with the knowledge that they will influence the decision and that the decision will in turn affect them (IAP2, 2006).

In addition, the appearance of institutionalized participation in more democratic states has formed the creation of civil society. In general, “civil society” refers to the non-political aspects of the contemporary social order. Jones and Baumgartner indicate that both traditional and contemporary political scientists believe in public participation and that its existence is imperative for positive social outcomes (Jones & Baumgartner, 2004). The existence of many associations and institutions within more democratic societies have generated the patterns of dialogue necessary for healthy relationships between the state and citizens while creating consensus for policy decisions that are made in these societies. Booher and Innes believe that participation through civil society is about ‘building support’ as well as gaining legitimacy for public decisions (Booher & Innes, 1999). They maintain this perspective by asserting that “If a planner can say, ‘we held a dozen public hearings and reviewed hundreds of comments and everyone who wanted had a chance to say his piece’, then whatever they decide to do is, at least in theory, “democratic” and therefore legitimate”(Booher & Innes, 1999a, p. 31). Therefore, in order to build a participatory democracy, it is necessary to provide citizens with an institutional framework that allows effective participation in public issues. Innes and Booher indicate that efforts by government should be taken to facilitate participants in

direct dialogue with one another and with decision makers. They believe that if these efforts are well designed, they can actually empower citizens and cause policy change (Booher & Innes, 1999b).

Another challenge when considering public participation is to generate a “good” participatory project. Nevertheless, the literature on public participation lacks a set of concrete evaluation criteria to determine if a project is good or not, because many scholars believe that due to the diversity of expectations and goals, “good” or “successful” participation is relative and therefore context-dependent (English, 1991). Peelle also suggested that many factors considered in the evaluation of participation depend on contextual factors such as the social, economic, historical, and political context of the situation (Peelle, 1996). However, based on Chess and Purcell’s extensive research on public participation, there are a set of indicators that define effective participation (Chess & Purcell, 1999). Laird, for example, created a set of criteria from theories of pluralism and direct participation that included the number of groups/individuals brought into the process, opportunity for learning and improved understanding, access to relevant officials, equality of resources, and degree of influence (Laird, 1993). Several studies (Vaughan, 1995; Shepherd & Bowler, 1997) include the importance of citizen representation in their evaluation of the involvement process during the design, implementation and later assessment of any project. Laird asserts that the learning process is central to effective participation and enables the participants to understand the fundamentals of participation, its rationality and its mechanisms, and its outcome as social goods (Laird, 1993). Further, based on the theory of “communicative action”, Weblar indicates that “good” public participation opens multi-way

communication and is non-hierarchical, and as it relies on citizens' reasonableness, it supports respect for individual autonomy and promotes critical self-reflection (Webler, 1993). In a literature review on public participation, published by Scottish government, Linda Nicholson indicates that issues such as early engagement, modifying traditional methods of engagement, and creating new techniques and proper facilities, which generate more public-involvement, are common to produce effective public participation projects (Nicholson, 2005).

Given this review, a set of criteria agreed on by most scholars, can be considered to evaluate the success of a public participation project. They are: early engagement of the public; allocation of adequate resources to facilitate more participation; creation of multi-way communication between stakeholders; the methods and mechanisms used for designing, implementing and evaluating the project; development of provisional trust between government and the public, and; setting priorities such as building trust, promoting public participation through an educational process, providing facilities for equal participation of men, women, minorities, etc, and finally opening the ground for deliberation which empowers the public to take part in their own future.

## **2.2 The Definition, the Importance and the Challenge of Public Participation in Countries in Transition**

The importance of considering public participation within countries in transition is even greater since the rapid urban transition toward cities and the scale of this transition impact these countries more than any other in the world. For example, the population of Mexico city in last 4 decades has tripled, Sao Paulo has reached a population of 20 million, Jakarta in Indonesia and Karachi in Pakistan have each

exceeded 15 million residents, and in Iran, more than half of urban dwellers, nearly 14 million, live in the capital City of Tehran (UN-Habitat, 2006a). Many reports from UN-Habitat have demonstrated that since the increase of population in these cities has not been relative to their economic growth, the process of urbanization has caused increasingly complex and challenging problems such as air pollution, traffic accidents, unemployment, drug addiction, and increase in crime rates and poverty (UN-Habitat, 2006b). These reports have expressed that since the problems of urbanization in these countries are varied and vast, they must to be tackled from the bottom up and in consultation with those most deprived (UN-Habitat, 2006c). The importance of public involvement is to create policies and projects that intend to facilitate more public participation and can be effective in the development of these countries (World Bank, 1996; Un-Habitat, 2006a). A part of UN-Habitat report presented at World Urban Forum III stated that “there is a need for all urban players-citizens, local and national governments, and private sectors and civil society organizations to work together to solve urban problems and challenges and that they all have to do their part, rather than simply transfer responsibility to others” (World Bank, 1999; UN-Habitat, 2006b, para. 3).

Yet, the challenge of public participation and interactive engagement in countries in transition has become more complicated because most governments in these countries are authoritarian in nature and therefore their functions are based on a centralized decision making process. Franz Vanderschueren’s report at the conference on the State of Safety in World Cities indicates that the complexity of problems in these countries are created due to the existing central decision making processes which have no concern for “the different environmental, economic, or social conditions of their diverse

communities” (Vanderschueren, 2007). Reports by the Human Settlement Department of the United Nations also have recognized the problem of centralized decision making in countries in transition (UN-Habitat, 2006c). These reports state that in these countries, urban planners are making day- to-day decisions that affect the lives and livelihood of millions of people, while most of the time these decisions are taken without any considerations of the perspective of those whose lives are affected by these decisions (Un-Habitat, 2006c).

In addition, the lack of a forceful civil society in “countries in transition” has also caused the process of decision making to be based on a top-down approach and therefore centralized. This is because the idea of civil society in many Middle Eastern countries is about institutions and associations that challenge the state; therefore, public participation through such organizations means intruding in the state affairs, and any challenge in more repressive states is counted as a threat to national security. Ali Abotalebi states that while in the Western world the existence of civil society and the extensive practices of these societies have become a part of the governments, in the Middle East, civil society is mostly understood as a force against the state. He adds that this is why most of the authoritarian regimes prefer the state to have influence on society rather than let the society influence the state (Abotalebi, 1995). Thus, under authoritarian regimes, there are not many independent institutions and associations, and private or independent governmental agencies that can work jointly with the government to discuss, negotiate, reflect, deliberate, implement, and even monitor and evaluate the state’s policies. Therefore, a type of decision making that helps societies to generate patterns of dialogues

necessary for a healthy relationship between the states and the public are missing within countries in transition (Fiorino, 1989; Peelle, 1991).

Yet, considering the absence of civil society, it is more challenging to find a functional concept for public participation within countries in transitions, as the system of governance is considerably less democratic in these countries. Many social observers indicate that in the Middle East, civil society is an expression used to indicate how clubs, organizations, and groups act as a barrier between state power and the citizen's life (Gellner & Muslih, 1991; Sadowski, 1993; Peteet, 1995). For example, Emmanuel Sivan notes that a number of group movements such as The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, or the National Salvation Front in Algeria, have failed to change the state's domestic and foreign policies because public involvement in these countries has been often regarded as a threat to national security (Sivan, 1997).

However, recently, many states in Middle East have changed their attitudes toward public participation. Examples that confirm this change can be found after the 1979 revolution in Iran, which gave rise to Islamic movements in the 1980s and facilitated interest in state-society relations in many states in the Middle East. The revolution of 1979 created opportunities for the appearance of some forms of civil society in Iran, although supervised by the national government. For example, by giving a limited foundation for some governmental founded organizations such as the 'Workers Islamic Union', the 'Students Islamic Unification', and 'Basij' (Revolutionary Force) in schools, factories and universities, the national government hoped to ease some of government's problems. The state intended to control the rise of civil society by

mobilizing the public toward these governmental-formed organizations, to convey the idea to the public of being a democratic government. Political scientists like Diamond, White, Beckman and Chankhoke have also noted that the state-society relationships in these countries are complex because within an authoritarian state there is no organization that is autonomous (Diamond, 1999; Beckman, 2001; Chankhoke, 2004 and White, 1994). A good example of this complex relationship is the existing labour and student unions in Iran, where factories and universities are national agencies and to function, they have to act upon governments' interest. Consequently, in Iran, like many other countries in transition, formation of any group in such an environment is not separate from governmental supervision and the appearance of any participatory project either is led by the government or functions under the government's direct supervision. Therefore, it can be said that some mandatory regulations toward public participation, government transparency and accountability imposed by the United Nations, have also forced these governments to make some changes in their governing structure (Abotalebi, 1995).

## **2.3 The Importance and the Challenge of Public Participation in Iran**

### **The Existing Foundation of Public Participation**

A review of public participation in Iran demonstrates a historical memory that situates the foundations of public participation in popular and official understanding of Iran's pre-Islamic and post-Islamic history (City of Tehran, 2007a). Public participation has been said to have been practiced throughout the history in Iranian society although the scale and forms of practice have been situational and context dependent. Studies on public participation and urban planning in ancient Iran indicate that the most effective government was believed to be the one that coordinated with the citizens, regardless of

existing religious and political diversity (National Anthropology Museum, n.d). For example in 600 BC, during the Acheamenid Kingdom, when Persians dominated a vast region of what is now the Middle East, King Darius is said to have designed a new form of urban management which was a problem-solving method based on responsiveness, public participation and mutual agreement, believing that these would promote social solidarity and order (Saghebfar, 1998). One particular section of Darius's will to Xerxes is particularly noted: "While well digging and road construction is important, never ignore the importance of social solidarity as it is a rule that if you ignore your nation, your country does not develop and moves toward destruction" (National Museum, Wills of King Darius to Xerxes, n.d).

During the Islamic era and around eight hundred years ago, mosques poly-functional and did not function solely as prayer houses. Mosques were an administrative and political center for Islamic legislative assembly, and a center for receiving public views for a better decision-making process. Mosques, historically, played an important role in the growth and development of people's lives, and helped to mobilize people for collective actions in social affairs. There are many examples of Imam Ali, the first Imam of Shia group that recommended to his governors to take the public's views into account. In many of his speeches, prayers and thoughts, Imam Ali recommends to his governors to interact with chaste scholars and people and to exploit the knowledge gained from these connections (Dashti, 1379 ( 2000) ).

Nationwide participation that mobilized people against the Mongol and Arab invasions are other examples that confirm the existing foundations of public participation in Iran. The national mythology about the movements under the leadership of



Abomoslem Khorasani and Babak Khoramdin are two cases that illustrate such participations. In both, Iranians believe that the massive participation of citizens for a cohesive goal resulted in successful outcomes for Iranian nation. As an honourable preacher, Abomoslem,'s speeches are said to have been distributed by travellers around the country and resulted in Gyam', a national movement against Umayyad Caliph's ruling in Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Zarrinkoub, 1975; Nafisi, 1955). Babak, a liberal nationalist from the province of Azerbaijan, led Babakian's movements. Babak formed a coalition of people around the country against Arab ruling Abbasid Caliph in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (Zarrinkoub, 1975; Nafisi, 1955). Babakian's victory, through mobilizing people to work together and participate in the movement against unjust Abbasid dynasty, is taught in the primary school books today in Iran.

The 1906 and 1979 revolutions in Iranian history also happened based on mass participation of people who demanded more engagement in the government's decision-making process. The 1906 constitutional revolution gave birth to 'Mashrotiat', a form of constitutional monarchy. Within constitutional monarchy, any law offered by the king had to pass the parliament's vote before implementation, and if the parliament passed the law, the king had to approve its implementation (Matofi, 2006). The creation of municipalities was, in fact, one of the first considerations of the new Iranian parliament in 1906 and, because of the constitutional monarchy, did not need the approval of the King (City of Tehran, 2007a ). Elm indicates that the establishment of Tehran's municipality was the first attempt of decentralization within Iran's contemporary history of urban management (Elm, 1992). In 1979's revolution, mass public demonstrations changed the system of Iran's government from the constitutional monarchy to an Islamic Republic.

## **The Challenge of Public Participation**

The literature on public participation in contemporary Iran demonstrates that the formation of a concept of participating, the form that participation have, how to implement a participatory project, and what organization/s is responsible for it, are all serious challenges. The two most important factors underlying these challenges are the existence of varying understandings regarding public participation and the presence of political sensitivities towards public participation within Iranian society.

In Iran, participation that means engagement of the community for a collective goal is not novel, but many of the currently presented reasons for participation, sustainability and environmental concerns or problems such as pollution and traffic, growing slums, sanitation and waste-management, are new. In the past, communities were not faced with today's concerns over unemployment, poverty, drug addiction and environmental degradation. However, over the time, as communities, villages and cities have grown, these problems have become more complicated and therefore have required changes within the traditional system of city management. In addition, although the public was engaged in decision making in premodern society in Iran, concerns over "democratic" involvement, the global environment, or sustainability factors were not in debate. Presently, considering these issues has become important and essential as they do affect the local, national and international environment.

The existing political sensitivities within Iranian society are another main challenge when considering public participation. Currently, there are different understandings about public participation and different approaches toward implementing them within different levels of governments in Iran. Eickelman and Piscatori assert that politics in Iran "involves competition and contest over both the interpretation of symbols

and the control of the formal or informal institution that produce and sustain them” (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996, p. 5). Tajbakhsh indicates that after 1993, the shift toward decentralization that has empowered the local governments to some degree has also facilitated grounds for more debates around public participation (Tajbakhsh, 2000). Therefore, presently, there are differences among Iranian clerics regarding what participation means and how, when or to what degree the public should be involved. For example, the new constitution created after Iran’s revolution in 1979 states the importance of consultation (Showra), meaning the public’s involvement (Mosharekat) in all parts of the decision-making process (Tajbakhsh, 2000). In fact “Article 3 [“State Goals”] no. 8 calls for “the participation of the entire people in determining their political, economic, social, and cultural destiny”; and Article 7 [“Consultative Bodies”] no. 1 states: “In accordance with the command of the Quran contained in the verse “Their affairs are by consultations among them” [42:38] and “Consult with consultative bodies such as the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Provincial Councils, and the City, Region, District, and Village”( National Library, 1980). Yet, the same constitution notes that the final decision is definitely the task of the ‘Valieh Faghih,’ the highest clergy within Shiite Imam. Given this contradiction, the question of who should make the decisions and what is the public role in this process has been one of the most contested issues in Iranian politics since the revolution in 1979.

However, even with these recent challenges, Iranian society has witnessed some change of attitudes in the management system of national and local governments - particularly in Tehran. Many administrators and politicians have begun to show interest in increasing public participation in public decisions around 1997. In this regard,

Tehran's local government has begun to demonstrate its interest toward public participation to a greater degree by becoming member of many international associations and institutions within the United Nations by working in partnership with the organizations that promote positive outcomes of public participation. A major reason for this shift was to preserve Tehran's status and reputation as the capital of the only Islamic Republic country in the world. In the recent years, one of the immense concerns of Tehran's municipality has been to promote its reputation as an Islamic government because an Islamic government, clarified by Islamic books such as 'Usole Kafi' (Fundamentals of Islam by Kafi), is a government that is responsible for the prosperity of its nation (Usole Kafi, n.d.). Yet, Tehran with 14 million people who are subject to a series of widespread problems such as earthquakes, air pollution, and organized crime groups, is not only not showing any signs of prosperity, but the city is also losing its historical reputation as the nation's cultural and economical center.

Covering an area of 1600 Km<sup>2</sup> and situated in the north-central part of Iran, Tehran stands on the slope of the Alborz Mountain and is virtually surrounded by faults that have caused earthquake disasters in cycles of approximately every 150 years. Since there have not been any large earthquakes in Tehran in the past 170 years, local seismologists are considering the possibility of a large earthquake in Tehran in the near future (Disaster Risk Management, 2008 ).

Located in a valley, the City of Tehran suffers also from air pollution created by cars that do not meet the global emissions standards. Due to this problem, the city center must be closed periodically to traffic. The scale of the problem with air pollution that recently claimed the life of 3600 individuals in Tehran, leading one senior official to state

that living in the Iranian capital “is a very serious and lethal crisis and a collective suicide” (Institute for Health and Scientific Research, 2007).

According to the Department of Disciplinary Police in Tehran, the crime rates also have increased, as the city has become an active ground for organized crime groups using some of the unemployed young immigrants in the city and those living on the streets (Tehran Times, 2006; DPD, 2004). The concerns regarding these people, as well as about the safety and security of the residents in Tehran, have grown in recent years, while there has not [yet] been any effective solution (Ghanizadeh & Komijani, 2006).

Overall, as these ongoing problems have threatened Tehran’s reputation as one of the greatest cultural and social centers in the Middle East and a city that is still desirable for many to live in, the local government has taken steps toward considering public participation as a concept and practice that is imperative to city’s survival. Ghanizadeh has articulated this receptiveness of Tehran’s local government due to the growing problems of urbanization by indicating that:

Tehran’s current urban management has noticed that in the competitive global arena the survival of Tehran’s reputation can be reflected in the city’s design, in superb management, in innovative health and safety programs and projects, and most particular, in the stability and security of its residents. Otherwise, the city risks losing its central, unique cultural and political status in the Middle East due to issues such as transportation and traffic, waste management, environmental apprehension and pollution (Ghanizadeh & Komijani, 2006, p. 49).

Recently, the number of Iranian officials attending conferences and symposiums with public participation as part of their agenda has increased. For example, in the Third World Urban Forum in 2006 in Vancouver many officials from different levels of the Iranian government, such as Ministry for Housing and Development, Department of Disaster Control within the Ministry for Internal Affairs and Tehran’s local government were present (City of Tehran, WUFIII, Municipal Report, 2006b). This demonstrates that

the different levels of government in Iran are concerned with the environment and the loss of green zones, as well as with rising social problems such as poverty, drug addiction, homelessness, health and safety issues, and the increase of crime rates. In the report for the mayor of Tehran, the group that attended the 2006 forum in Vancouver wrote that they were introduced to different experiences and experiments regarding public participation practices by various private and governmental led agencies around the world (Ganizadeh, 2006). The report pointed out that presently, many governments try to give citizens more opportunities that enable them to have a greater degree of involvement in the process of decision-making at the local level (Ganizadeh, 2006). The report, specifically, emphasized that the current rising issue within the concept of public participation is the involvement of the public in the whole process of decision-making, starting from the project proposal, discussion period, and to the implementation, deliberation, monitoring and evaluation of existing and upcoming policies or projects (Ganizadeh, 2006).

## **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The research method for this project was based on a qualitative approach and a case study model that enabled me to examine the social and cultural phenomena of public participation in Iran's cultural context. Babbie explains that qualitative approaches have the advantages of flexibility, in-depth analysis, and the potential to observe a variety of aspects of a social situation (Babbie, 2003). Using a qualitative approach, I intend to give the readers more understanding of the social phenomena and meaning of public participation which is practiced presently within local government of Tehran. I have used the case study model as a tool to research, explore, explain and develop a pattern of information about the social conditions around public participation (Ragin & Becker, 1992). In addition, I have used the information from my exploration through the literature of public participation to investigate the roots that caused the initiation of public participation in Tehran's municipality. Further, I have evaluated Center 1888 in two parts - the design of the project and the workings of the center. To evaluate, I have considered some of the criteria for effective participation discussed in the literature section. By using the indicators collected within literature of public participation, I have demonstrated the missing elements that should have been considered when designing Center 1888. I have used the methods and techniques proposed for a single case study to provide a detailed examination of Center 1888 (Yin, 1993).

### **3.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis**

The data collection and data analysis for this research was based on ‘sequential analysis’ or ‘interim analysis’ (Becker, Geer, & Hugjes, 1968). Sequential analysis believes that in qualitative research, the analytical process begins during data collection, and this process shapes the ongoing process of data collection as well. Using this method, this research had the benefits of going back and refining questions, developing a hypothesis, and pursuing emerging avenues of further inquiry (Miles, 1984). The data was collected from published and unpublished primary and secondary documents existing within Iran’s national library, the work of authors who studied the phenomena of decision making processes under different levels of Iran’s authoritarian government, and data about Center 1888 within Tehran’s municipality.

The data from secondary sources such as books and journals helped me to point out some of the historical events such as the two most important revolutions in Iran, which have influenced the social situation around public participation.

In addition, since a systematic data collection often is problematic within countries in transition due to the authorities, concerns for distribution of materials and information in these countries, I have used some of my own prior experiences working for the municipality of Tehran and other government agencies to investigate and collect the required data. The collaboration with the municipality helped me to increase my access to the materials as well as provided the opportunity to be an informal observer of many public participation theories and meanings pointed out by senior officials of the municipality. Being an informal observer has enabled me to confirm the existing different understandings of public participation in the local municipality and to experience the



present challenges around Center 1888. McRoy believes such analysis is almost inevitable in qualitative research: because the researcher is “in the field” collecting the data, it is impossible not to continually think about what is being heard and seen (McRoy, 1988). Giddens also believes that “such an approach involves “mutual knowledge”, shared by the observer and participants whose action constitutes and reconstitutes the social world” (Giddens, 1984, p.15). Thus, the observations were based on a mutual respect between myself and those officials who had the knowledge of the nature of this collaboration. To bolster this claim, the Planning and Coordination Office at Greater Tehran Municipality issued a letter allowing me to have access to the municipality’s primary documents and publications. Further, Dr. Mahmodi, the director of Center 1888, ordered to all sub-center's executives of Center 1888 to collaborate with me in this regard.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis-Examination and Evaluation**

### **4.1 Overview of Center 1888**

Center 1888 is a telephone call center established by Greater Tehran Municipality in 2005 as a means to monitor and oversee the activities of Terminal 137, which was established in 2000 to receive citizen's concerns in relation to the municipality's performance (Terminal 137, 2000). Realizing that the terminal's methods were not efficient and effective for running the affairs of City of Tehran, under the supervision of a new mayor, Dr. Qalibaf, GTM initiated to transform Terminal 137 from an answering service to an active center in 2005. Equipped with 44 operators in each working shift, 60 telephone lines and 2 websites, Terminal 137's current main tasks are to receive the calls, to identify the everyday occurrence of urban problems, and to direct the related emergency team in order to deliver the service necessary to deal with the problems (City of Tehran, 2005). In addition, Center 1888's documents assert that citizens who could contact 137 and put forward their problems with the experts within Terminal 137, are also able to pursue their problems until gaining favourable results through Center 1888 (Center 1888, 2005b).

Further, Terminal 137 is located at the main municipal building in central Tehran and every mayor in 22 districts is the official responsible for 137. However, for Center 1888, although there is an office and an executive director as acting representative established in each of the 22 districts of Tehran, the mayor of Tehran is accountable for each district. Therefore, while Terminal 137 is a district-based service, Center 1888 is a

“watchdog” that has been created to supervise the performance of the municipality and its management system. In addition, as the scale of demands and activities within 137 has escalated, Center 1888 has been established to take measurements for the accuracy and the quality of these activities (Center 1888, 2005b).

Citizens communicate with Center 1888 through the following eight instruments:

- through a direct phone access by dialling 1888 from any phone, anywhere at any time;
- through mail with no need of a stamp addressed to P.O. Box 1888;
- through a fax number of 55167171;
- through E-mail address of [www.tehran.ir/1888](http://www.tehran.ir/1888);
- through proposal and critique boxes stationed through the city and within many organizations;
- through weekly meeting at the headquarter in Behesht Street;
- through Terminal 137 that further will be directed to 1888 phone line, and;
- through a direct line to the mayor’s office.

Through these communication avenues, after the received calls are sorted into the categories of criticism, suggestion, complaint, and appreciation, they are analyzed and directed to the related districts and/or departments. Center 1888 is responsible for the follow-up process, which is to inform the callers regarding the undergoing process and progress related to their complaint or suggestions. In addition, Center 1888 is responsible for the special investigation process, which is to communicate with the policy makers in order to bring changes to particular bylaws and/or to take a problem or demand to a higher level, such as contacting other organizations within the national government in Iran (Center 1888, 2005c).

There is also one public meeting per week open to all. The meetings are held at the main municipal building in central Tehran from 6.00 to 9.00 PM. In these meetings, citizens and municipal managers from all 22 districts can meet face-to-face and discuss the concerns about the issues of their concern about the city. The existing reports of these meetings demonstrated that participants were mostly representatives of administrative bodies from the 22 districts (Center 1888, 2007a). A form is required to be filed prior to the meeting if any individual or organization wants to be present. Center 1888 indicates that the form is necessary, since it helps the center to identify the nature of the claims and the required process, and to invite the related managers to be present during the discussions in these meetings (Center 1888, 2005c).

In 2007, Center 1888 was granted an ISO 9001 license from Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Limited in London. The agency evaluated the management and system effectiveness and the continual improvement of the center by reviewing the following areas:

- the interaction of the processes and departments;
- the qualitative criteria and the levels of provided services, and;
- the scope and boundaries of provided services via 137 and 1888, and the difference of these two services for the interested parties.

The agency's evaluation of the centre's system effectiveness and continual improvement indicates, "The established system seems to be proper for the size and the nature of the organization and policy and objectives have been set properly" (LRQA, 2007, p. 1). It cites evidence of the continual improvement of the center including the implementation of corrective and preventive actions and the internal audit of management reviews. The Lloyd's assessment outcome asserts: "Center 1888 had been

able to establish and implement the quality management system and cover all requirements of the standards satisfactorily. So, issuance the certificate based on standard ISO 9001:2000 is recommended” (LRQA, 2007, p. 3).

Overall, Center 1888 has been established to be a hub for organizing and controlling the performance of the municipality as well as the performances of its managers. Through Center 1888, the city aimed to create a positive and mutual relation between Tehran’s citizens and authorities. Dr. Qalibaf, the mayor, has referred to this center as “ A breakthrough in public services”, which has been achieved by institutionalizing citizen-based planning as well as paying special attention to the well-being of Tehranians while maintaining the social and cultural level of the national capital of Iran (Center 1888, 2006a).

## **4.2 The Evolution of Public Participation and Center 1888**

The Islamic revolution of 1979 changed the face of Iran’s government from a constitutional monarchy to a fundamentalist Islamic republic and resulted in the formation of a new constitution based on the fundamentals of Islamic rules and regulations. Accordingly, in the new constitution, the law of ‘Showra’, meaning public consultation as the basis for any decision making process within the government, was declared (Constitution, Iran, 1980). Despite the widespread perception of Islamic law as being un-”democratic” and authoritarian in principle, popular participation is invoked by the Islamic constitution and is referenced in many Islamic sources, including explicitly in the ‘Quran’ - the holy book of Islam(Tajbakhsh, 2004). Tajbakhsh indicates that: “in fact, the word for councils, which expresses the necessity of consulting (*moshaverat*) and

participation (*mosharekat*) of all community members in the organization of their society, has roots in many Islamic sources”(Tajbakhs, 2004).

The revolution of 1979 opened grounds for mass public demonstrations demanding stronger public involvement in government’s decision-making process. The empowering speeches by the leader of revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini<sup>3</sup>, gave rise to more union formations, especially within universities around the country where the younger generations craved new ideas of representative democracy. It was the presence of the students union that caused the establishment of reformist movements in 1997 in Iran’s politics and the demands for new forms of direct participation in the state’s politics. On a nation-wide scale of participatory movement, the reformists demonstrated their seriousness by promoting the presidency of Mohammad Khatami in the presidential election of 1997. This movement initiated the establishment of city councils, a demand that was addressed in the 1906 revolution and provisioned in the 1906 constitution but took approximately 100 years to come to the implementation phase.

Under the influence of the reformist movement in 1997, the local government of Tehran considered that building a good relationship between the community and the municipality was imperative. Many local officials believed that such a relationship will lead to promotion of citizen capacity, promote social ownership, and strengthen social reliance between citizens and municipal managers (Center 1888, 2005a). Thus, through such relationship, the municipality would endorse urban democracy via fulfilment of citizen’s rights and therefore, could resolve the city’s problems via public participation (Center 1888, 2005b). By referring to the important of ‘Showra’, policy makers, mostly

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<sup>3</sup> The founder of Islamic Republic of Iran.

members of the elite within GTM, indicated that the mechanism of participatory projects could produce basic and essential social goods for the public and the state collectively (Center 1888, 2006b).

In addition, international concerns about rapid urbanization around the world and the United Nation's demands for considering public involvement, when managing cities, have had an extensive effect on the shifting attitudes of Tehran's municipality toward public participation. Distressed by widespread urban problems, the national and local government has become motivated in preventing the acceleration of these problems in Tehran by seeking help from programs offered by the United Nations Development Program to "developing countries" (UNDP Iran, 2005). However, to be eligible for the UNDP's development programs, Tehran has had to recognize the agency's regulations such as transparency and accountability, the two most important criteria within good governance promoted by United Nations (UN-Habitat, 2006d). Therefore, Tehran's local government initiated steps toward public engagement. Programs such as the Millennium Development Goal within United Nations promoted such initiatives believing that such approaches in urban management made it easier on local governments to meet criteria such as accountability and transparency (UN-Habitat, 2006d).

Overall, in recent years and under the influence of these views, the strategic planning department in Tehran municipality has taken steps to develop projects such as Terminal 137, the Family Mayor, School Mayor and Neighbourhood Mayor to promote citizen's responsibility among Tehranians. Consequently, Center 1888 was implemented to promote public participation in Greater Tehran's management system indicating,

“The proceedings of the center must be based on public inputs and public consultation”  
(Center 1888, 2006d).

### **4.3 The Evaluation on the Design and the Proceedings of Center 1888**

For evaluation, this study has approached the design and the proceeding process of Center 1888. I believe that to assess the design process of this project, it is important to know if the main inputs to the center fit the common set of criteria necessary for an effective public participation project. By reviewing numerous public participation practices around the world, mostly conducted by the World Bank, and by studying the work of many scholars in public participation such as Innes & Booher (1999), Beierle & Konisky (2000), and Sarkissian (2003), a common set influential to the creation of a good and/or successful participation includes:

- setting of priorities such as early public engagement, training and educating the local administrators who will be delivering the center’s services, and providing a framework for implementation and evaluation for a project, and;
- allocation of resources for facilitating dialogues that ensure interactive communication and facilitating meetings that ensures the emergence of public participation and equal representation.

In terms of evaluating Center 1888, this set of criteria was selected because it includes the most fundamental elements to be considered when processing the design of a public participation project and to be accepted by many international agencies (IAP2, 2006). Further, the set was used because its elements are constructive and provide the opportunity for more interactions in public participation (Carson & Twyford, 2005; Innes, 1999).



Further assessment is placed on the center's current proceedings to define the form and the level of participation of Tehran's citizens in this project, using a comprehensive framework defined by IAP2 and used to indicate if under its current application, Center 1888 met/meets its objectives as well.

## **The Design of Center 1888**

### **The History of the Project**

Although the existing evidence supports that it was Dr. Qalibaf, the mayor of Tehran, who initiated and established Center 1888 in the municipality, upon reviewing the history of Center 1888, it was clear that Center 1888 was duplicated from a project in Tehran's Disciplinary Police Department called Center 197. Therefore, the claim that Center 1888 was a new innovation for the municipality is not accurate. Center 1888 was created in 2005 to oversee Terminal 137, an active call center in the municipality since 2000. According to Terminal 137's data, the purpose of establishing the terminal was to receive people's points of view and suggestions regarding the city's management affairs (Terminal 137, 2000). As the head of DPD in 2000, Dr. Qalibaf proposed Center 197 to oversee call center 110, a hub which attempts to gather information regarding public security and safety in Greater Tehran.<sup>4</sup> When Dr. Qalibaf was transferred from DPD to the municipality to be the mayor of Tehran, he proposed Center 1888, essentially a replica of project 197, to supervise the function of Terminal 137. Thus, it is clear that Dr, Qalibaf has utilized and supervised the aforementioned centers, either as the head of Tehran's DPD or the mayor of Tehran (Tehran Times, January 7, 2008). Yet, the

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<sup>4</sup> Since their creation, both centers, 110 and 197 appear to be successful operations among Tehranians.

relationship between the head of disciplinary police department and establishment of Terminal 137 in the municipality remains unacknowledged within Center 1888's data.

In addition, through a very fast transition, Dr. Qalibaf, brought many police officers who were in charge of 197 at the Disciplinary Police Department to the municipality and assigned them to Center 1888's head offices and other related departments in the municipality (City of Tehran, 2006c). So, the police officers, with no prior experiences in city management and no training prior to their transition, were located at the management level of the municipality and became a part of the municipal government's elite. Yet, based on the organizational design theory, one of the first and foremost activities for excellent performance in an organization is to identify and establish the most effective team and recognize the appropriate individuals for that team (Astington & Jenkins, 1995). Further, as administrative attitudes in an organization should be related to the services provided by that organization, the selection of individuals who provided these services should have been based on certain measures such as adaptation in a changing environment for an excellent performance, (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). In addition, as the nature of the services in an organization creates a culture unique to that organization, its managers must adapt to its culture to be able to understand the organization and to have enough knowledge to navigate through the patterns and services provided by that organization (Alvesson, 2002). In this regard, Center 1888 did not act according to these criteria when transferring DPD's police officers to Center 1888. Furthermore, with the existing political sensitivity within the Iranian state and considering that these police officers used to work under the supervision of the special security department within the Ministry for Internal Affairs, appointing these police

officers had negative effects on building a relationship of trust between Tehran's residents and the municipality. Thus, Tehran's municipality has disregarded one of its most important objectives, which is strengthening social reliance between citizens and the municipal managers, a fundamental aspect of effective public participation (IAP2', 2006).

### **Setting Priorities**

Setting priorities is one of the most important considerations in regards to the public participation process. At the core of such considerations is the early engagement of the public itself, prior to the design of any participatory project. Each society is challenged by a set of problems and difficulties and therefore it is important to engage people who face these problems and difficulties to identify them. For example, scheduling workshops and meetings with the public to identify problems and establish a framework to solve them within the society is deemed a priority in most public participation projects. The internal reports within Center 1888 gave no indication that people were consulted prior to the design of this center (Center 1888, 2005c; City of Tehran, 2007b; 2008). Therefore, the absence of citizens who could conceptualize and identify the indicators that caused problems within the community hindered the project in setting priorities in order to finding effective solutions for existing problems. Thus, with no consideration of the citizen's right in their individual affairs, Center 1888 acted inconsistently with the promotions of citizen capacity and social ownership, which are important factors within a public participation framework.

## **Training and Education**

Setting a system that educates and trains the public and officials for necessary aspects of participation is another priority that should be considered when designing a project. Educating the public with regard to the imperatives of participation and how it can deliver an effective social outcome, is important for any project seeking public involvement. It helps the public to define participation and/or design a good plan. Laird points out that learning are central in deepening an understanding towards public participation (Laird, 1993). Training is also necessary for those officials who have to interact with the public and manage project delivery since through training they become more aware of the rational of public participation and will understand the dilemmas the public is facing. These officials, consequently, can find rational solutions for these dilemmas. Yet, a review on working papers and published interviews regarding Center 1888 indicates that no such priorities were set (Center 1888, 2005c).

## **Early Engagement**

Center 1888 started in 2005, based on a direct order of the mayor himself. Although in the official order the mayor indicates the importance of public participation in the supervision of the municipality's management system, and the importance of the people's viewpoints for a successful urban management in Tehran, it is clear that the public was not involved with this project and their significant contribution was not considered by the project's designers (Executive Order No. 8610/8669017, 2005).

Direct and early public involvement has been known among scholars to be the most desirable elements of public participation, and has to be taken into consideration even prior to any design of a public participation project. Fox (as cited in Fineman, 2008) indicates that early engagement in the design of public participation does make a

difference in project planning. Fiorino suggests also that early engagement is integral to the decision making process and enhances the equity of representation within the mechanism of a participatory project (Fiorino, 1990). Among many benefits of early engagement, the most important ones according to many political scientists and communication scholars, are improvement of quality and quantity of information, improving project design, increasing project support, and building a strong relationship between the state or agency and the public (IAP2, 2007). Therefore, considering the population of Tehran, the municipality has ignored the valuable opportunity to gather information from citizens who would be engaged in the design process and who could discuss, debate, and arrive at a shared decision when working on finding a solution for a particular problem. Further, by ignoring citizen's information input, GTM has also disregarded the possible massive support for the project's implementation. In addition, as a result of such a top-down design process, Tehran's municipality has missed the opportunity of information exchange and has lost the chance to let the public to know more about the concerns and initiatives in the municipality. The municipality has also lost the opportunity to fortify relationships with the public whose knowledge of such initiatives would benefit the accountability of the municipality.

## **Evaluation**

The absence of evaluation criteria for Center 1888 was also discovered in this study. The internal data of Center 1888 demonstrated that the importance of an effective evaluation was not considered when designing the project in 2005 (Center 1888, 2005c). It is clear that if a project involves evaluation throughout its design, its implementation and its operation, it results in higher quality, especially if the evaluation involves input

from the public whose engagement increases their commitment to the project (Rowe & Frewer, 2000). During the period of 2006 and 2007, the only evaluation done was internal and based on the number of calls at the end of every three-month period. By observing tables and figures based on internal information, the officials believe that the center functions well because the numbers of calls have risen compared to each of the previous three-month periods. Although this numerical data explains the growth in the number of the calls, considering Tehran's growing population, these numbers are statistically invalid and do not represent the actual growth of the center's popularity among Tehran's citizens.

Further, the external evaluation that was conducted in September 2007 by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Limited in London was a contract between the agency and municipality (LRQA, 2007). A review of documents provided by LRQA office in Tehran demonstrates that the data used for this evaluation was provided internally by Center 1888's head office and based on documents provided by the center's management and internal interviews with center's leading officials (LRQA, 2007). Further, while the same document provides evidence that LRQA has not used multiple data, such as survey materials that confirm the reliability of data provided by the Center 1888's officials, the validity of the data for evaluation are in question. (LRQA, 2007). In a study for performance improvement of public service in Lebanon, Salem indicates that in many countries, political pressures are often so great that data seems to be concealed or overlooked, and as finding dimensions for measurement is challenging, the conclusion based on represented data is incorrect (Salem, 2007). Yet, considering the existing culture of management in Iran, a characteristic authoritarian one that overlooks public's input in

such an evaluation, and considering that LRQA is a business assurance company hired by Center 1888 and worked under the center's direct supervision, means that the center has not been evaluated objectively.

### **Allocation of Resources and Facilitation**

A review of Center 1888 demonstrates that at the time, the available eight resources; direct phone access by dialling 1888 from any phone line, anywhere, at anytime, mail, fax., website, boxes stationed throughout the city streets, weekly meetings at municipal headquarter, Terminal 137 and a direct line to the mayor's office, designed by Center 1888 neither promote nor enable participation as they are not placed efficiently to facilitate communication between the public and municipality. Webler indicates that part of a government's plan for an effective participation process must be to allocate resources in order to facilitate more public engagement and public dialogue, which improve the decision-making process (Wabler & Tuler, 2006).

### **Facilitating Interactive Communication**

The function of Center 1888 is based on a feedback process from the individual phone calls. A review of some of these calls, demonstrates their scattered nature. Consequently, the feedback from Center 1888 to GTM's citizens is based solely on individual interests. Unsurprisingly, in such a large city, the problems of individual citizens are incredibly diverse. However, while it is Center1888's role to categorize these disparate calls, to provide a more systematic response, its feedback procedures are inadequate to fulfil this goal. For example, when the feedback center of 1888 called a

resident of Tehran who had called Terminal 137 a few days earlier and complained about the lack of removal of advertising from his home gate, he indicated that his door was the only one that was cleaned although all his neighbour's gates were still covered by these ads (City of Tehran, 2007c, p. 50). In another example, the interest of the operator who lived in the same area as a caller made the service team act based on the complaint raised by the call (City of Tehran, 2007c, p. 49). Such individual actions demonstrate that the task and the responsibility understood by the center's team and services are geared to satisfy the individual callers and are not based on a broader understanding of the information received in order to set regulations that benefit the whole city rather than individual interests.

In addition, by tracking some of the feedback published in 'Nedaye Shahrvand' a quarterly report on Center 1888, one important finding verifies the absence of legal provisions needed for taking actions based on the issues that came up from the calls (City of Tehran, 2007d). For example, in late 2007, a subsidiary program within Terminal 137 called 'CRASH' was designed by district 16 to set some priorities for the social aspects of the city and municipality's operation. 'CRASH' concentrated on issues such as corruption within twenty-two districts as well as poverty, addiction, homelessness, health, etc, and was implemented by district 8 shortly after it was established in district 16 (Terminal 137, 2007a). In the same year, 'CRASH' tackled some calls referring to a series of unfair administrative actions in district 16 and in fact identified the offender. However, because of the lack of existing disciplinary provisions, the offender was only relocated from that district to another one (City of Tehran, 2007d, p. 2). Even more significant, was that at the conclusion of data collection for this research in early 2008,

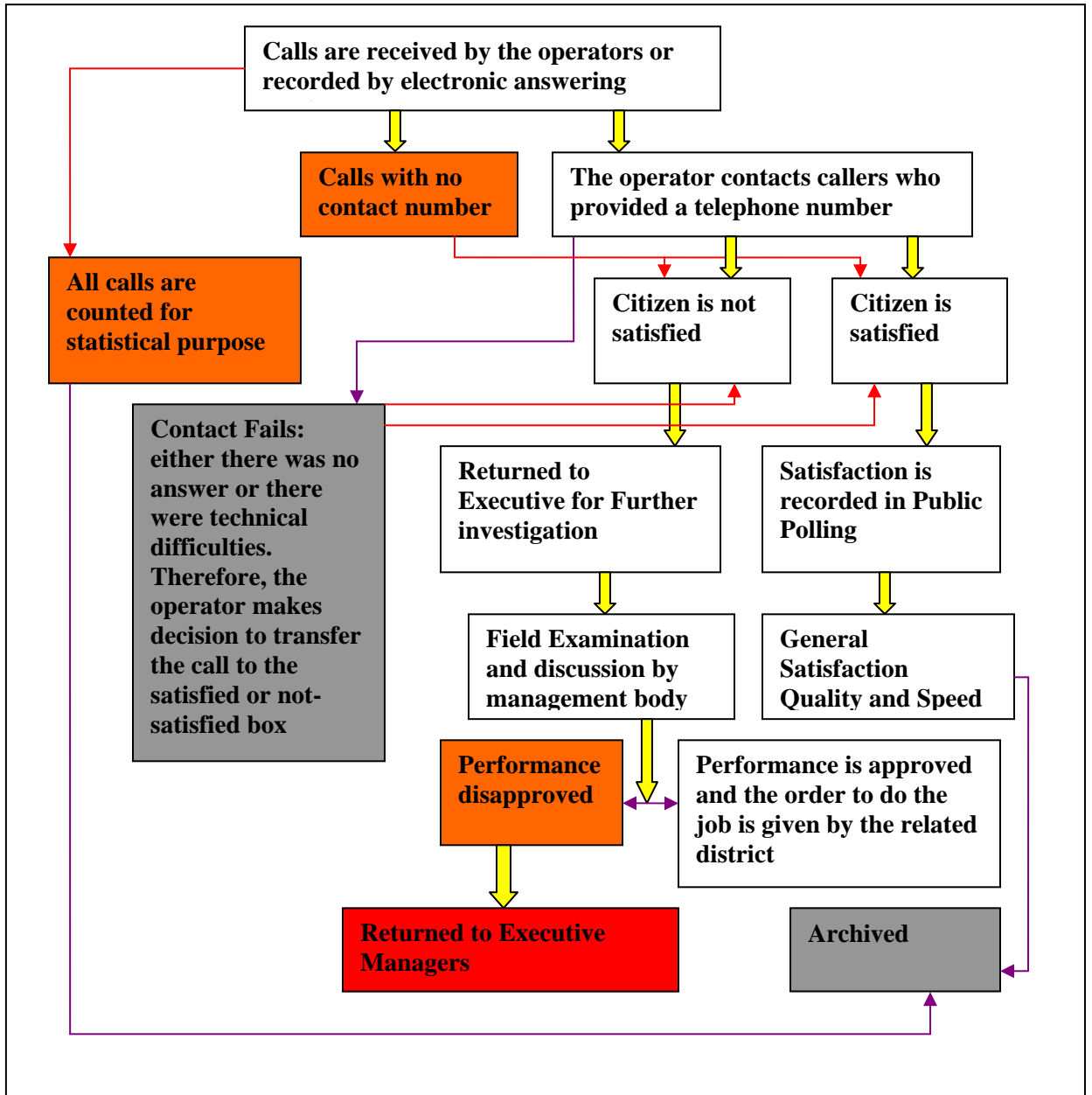


there were no other districts known to implement or to have ‘CRASH’, this pioneering anti-corruption effort, into their agenda.

The internal data of Center 1888 indicates that communication through phone is the most popular form of contact. A team at the main municipal building processes the received information and directs the messages to the related department within 22 districts. Each district has an office related to Center 1888. The received information, through any of these venues, is classified into four categories: Complaint, Criticism, Proposal, and Appreciation. The problem with this form of information processing is that operators, with no prior training, are in charge of deciding in which categories the information should be placed. Although in early 2008, at the end of data collection for this study, Center 1888 did begin a training program, there are still no standards for classification of these calls (Center 1888, 2008b). Therefore, the information is classified based on the personal interpretation of the operator. Considering the array of complaints and critiques, it is difficult for operators to determine the relative importance of these calls. While there are no indications that the classification of these calls is based on priority, another problem identified in this study is within the responses to these calls. Typically, the only response to calls is the confirmations of received messages within 24 to 48 hours, while there are no obligatory provisions in order to solve the actual problems raised by the callers.

The most significant problem is evident in the design of the project’s feedback, which is shown in the following table:

Figure 1 – Center 1888 Feedback Process



Source: Adopted from Center 1888 & Terminal 137 ( City of Tehran, 2005b)

A review on the feedback process demonstrates that not all received or recorded calls are subject to feedback. If the contact fails, the message can have three possible directions; going to the satisfaction box, the dissatisfaction box or the non-contact box.

The question is who makes the decision of what box and based on what category?

Another problem is that if the contact fails and the message is referred to the non-contact box, it goes directly to the archives section and therefore the problem aroused by the caller will not be recaptured. Consequently, at present, there are no constructive means to use the received information in the discussions or consultations for a future policy making process. Thus, the information that could help to set and/or modify effective policies, and could potentially bring changes to the lives of 14 million urban dwellers in Tehran, die in the archive section. Despite these problems, the evidence demonstrates that in 2007 a few officials in Center 1888' conference, have addressed the importance of setting a series of clear standards for the classification of the messages to save the invaluable information for further policymaking performance (Center 1888, 2007b).<sup>5</sup>

Another significant component discovered within the data is the issue of accountability. While all calls are counted and used for the center's publicity or in various media related reports, some of these calls do not receive feedback if the caller does not provide his/her telephone number and address. Center 1888 claims that if a person does not provide this information, the call will not be considered for feedback, and consequently, the call would be stored in the archive (Center 1888, 2005c). As a result, many important issues and concerns provided by interested residents are not retrieved through this system, and then the necessary action is not implemented. Administrating under this form of general information collection demonstrates the municipality's negligence to identify a more practical form of information collection. Therefore, the municipality has squandered the opportunity of allocating one of the most important

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<sup>5</sup> Government system in Iran and in many "nation in transition" is consisting of managers with different attitudes.

resources, namely, exchange of information, to achieve an effective participatory project (IAP2, 2006).

Further, the feedback process demonstrates that some messages remain in the executive manager's office with no further supplementary investigation. Due to the management style within most authoritarian states, it is typical to keep particular sensitive issues concealed from the public. So, although the municipality profits from this system of collecting information, in return, it does not reflect appropriately to the most fundamental rule of public participation criteria which is "exchange of information for a better collective decision making processes"(IAP2, 2006). So, the disappearance of many comments and complaints under such performance by Center 1888 demonstrates that the center is not committed to government transparency and therefore prevents the avenue for building a collective trust between the policy makers and the public.

The internet infrastructure within Iran is another problem as the frequent network difficulties prevent the possibilities of effective and efficient dialogue for exchange of information through this medium consumes more time. In addition to this, not everyone has access to internet. Although many young people are interested in the internet, due to the current political system in Iran, in the time they have to access the internet in 'internet cafés', they would rather read weblogs that discuss political issues and other non-available information in mainstream medias than contact Center 1888 about neighbourhood problems (Ebrahimi, 2007). As already discussed, in order to communicate through this process, it is also necessary for citizens to register in advance and to provide an official address and telephone number.

## **Facilitating Meetings**

The lack of facilitating public meetings is another important fact in the design of Center 1888. It is a fact that facilitating meetings enables people to come together and to share and exchange information and ideas on a set of problems. Face to face meeting allows the flow of multi-way communication and offers an opportunity for the people to share their concerns while building stronger relationships between the government, agencies and the public. However, there is only one weekly meeting in the central building of Greater Tehran Municipality in the center of the city's old quarter, and it occurs in the evening. Furthermore, while these evening meetings are open to the public, in order to attend, people need to register in advance. Considering the size of Tehran, and the existing poor availability of public transportation systems in the evening, the choice of the time and the place by the municipality demonstrates that these meetings are not actually designed for the participation of the public. The few attendees in these meetings are often district officials who see this as an opportunity to discuss some of their concerns with the central municipality's officials (Center1888, 2007a).

These meetings are also not representative because women are definitely absent or outnumbered by men. In Iranian culture, the evening is designated as a family time and the role of women is central to home activities. Even if they are in the work force, they are primarily responsible for domestic tasks. Therefore, scheduling these meetings in the evening is inherently exclusionary towards women and thus not representative of the community at large. Considering that representation is an important factor for effective public participation, people with diversity of age, gender, and ethnicity should be present when decisions are made as it enables participants to influence the agendas involving their future and would increase the fairness of the decision made (Webler, 1993). Bailey

and Peel indicate that accessibility to the decision-making process, diversity of views represented, opportunities for participation, information exchange, and identification and integration of concerns are essential for the success of public participation process (Bailey & Peel, 2002). As for Center 1888, with the existing facilities, the planners within the Greater Tehran Municipality have failed to identify the important of representation that is vital for government to identify and prioritize the possible solutions, incorporate the public's recommendations, and implement shared solutions.

Yet, according to the center's publications, using scientific methods, and through cooperation with university experts, specialists and elites, Center 1888 has promoted its system's goals and functions (Center 1888, 2006a). Center 1888 has initiated working with scientific methods, based on performance management and social science theories, in order to bring further effectiveness and greater efficiencies into its operational techniques. To date, there have been two international conventions held which have required input from scholars, scientists and academic institutions, whose work is, or can be related to the center. Although in both conventions public participation and supervision have been the main discussion point, in neither event was the public invited or informed (Center 1888, 2006b ; 2007b). Therefore, I believe that although these conferences were specialized meetings in which many experts and elite participated, the absence of public input has prevented the project to gain public agreement and to maximize its potential development. Since public participation plays a critical role in the development of this potential, it ought to be seen as positive for all involved. So, by not considering the present of the public in both conventions, Center 1888, effectively, has

undermined its public creditability and has missed the opportunity to develop more potential for the expansion of its project and its proceedings.

## **The Operation of Center 1888**

The second set of evaluations was based on the output of Center 1888 and its day-to-day operation. The criteria used for this evaluation includes the levels and the forms that enables people to participate with Center 1888. To define the levels and the forms of present participation in Center 1888, the following table, depicting the spectrum of public participation used by many agencies such as IAP2 was used (IAP2, 2007). The table includes elements such as delivery of information, negotiation and consultation, deliberation and delegation, and their interpretations. The objective of considering these elements is to see if under the present form of involvement, Tehran's citizen can influence the creation of any outcomes such as new policies and/or can result in any modification of existing ones.

With the existing interpretation of these levels and forms and considering that the current form of involvement of Tehranians is low, this study indicates that the present role of Tehranians does not advocate people's participation in the process of decision making as Center 1888 claims.

Table: 2 – Levels and Forms of Public Participation

<b>Level and Form</b>	<b>(1)Information</b>	<b>(2) Consultation and negotiation</b>	<b>(3) Deliberation and collaboration</b>	<b>(4)Delegation</b>
<b>Technique</b>	Initiator provides information in an ongoing activities	Interchanging of information, inputs requested and concerns addressed and Joint problem solving	Decision making power shared or transferred to beneficiaries	Joint entrustment for implementation and evaluation of alternatives
<b>Participant's role</b>	Participant as benefactor	Participant a client	Participant as a partner	Participant as manager
<b>Government's role</b>	No systematic feedback	Responsive feedback and accountability	Consensus building	Power sharing
<b>Result</b>	Passive influence	Open option for active influence	Influence	Empowerment

Source: Adopted from IAP2-Public participation: Model of engagement. (IAP2, 2006)

Indeed, as the output of any public participation depends directly on the consideration of the inputs, and considering the interpretations of the forms and levels of participation within IAP2's proposed table, it is clear that the existing participation in Center 1888 is limited to a set of received information provided by the public and based on individual interests. Although there is a system that responds to some of these calls, the kind of feedback system carried out by Center 1888 is not organized towards empowering the public, as was promised by project's initiators. In addition, with the lack of existing facilities for public meetings and the lack of representation, discussed in the first part of the analysis section in this paper, there are no possibilities for people to address their problems and therefore, no shared decision making processes. Nicholson



states that success in participation follows from the understanding of a basic rule, which is combining principles, circumstances and methods based on existing situation within a given society (Nicholson, 2005, chap. 5; IAP2, 2007). In the case of Center 1888, as its designers have overlooked the importance of combining elements such as allocation of resources or setting of priorities with the existing situation of Tehran (e.g., geographical, social and political setting), the center does not meet the basic requirement rule of design essential for a successful public participatory project. Therefore, under such circumstances, participants in this project are not managers or even partners with the municipality of Tehran.

#### **4.4 Summary of Analysis**

This study concludes that the effective input for an effective output are not obtained by Center 1888 given the following factors:

- there were no considerations for public engagement in the beginning of the design process, center's development process and the evaluation process;
- the current system of communication in the form of information exchange is one-way and therefore, does not satisfy the intention of a multi-way communication, an important and necessary indicator for an effective participation;
- the current process undertaken by Center 1888 does not facilitate meetings in a form whereby all members of the public can attend, discuss, negotiate, reflect or deliberate; hence, there is a lack of representation and equal opportunity for public voice;
- the allocations of resources fail to support public representation and evaluation of the design and the proceedings of the center as they are not based on public reflection, and;

- the public provides the center with direct observations only based on individual interests and further, the received information is not processed objectively.

Therefore, as the center fails to meet the basic foundations for participatory project design and fails also to generate the interactivities necessary for participation between GMT and the public. It does not function based on what it claims and will not meet its objectives for effective and responsible outcomes for the citizens of Tehran at any period in the near future.

## **Chapter 5: Policy Recommendations and Conclusion**

This study has focused on various indicators existing in the historical and social context of Iran and has identified some of the perceived causes and conflicts influential to the changing attitudes of Tehran's municipality toward public participation. The study has observed that with the rising social problems in the city, Tehran's municipality has taken steps toward planning a variety of programs focusing on social, environmental and educational issues hoping to benefit from the public's participation and to prevent the city become 'Delhi', a word representing a dying city because of its maximum and unmanageable problems such as poverty, un-healthy sanitations and the growing slums (City of Tehran, 2007b; 2008). However, the structure and implementation of these programs have been subject to a top-down design approach, functioning directly under the Greater Tehran Municipality's supervision. This is because under current management of Tehran's municipality, the patterns of any decision making process is dependent on the leadership and management of a small group of decision-makers in the center of local government itself.

Yet, as Center 1888 is currently active and includes promotion of participation and individual's rights in its objectives, it is imperative for the center to set a series of clear goals that are consistence with its function as a participatory project. To promote participation, the center should conduct a series of research and surveys that disseminate information on municipal issues to the broader public, and increase public debate on relevant policy issues. These are obtainable from IAP2's spectrum and core values which

are the outcomes of many studies on public engagement and public monitoring. For example, in one study done in 2000 on the issue of public participation and monitoring, a number of indicators relevant to the conditions within countries in transition have been identified. Using these examples will indeed increase the knowledge of designing participatory projects that promote service delivery, while opening opportunities for those who are interested in working collaboratively with the municipality of Tehran. Further, carrying on a series of open-to-public meetings and letting the people of Tehran decide on the priorities for Center 1888 will help the center to set more clear and possible-to-follow objectives. Facilitating meetings that are accessible to all members of public is the key for the success of any project. In addition, as women need to be part of the decision-making process, the municipality should also maintain a simple public participation process by initiating neighbourhood meetings in 'cultural houses' (Farhangsaraha) in each community and invite interested public to be involved in simple dialogues on important issues. This will generate better decision-making processes while it will enhance a greater legitimacy and acceptance of Center 1888 and Terminal 137 within the community.

Urban management in Tehran is a complicated issue as the city is vast and the population is both diverse and at its fullest capacity. Therefore, keeping the meetings within the community will make it easier on the municipality to identify the existing problems within each community and generate a higher level of information exchange resulting in improved decision-making process. Further, if the meetings are kept simple and internalized within the community, they can have broader effects and therefore broader applications. In other words, as the community is involved with the process of

decision-making, the residents in that community will have the opportunity gaining enhanced understanding related to the process and therefore they support the outcome of their participation. In this case, they would first be informed of the existence of the center and second, learn about the project's importance, and understand the impact of their own participation. Through such activities, the municipality could not only promote public participation, but also would set an environment for education around the significance of public participation among citizens.

Further, as the staffs assigned to administer and monitor the process of the center were usually not trained for their position in the municipality, organizing educational courses and facilitating trainings for local government officials in policy development is also important and should be considered by Tehran's municipality. Supporting educational and training facilities will generate knowledge and cultivate experiences necessary for improved policy-making process and policy makers within Tehran's municipality. More knowledge and experience would enhance policies that affect wider public and prevent the appearance of similar problems in similar communities in Tehran.

Moreover, the absence of open- to- public participatory evaluation has reduced management ability to learn and has prevented center's improvement. The process of defining what constitutes success for a project is another important step the municipality must consider. Taking evaluation as a measurement for project development is necessary for the development of the project (UNEP Secretariat, 2005). The municipality needs to define the success indicators for Center 1888. Based on these success indicators, the center would be able to evaluate and identify whether it accomplishes its intended objectives. Thus, an ongoing evaluation process is needed to determine out if the project

is working and what impacts center's activities have on the public and the municipality, and what has changed or needs to be changed. The municipality should invest more in evaluating its performance through open discussions and based on public reflections. As the evaluation criteria should be identified through public engagement, the evaluation results should be documented and made available to the public for the sake of learning from the experience.

As individuals' criticisms, complaints and suggestions do not affect the traditional top-down decision-making process in Tehran, the municipality should increase the opportunity for NGOs to operate within it. The existence of NGOs gives the opportunity to concerned citizens in order to have dialogue regarding particular issues within their communities. Through these dialogues and discussions regarding what have been practiced in other similar communities, these organizations can share the knowledge of what has or would work in differing circumstances with the municipality of Tehran. By giving more capacities to these organizations, the local government of Tehran would open an environment for more participation, and provide the opportunity to use the outcomes of these information exchanges to reach to Center 1888's objectives.

As the study verified that the received information is based on individual interests and in later stages, meaning after the appearances of problems in the city, and as Tehran's problems are affecting nearly 20 percent of the nation's citizens directly, the municipality must utilize the received information for policy formation in order to improve the urban conditions for 14 million people.

Overall, the Greater Tehran Municipality has designed Center 1888 in order to promote participation and to foster an ideal urban management. However, the design of Center 1888 was ineffective primarily because the project was not created effectively. Yet, the study demonstrates that considering recommendations such as re-evaluation of the center's objectives and activities based on consultation with Tehran's citizens, and their knowledge and interests will help 1888 to improve its development and fulfil some of the promises in its objectives. While pointing out the importance of citizen's early engagement in any decision-making process, the study also identifies that enough time, research, resources, and information should be available prior to the design of any project and affected people ought to be included prior to these designs.

Tehran is the center of the nation's economy, social, and politics, and the importance of taking steps toward any change and/or any improvement in this city would be perceived as a model and if modified based on physical and cultural context of each community or city, and could be used in other Iranian cities.

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