DECENTRALIZATION AND DEMOCRACY IN IRAN

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Abstract

It was only twenty years after the 1979 Revolution that local Islamic councils were legalized and launched everywhere in Iran as part of reforms to strengthen decentralization and enhance people's participation in policy planning. However, although these councils comprise elected members, they have not been fully institutionalized within the local government system and within Iran's hierarchy of power. Local councils, therefore, have not led to the greater empowerment of people.

This study assesses the decentralization process within the power structure after the Iranian Revolution. The research aims to provide insights into these key questions: how was the structure of the post-revolution decentralization system different from that of the previous regime? Why has the policy of decentralization not led to the sort of devolution that would enable people to participate in decision-making? What are the political obstacles to the empowerment of the people, a professed goal of the post-revolution government?

A qualitative research method involving a multiple case study approach is used here. Urban and rural communities were selected for assessment through purposive sampling. Easton's theory of political system was applied as it provides an effective conceptual framework to examine and explain the data.

The results indicate that the post-revolution system is one that can be classified as a filtered democracy. In this type of political system, inputs from society have to pass through filters created by power elites. The feedback loop within society does not connect the inputs to the outputs. Demands from society, therefore, are not the basis for decision-taking at the top level of the political system. Only certain urban-based councils, particularly those in Tehran, showed degrees of power devolution. In Tehran,

the councils have moved from beyond their defined legal functions. The whole decentralization process faces a series of political obstacles that cannot be removed until the system reforms its centralized hierarchy of power. There is a tightly controlled hierarchy of government bodies, from the center down to the provinces, townships, districts and villages, in all parts of this filtered democracy. The councils are not institutionalized in the political system. The decentralized councils are only connected to municipalities that are responsible for certain municipal services. These councils are not decision-making organisms, rendering invalid the post-revolution objective of people empowerment.

Abstrak

Pembentukan majlis-majlis Agama Islam tempatan di seluruh Iran sebagai salah satu daripada proses reformasi dan pemerkasaan rakyat dalam perancangan polisi selepas berlakunya peralihan kuasa daripada kerajaan pusat kepada kerajaan tempatan hanya dibenarkan oleh undang-undang Iran 20 tahun selepas Revolusi 1979. Walaubagaimanapun, majlis-majlis ini tidak diinstitusikan sepenuhnya ke dalam sistem kerajaan tempatan serta hierarki pemerintahan Iran walaupun ia terdiri dari ahli-ahli yang telah dilantik. Ini membawa maksud pembentukan majlis-majlis tempatan ini telah gagal untuk memberi kuasa kepada rakyat untuk bersuara di dalam sistem pemerintahan di Iran.

Kajian ini menilai proses peralihan kuasa dari kerajaan pusat kepada kerajaan tempatan di dalam struktur pemerintahan selepas Revolusi Iran. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk memberi jawapan dan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam kepada persoalan-persoalan berikut; Apakah perbezaan dari segi struktur pemerintahan selepas Revolusi dengan pemerintahan rejim sebelumnya? Mengapakah polisi-polisi yang terdapat dalam peralihan kuasa kerajaan pusat kepada kerajaan tempatan tidak membolehkan rakyat terlibat sama dalam membuat keputusan? Apakah halangan-halangan dari sudut politik yang dihadapi dalam pemerkasaan peranan rakyat di dalam sistem pemerintahan yang juga merupakan antara tujuan utama kerajaan pasca-revolusi?

Metodologi kualitatif telah digunapakai dalam penyelidikan ini melalui pendekatan kajian ke atas berbilang kes. Beberapa komuniti urban dan luar bandar telah dipilih berdasarkan tujuan tertentu dan teori sistem politik Easton digunakan untuk memberikan konsep rangka kerja yang efektif dalam penilaian dan penerangan data. Keputusan kajian telah menunjukkan bahawa sistem pasca-revolusi ialah suatu sistem yang boleh diklasifikasikan sebagai demokrasi 'tersaring' (filtered decmocracy) dimana segala input daripada masyarakat harus melalui proses tapisan atau saringan yang

dicipta oleh pemegang kuasa elitis atasan. Tiada maklumbalas serta hubungkait terhadap input yang diberikan oleh masyarakat dengan ouput (hasil keputusan). Oleh itu, boleh dikatakan bahawa permintaan dari masyarakat bukanlah menjadi dasar kepada proses membuat keputusan di peringkat atasan dalam sistem politik. Hanya segelintir majlis-majlis tempatan dari kawasan bandar terutamanya di Tehran yang ada menunjukkan sedikit peralihan kuasa dari kerajaan pusat. Di Tehran, majlis-majlis agama Islam ini ada yang memainkan peranan lebih dari fungsi yang telah dibenarkan dalam undang-undang. Secara keseluruhannya, proses peralihan kuasa dari kerajaan pusat kepada kerajaan tempatan ini menghadapi beberapa siri halangan politik yang tidak dapat dielakkan sehingga sistem ini mereformasikan hierarki kuasa kerajaan pusat. Kerajaan pasca-revolusi masih mengawal ketat hierarki badan-badan kerajaannya dari pusat sehinggalah turun ke peringkat wilayah, bandaran, daerah dan kampung-kampung; ini adalah sebahagian daripada sistem demokrasi tersaring. Majlis-majlis tempatan tidak diinstitusikan sepenuhnya di dalam sistem politik Iran; sebaliknya hanya dihubungkan kepada pihak berkuasa bandaran yang bertanggungjawab menyediakan beberapa perkhidmatan untuk masyarakat di dalam kawasannya. Oleh itu, majlis-majlis tempatan ini bukanlah organisasi pembuat keputusan di dalam sistem pentadbiran tempatan sekali gus menggagalkan objektif pasca-revolusi untuk memperkasakan rakyat.

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BDs	Basic Democracies
CBO	Community-based Organization
EU	The European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
KDPI	Kurdish Democratic Party
KSR	Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee
NA	Narcotics Anonymous
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PRDD	Panchayat and Rural Development Department
PRI	Panchayats Raj Institution
SGP	Small Grants Programme
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UPs	Union Parishads

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Chapter One

Introduction:

Problem Statement, Key Questions and Objectives

1.1. Setting the Context

After the 1979 Revolution in Iran, institutional changes were proposed to create a democratic system where people could participate in all affairs of society. At that time, when the constitution was outlined, local councils were appropriately regarded as part of the policy of decentralization. These councils were to be elected through direct votes of people in villages, towns and cities.

Today, these local councils, or "Islamic councils" as they are called, exist everywhere in Iran, in urban as well as very rural areas. These councils are reputedly part of the democratic system that has been realized by the government. These councils constituted part of a democratizing movement that paved the way for the devolution of power; they, therefore, served as important institutions established after the revolution to empower the people.

However, these councils have failed to play the role of empowering people. A comprehensive study is necessary to assess the reasons why this attempt to empower people through local councils have failed. The present research assesses the decentralization process in Iran in connection with the concept of democracy in the political context of a government that professes itself to be an Islamic Republic.

The present study proposes that a model of filtered democracy is prevalent in Iran. In fact, various forms of support and demands as inputs into the political system are filtered to guarantee the survival of the system. Meanwhile, there is a decentralized system in the form of urban and rural councils, but these councils do not act as demand articulators. Civil society is not powerful enough to work with these councils to

strengthen the feedback loop from the outputs to the inputs into the political system. And, whenever there are forms of support or demands, they are canalized into the system in a filtered way that only selected supports and demands are accepted.

This research does not see Islam as the dominant political idea that shapes how this political system works.[1] This study focuses on the political system to determine how decentralized institutions were shaped after the revolution. The primary objective here is to understand Iran's model of decentralization and what it reflects about the participation of people in decision-making within the framework of democratization that was instituted after the revolution, particularly during the research period (2012-2014).

1.2. Problem Statement

Iran experienced a massive uprising in 1979 that changed the political system from a 54-year-old constitutional secular monarchy under the Pahlavi dynasty[2] to an Islamic Republic. The 1979 Revolution which was led by the clerics[3] was a popular mass movement that brought to an end a corrupt monarchy system. A deeper review of the political developments in the early Revolution years indicates, among other things, three significant characteristics: new political institutions, the emergence of populist approaches, and a hasty and temporary devolution of power (Bashiriyeh, 2002, p. 45).

As a result of the Revolution, political institutions were replaced by the new ones based on a different constitution that was inspired by the doctrine of "Velayat-e Faqih"[4] and

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[1] While the focus here is not the value system of Islam in Iran, the researcher accepts that religion could be of great importance to understand the Islamic value-system of the governing body; this issue can be the theme of another study.

[2] The Pahlavi dynasty comprised only two "Shah" or monarchs, Reza Shah Pahlavi (reg. 1925–1941), the father, and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (reg. 1941–79), the son.

[3] Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989) was considered a very powerful leader in the 1979 Revolution. He had continued to denounce the Shah regime for a period of fifteen years, while in exile. Ayatollah Khomeini persistently criticized the tyranny and despotism of the Shah, his subordination to the West, specifically to the United States, and his collaboration with Israel. In 1979, the Ayatollah was nominated by *Time* magazine as "Man of the Year". He was the central figure in this revolutionary movement and this was clearly seen from the beginning of the Revolution. His name was used in most of the slogans chanted by the protestors in demonstrations; his portraits even served as a sign of protest (Khomeini and Algar, 1981).

[4] The doctrine of "Absolute Velayat-e Faqih" or the Guardianship (or Providence) of the Jurist (as mentioned in Iran's Constitution) – raised by Ayatollah Khomeini, in his book *The Islamic Government* - gives power to the faqih, or the Jurist, to govern the people.

an Islamic government. Khomeini and Algar (1981) note that a major difference between an Islamic government and a constitutional monarchy (the system during the Pahlavi dynasty) is that "whereas the representatives of the people or the monarch in such regimes engage in legislation, in Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty". The new constitution was approved in a referendum months after the Revolution.[5] Among the new institutions, some were totally new, such as the institution of leadership, or Vali-e Faqih, an elected council, or "majles", of experts for the supervision of the leadership. A Guardian Council was also created to safeguard the Islamic ordinances and to examine the compatibility of all legislation with Islamic values. A new court of administration of justice was also part of this system. Other institutions remained the same as before, that is the three branches of the executive, the judiciary and the legislature, though with slight changes in their relationship with other political entities. These institutional changes were instituted to guarantee a new political system based on the participation and votes of people.

Since the early Revolution years, dominant populist approaches could be perceived in a majority of the policies implemented by government institutions that extended their hierarchy to the local level where they could reach people in villages. For instance, improvement of agriculture and villages both came into the agenda of the Revolutionary government and the "Jihad Sazandeghi" (Reconstruction Crusade)[6] was initiated to improve the conditions of life in villages. The volunteer forces of Jihad went to poor

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In this way, the Jurist has the power of custodianship over people, which means those who are most knowledgeable about Islamic law have to govern society. Within the framework of this doctrine, "religion" and "state" or "politics" are not separate concepts, and there is no distinction or distance between them. They are inter-related. Meanwhile, the Vali-e Faqih, or the supreme leader, has a major role in the power system.

[5] Less than fifty days after the victory of the Revolution, more than 98 per cent of people went to the ballots boxes in a referendum to vote for the Islamic Republic. The Constitution was drafted by an elected Assembly of experts; the final text was adopted by a referendum in December 1979 – just eight months after the vote for the Islamic Republic.

[6] Jihad Sazandeghi (reconstruction crusade) was a government body that was established in 1979 due to pressure from those who were supporting a better life for people in rural areas, with a mission to struggle against rural deprivation. This massive and revolutionary organization was very successful in mobilizing thousands of villagers all over Iran through institutions such as cooperatives that brought modernity to villages and changed the appearance of most rural areas (Hooglund, 2009).

villages in remote areas, offering villagers services such as construction of infrastructure or training to develop skills. Jihad lacked a full-fledge national programme for sustainable development. Rather, it was effective in building rural roads, extending the electricity network to villages, especially in remote areas, and improving the quality of agricultural products. It was in those times that an extensive network of "health houses" was established by the Ministry of Health, down to the local level, from small towns to villages. The literacy movement that was also established by the direct order of Ayatollah Khomeini played an effective role in holding classes for illiterate adults everywhere.[7] Other government bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Cooperatives were busy spreading their services or expanding their outreach to villages. As Bashiriyeh (2002) mentions, a policy of "massive mobilization" was pursued by the Islamic government, in which poor people from the lower classes were targeted, and such a policy was further supported and strengthened during the war with Iraq.

Despite the institutional changes within the system and a populist approach among revolutionary government authorities, a devolution of power never happened, and "elective participation" approaches gave way gradually to "selective participation". A kind of hasty and temporary devolution occurred after the revolution, as a natural consequence of any massive revolution, and certain local councils were shaped at different levels in those revolutionary days. These councils were gradually dissolved.

Though devolution never happened, a policy of decentralization had been part of the development agenda even before the revolution. In fact, it was during the second Pahlavi administration that villages first experienced local councils. The first rural councils were established in certain districts of Iran in the form of a five-member composition with one representative from landlords, three representatives selected by

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[7] The members of the Literacy Movement were so persistent and determined in their work that UNESCO would later recognize them as one of the most successful literacy programmes in the world.

the peasants and the last member was the kadkhoda.[8] Given the authority of the landlords and kadkhodas in villages, these selective (rather than elective) rural councils were not able to act as effective institutions at the service of people. Therefore, people became passive actors, with no involvement in decision-making.

Another important factor for the failure of these councils was the 1953 coup d'état[9] and the massive suppression afterwards. In 1962, a significant land reform took place under the Shah as part of his socioeconomic reforms. At this time, the Iranian economy was not faring well while there was some political unrest. These land reforms led to a huge redistribution of land to rural people who previously had no possibility of owning land as they were poorly paid labourers.

Certain researchers, such as Moghadam (1988), argue that these changes and especially the land reform, contributed a great deal to the 1979 Revolution. Abrahamian (2008) also believes that the land reform paved the way for the revolution because many farmers remained without arable land and therefore migrated to towns; by the mid-1970, the ruling system was encountering numerous social problems.

The decentralization process continued after the Revolution. A hierarchy of community (*roosta* or village, and *Mahaleh* in town), district (*Bakhsh*), town (*Shahr*), township (*Shahrestan*) and province (*Ostan*) was devised in 1980 by the Council of the Islamic

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[8] During the monarchy, the villages were managed by Kadkhodas who were village heads, or leaders. A Kadkhoda was the representative of villagers, the village landlord, and the government since early times in Iran. For various reasons, especially after the Land Reform of 1962, the administrative system within villages went through gradual changes, and it was before the Revolution in 1976 that the position of Kadkhoda was omitted from the system. However, Kadkhodas were still in power when the Revolution occurred.

[9] The coup d'etat of 19 August 1953 (known as the 28 Mordad coup) was managed by Britain ("Operation Boot") and the United States ("TPAJAX Project") and ended in the overthrow of Mohammad Mosaddegh. As a result, the monarchical rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was strengthened. In 1951, the National Front that dominated Parliament gave a vote of confidence to Mossadegh who was appointed prime minister by the Shah. Later, there were tensions between Mossadegh and Kashani, a religious leader and the Speaker of the Parliament. Kashani was against Mossadegh for not "Islamizing" the country, However, Mossadegh believed in the separation of the state and the religion. Moreover, Mossadegh, who was the leader of the pro-democracy movement, was for the nationalization of the petroleum industry and wanted the Shah to be only a formal monarch without ruling powers. Inevitably, the Shah and Mossadegh had a contentious relationship. In 1952, the Shah dismissed Mossadegh but he was again appointed because of widespread protests. At the same time, the Tudeh Party (the Communists), backed by the Soviet Union, supported Mossadegh while before they were against the National Front. Britain made a claim against Iran, following the nationalization of oil, in the International Court of Justice, but lost the case. Britain continued an oil embargo against Iran, a reason why the country suffered from economic tensions too. In 1953, Mossadegh decided to dissolve the Parliament through a referendum and this gave the Shah the excuse, along with the Americans and the British, to start the coup (see Gasiorowski, 1987; Gasiorowski and Byrne, 2004).

Revolution[10] to create a new system. This system of hierarchy was not much different from the hierarchy in the last years before the revolution. In 1979, the Leader of the Revolution also issued an order for the establishment of councils. As mentioned, the elections were held in certain cities and 156 councils were established. However, as the related order was very general and there were no regulations, the councils were gradually forgotten, especially with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, following which there were no more councils in Iran.

It was only twenty years after the Revolution that local Islamic councils were legally approved and launched everywhere and at different levels as a part of a reformist policy to strengthen the decentralization process and people's participation. Khatami, the Reformist President (and the representative of the Reformist Movement too), was elected in 1997 during an election where there was a massive turn-out. He was able to start a series of administrative and political reforms. The issue of downsizing the government was raised and policies of decentralization were adopted and supported by his cabinet. In fact, the establishment of local councils had been envisaged in the Constitution (Principle 100) but its realization needed a law. A related law was adopted in 1996 by the Islamic Assembly and was approved by the Guardian Council. These local councils together with the Islamic Assembly, according to Principle 7 of the Constitution, are "decision-making and administrative organs of the State" – a status that councils seem to have failed to gain.

Based on this related law, the councils have to select mayors, supervise activities of municipalities and determine, within their own constituencies, what people need in terms of social, cultural, educational, health and economic matters as well as inform the related government bodies about such requirements and to follow-up on them. These

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[10] The Council of the Islamic Revolution (or Showra-ye Enghelāb Eslāmi) was a council that was formed on 12 January 1979 to handle the Revolution. This council played a major role in the selection of a prime minister for the temporary government, administration of the revolutionary tribunals and nationalization of a series of enormous companies and factories belonging to powerful people in the Shah regime. The council was active until the establishment of the first Majles in 1980.

councils are elected by the people to a four-year term in all towns and villages. Four elections have been held consecutively, in 1999, 2003, 2006 and 2013. The fourth run was not held in 2010 and was postponed, by a decree of the Islamic Assembly, and was held in 2013, concurrently with the Presidential elections. Meanwhile, it was during the third run that a council of the councils at the provincial level and a higher council of councils at the national level were established through representation. This hierarchy provides councils with more access to legislative motions and connects the local level to the higher level.

On the other hand, the situation involving the economy has not been promising. Since 1979, the population has doubled while resources have significantly declined. The official unemployment rate is still more than 15 per cent. A persistent economic recession is the most significant challenge to Iran's population. However, based on a UNDP report (2010), Iran ranks 70th according to Human Development Indicators; it also shows that Iran has been moving up steadily from its previous ranking (106th) in 2003. This ranking has been influenced by Iran's oil revenues which have been rising due to price hikes during the past seven years. However, the quality of life has been deteriorating during the past decade. Pro-poor policies of the Islamic government have not been very effective in reducing inequalities and poverty in Iran (Hosseini & Jafari Samimi, 2010; Salehi-Isfahani, 2008; Ziari & Mousavi, 2009). Such failures could be partially due to the inefficiency of local institutions or their poor capacity to deliver policies, especially in the villages.

These councils, though comprising elected members, have not been fully institutionalized within the local government system and within Iran's hierarchy of power (Tajbakhsh, 2000), and therefore, they have not led to greater empowerment of people. Although there is a need for a historical analysis of the context where the councils were envisaged, the related law has to be fully studied for its faults and flaws.

Moreover, the process of selecting candidates and of the election needs careful analysis while the Iranian characterization of the concept of "participation" has to be discussed (Piran, 2002). This is because, given the significant status of councils in the Constitution (as people's entities for decision-making at local level), it appears that the councils have not obtained sufficient power to institute changes. While they can supervise the municipalities, they do not have enough power to decide how they should be run.[11]

This study analyses decentralization policies and the power structure in Iran. It attempts to determine the process of the distribution of power at the local level with an aim to shed light on the present form of local governance. This assessment provides insights into the character of the present model of decentralization, if there is such a distinct model, as well as determine why this new model is not working.

1.3. Key questions

This study has two major issues that are assessed through an empirical study of local communities in Iran. The first issue focuses on the structure of politics, with an attempt to determine why the democratization of the political system through a decentralized model in Iran after the revolution has not been effective. The second issue involves the role of local institutions, specifically why the local councils have not emerged as an avenue to ensure the participation of people in the decision-making process. The two questions are as follows:

- How is the **structure** of the post-revolution decentralization system framed? Why has it not enabled people to participate in decision-making?

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[11] Mehdi Chamran, the present head of the Higher Council of the Provincial Councils, believes that councils do not have enough powers to make decisions. See his various editorials in the magazine, *Shora-ha*, especially his speech at the 41st meeting of the Higher Council of the Provincial Councils where he emphasized that the councils have not gained their appropriate status in the society.

- Why has the **policy** of decentralization not led to devolution? What are the political obstacles?

In fact by responding the first question, the role and functions of institutions in decentralization will be understood and it will reveal how the power structure functions during decision-making. It will also cast light on the structural obstacles that can enable people to participate in decision-making. This institutional approach in studying the decentralization process is vital to explore the role of different institutions at various levels, especially local institutions – in connection with each other – in decision-making.

The second question looks at the policy of decentralization and it intends to study the political obstacles that obstruct the devolution of power. It will show why people have not become empowered following decentralization. By responding to this question through the bulk of evidence coming out of from a cross-case study, this assessment will shed light on the existing obstacles and will provide insights into how the policy has been truly implemented.

1.4. Research Objectives

Based on the above key questions, the research is aimed at the three following objectives:

- to understand the reality of the **process** of decentralization;

- to explore the **actual role** of local institutions in decision-making at the local level; and

- to explain why the **policy** of decentralization has not led to the empowerment of people.

The first two objectives are related to the first key question and, therefore, they focus on the structure of the post-revolution decentralization. The third objective is related to the second key question.

1.5. Justification for the research

The 1979 Revolution promised a better future for Iran. The political structure changed with an aim to facilitate the process of democratization in the country. A series of measures started to create a decentralized system within the framework of a "down-sized government". The decentralized policies were to strengthen the process of democratization and, at the same time, any democratized process needs to guarantee the increased participation of people in decision-making. That is why the research is necessary, to analyse the democratization process by studying decentralization policies. Crucially too, this study focuses on democratization through decentralization in the context of a government that has legalized local councils throughout the country.

There also seems to be a vital gap in the existing literature on decentralization, especially in relation to the political system, and in particular in relation with the devolution of power. Much of the existing literature has only dealt with administrative issues (Jabbari Beirami, Tabibi, Delgoshaee, Mahmoodi & Bakhshian, 2007; Motlagh, Rahbar & Kabir, 2008; Farzinvash & Ghaffarifard, 2007; Azaehdel & Ramli, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to study decentralization from a political point of view. Meanwhile, there is little research using a theory of the political system as the conceptual model for studying the functioning of existing local councils within the whole hierarchy of power. This research is a new contribution to the literature, responding to many unanswered questions regarding existing decentralized policies.

1.6. Scope of the Research

The scope of the present research was determined by the problem statement and, therefore, it is focused on rural and urban councils in Iran, with the aim of answering two key questions regarding the devolution of power. Thus, while the research is limited to Iran, in the literature review, this thesis will appraise certain experiences of decentralization in other countries to obtain a better view of the issue and the uniqueness of the Iranian experience. Since this research is a political study, it will try to look at the political obstacles while studying policies and decision-making processes. While it studies the issue of decentralization, which seems to be an administrative issue, this is done within a political scope and remains within the framework of power devolution. Each time a case study is conducted, it will be assessed within the whole political system. In this way, the research is guided and motivated by the two key questions.

The issue of decentralization in a country like Iran could be an incessant quest. Since there has only been a twenty-year period since local councils were established, there might be many varying questions that have to be responded to. However, the study will be limited to studying the three objectives of the research, i.e. to understand the process of decentralization, to explore the actual role of local institutions and to explain the policy of decentralization, within the cases selected for the research, trying to shed light on the key questions. It is clear that the researcher cannot study the system of all the councils in Iran; it is even not possible to study the councils in a province. While this was one limitation, the researcher selected the case studies in a way that they represented the other councils.

1.7. Importance of the Research

This study offers certain possible solutions to the existing conditions of the devolution of power that may be helpful to provide remedial insights or solutions to the unsatisfactory situation of local councils and the process of decentralization in Iran. This research is timely and relevant since there have been four elections since its implementation, providing sufficient data for such a study on the outcomes of decentralization policies. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the existing literature on democracy since the concepts of "devolution" and "people participation in decision-making" are directly related to the democratization process. Therefore, the research may be beneficial to the researchers on democracy in general and in the Middle East in particular.

Understanding the present model of the decentralization can be a significant as it may reduce the existing ambiguities regarding the functioning of local councils. This is because this research intends to study the model within the macro political system and to find out the political obstacles to the devolution of power, an integral part of the decentralization in Iran.

Policy-makers and policy researchers in Iran are the most important group of beneficiaries of the present study since it is a study that discusses the outputs of the system within the framework of decisions and policies adopted and taken in connection with the selected communities. While the effects of the decisions within one or two communities may not be of much importance to a policy-maker, the cross-case studies will help them to see how various communities have been affected by public policies and, crucially too, how the mere process of decision-making is affecting the people and how much the people are participating directly and indirectly in decisions. That is why a series of recommendations have been proposed to the policy-makers as part of the conclusion of this study.

Civil society activists will learn from the present research since it will shed light on their empowerment activities in local communities and their role as demand articulators. It will also help non-governmental organizations in their role in relationships nurtured with the local institutions and of course with the inputs from and the outputs to the political system.

1.8. Organization of the Chapters

The research has been organized in seven chapters. Chapter One looks into the context of the research, stating the problem, outlining the key questions and objectives, justifying the study, and presenting its scope and importance as well as the organization of the chapters. Chapter Two provides an extensive literature review, organized in a thematic way to study the existing literature on decentralization in Iran (pre-Revolution and post-Revolution) and in other countries. Chapter Three introduces the theoretical framework of the political system and the related conceptual framework used in the research and presents the research methodology which is the qualitative method of multiple case studies. In this chapter, the researcher presents the cases and offers insights into the selected communities, means of data collection, the pivotal interview questions and the way for assessing the validity and reliability of the data. Chapter Four presents four urban case studies containing findings from four urban communities (Oudlajan, Bardasht, Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee and Salemi-Yek). Chapter Five presents the rural case studies that contains findings from six villages (Ahmadabad, three villages of Houkard, Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No, Tajabad, and Sarab-Karyan). Chapter Six analyses the results from the case studies in three forms of comparison – urban cases, rural cases and urban-rural cases. The last part is a cross-case study to approach the issues through multiple lenses. Chapter Seven presents the research conclusion that starts with an introduction and an overview. Then the findings are analysed with an aim

to draw conclusions from the results. This chapter lists the novel empirical contributions of this study as well as new theoretical insights garnered from this research. It also contains recommendations in two parts: recommendations for policy-makers and for practitioners and activists, especially for those involved in non-governmental organizations. The next part discusses the research limitations and the future studies. The chapter ends with a summary.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

To analyse the relevant literature on decentralization in post-revolution Iran, this review is divided in three parts. The first part looks at the literature that has studied democracy and the political system in Iran in a general way. The second part addresses directly the issue of decentralization. It discusses certain decentralization models in other countries and then it returns to Iran and studies the related literature, mostly those works published on the post-revolution decentralization process. The third part is a comparative review of decentralization during the secular Pahlavi Monarchy and the post-Revolution era. The review focuses only on academic sources as there are a massive non-academic writings on both the political system and the functions of councils.

2.2. The General Overview

The 1979 Revolution created an Islamic republic. It is a "republic" since the political system gained its legitimacy from the people's votes (for elections of Parliament, Experts' Assembly, the Presidency, and Rural and Urban Islamic Councils). It is "Islamic" since in its Constitution, Shia Jurisprudence has been defined as the state religion. Principle 4 of the Constitution states: "All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria".

The preamble of the 1979 Constitution states that "(t)he basic characteristic of this revolution, which distinguishes it from other movements that have taken place in Iran during the past hundred years, is its ideological and Islamic nature". In fact, the official motto of the Islamic Revolution was "Freedom, Independence, Islamic Republic". The Islamic government, based on this preamble, aims to establish "an ideal and model society on the basis of Islamic norms." The whole system has to be influenced by principle 56 of the Constitution which stipulates that "the absolute sovereignty over the world and man belongs to God, and it is He Who has made man master of his own social destiny". According to the Constitution, the right to participate in and to decide one's destiny is a divine right and that people can exercise it but within the framework of divine rules. As Martin (2003: 159) mentions, the Constitution is an eclectic document "professing to be Islamic but in fact retaining principles derived from the Western democratic systems". Based on the Constitution, the purpose of the government is not only to enable the manifestations of the divine dimensions of human beings to flourish; it also seeks to establish a just and balanced social system. In fact, the present defined system distinguishes the country from the common pattern of liberal and socialist governments (Azaehdel & Ramli, 2009).

The model in Figure 2-1, presented by Maleki (2009), illustrates the political system in Iran. As it is clear from the upper arrows, there are three key institutions: The elected institutions, appointed institutions through elected institutions, and unelected institutions. One important point that Maleki ignored is that the local councils had to be added among the elected institutions. Apart from this oversight, the model helps us to understand the political system. According to this model, the people vote to elect representatives for the parliament (Islamic Assembly or Majles), the president and members of the Assembly of Experts (that monitors the performance of the leader and

may select or de-select the leader). The Assembly of Experts was one of the new institutions established after the Revolution.

Moreover, two of the three appointed institutions through elected institutions, i.e. the Supreme leader who is Vali-e Faqih, and the Guardian Council, are both religious bodies established after the Revolution. According to the Constitution, the Supreme leader, or Vali-e Faqih, is a religious scholar who has a proper political and social perspective, is resourceful, pious and courageous and has adequate capability to lead. In the model, it is not clear if these institutions have hegemony over each other or not. It only illustrates the difference between the three group of elected, appointed by elected and unelected institutions.
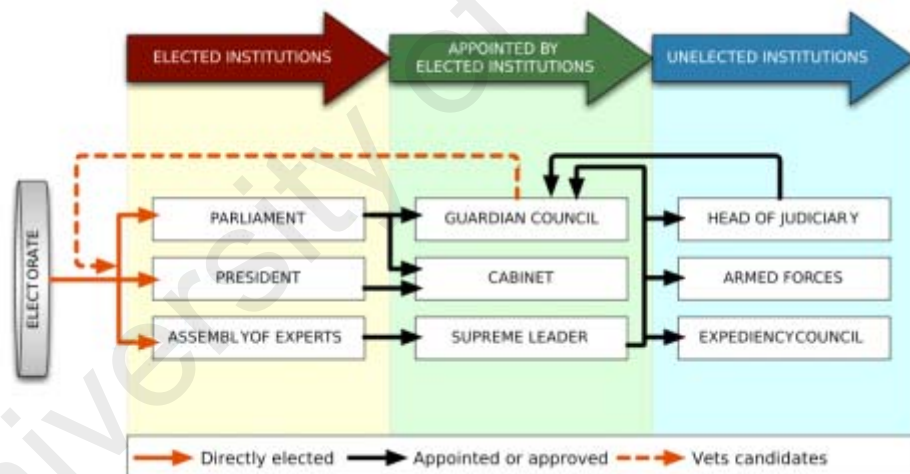
Figure 2-1: Political System in the Post-Revolution Iran (Source: Maleki (2009))

The Guardian Council is composed of twelve members: six jurists by the Judiciary and approved by the Majles, and six theologians selected by the Supreme leader. They have to approve the list of candidates for different elections as well as approve all bills that are passed by the Majles. In fact, this Council has to ensure that all legislation adheres to the Islamic law and is according to the Constitution.

The three unelected bodies, based on the above model, are appointed by the leader: the Judiciary, the armed forces, and the Expediency Council, a post-Revolution institution, whose role is to resolve disputes between the Guardian Council and the Majles as well as advice the leader on possible amendments to Iran's Constitution. These institutions are new and show that Iran has gone through a structural change after the Revolution (Abootalebi, 2001).

Most academic work on issues such as political development, democracy, Iran's revolution, participation and even gender issues have focused on the functions, decrees, or behaviour of these three types of elected and appointed institutions. Bashiriyeh (1984), in the last chapter of his book, *The State and Revolution in Iran*, describes how the clerics fused religious and political authority based on the principle of Velayat-i Faqih as stipulated in Principle 110 of the Constitution. The Islamic Revolution institutionalized the concept of authority based on the principle of the "rule of the theologian" as the agency of the Imam. In fact, not only is the faqih (or theologian) the leader of the revolution, but he is the representative of the Hidden Imam too. In this way, "authority originates in God, and in the absence of Imam, is vested in a just and pious jurist" (Bashiriyeh, 2012, p. 167). Bashiriyeh explains that the Faqih is accorded extensive powers by the Constitution such as the appointment of the six members of the Guardian Council, the appointment of the members of the High Judicial Council, the commander of the armed forces, etc. The three legislative, executive and judicial powers operate under the Faqih's supervision. Bashiriyeh (1984) also mentions that the judiciary is of particular interest to the clerics. This book is not a study of the structures and institutions in Iran and does not assess the general system of the Monarchy; it deals primarily with the issues that led to the Islamic Revolution and what transpired after this uprising.

Bashiriyeh's (2002) most important contribution is his political sociology of Iran. He studies the political developments in Iran and refers to three crises within this ideologically-based Islamic government involving existing institutions and factionalism. From his point of view, Iran has experienced three post-Revolution crises: political participation crisis, political legitimation crisis and political domination crisis. In this book, he studies political developments and institutional change within the framework of these three crises. He explains that as a result of the modernization policies of the second Pahlavi regime, there were certain changes in the Iranian society: weakening of the traditional society and the classes related to the pre-capitalism period (feudal), creation of a massive society through the land reform and economic reforms, urbanization and migration to cities. When the bazaar traditional groups[12] and the clerics used the mobilized masses, the traditional society and the pre-capitalism classes joined together accompanied by the others who were demanding the implementation of the Constitution, continuation of the Constitutionalism and the limitation of the Shah's power, and these shaped the main engine of the Islamic Revolution.

Bashiriyeh continues that, after the revolution, two tendencies emerged: those who were against the integration of the religion and the state and those who were for it. The latter would prevail. But this group was divided into two sub-groups: the new middle classes who were against the Velayat-e Faqih principle, believing in rule of experts, and the other group which was for Velayat-e Faqih, believing that the Faqih or the Jurist has the power to govern the people (mostly comprising of clergies, descendants of clergies and the leaders of the traditional Bazaar). The second sub-group would prevail in the Experts Assembly. This group split into two sub-groups: the first was the traditional

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[12] "Baazar" refers to various groups of shop-keepers, traders and merchants that are involved in traditional commercial activities. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Bazaar was an "interaction" space that acted like a bridge across several social classes (Hedayat, 2010); it was the place of the traditional business elite with political influence who could control fifteen per cent of the private sector credit (Graham 1979, p.221); and it played a major role in the victory of the 1979 Revolution (Hedayat, 2010). Keshavarzian (2007) mentions that it was a symbolic name for the state-dependent class (after the Revolution) used by those who were outside the Bazaar; it was a political force that could be involved in collective actions because of its independent resources (Parsa, 1989, p.129).

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bazaar leaders who defended private property, non-intervention of government in the economy, and non-control of domestic and foreign trade. They were later known as the "traditional right" and had the support of the Guardian Council. The second group comprised retail owners who were known as the "traditional left" and were supported by the then leader; they emphasized the Islamic economy, land reform, justice, the intervention of the government in the economy, codification of the labour law, nationalization of the foreign trade and prohibition of wealth amassing. From 1989 to 1997, the first group prevailed and as a result an oligarchy was shaped – that is why political participation weakened. The second was passive and therefore there were some changes in their composition and they gradually oriented towards a new middle class (Bashiriyeh, 2002).

The policies of privatization and their impact on the economy ended in inefficient strategies and wide inflation and as a result public discontent. Two new groups were shaped out of the "traditional right": a group called Kargozaran Sazandeghi (agents of construction) who believed in economic growth and another group (mostly clergies and bazaar leaders) who believed in justice and the safeguarding of Islamic values. As mentioned, political participation was severely weak during this period, until Kargozaran joined the traditional left (which had changed into a new middle class and has corrected part of its position) in Majma Hezbollah which created the reformist movement in 1997. This movement led to the emergence of political parties, an independent press and civil society organizations and as a result the crisis of political participation decreased (Bashiriyeh, 2002). After the failure of the reform movement in 2005, once more the crisis of the participation increased.

Regarding the crisis of political legitimacy, Bashiriyeh mentions that the political regime in Iran has received political legitimacy in three ways: 1979-1989 – charismatic authority; 1989-1997 – traditional authority (traditional oligarchy); 1997 and afterwards

– legal authority and a persistent conflict among these three kinds of legitimacies. In charismatic authority, the main elements have been massive mobilization of people and the concentration of power in the hands of the clergies, while the leader had always been the final decision-taker in all issues. Absolute Velayat-e Faqih was shaped during this period; such attitude maintains that the Vali-e Faqih has "to govern" (and not just to be involved in politics). It was in this period that the theory of "Velayat" prevailed over the traditional theories of Shia. The leader is not only responsible for the Sharia and religious regulations; his main duty is to safeguard the expediencies of the Islamic state.

After 1989, the clergies, accompanied by the tradesmen and the bazaar leaders, secured more power: an oligarchy was shaped; as a result, massive mobilization weakened. After the victory of the reformist movement in 1997 in the presidential elections, a wave of support for the rule of law started. This wave tried to increase the issue of political legitimacy; however, the conflicts among these three political currents (the charismatic authority, the traditional authority and the wave of rule of law) and a new reading of Velayat-e Faqih (the absolute Velayat-e Faqih that does not require people's votes to be selected) tightened the wave of rule of law (legalism). It was in this political period that the first run of elections for urban and rural councils was held. It was a significant victory for the reformists who believed that the councils were strong institutions for strengthening the participation of people.

This new reading of Velayat-e Faqih does not recognize the votes of people as the criteria for selection of the Faqih, but this is the Faqih which gives credibility to the votes of the people. In this attitude, Faqih is selected by God (like the Prophets and Imams) and people ought to obey him. On the other side, there were the pro-Constitution groups (in 1990s) who accepted Velayat-e Faqih within the framework of the Constitution with a clear definition of his responsibilities. These were the signs of a deep political legitimacy the ruling system was going to face.

The third and the last crisis was the political hegemony crisis. To be in power, the ruling regime had to be successful in carrying out three things: prevention from any split in traditional classes (which it failed); prevention from any union among modern classes (which it failed again); and keeping alive the massive mobilization (which was a failure too, due to economic privatization policies). Meanwhile, with the creation of a dualism in the system, the previous political balance has been broken; the ideological element of hegemony has been weakened among people and cannot be easily restored. Such crisis has made the system vulnerable. Bashiriyeh analyses the system within the framework of these three political crises.

The local councils and the decentralization policies can be read within the context of the crisis of political participation. In fact, the policies should end with the empowerment of people everywhere, in villages and in towns, so that they can have their representatives in the councils that decide on the issues related to the life of people. It is a political issue, since part of decision-making power has to be entrusted to the people. Although Bashiriyeh does not talk about this aspect of the crisis, this issue was well illustrated by him.

Movassaghi (2006) analyses the political developments from a modernization perspective. Chapters five and six of his book discuss modernization and reforms during the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Revolution. In concluding chapter five, he mentions that the Islamic Revolution was the consequence of unsuccessful reforms during the Shah's reign. In discussing the political developments after the Revolution, he distinguishes four periods: the first period was dominated by the ideological left in which the government expanded with interventions in the economy. Two approaches were powerful: one under the leadership of the then prime minister with an emphasis on social justice and fair distribution of services. The second approach was supported by the traditional market (bazaar), based on a trade logics, which wanted to have more

share within politics. During the second period, another approach came up that gave priority to strengthening of infrastructures and more production; they used the technocrats and experts and tried to create a more open society. The amendment to the Constitution happened in this period with gave more powers to the President and the position of the prime minister was omitted. The conservatives controlled this approach that was led by Hashemi Rafsanjani. It was during the third period that reformists (with Khatami as the president) came to power supporting the discourses of civil society, civil freedoms, rule of law, democracy and dialogue among civilizations. They did not remain in power since they could not resist the political and ideological pressures by the power blocks (the right wing composing of conservatives and fundamentalists) while there were internal conflicts among the reformists too. The fourth period belonged to the President Ahmadinejad, who was the representative of the right wing who came to power with the motto of targeting poverty. This approach criticized the whole history of the Islamic Revolution. A strong fundamentalist populism dominated. The author forecasted that this approach would not continue to be in power since it was of a conservative nature that did not seriously consider poverty and injustice (Movassaghi 2006: 306). During the whole analysis, Movassaghi does not study the decentralization policies that started during Khatami and in particular does not discuss the elections of councils; in fact, he refers to the reformists' agenda for downsizing the government and giving more power to people (p.295) without providing more details. Movassaghi (2006) believes that these policies came to be a failure because of the severe disagreements by the right wing (p.297).

Martin (2003), in his book *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, studies Ayatollah Khomeini's attitude about an Islamic State and of Islam as a political ideology. The book explains the ideological roots as well as the dynamics of the Revolution from Ayatollah Khomeini's point of view. Martin reviews the influence

of Irfan[13] on Ayatollah Khomeini, his differences with other religious leaders in Qum, his political life, the way he looked at other Islamic movements and his establishment of the Islamic Republic. The book is a conceptual analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's belief system.

Algar (1981), in his detailed and reliable introduction to the ideas and pronouncements of Ayatollah Khomeini, summarizes three major points that emerged from the Revolution leader's lectures: 1) the necessity for the establishment and maintenance of Islamic political institutions, involving the need to subordinate political power to Islamic goals, precepts, and criteria; 2) the duty of the religious scholars (the fuqaha) to bring about an Islamic state and to assume legislative, executive and judicial positions within it (in short: the doctrine of "the governance of the faqih", or Vilayat-e faqih); and 3) a programme of action for the establishment of an Islamic state, including various measures for self-reform by the religious establishment. The book is very helpful in order to understand the key concept of "Vilayat-e faqih", though it does not clearly analyse how people's participation is seen within an Islamic context and it does not show how a decentralized system of power functions within the religious system.

2.3. Democracy and decentralization in Iran

There is an extensive literature on democracy in Iran. In particular, a large number of articles have been written on this topic after the 1979 Revolution. Part of the academic literature on democracy is focused on reforms which started after Khatami's presidency in 1997. In fact, the establishment of the councils all over Iran was part of the reformist agenda. It was during Khatami's administration that the related law was adopted.

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[13] Irfan (also Irfaan and Erfan) means "knowledge" and refers to mysticism that is a power to have an intuition and perception of the unseen and the love for God. Ayatollah Khomeini was among the Shia proponents of Irfan. Mulla Sadra, who lived in the seventeenth century, was among the major ideologue for Irfan (see Mutahhari, 2014).

However, this issue has been ignored by many writers and researchers who wrote about the reformist movement. One can argue that such a policy was totally new for a country like Iran that had never experienced the presence of councils at different levels by that time. Most researchers tried to analyse the reformist movement with an aim to show it had been contributing to a more liberal atmosphere and that it was on the gradual and endogenous path to more freedoms in the country. For instance, after the second victory of Khatami, Sadri (2001) writes about the attitudes and beliefs of certain reformists and their conflicts with the right wing with the purpose of depicting the future of the movement, specifically whether it could be successful in creating a stable democratic atmosphere. Takeyh (2003) studies the reformist movement through an analysis of views and comments by reformist politicians and concludes that the movement might create a change in the future. Vahdat (2005) studies the discourse of Khatami, trying to reveal the challenges of an Islamic democracy. However, few researchers address the policy of decentralization initiated by Khatami and the reformist movement as part of the democratization process. Arjomand (2002) refers to this policy in Khatami's words that "participation is the first step of political development" but the process and the way such a policy can help to democratization is not analysed.

Similarly, there are articles on elections and electoral policies. Milani (2005) focuses on the manipulation of the election by the ruling clergy which governs in Iran; he, therefore, argues that this is not democracy, but a regime that masters the process of elections each time it is about to happen. Milani (2005) also goes beyond the elections and examines the theory developed by the supporters of the regime, which mentions that society is divided into camps of "insiders" and "outsiders" and only the "insiders" can become candidates. Therefore, elections are just an appropriate tool of political propaganda for the system. He has some references to the elections of local councils, but does not analyse them (Milani, 2005).

A part of the democracy literature is about the women's movement. Paidar (2001), in an article entitled "Gender of democracy: The encounter between feminism and reforms in contemporary Iran" written for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), depicts a history of women's participation in the post-revolutionary period and shows how the women's movement has been deepening among people. She also studies the women's movement within the framework of reformism. She discusses the contribution of the Islamist reformists to the democratization of the women's movement and describes the limitations and challenges of the Islamist reformists in dealing with gender issues. She also talks about the elections of rural and urban local councils and shows that the candidacy of women in 1999 elections constituted only 2 per cent of all candidates but 10 per cent of all the winners were women. However, she does not discuss whether women have played a role in these decentralized councils.

Hoodfar and Sadr (2009) address a series of concerns on gender equality with an aim to find out whether women have been successful in changing the governing discourse among religious leaders and whether they have created any change in law and regulations. Hoodfar and Sadeghi (2009) claim that the women's movement has paved a way towards democratization through "a decentralized manner"; they refer to a variety of groups, activists and cases which show how the movement has been organizing in a bottom-up direction. While other researchers such as Kian (1998), Kar (2001), Mir-Hosseini (1999), Moghadam (2002), Tohidi (2002), Abbasgholizadeh (2006), Ahmadi-khorasani (2007), Bayat (2007) andre Afzali (2008) have illustrated various aspects of women's movement, there is no research on the role that women can play or have played in local rural and urban councils or the role that is played by women in local communities and whether these roles have contributed to democratization process.

In other articles regarding political elites, there is such neglect. For instance, Rakel discusses the political elites and provides an illustration in which she depicts the informal power structure; in this illustration, there is no place for the over 100,000 members of the councils all over Iran. Mashayekhi (2001) studies the student movement during the Khatami period and compares it with the movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Mashayekhi (2001) also studies the relationship this student movement had with pro-civil society activities.

There is an extensive literature on Islam and democracy. Tezcür (2007), while studying the political systems in Iran and Turkey, talks about the notion of Islamic democracy and shows that the majority in such Islamic democratic societies can create a tyranny unless there are constitutional provisions that can control the powers of the legislative branch while a powerful judiciary is needed for realization of people's rights. Dallmayr (2011), in responding to the question whether a religious democracy exists or not, studies the two paradigms of "segregationist" (religion has to be separated from politics) and "amalgamation" (in its two ways, whether religion subjugate politics or vice versa). This study also looks at the political system in Iran from an Islamic point of view, showing how it can be democratized. Hashemi-Najafabadi (2011) studies the role of religious modernists in creating an Islamic society based on democratic values; he argues, they need to re-read the concepts of Islamic thought and find ways for reconciliation with modern concepts. In this literature on Islam and democracy, there is a lack of studies on "decentralization" from a religious modernist view, with no focus on the question why the establishment of rural and urban councils was incorporated into the Constitution.

All these studies evidently lack a study of decentralization in Iran. The diagram by Maleki (2009) does not refer to the elections of rural and urban Islamic councils (see Figure 2-1 and compare it with Figure 2-3 that is a revised model by the researcher).

Even Bashiriyeh (2005) does not analyse the establishment of councils even though this was an essential part of the reformist movement. Although Martin (2003) refers to the elections of councils in some sentences, he does not study it as a part of the government policy to ensure people's participation. In principle, the research activities before 2000 have not seriously studied the issue of decentralization since the first run of elections of councils happened in 1999. Meanwhile, the studies on democracy ignore the relationship of these decentralized polices with the democratization process.

2.4. Literature on civil society and decentralization

There are other studies on democracy that focus on civil society. An active civil society can be very effective in the process of decentralizing and devolving power. Katouzian (1995), while referring to the exclusion of large sections and groups of society which represent the modern middle class, argues that the most significant requirement for political development in Iran would be the extension of basic rights and freedoms to excluded people. There are, however, various attitudes towards civil society. In fact, after the reform movement started in 1997, and Khatami became president, strengthening of civil society came into the agenda of the reformists.

Kamrava (2001), in a survey of the literature by the Iranian academics on civil society, provides four categories of concepts of civil society. In the first category, there is the indigenized notion of "civil society"; the second group finds an important role for civil society in the rule of law; the third attitude interprets civil society within a proper interpretation of Islam. The last group has worked on culture and believes that without a civic culture, civil society is not possible. Another categorization of the concepts of civil society has been done by Chaichian (2001) which is very different from that of Kamrava (2001). He has divided the concept into six categories: Liberal notion (a pro-market concept supported by Ghani Nezhad, 1998); Developmentalist-Pragmatic (raised by Amir Ahmadi, 1998a, 1998b); Developmentalist-Democratic (Ganji, 2000); Islamic

Democratic (Soroush, 1998); Institutional-Islamic (raised by Khatami, 2000 – the reformist president) and Secular-Reformist (developed by Hajjarian, 1998). Among these categories, Khatami refers to the institutional concept; he believes that institutions can pave the way for people's participation, and from that position, institutions can be effective in the devolution of power where people's participation and empowerment have to be guaranteed. Meanwhile, none of these concepts is directly connected with decentralization, though civil society has a major role in the democratization of the society. Both Ganji and Soroush believe in a democratic notion of civil society where civil society can act like a protective shield between the citizens and the government.

After studying various viewpoints and approaches on civil society in Iran, Chaichian (2003) raises the point that most researchers seemingly agree that strengthening civil society is a prerequisite for establishing democracy. However, Chaichian (2003) follows the model of Gramsci for civil society and does not agree that a civil society project can be possible in Iran due to two kinds of structural obstacles: internal and external. The existence of a powerful state (the state acts as the major employer; it depends on oil revenues and it has increased autonomy) and powerless citizens (too weak to demand democratic reforms in the absence of competitive environment that discourages investment) as well as a lack of government capacity for sustainable policy making, are among the internal economic impediments. One major political impediment is the power system, as defined by the Constitution, that does not permit political autonomy for citizens and associations. Chaichian (2003) also refers to social impediments such as the existing structural constraints for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that obstruct their proper and free operation while there is no independent labour union; problematic press freedom, and lack of independent intellectual parties. Chaichian (2003) refers to a series of external obstacles such as Iran's dependence on Western technology and its weak currency on one hand and the imposition of economic and

political sanctions by the United States on the other hand as well as the criteria of the donor organizations for supporting governance and economic reforms. In fact, the pressures from outside and the internal obstacles weaken civil society ("a 'truncated' civil society sphere") and reinforce the state.

Falsafi (2010), in her comparative paper on civil society and democracy in Japan, Iran and Iraq, studies civil society movements. Falsafi (2010) tries to use the relevant historical data on civil society to forecast the future of democracy movements in Iran and Iraq, while also taking lessons from certain social movements in Japan. In fact, after analyzing constitutionalism in industrialized Japan and two Middle Eastern countries with a focus on gender and labour issues, she turns "back to the future" to study social movements in post-World War Two in Japan, post-Reza Shah in Iran and post-Invasion in Iraq. The article concludes that while representative institutions are weak, Iran is a mirror of Japan's experience (more than Iraq), and it is ready to enjoy democratic government under the leadership of civic forces.

Falsafi's (2010) article builds on the historical events of constitutionalism in Japan, Iran and Iraq, and then shifts to a series of systematized historical facts on labour and gender in these three selected countries. The three countries have certainly gone through constitutionalism, though at different times (Japan, 1868; Iran, 1905; Iraq, 1920, 1930 and 1943), and there have been civil protests and social movements in them. The article refers to the important data during these times; in particular, it depicts the power of relationships (between the Monarch, legislative body and people). It clearly shows that although the movement in Japan and Iran were more powerful and comprehensive, the movement in Iraq seemed to be weaker. The author gives civil society in transient societies a different role of seeking democratic governance. The paper also concludes that democratization is not solely related to the strength of the civil society but depends on the history of social movements. The absence of a civil activism may influence the

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democracy movement and even leads to "illiberal democracy". The author shows that the mere focus on elections and establishing democratic institutions in such societies (those in transition) are not enough and these societies are not ready for political reforms.

2.5. Decentralization models in Asian Countries

Decentralization in post-conflict countries needs a different model for the state that is still fragile, the country needs growth, the socioeconomic infrastructures are required to be reconstructed or recovered and more stabilization policies have to be adopted. Brinkerhoff and Johnson (2009), in an article on decentralization in Iraq, showed that what was needed in a post-conflict fragile state was "local governance". They found that the building blocks of an institutional architecture were of great importance for facilitating the process of power devolution in the long term; that was why the capacity of sub-national governments had to be increased. These researchers have found out that any effort to have a "strong centre" would weaken the periphery whereas there should be a balance between the centralized system and decentralized authorities. Governance was needed to guarantee that the process of decentralization could be possible in sub-national states while the post-conflict centre has to be strengthened too. In this way, a process of democratization could be possible.

Afghanistan, a country that is going through a process of state-building too, is a special case. Lister (2007), in her article on local government in Afghanistan, a fragmented country with strong and powerful tribes and religious communities, illustrates how the process of a powerful centre will be more helpful to the decentralization process. Therefore, a series of reforms involving introducing rule of law and legal mechanisms, reinforcing the police force, and putting an end to the "rule of the Kalashnikov" are vital. In fact, without an empowered centre, the provincial states may not be able to be an effective institution (Lister, 2007).

In Turkey, the Ottoman Empire's legacy of a powerful centralized government structure has been helpful to create a modernized country and when political elites and parties have been weak, military interventions have happened. It was in the 1980s that the issue of decentralization entered into the agenda of the government. In 1993, Turkey ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government. However, the changes were very slow. Ozcan (2000) emphasizes the active participation of people and institutions for a real decentralization. In his conclusion, the author recommended an effort to build local democracy through increased civic consciousness, a new definition of the provincial-municipal relationship, and a "de-personalisation" of local administration (Ozcan, 2000). The issue of the dual decentralized system (appointed authorities at local level and elected representatives) had to be resolved (Yilmaz and Guner, 2013). Later, the European Union accession accelerated the process which ended in a series of policies for increasing the number of municipal authorities with more economic powers (Ozcan and Turunç, 2008).

In Indonesia, democratization and decentralization have been interwoven since its independence. Every time an undemocratic regime was in power, decentralization gave its place to centralization. Although decentralization was prescribed in the Constitution (1945), the laws, one after another, adapted it to the existing political circumstance. Though a unitary state, there have been endeavours to create a decentralized political and administrative system. In the 1950s, there was some progress but decentralization failed to realize for various reasons such as a destabilized central government, financial problems and lack of funds at the local level (Matsui, 2003). While there was a spirit of the most possible autonomy for regions in the wording of the related law (Law No. 1/1957), it could never be materialized. Such failed decentralization ended in 1959 when Sukarno changed the system into a centralized one. It was the time when "Guided Democracy" meant more powers for the President and less power for the local

assemblies (Matsui, 2003). In reality, the local government head became an agent of the central power while it has some limited autonomy. These are power relations that are important, as Hadiz puts it, and but it does not constitute decentralization (Hadiz, 2004). This situation was legalized in 1965 (Law No. 18/1965), which was the order during Suharto's time. After Suharto, decentralization policies and regulations[14] were again adopted as part of the democratization process. As a result, as Hadiz concludes in the case of Indonesia, the mere decentralization policies are not enough to guarantee a democratic process and environment, but there is the need to analyse the power relations. In fact, the decentralized "institutions" could be easily "hijacked" (Hadiz, 2004).

Pakistan offers a good example of accumulated experiences in the decentralization process. In fact, the local governments were started under British rule but they were organized in a "top-down" manner in both rural and urban areas, and certain limited duties with non-elected members nominated by the British. During World War One, more autonomy was given to the political parties in India especially at the provincial level. Years after, the India Act of 1935 created a federal government. However, there was still the British control over the provinces through appointed governors. What is important here is that the whole decentralized system was a British initiative that was implemented top-down under their control. After Independence, while there were certain regulations to strengthen decentralization, nothing happened since the system controlled local governments (Cheema et al., 2003).

It was under Ayub that "Basic Democracies", or BDs, were established in an environment where the new Constitution of 1962 gave the whole power to the armed forces which were under the President. The office of the President was linked to all

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[14] The Law No. 22/1999 was about local administration and the Law No. 25/1999 was about the financial relationship between the central and local governments. Both laws came into force in early 2001. For an analysis of these two bills, see Ahmad and Hofman (2000).

these local BDs. It was, in fact, a system under bureaucratic control, organized according to Ayub's concept of "controlled democracy". During Zia's rule, a policy of non-Party elections was pursued to decrease any intervention by political parties in local elections which as Wilder (1999) mentions ended in "personalization of politics at local level" (quoted in Cheema et al., 2003). It was in this period that elected members were elevated as "controlling authority" (Cheema et al., 2003). As those elected were acting in their personal capacities, competition started and, in certain cases, there were tensions within the local government or among them. It was in 2000 that General Pervaiz Musharraf introduced the plan of "devolution of power". The plan was implemented quickly (it was completed in September 2001), possibly because there were no provincial or national elected governments in power. The plan devolved administrative responsibilities to local governments and it covered the expenditure duties too. There were also some changes in the accountability of decision-makers, whether political or bureaucratic (Cheema et al., 2003).

Bangladesh, with its Upazilas (sub-districts), can be an example of a decentralized country. In fact, the structure starts from the top, with seven divisions, 64 districts and about 490 Upazilas/thana and Union Parishads (UPs) composed of three elected members with a quota for women (one out of the three members). Below the UPs, there exist villages (gram) and para, the last two with no electoral member and with no power. The former military ruler, President Ershad, introduced this decentralized system with an aim to devolve power in Bangladesh. In 1982, there was a local government ordinance (that was amended the year after). Meanwhile, just recently, the country started its own fiscal decentralization too. However, as Fjeldstad (2014) mentions, this decentralization is a matter of power and politics. He adds that these are the policies-makers who have to pay more attention to what is really happening. There are reports of corruption among local government officers. He believes that there is a

need for "strong political support" from central government to increase the local capacity. Hossain (2014) recommends that the Upazilas should have more decision-making powers and they have to be enabled to carry out practical bottom-up planning – from Upazilas to the national level. Islam and Fujita (2012) have done a comparison between India and Bangladesh in terms of the process of decentralization in rural areas. They have shown that both countries have a three level rural administration (lower, middle and upper). They conclude that in India, the rural administration has been empowered and a self-governance has been formed as a result of decentralization. However, in Bangladesh, the lowest level is depended on the middle-tier one (Islam and Fujita, 2012).

India is a good case of decentralization, especially the West Bengal with its Panchayat system that has been successful in devolving power (PRDD, 2009 quoted in Islam and Fujita, 2012). The Panchayats Raj Institution (PRI) was the result of a democratic decentralization. In fact, the local government is a three-tier structure with PRIs at the village, Taluk and District levels (Rao, 2009). When Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th constitutional Amendment bill in 1989, it was with a purpose of conferring constitutional status on the PRIs. It happened later through the Seventy Third Amendment Act 1992 that conferred constitutional status to PRIs, which came into force in April 1993 (Islam and Fujita, 2012). With this Amendment, the PRIs have the responsibilities of economic development, social justice (29 duties were determined to be dealt by the village Panchayat according to the XI Part of the Constitution). In fact, they have to play the role of facilitators for bottom-up planning and pave the way for people's participation in direct democracy (Johnson, 2003).

Ten years after the enactment of the constitution, the government and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj carried out a series of roundtables all over the country to discuss the strengthening of capacities among local entities and to improve decentralized planning.

The resolutions from these conferences were included in a memorandum of understanding with the Indian government, to pave the way for more devolution of power based on the "Principle of Subsidiarity", which means that any duty that can be carried out at a lower level, should not be given to the higher level (Rao et al., 2011).

Kalirajan and Otsuka (2010) have shown another fact about decentralization in India. They have referred to the role played by the government in preventing widening disparities between states. They have shown that India has been successful in keeping inter-state disparities from becoming more widened because of the role played by both the central government and the states. Kalirajan and Otsuka (2010) emphasize that there should be more institutional reforms in the governments at state level as well as the central government to deal with this issue.

The above studies show that decentralization cannot be a separate policy from the process of democratization. If decentralization is realized in a proper way, then it contributes to the realization of the democracy (the Indian model), while wherever decentralization is not realized in a proper way then the democracy is "controlled" or "guided" or the local governments become corrupt. In the case of countries with Muslim-majority populations such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan – and even Indonesia – there has been no pattern that decentralization has been under the influence of Islam or its teachings. Meanwhile, it was shown that the local government needs to increase its capacities (cases of Bangladesh, Iraq and Afghanistan), especially in new democracies, and therefore, there should be a balance between the policies that strengthen the centre and the policies that increase the capacities of the local governments. A study of Iran after a massive Revolution that brought about significant structural changes can contribute to the existing literature on decentralization since this review indicates that this process has always been unique in each country.

2.6. Decentralization in Iran - Pre-Revolution literature

The literature on decentralization in the pre-Revolution era is not rich. Councils were prescribed by the then Constitution, and they were part of the political system during Pahlavi regime. Sabouri Kashani, a researcher at the Institute for Social Studies and Research, published two studies in 1975 (four years before the Islamic Revolution) entitled "Decision-taking and participation: A study of the city councils in the present system of decentralization" and "Social-occupational groups in city councils and the social origin of their members". Both studies are of great importance. The research was undertaken in seven towns (Democracy Group, 2010). The findings of the first report are very impressive since they unfold the nature of the centralized political system before the Revolution, while the system had claimed to democratize the governance.

The findings showed that city councils had no relationship with the government bodies except for the governor's office, since they needed governor's approval for their decisions to take effect. In fact, the city councils had no significant role as the people's representative and even the ceremonial role was played by the mayor rather than the head of the city council. It was also found that these councils were not local parliaments, since they had no legislative powers. The councils were not involved in any policy-making or local planning regarding developmental projects. Another important finding was about the people's familiarity with the councils. There was little recognition by people, and in fact, most people did not know anything about the councils and their functions. Meanwhile, the results showed that the city councils were not able to decrease local problems or create any decentralized administration. Nothing was changed and the decisions were taken by centralized organizations such as the ministries and local issues were handled through the existing hierarchy. The city councils had neither power nor any role in decision-making (Democracy Group, 2010).

2.7. Post-Revolution Decentralization

Before reviewing the literature regarding the post-Revolution decentralization, it is necessary to have a look at the provisions of the 1979 Constitution regarding the councils and the process of adoption the laws and regulations thereof.

2.7.1. The Law and Regulations on decentralization

There are seven articles (Principles 100-106) in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran which directly and clearly discusses the nature and functions of the councils. There are also other articles that deal with the councils from a more general viewpoint. According to Principle 6, the councils are among the elective institutions, and in Principle 7, while emphasizing two verses of the Quran regarding "consultation", it mentions that the consultative bodies are the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) and the provincial and the local councils. It clearly mentions that they are the "decision-making and administrative organs of the country". Principle 100 is the starting article that specifically legalizes the establishment of the councils. It is clear that the establishment of the councils can be part of a decentralized policy with this attitude that the power should be devolved but the provisions stipulate that it has to "preserve... the sovereignty of the central government". The full text of the Principle 100 reads as follows:

> *In order to expedite social, economic, development, public health, cultural, and educational programmes and facilitate other affairs relating to public welfare with the cooperation of the people according to local needs, the administration of each village, division, city, municipality, and province will be supervised by a council to be named the Village, Division, City, Municipality, or Provincial Council. Members of each of these councils will be elected by the people of the locality in question. Qualifications for the eligibility of electors and candidates for these councils, as well as their functions and powers, the mode of election, the jurisdiction of these councils, the hierarchy of their authority, will be determined by law, in such a way as to preserve national unity, territorial integrity, the system of the Islamic Republic, and the sovereignty of the central government.*

Principle 101 legalizes the establishment of the Supreme Council of the Provinces and determines its composition. The spirit of the law – through the starting words used in this principle – is prevention from discrimination within development programmes and to guarantee the welfare of the provinces. Principle 102 connects this Supreme Council to the Islamic Consultative Assembly. The Supreme Council has the right to prepare bills for the parliament, either directly or through the government. The Supreme Council has a legislative nature while this is the Assembly that has to decide about them. Principle 103 defines an established position for the councils since it mentions that the governors at different levels must abide by the decisions taken by the councils. Principle 104 refers to the establishment of councils composed of the representatives of the workers, peasants and other employees and managers in all educational and administrative bodies. Principle 105 indicates that the decisions of the councils must not be contrary to Islam or the laws. Principle 106 is about the dissolution of the councils and mentions that they may not be dissolved "unless they deviate from their legal duties". It proves that for the law-makers, the councils have been vital entities such that no other organ can dissolve them unless they deviate from their legal duties and even then they have the right to appeal to a competent court.

After the Revolution, two laws were adopted: one for rural councils and one for urban councils. But the councils that were established did not last long (due to the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq). Later, a more general law was adopted in 1982 and amended in 1986 and later in 1990; however, the elections were not held according to this law. It was in 1993 that the Law regarding the Organization, Duties and Elections of the Islamic Councils and Appointment of Mayors was adopted by the Consultative Assembly and approved by the Guardian Council in 95 Articles. This law was not implemented until the reformist president came to power in 1997 and it was in 1999 the

first elections were held. This law was amended twice, in 1997 and 2013 but certain articles were changed or added during the years (there have been a series of amendments). Part of the law regarding the urban councils has been studied in Chapter four and the part regarding the rural councils has been reviewed in Chapter five.

2.7.2. Post-Revolution Decentralization

There are a few studies that discuss post-Revolution decentralization. In a comprehensive review of the decentralization in Iran, Tajbakhsh (2000) studies various aspects of local councils in Iran. He writes that even the word for "council"[15] in Farsi, i.e. "shora", has an Islamic background and it shows the necessity of "moshaverat", or consultation, and "mosharekat", or participation, of all members of the community in their own society. He explains that proponents of the "Islamic road to democracy" mostly refer to certain instances in early Islamic history where the Prophet and Imam Ali considered popular opinion in their decision-making. However, he believes that these councils, though comprising elected members, have not been fully institutionalized within the local government system inside Iran's hierarchy of power and therefore they have not led to greater empowerment of people. His study, though invaluable, was shortly after the first elections of the councils with no empirical facts and figures on the functions of the councils. There is also no consensus on the issue of people's participation among the clerics. There is another well-articulated discourse, though not documented, that people's votes are not of any legitimacy. In fact, it is the Vali-e Faqih (who is the Supreme leader of the Revolution too) who gives legitimacy to the people's votes. If he decides that people have to participate in the elections and vote, the people's votes are thoroughly legitimate. Within the framework of "Vali-e Faqih"

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[15] The word used before the Revolution was "anjoman", a Persian word that means council. "Shora" is a religious word, used in the Quran (the name of a verse). Shora has been encouraged in Islam and is among the Prophet's traditions.

discourse, people are considered as followers of "Vali-e Faqih". In this context, the Islamic government is not any more a "republic", and decentralization has no meaning.

Buchani (2012) edited a book in Farsi entitled *Local Democracy* that contains fifteen interviews and twelve roundtables with a concentration on urban councils in Iran that covers various issues such as democracy and local councils, urbanization, municipality functions, environmental, health, social and cultural issues as well as the role of NGOs in connection with the councils. In a long introduction to the book, the editor mentions that the councils, as major entities in decentralization, have unique roles in two legal and civil aspects of sustainable development (Buchani, 2012, p.20). He lists a series of indicators that are vital for sustainable development planning in rural and urban areas and the councils may have a major role thereof: (1) transparency; (2) accountability; (3) responsiveness; (4) effectiveness and efficiency; (5) participation and consensus; (6) the right for public opinion; (7) rule of law; (8) satisfaction; (9) fairness; (10) coordination and integration in urban governance; (11) bottom-up planning; (12) improvement of urban life and environment; (13) mobilization of sporadic rural resources in enhancing social capital; and (14) a decrease in urban management costs through civil institutions (Buchani, 2012: p.20). He then concludes that the key strategy is "decentralization as the national development" (Buchani, 2012, p.20). The position and functions of the Supreme Council of Provinces was the most highlighted issue, one that was studied in detail, through interviews and roundtables. While those who have contributed to the book are among the authorities on this subject, or are from the municipality or universities, the book lacks organized and meaningful empirical data from the communities or the councils, though certain cases have been discussed, in particular regarding the environmental issues in Tehran.

Alekajbaf and Jawan (2009), in their research activity on local government in Iran, discuss in-depth the issue of decentralization and formation of local government. While

presenting a background on local government and decentralization, they offer various theories and approaches on local government (liberal democratic, economic, radical-elitist, Marxist, structural-institutional and legalistic-institutional) and discuss the origin of local government in Iran. Their objective here is to give certain historical and political information about the Iranian context. The laws and the regulations regarding the local government are well explained and the relationship between local authorities and the central government are presented. The book ends with a comparative study, offering models of local government in France, the United States and Britain. The authors believe that the local government in Iran has its own distinct structure. They also argue that while "power" has been decentralized theoretically, local authorities still depend on the central government for financial resources and decision-taking on every service to be delivered (Alekajbaf and Jawan, 2009, p.72), while the local government "struggles to redefine itself" (Alekajbaf and Jawan, 2009, p.96). The book lacks empirical information about the local councils which are studied adopting primarily a legal approach.

As mentioned, the institution of urban and rural councils constitutes a major part of Iran's constitution (Principles 100-106). After a series of laws were adopted, the final version of the related law on councils was approved in 1993 but it was not implemented. It was during the reformist government of Khatami in 1999 that the law was implemented and the first councils' elections were held, about 92 years after it was first proposed during the Constitutionalist movement. It is also important to consider if the law adopted by the Islamic Assembly are restrictive and does not give the councils enough room to manoeuver (UCLG, 2009; Buchani, 2012). However, it should be admitted that the Islamic councils that were legalized and established after the Revolution are the closest institution to the people. Azkia and Imani Jajarmi (2006) believe that this lack of democratic traditions, centralized administration and vague

regulations have caused a phenomenon of non-institutionalization of councils in Iran and limits their scope of practice and powers. They argue that councils do not have any defined relationship with the political or administrative system.

Hafez-Nia and Veyssi (2007), in their unique comparative research on local councils established before and after the Islamic Revolution, start their paper with this important comment that in Iran's history, its governments have generally been individualistic, despotic, tyrannical and autocratic. They explain that although the first steps towards decentralization in the political structure of the government were taken by the Constitutionalist Revolution, it was only seventy years later that the participation of councils and citizens to protect public rights and freedoms were targeted by an Islamic Revolution. They conclude that there has been a conflict between centralization policies (always imposed by the central government) and decentralization demands (local governments often request for more power and resources); and it is clear that "centralization" has often overcome "decentralization".

In his legal study of administrative patronage of Iran's law, Harissinejad (2002) claims that Islamic councils of towns legally established after the Revolution have limited and vague decision-making powers and are under strict supervision by the central government. He adds that volunteers for councils have to be approved by the central government's supervision councils. Taghizadeh (2010), while using a comparative approach in his legal analysis of ineligibility matters in elections of councils, studies the qualifications needed for those interested to become a candidate for Islamic councils. He concludes that certain cases of absolute eligibility can be well understood considering the religious and revolutionary characteristics of the political system but vagueness in election law cannot be easily ignored.

There are two other articles on rural Islamic councils. The first is by Papzan and Alibeigi (2006) who study rural people's expectations of their own Islamic councils.

The second, a case study by Rezwani and Ahmadi (2009), looks into the role of Islamic councils in rural development. The latter concludes that these councils can be very effective in resolving the problems of rural communities. Apart from these two academic efforts, there is no other serious research about the roles and functions of institutions at the local level. However, much can be found on the sociology of Iranian villages, rural power structure and participation issues, especially by Azkia (2002) Ghafari (2001) and Rafi-pour (1993).

Other studies on decentralization in Iran are about issues such as decentralization of the health system; impact of fiscal decentralization on economic growth (Farzinvash & Ghaffarifard, 2007); and an analysis of the administrative reforms in Guilan province (Azaehdel & Ramli, 2009). Each of these studies discusses only limited aspects of decentralization in Iran while not describing its general characteristics.

2.8. Comparisons

In this part, a comparison is made of the system during the Pahlavi political regime and in the Post-revolution period to understand the differences in processes of administration. Before the revolution, the political system was a monarchy. Reza Shah came to power following a coup d'état in 1925 and established the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah wanted to have a centralized and powerful system and subsequently introduced a series of political and economic reforms. His son, Mohammad Reza succeeded him in 1941.

The political structure of the Pahlavi regime, which is a typical secular system, is shown in Figure 2.2. Provincial and departmental councils are shown on the left-hand at the bottom. It is obvious that these councils had no connection with the whole system. This means that these councils are not in connection with the Legislative or Executive branches of government. This is in line with Sabouri Kashani's findings in 1975.
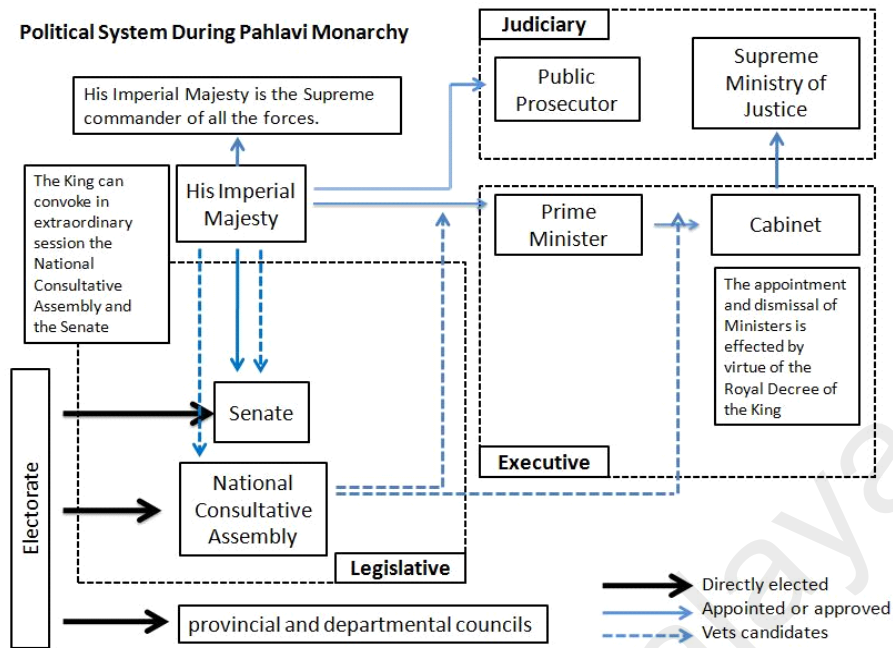
Figure 2.2: Political System during the Pahlavi Monarchy Source: Designed by the researcher

Figure 2.3 shows the political system after the Revolution. In the Monarchy system, the king is at the centre of all power, while in the Islamic Republic, the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council - and to some extent, the President - play major roles. Within the Pahlavi Monarchy, among the three elements of "people", "king" and "religion", the king is the most powerful one, while religion is only in words and people have no share of power. However, within the Islamic Republic, the three stated key components are "people", "Vali-e Faqih" (or Supreme Leader) and "religion",   though Vali-e Faqih and religion are in fact the two most important elements.

Political System in the Post-Revolution Iran
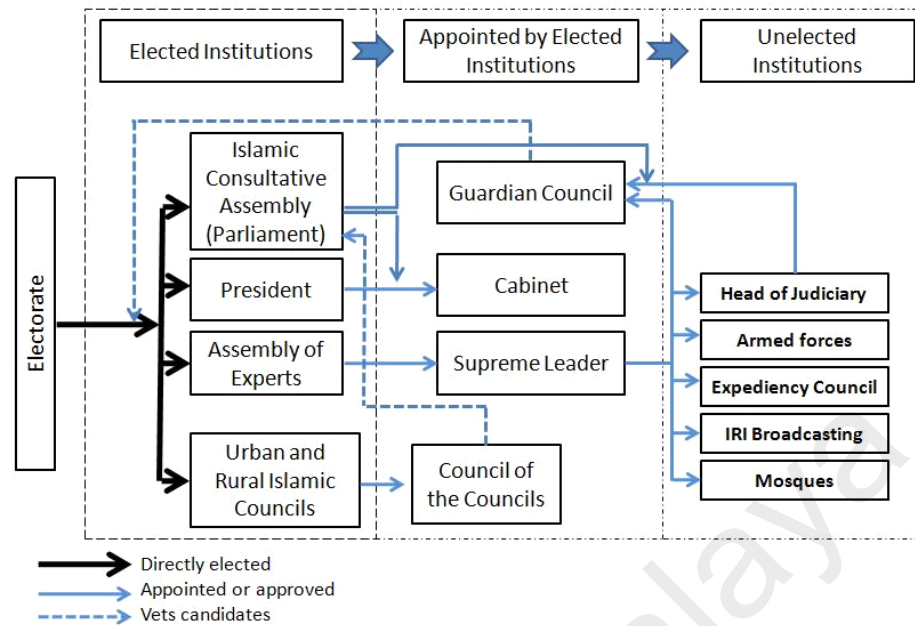
Figure 2.3: Political System in the Post-Revolution Iran Source: (Designed by the researcher)

After the Revolution, the country still enjoyed the same system of provinces with a centralized administrative body (Imani Jajarami, 2010). However, a policy of decentralization was emphasized in the first, second, third and fourth development plans of the Islamic government after the Revolution, but it has always been ignored (Etaat & Moussavi, 2010).

Another difference between the two systems is that the hierarchy after the Revolution was extended to the local level (something that has not been shown here). As explained before, such a populist approach was very much dominant soon after the Revolution and, therefore, the government extended itself to people in villages where the previous traditional Kadkhoda-system was abolished.

Based on the regulations and laws and the existing literature, a comparative review of decentralization during the secular Pahlavi Monarchy and post-Revolution can be illustrated as follows in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Comparison of local councils during the Monarchy and the Islamic Republic

	Pahlavi Regime	**Islamic Republic**
Legal Aspects	Principles 91-94 of 1906 Amendments – Law of the Provincial and Departmental Councils (1907); Law of the Municipal Councils (Anjoman Baladieh) The Law during Mosadegh's tenure on Rural Councils and also Municipal Councils (1951-53) Municipality Law (1955) with certain parts focusing on people's participation, Act of Transfer of Health Issues to people (1957) and the Act of Agriculture Councils (1958)	Shora or Council. Principle 7: emphasis on the role of councils in the country; Principle 100 on Islamic Councils; Principle 101 on Higher Islamic Councils of Provinces; Principle 102 on presentation of draft bills by the Higher Islamic Councils to the Parliament; Principle 103 government authorities have to respect the decisions taken by the councils; Principle 105: decisions taken by the councils should not be against Islam and the law; Principle 106: Right against Dissolution.
Practical Aspects	Both forms of councils shaped in 1907 lasted only 4 years. Councils shaped during Mosadegh's tenure lasted for a short time. 1953: Attempt to secularize the law was faced with a religious backlash. The three laws adopted during 1955-1958 were never implemented. The councils that were shaped after 1970 were not effective.	Four elections of city and village councils were held since 1999. In the first, about 65 per cent participated, and in the second about 49 per cent.
Scope	Geographically limited (only in certain cities)	Everywhere in Iran: in 905 towns and 34,205 villages.
Administrative reforms	No administrative reforms	Extension of hierarchy to local level (in rural areas) early Revolution as part of a populist policy. No administrative reforms.

Source: Designed by the researcher

This comparison illustrates that the policy of decentralization, and as a result the councils established after the Islamic Revolution, was seriously taken into consideration with three nationwide elections. The councils established prior to the Islamic Revolution were short-term initiatives that were mostly demolished or deactivated by political changes. The councils after the revolution were based on an Islamic notion (shora) and have been more sustained. However, the question is whether these councils have been effective in delivering policies at the local level.

Rodriguez-Pose and Gill (2003), in a study about the global trend towards devolution, have found that any analysis of devolution must consider at least the three factors of

legitimacy, transfer of resources as well as authority from the centre to lower regions or units. Within this framework, to examine a decentralization model such as that in Iran, one may ask whether the process of decentralization entails a transfer of political power to the lower bodies (here the councils) that are not central. Has the government given a discretionary authority to the councils to manage the operations at the local level? Whether members of these councils can make their own decisions based on their capacity and available resources? Do they have autonomy over their community which is only limited by the broader national interests and policies? Are they accountable? Are there mechanisms of checks and balance? What is their relationship with the existing hierarchy of the government? Table 2.2 clarifies partly the decentralization through the councils in Iran.

Table 2.2: Theory and Practice on decentralization in Iran

Question about Devolution (theory)	Answers (Practice)	Legal Aspects
Do the Islamic councils have powers to decide? Are they only consultative (advisors) or monitoring bodies?	Limited and vague decision-making powers (Harrisinejad, 2002); not enough room for the councils to manoeuver (UCLG, 2009) No research on their decision-making capacities is available.	The councils have the power to appoint a mayor, establish social bodies, approve the municipal budget and loans, supervise municipality, adopt policies, nominate streets, approve transportation rates and regulate markets and fairs.
Do they have access to resources?	No research available on difference between councils in towns and villages. No research available on models of decentralization.	Government has a central system for tax collection. Certain regulations on provincial budgets.
Are they accountable?	No research has been done on accountability. Another key question has to be answered: Is accountability a legal duty or an individual Islamic duty?	No regulation. If they deviate from their duties, they may be dissolved.
What is their interaction with the hierarchy? What is their relationship with the entire system?	Under strict supervision by the central government (Harrisinejad, 2002); not institutionalized (Azkia & Imani Jajarmi, 2006; Tajbakhsh, 2000); candidates are selected (supervised by the central government) (Taghizadeh, 2010)	The Higher Council may propose bills to Parliament.

Source: Designed by the researcher

From Table 2.2, it can be easily concluded that there is no comprehensive research on decentralization in a theocratic state such as Iran. The notion of "Shora", which may mean a "mere consultation", is different from the concept of participation. It is also not clear how the individual value system works in the greater decentralized system. Moreover, a good Shiite Muslim has to follow what Vali-e Faqih requests; "the Vali-e Faqih's decree is above all laws, including the decrees of other clerics; thus, it must be obeyed".[16] The selection of candidates is another important aspect to think about.

2.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, there is an obvious lacuna in the literature on decentralization policies in post-revolution Iran; there are only a few studies that address the distribution of power at the local level. The existing literature deals with "decentralization" as a pure "administrative" tool, and not a political policy and, therefore, they are not within the broader framework of democratization in Iran. Importantly too, the literature on democracy lacks decentralization. In other words, there is a gap in analyzing the political aspects of local councils and their role in the democratization of the society. Moreover, there are certain articles on "local councils" in Iran that study the issue in a "limited" scope; it is obvious that the councils are part of the political system and one cannot study the councils without looking into the system.

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[16] Iran newspaper, Oct. 4, 99.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the literature regarding decentralization and democracy was reviewed. In this chapter, the researcher intends to illustrate the theoretical framework and outline the research methodology for a systematic study of the empirical data. The chapter starts with an overview of the theory of political system advanced by David Easton. Then, after a review of the political system in Iran, it presents the conceptual framework of the research.

The next part of this chapter discusses the research methodology. A qualitative research method has been selected to give the researcher an effective means to provide insights into the questions of this research. It continues with a multiple case study approach, case study design, means of data collection (interviewing) and purposive sampling (how participants are selected). Then, pivotal interview questions are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion on the validity and reliability of the data derived from the methodology and research procedure. This data is subsequently presented in Chapter four (for urban communities) and chapter five (for rural communities) and analysed in Chapter six.

3.2. Theory of the political system

A theory of the political system, as developed by David Easton, is used to study and analyse the power system in Iran. Easton's systems theory was brought into the

political science as part of the behaviouralist movement in the United States after World War II. Easton was of the opinion that this World War was a turning point in political science. Before the War, most researchers used "moral philosophy". It was after the War that a series of theories gradually appeared. As a result of the influences of the discipline of science[17] on political thinkers and due to an expanding behaviouralist movement, a theory of political system was framed (Easton, 1966).

For Olsson and Sjöstedt (2004), "system" is a key concept, especially in an intellectual approach to problem solving. A system is composed of various elements with interactions among them (interaction is the heart of the system). The system is connected to the environment that is regarded as "external" with a series of inputs into this environment and a series of outputs from the environment into the system. In this way, a "mode of thinking" is provided that can be used for resolving complex problems (Olsson and Sjöstedt, 2004, p.3).

Rapoport (1966, 1968) defines the system as a set of entities that are inter-related and connected by their behaviours and history. According to him, the system has a "set of identifiable elements", with "relations" among them, and these complex relations "may imply others" (Rapoport, 1966, pp. 129-130). Such relations are in fact "power relations" that are framed as "structures". These structures are applied to patterns of power. In fact, through these structures (power relations) and patterns of power, the relationships between the rulers and the ruled can be recognized (Mitchell, 1969).

Laszlo and Krippner (1998) present systems theory as a general framework for inquiry. They explain that General System Theory was developed out of biology (organism system) and its ideas rapidly found its way in most of the branches of the humanities.

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[17] The systems approach was first developed in the discipline of science and gradually a "social movement" emerged among scientists; Von Bertalanffy was the forerunner in this area and established the Society for the Advancement of General Systems Theory in 1954.

They list the capabilities of a system theory in general and emphasize the point that it can "model complex entities" that are the result of the complex and multiple interaction of numerous components by finding details of related structure and involved components. In fact, this is the reason why the system theory has been applied in political science where different groups and agents as well the whole complex institutions are involved in policy-making and administration of a country.

More than one decade after the theory of the political system was introduced by Easton in 1953, Almond and Powell (1966) considered three properties for a political system: 1) it is a comprehensive system. It is not only composed of all "inputs" into the system and "outputs" out of the system, but it embraces the interactions with the system (even the violent one such as street riots); 2) it is an interdependent system. Various parts of a political system are interdependent. It means that they are related to each other. One change in one part of the system creates changes in other parts; and 3) it depicts boundaries between society and the whole political system (Sharma and Sharma, 2000). Almond and Powell have also considered certain characteristics of political systems: universality, political structure, political functions, multi-functionality and cultural mixed character. Input and output, as depicted by Easton, is studied as "functions" in Almond's model. While they studied the theory of the political system within a framework of a "developmental approach", they relied on the same pillars that Easton applied in his theory (Almond and Powell, 1966).

Almond and Powell (1966) believe that systems theory posited by Easton (1965) and Deutsch (1963) are an output of the sociological (behaviouralism) and communications theory (Ishiyama and Breuning, 2010) though they applied it in politics (Almond and Powell, 1966, p. l2). Easton worked on the political system with the belief that there is an urgent need to value theory while there is a "critical task" of building empirical theory too (Easton, 1969).

As mentioned, others such as Ervin Laszlo tried to popularize the concept of "system" and argued that the whole universe could be observed as one "unending array of systems and subsystems, each of which is itself made up of smaller systems and is in turn part of a larger one" (Kamrava, 1996). For Easton, any political life can be regarded as a political system with a set of interactions. He adds that political systems are units that can be analysed, and interactions are the basic units of analysis. Such interactions are predominantly oriented toward certain "authoritative allocation of values" for a system (Easton 1953: p.129). Other important aspects of his theory can be summarized as follows (Easton, 1965a):

- A political system acts within an environment and it can be distinguished from its environment. However, each system is affected (and may suffer) by the influences or disturbances from the environment.

- The political system receives inputs and supports (responses) from the environment; it also receives inputs from its own internal sources (with inputs). The system has certain outputs channelled into the environment in the form of decisions and actions. In this way, a feedback loop is created. The interaction within the system and also between the system and the environment has to be emphasized.

- A system may also suffer from its failures that may "be attributed directly to processes or structural arrangements within the system itself" (Easton, 1965a). A system can persist under the condition that there is a feedback loop from the environment back to decision-makers within the system. The flow model of Easton's theory is shown in Figure 3.1.
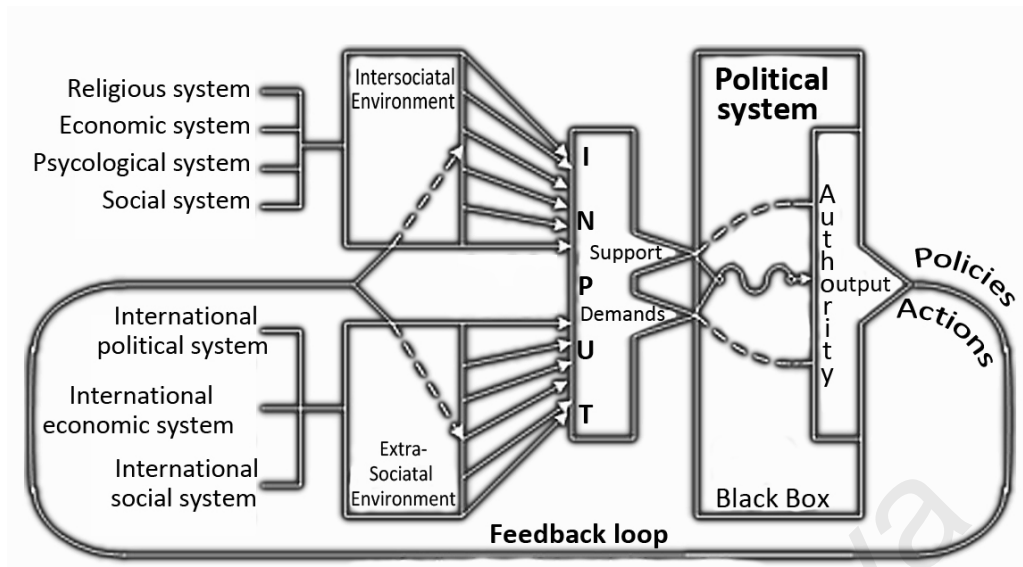
Figure 3.1: Easton's model of a political system (Source: Easton (1965a))

In his explanations about political structures, Easton first refers to the concept of "collectively" (Easton, 1965b). In fact, the major focus of a political system is to create and strengthen an organization that is "oriented to the attainment of collective goals". He further explains that there should be three conditions for this collectively in the political system: first, legitimation of the collective goals; secondly, bureaucratic subsystem and a hierarchy for mobilizing resources and using them to implement the policies; and the third condition is the associational subsystem. The second and the third conditions refer to the structures within the system. The system needs a structure precisely defined to assist the system to attain the legitimized goals, while various institutions and associations function as subsystems or even systems in the environment that act as supportive subsystems. But, for Easton, political structures and their character are only of "secondary importance" while their interactions have to be at the first priority. He writes that it is the "processual nature" of political interactions that must form the focus of analysis. It has to be analysed how the structure, political activities and processes are working to help the system to attain its defined goals. The interaction, and checks and balance between various structures within the system and

with the systems or sub-systems outside the system have also to be studied. Therefore, it is important to understand all sets of constraints on political interactions in such a system (Easton, 1965b).

Inputs can be in form of demands and support. Easton defines demands as "articulated statements, directed toward the authorities proposing that some sort of authoritative allocation ought to be undertaken" (Easton, 1965, p.120). In this way, not any voice in communities can be considered demands. They are demands when they are articulated in a structured form. Here, there should be an emphasis on demand articulators. In an atomic society with no demand articulators, there would be no follow up or decision for demands or any change in the system since the system receives nothing from the environment. In fact, demand articulators in form of councils, representatives, representative groups, interest groups, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, community-based entities, media such as newspapers and magazines, and other social actors play a major role. Easton writes that there are infinite forms of demands: they might be for "financial support", for a "service", or even for "enforcement" of a law or a principle, or demands for "symbolic recognition". Almond (1965) recognizes four kinds of demands (extractive, regulative, participative and symbolic). The extractive demands refer to a service that has to be implemented. For example, regulative demands are about a law or a regulation needed; participative demands are about request for participation; and symbolic demands are for recognition of a value.

Another important aspect of Easton's work is the connection between outputs (that influence the broader society) and inputs in the form of a "feedback loop" (Easton, 1966, p.152). Any change in the system may start within this loop since the outputs (provided by the authorities) can create a response by people in society and the communication of these responses in the form of inputs (people may support the outputs or have new demands) may end with possible new actions or policies by the authorities

(Easton, 1966: p. 152). The authorities require these responses since without the information, the decisions are not properly taken to satisfy the existing demands. Any decrease in support should be considered by the system an important source of stress and therefore, the feedback loop plays a major role in the stability of the system. That is why outputs, inputs and the feedback loop have to be the major elements of the conceptual framework.

Miller (1971) critiques Easton's work and refers to the inconsistency in Easton's advocacy of behavioural science, his weaknesses in defense against historicism, and his definition of society that is vague and independent of politics. Miller (1971) argues that Easton has no definition of politics too, and finally the last complaint is about the concept of persistence. Miller (1971) thinks that Easton's mode of analysis is a final choice of persistence and non-persistence without any choice of change during the time.

Easton responded to Miller's criticisms in an article published in the *Political Science Reviewer* in 1973. The most important part of this rebuttal was the discussion regarding changes in the system (as it is much related to our work here), as was his response to Miller's concerns about the issue of persistence. Easton considers four kinds of changes in his framework: (1) State change in the system – this means that the system is stable and persistent but certain elements such as authorities or the ruling party change – which happens because of the change in the inputs; (2) System type or regime may change such as fundamental alterations in the rules or goals of the system; (3) political community change – and it happens when those involved in the system break up or a new independent political system may emerge and the system changes along with the community that has changed; and (4) Basic system change and this is in reference to the instances when the system is under stress and those involved in the system cannot continue anymore and even when the persistence is threatened by the members of society that do not let the system continue (Easton, 1973). Easton explains that Miller

has only referred to the fourth change while there are the three others that can be analysed based on the theory of political systems. He also goes further and adds that such analysis is developed to equip the researcher with a framework for understanding how a system works, as well as to explain its elements and interactions. In fact, if a system persists, it does not mean that the system is good or bad, but it can be explained or understood why the system persists (Easton, 1973, p.289).

3.3. Conceptual Framework

By using a theory of systems, the policy of decentralization within the political system in Iran, as well as political behaviour, is conceptualized and analysed. In fact, by studying the present structures within the political system in Iran and their interactions with other structures, it becomes clear how well they are working, within the scope of decentralization. In particular, the expected and accepted procedures that are working in the processing and implementation of the demands and needs for decision-making by people become clear. The framework has also to make it clear why devolution of power has not been realized. The structures show how "power is distributed and organized with regard to the authoritative making and implementing of decisions" (Easton, 1965b). The interactions show the checks and balances between various related entities. Meanwhile, the framework has to show the nature of the inputs and the outputs and how the feedback loop is working.

Political power is the key concept (see Figure 3.2). This is the political power that guides the institutions and lets them become the empowering entities. The Black Box is directly connected to the concept of political power: decisions and policies are decided here within the Black Box and these are the authorities who receive the inputs in the form of support and demands. At the same, the policy that is going to be studied here is

devolution of power – and therefore, the empowering policies and the actual role of local councils gain importance. It has to be studied how the power is being transferred from the centre to the periphery. Existing structures (local councils) have to be within the framework since they have the role of decision-makers at the local level.
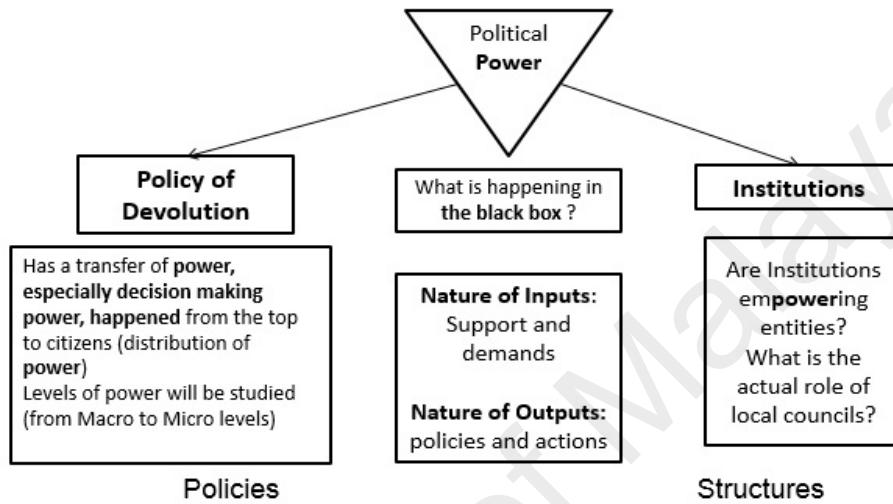
Figure 3.2: The concept of power as presented in the research (Source: Designed by the researcher)
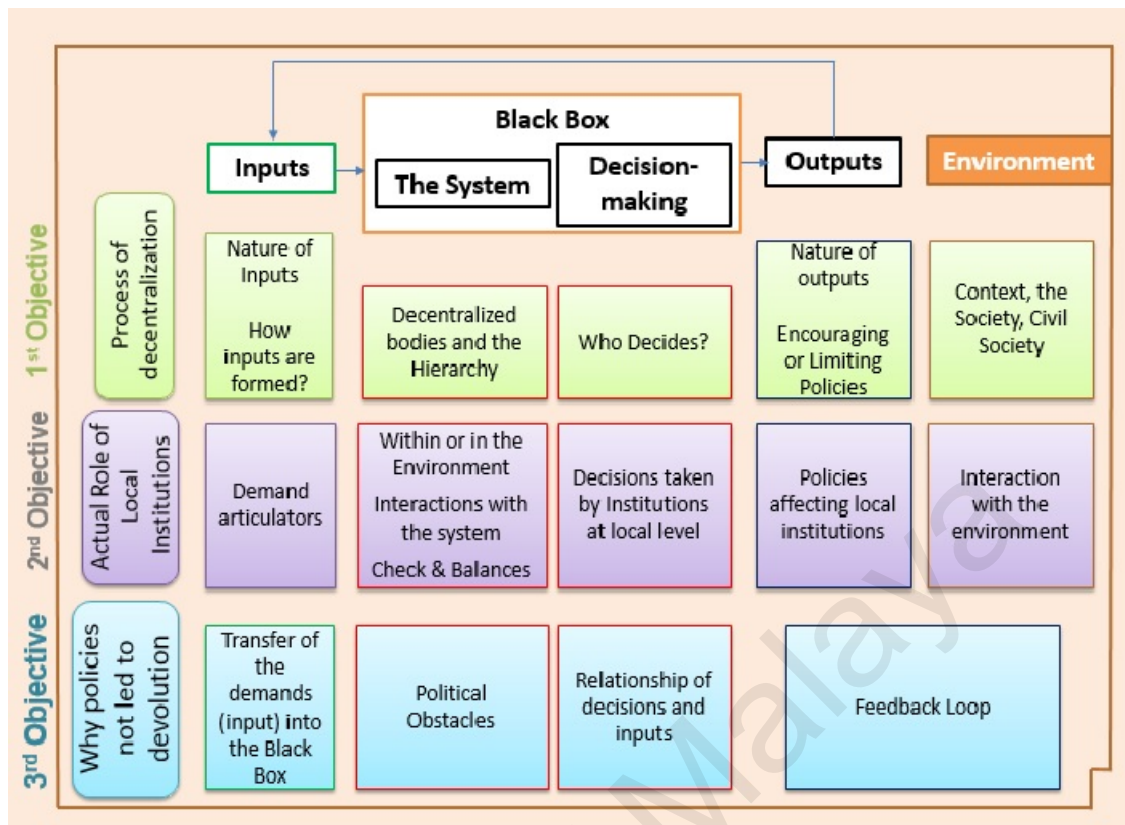
Figure 3.3: Conceptual framework of the research (Source: Designed by the researcher)

By considering the three objectives of the research and the theory of political systems, another framework can be designed where we can apply the concepts from the theory within the framework. In the upper part of the design, we have a simple design of the theory (inputs – black box – outputs and environment) while on the left side, we have the three important parts of the research questions (process of decentralization, actual role of local institutions and why policies have not led to devolution). Within the framework, the related concepts under each element of systems theory in connection with the key questions have been used. In this way, the research knows how the research has to be designed to find the answers to the key questions.

This is a deeper study which goes beyond the mere review of the contents of the Constitution as the source of laws and regulations. The study looks at the power system first, and then further develops it to focus on the decentralization policies implemented

in Iran, with the local institutions as the targeted structures. Therefore, their interaction within the local communities and with institutions in government, including the hierarchy, and their checks and balances are studied based on this theory.

3.4. Research Methodology

To be able to realize the research objectives, a qualitative method of research is employed. The method has to help the researcher to understand the process of decentralization, explore the actual role of local institutions in decision-making, explain the policy of decentralization, and clarify why it has not led to the devolution of power. In fact, the qualitative research helped the research to explain the underlying reasons for the research questions. It was needed to provide insights in the research questions and to develop ideas about them. That's why qualitative research was needed to be applied instead of quantitative one.

This section on research methodology explains the research design, defines the two concepts of "case study" and "multiple case studies", provides the sampling process and data collection protocols and determines the tools for validity and reliability, data analysis techniques and the research limitations.

3.4.1. Research Design

This study is an empirical research that collects the data based on the cases that are selected from among urban and rural communities in Iran. Both the samples and the data collection process are within the framework of Easton's theory of political systems and have been designed with an aim to help the researcher to find the answers to the key questions. However, when the case studies were being done, the researcher checked the process of case selection (he might add cases – as was done in the cases of Sarab-

Karyan and Tajabad) based on the results coming out of studies), revised the pivotal questions based on the theory or selected more informants due to the need to obtain more details. In fact, the researcher went to each community more than five times during the three years of this research to conduct the interviews or to collect data through observation or focus group discussions (FGD). Figure 3.4 illustrates the research design.
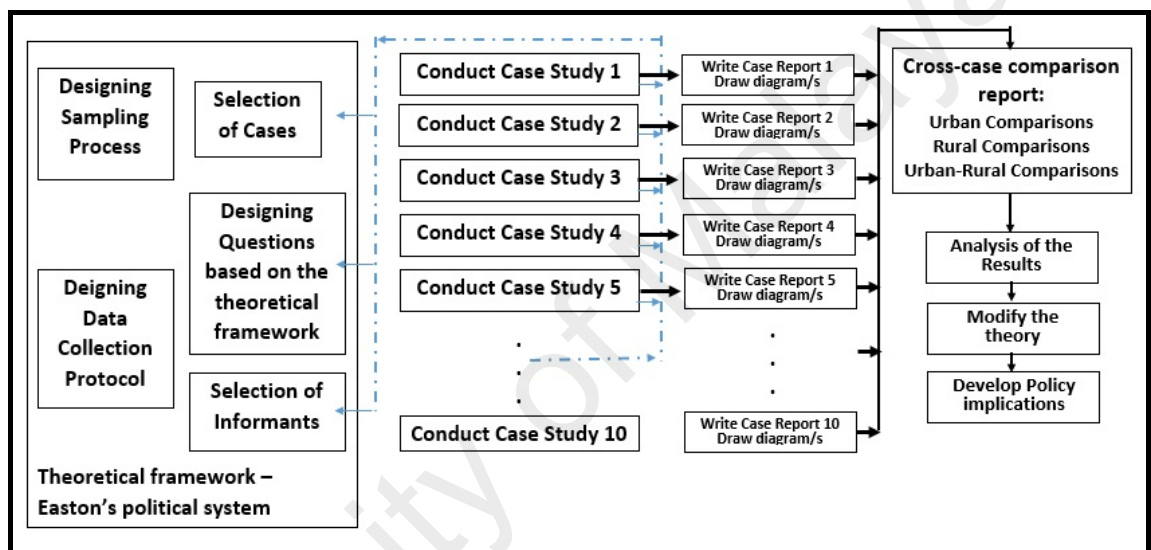
Figure 3.4: Research Design (Source: drawn by the researcher)

When the case reports were written, a cross-case comparison report was prepared which helped the researcher to analyse the results, and to develop certain conclusions or policy implications about the process of decentralization.

3.4.1.1. Case study methodology

For this dissertation, a case study method has been selected from among qualitative research methods. To be able to define case study, as Gilham (2000) believes the definition of "case" is a prerequisite. From his point of view, a case can be: "(1) a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; (2) which can only be understood in

context; (3) which exists in the here and now; and (4) that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw" (Gilham, 2000, p.1).

Gilham (2000) then defines a case study as a method which investigates the above to answer specific research questions and which looks for a range of various types of evidence. Such evidence is there in the case setting and has to be abstracted and collected to get the best possible answers to the research questions. According to Yin (1994), a "qualitative case study" helps the researcher to respond to the "how" and "why" questions. The "case" is the "unit" of the analysis.

Gilham (2000, p.2) mentions a fundamental characteristic of the case study method, that is that a "researcher would not start out with *a priori* theoretical notions", since s/he would not be able to know what theories work until getting to hold the data to understand the context. From Stake's point of view, the case study enhances understanding by "pursuing scholarly research questions" (Stake, 2005).

The case study method is appropriate for researchers when they intend to study certain contemporary phenomena and events in real life that are not under their control, especially when the boundaries between that phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 1994, p. 1 and p. 13). Moreover, Simon (2009, p.21) adds that a "case study" is a deep study from various viewpoints regarding a complex but unique case (that can be a policy, a programme or an institution) in the real context as it is outside. It is based on research, can entail different means of data collection and develops based on the collected evidence. The most important purpose of such evidence-based research is to create a deep understanding of the topic. The results can be used as a knowledge by professionals, researchers or consultants.

The characteristics of the subject of the present research – a study of power devolution and democracy within communities to understand the process and the structure of the

decentralization – requires a case study model to be applied. It is necessary to see how different councils, with different spatial and class features, have acted in real life and collect empirical data from communities to better understand the existing interactions, processes, nature of outputs and inputs and the way the hierarchy of the government delivers services to specific communities.

3.4.1.2. Multiple case-study approach

To be able to look at the councils in various parts of the country, a multiple case-study approach has been applied. In some research activities it is called "collective case studies" while others have called it "multisite qualitative research" (Stake, 2005, p.461). As Yin (1994: 12) mentions, case study research can include both single and multiple case studies. This approach is useful for understanding the difference between various cases, and especially to replicate certain findings across the cases. In fact, analyses through within-case and cross-case extend the work and helps the researcher to look "beyond initial impressions" and see the related issue through "multiple lenses" (Eisenhardt, 1989). Yin (2003) shows how this method is applied for "prediction of similar results" or "contrasting results" when there are "predictable reasons" (cited in Baxter and Jack, 2008).

3.4.2. Sampling Process

The cases are communities. These communities are selected with a wide range of interests in mind to create maximum variation. These factors are urban-rural; distance from the political centre; ethnicity (being mono-ethnic or multi-ethnic); women's participation; and economic status, To select the communities, a strategy of purposive sampling has been followed to create a higher degree of variance (Hickey et al., 2005).

The ten selected case studies are four urban and six rural communities to cover both urban and rural areas. The rural communities are all poor villages but with different features. In three of them, women are actively participating in village affairs (see Table 3.1). One of the villages is mono-ethnic (Sarab Karyan in Kermanshah), while others are multi-ethnic. Five of the selected villages are far from Tehran while one of them is closer to the political centre. To consider the spatial factor, Oudlajan has been selected in Metropolitan Tehran (in the political centre) and two far from the centre and one closer. The two far communities are a poor small township in the southern part of Kerman province, and one from a smaller city (Sanandaj, a town in Kurdish area of Iran). The small fishing and farming town in the north of Iran (Kiashahr) that is closer to Tehran. Two of the urban communities are multi-ethnic and two are mono-ethnic. Table 3.1 shows how various factors, have been considered to select the communities. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 describe the key features of the urban and rural communities respectively.

Table 3.1: Factors for the Selection of the Communities

Communities		Oudlajan	Kiashahr	Salemi	Bardasht	Ahmadabad	Houkard (3 villages)	Tajabad	Sarab Karyan
Urban – Rural	Urban	X	X	X	X				
	Rural					X	X	X	X
Ethnicity	mono-ethnic			X	X				X
	Multi-ethnic	X	X			X	X	X	
Spatial factor	Far from the Centre			X	X	X	X		X
	Metropolitan Tehran	X							
	Closer to the Centre		X					X	

Women's Participation		X		X		X		X	X
Economic Status	Poor areas		X		X	X	X		X
	Resource-affluent areas	X		X					

Source: Designed by the researcher

Table 3.2: Characteristics of the Selected Urban Communities

	Oudlajan	Kiashahr	Salemi Yek	Bardasht
Nature	A Community in metropolitan city of Tehran	Small Town in a resourceful area in North of Iran	A community in a small town (poverty-ridden area)	A community in a town (with a Kurd population belonging to the religious minorities)
Location	District 12 – Municipality	Astaneh Ashrafieh (a bigger town)	Roudbar	Sanandaj City
Province	Tehran	Guilan	Kerman	Kurdistan
Distance from Tehran	0	400 km	1400 km	550 km
Population	21254	10340	2000	6000
Households	5997	3083	400	1400
Poverty level	Urban middle class (mostly migrants from other places)	Urban middle class to lower level with a rural style of life	Urban poor; people with rural style of life	Urban poor people
Local Councils	Under Tehran City Council – while it has a local council too	Kiashahr Islamic Council	Both villages have Islamic councils	Under Sanandaj City Council while has a local council too
Local groups	An active youth group	Two local groups; both active on environmental issues	A non-formal group	Four self-help groups
Major occupation	Involved in small business or employed	Fisheries, agriculture, orchards	Workers, busy in small-scale manufacturing or businesses	Mostly involved in trading or small-scale business

Source: Designed by the researcher

Table 3.3: Characteristics of the Selected Rural Communities

	Ahmadabad	Houkard	Tajabad	Sarab Karyan
Nature	A village in the desert (with active women participation)	Three villages close to each other (poverty-ridden area)	A big village near the city	A mountainous deprived village
Location	Biarjomand (A District under Shahrood)	Jiroft	Bahae District	Firouzabad District
Province	Semnan	Kerman	Hamedan	Kermanshah
Distance from Tehran	700 km	1300 km	470 km	600 km
Population	850	3174	2320	130
Households	250	666	610	35
Poverty level	Rural poor people	Rural poor people	Rural poor people	Rural poor people
Local Councils	Ahmadabad Village Islamic Council	Each village has a local council	It has a local council	No local council
Local groups	One women's group	One steering committee for the three villages organized through a project on poverty	Advisory groups	Women's fund
Major occupation	Agriculture, livestock (sheep, goats and camels)	Livestock (sheep, goats), agriculture, orchards	Rain-fed agriculture, seasonal workers	Livestock, agriculture

Source: Designed by the researcher

Oudlajan is a community in District 12 in southern Tehran. Various empowerment projects have been implemented by the Tehran Municipality, other governmental bodies and NGOs. At the present time, the community has its own council members, elected by the community residents. Meanwhile, it is covered by the Tehran City Council too.

Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee is a community in Kiashahr in the north of Iran, beside the Caspian Sea, where Sepidroud River enters the Sea. Most of the residents are from fishing families who depend on the river and the sea for their economic livelihood. They are also involved in agriculture, producing rice, and gardening. Certain empowerment projects have been implemented in this community. The town has an active council.

Salemi mahaleh is located in the town Roodbar in the southern part of Kerman province, a very poor area, which is targeted by a governmental Poverty Eradication Project. The community has always been ignored. It suffers from drug addiction and unemployment. Smuggling, in various forms, is a prevalent phenomenon. 25 per cent of the people are illiterate. However, people like to participate in the projects that can lead to a change. This community and also the town was once a village but due to the increase in population, it has changed into a town. Most people have familial relationship. While they were all farmers before, they have changed their land titles, from agriculture to housing or business, in order to sell it.

Bardasht, an old community, with about 1400 families is located in central part of the Kurdish city of Sanandaj (between Nabovat square, Janbazanblvd, Namakiblvd and Enghelab Street), the centre of Kurdistan Province in the west of Iran. During 1978-79, especially during the Revolution days, many people moved from the villages to Sanandaj, and those with a lower income, shaped this community in the middle of the city. Sanandaj is a Kurdish city with a population belonging to the religious minorities (Sunni). The community has dense houses without any open green areas; the allies are very narrow, without any water disposal system; most houses were built by the inhabitants themselves; no health standards have been observed. According to the reports by the Urgency Centre of Sanandaj (2003), this community is one of the vulnerable communities in this town, suffering from drug addiction, theft and distribution of drugs. A project of poverty alleviation was started by an NGO with the support of the State Welfare Organization in this community to assist people to come out of the poverty cycle. A local group has been established.

Ahmadabad, a village with a population of about 130 households (840 persons), is located in the heart of the desert, in the southern part of Shahroud, a city in Semnan Province. Ahmadabad is on the borderline of the Touran National Park (a park of great

importance for the mere existence of Asiatic cheetahs and wild ass, both in danger of extinction), and that is why it has been targeted by environmental and livelihood empowerment projects. As a result, a women local group have been established and formally registered in the form of a cooperative in the village. The village has its own Islamic Council, elected by people.

Houkard is in fact the name used for three villages located very close to each other, in Jiroft in Kerman province with a population of about 3000 people. The three villages are targeted by a government-funded poverty eradication project and a steering committee has been shaped with the members from the three communities. Poverty is very obvious in these villages; most young people are unemployed.

The village of Tajabad Sofla (or Rasoulabad) is located in the township of Bahar in Hamedan province with a population of 2320. Most villagers are farmers (rain-fed agriculture) and they have some livestock. The village suffers from various problems such as poor water supply, poverty and unemployment. The important thing about the village is their powerful council.

Sarab Karyan is a small village located 83 km far from Kermanshah, the centre of Kermanshah province in the West of Iran. The village is located in the oak forests of the Zagros mountain chain. It has a population of 130 people with 35 families. Most of the villagers are ranchers. They also have limited rain-fed agricultural lands. The people talk in "lak" dialect. The village has no local council.

It is important to bear in mind that the nature of the subject and the research, the availability and the accessibility of the relevant information and statistical data to be used in the present assessment is difficult. Different places within the country, distance between the selected villages and towns have made it a difficult research to be done.

3.4.3. Date Collection

"Open-ended interviews" and, where possible, focus-group discussions (FGDs) were used to collect the data. In fact, the researcher aimed to have deeper information and therefore, interviews were selected instead of survey questionnaires. During the interviews, the researcher worked with the interviewee, asked questions several times to be sure that the answer is not given just as a reaction, and therefore, most interviews were time-consuming. Secondary data was used when demographic interpretation was needed. The researcher looked at the communities, their situation, informal and formal governmental institutions and their capacity to function effectively, as well as facilitating and impeding factors of people's participation and decision-making processes.

In each selected community, a method of **purposive sampling** was used, which means that informants (respondents) are selected, due to a series of qualities they possessed. These informants (68 people in total) can be divided in certain categories:

- Councillors (members of the councils) – in villages; the interview was done with all the members of the councils. In cities, the interview was done with one or two of them (in total – 14 councillors).

- Government authorities at local and meso levels (for villages, the interview was carried out with the authorities at Bakhsh level; for towns and cities, the interview was carried out at both levels) (in total 12 governmental authorities).

- Related NGO or CBO members (the NGO or the CBO active in the community was selected) (in total 19 members).

- People in each community (especially those affected by the decisions): three to five people (selected based on purposive sampling) – individually or in FGD (in total 21 people).

- Experts on rural and urban development (in total 2 persons).

Figure 3.4 shows a mapping of the informants. As Figure 3.4 clearly indicates, the data collection is a process, from the periphery to the centre. The informants were selected from the community, at the bottom, to those in the centre. This was to guarantee that the unit research is not only in the community, and the participants (respondents) have been selected from various parts through the hierarchy of the system.
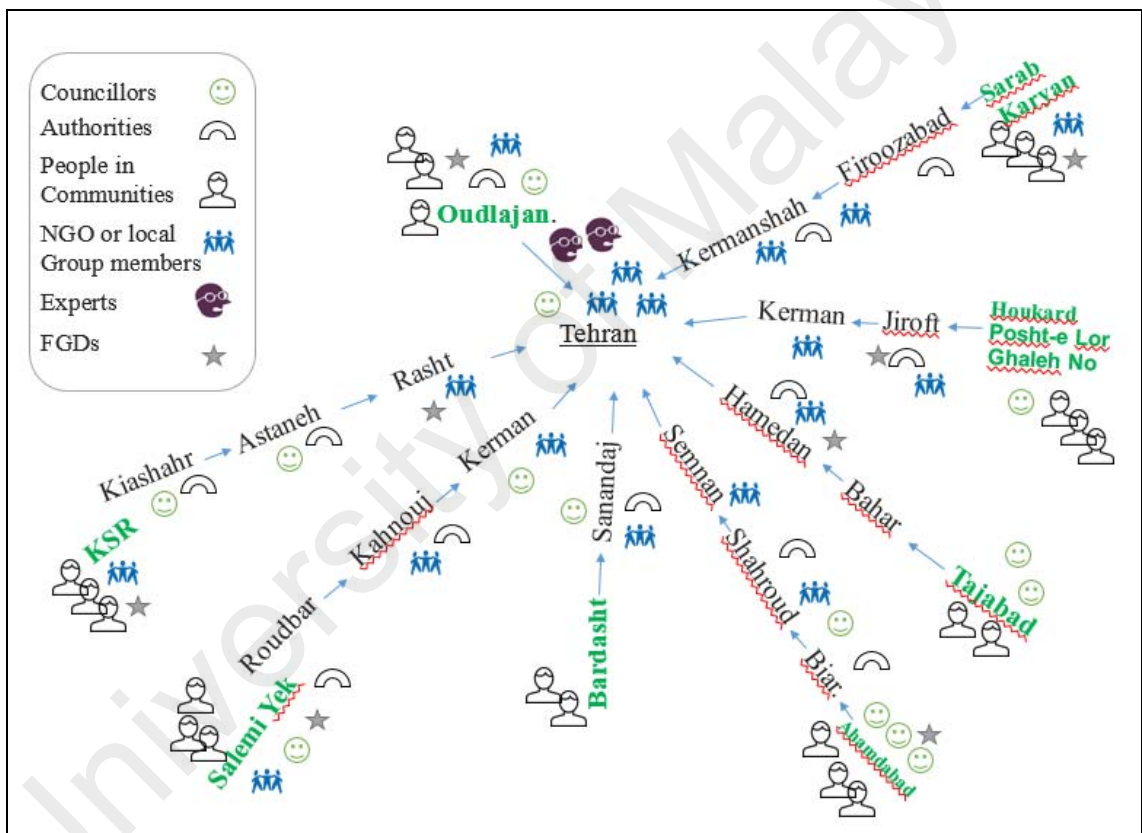
Figure 3.4: A mapping of informants for data collection (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

Since the researcher has been working as a facilitator and community-builder in rural areas and urban communities, he therefore had access to first-hand data. The trust of local people in the researcher facilitated the process of gaining deep information during the interviews. In fact, the researcher is part of the research since he has been in contact with communities for years and knows how to establish contacts with people in

communities. This assisted in ensuring the reliability of the data. As it is clear from the mapping of informants (figure 3.4), a purposive sampling has been applied for the selection of the respondents as a non-probability sampling technique, mostly because the researcher wanted to focus on particular characteristics and the involvement in the process of decision-making or affected by the process. This is not a weakness of the research but moreover it is a tool to focus on the people that are more related to the research questions and help the researcher to examine the problem in a deeper way. It also provides a wider scope of the problem (especially when the hierarchy is considered).

The pivotal interview questions were divided in the following five categories:

1. Questions on "past" and "present" comparison, to study the development of the community, devolution of power and changes from the pre-revolution time to post-revolutionary period and the present time. The answers show the process of change as well as how the power has been decentralized from the agencies to sub-agencies. The responses to these questions also provided information about the environment (the context).

2. Questions about decisions taken by the councils were raised, including about the origin of these decisions, i.e. whether it was requested by the government or if it was an initiative by the councillors, or if it was a need of the community, giving the researcher more knowledge about the nature of inputs (support and demands).

3. Questions about actual role of councils, about the appointment of the mayor or the village governor (dehyar) or other roles.

4. Questions about the structure of the decentralization, how it has been framed (this will help the researcher to design the structure) and how power is devolved from a central agency to sub-agencies.

5. Questions about the effects of the policies and the response of the communities (outputs).

These pivotal questions showed the researcher whether these councils were independent and powerful or if they were dependent and powerless; they also explain the decision-making process and describe the policies related to decentralization. The answers to these questions provided a picture of the environment, inputs and outputs, and helped the researcher to design the hierarchy structure. These questions have been studied in detail, to conform with the theoretical framework. The sub-questions that were used in these interviews have been added to the thesis, as an appendix.

The answers were recorded where the respondents gave the permission. In certain cases, the researcher took notes. The observations were also written during the visits. Meanwhile, it was necessary to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents. During the data collection and preparation of the text, the researcher tried to observe the principle of confidentiality.

3.4.4. Validity and reliability

Triangulation is used as a tool for increasing the validity and substantiating findings (Yin, 1994; Stake 2005; Stake 2013). Triangulation is an internal consistency method that tries to gather additional data while applying the same research design (Bellamy, 2011). In the present research, the two other data resources have been "direct observation" and "documents and reports". These resources increase the trustworthiness of the research, since the researcher can check the data at least from two other sources.

For direct observation, the researcher needs to be in the field several times. The researcher was in the field three times for data collection and once for the purpose of observation. The council reports (and websites, in certain cases like the Tehran city

council) were used. For the rural areas, since there are no such reports and written documents, meetings with the Bakhshdar (district governor – a level up in the administrative hierarchy) were used as a means of data checking.

3.4.5. Data Analysis

The researcher used diagrams in each case report to show the relationships of various components of the political system as much as it is related to that community power system. The graphic illustrations (diagrammatic models) used in each case enhance the understanding of the research results (Walliman, 2011, p.108; Yunus and Tambi, 2012), in particular when it comes to the complicated system and sub-systems.

Cross-case comparisons (comparisons among rural cases, urban cases and rural-urban cases) in multi-case reports (Stake, 2013) are part of the data analysis which provide deeper insights into the political system and creates useful results about the decentralization and democratization processes in the country. This analysis technique also helped the researcher to identify gaps in the reports; in certain instances through the comparisons between the cases, the researcher went back to the communities to collect more details.

After the cross-case comparisons, the findings were analysed, using the theoretical framework. At this phase, the researcher compared the data with conflicting or similar literature (if existing), and responded to the key questions. Recommendations for future policies and for further research will be provided after this phase (see the concluding chapter of this study).

3.4.6. Limitations

The multiple case study method was very helpful in producing empirical data. However, there are certain limitations about the employment of this method that have to be outlined here. The first limitation is that the cases have to be in limited numbers for various reasons, specifically due to time and costs constraints. It is true, of course, that all the councils and communities could be selected from each province. And, if this is done, the researcher could provide deeper and extremely accurate insights regarding devolution of power in each part of the country. This would also resolve the problem of generalization to all the provinces. A project of such a magnitude is however beyond the scope of this study.

The second issue is the categorization of rural and urban areas. Moreover, in Iran, there are also nomads. In discussing three cases of Roudbar, Sarab Karyan and Ahmadabad, nomads are somehow involved, but not directly. As nomads have their own traditional power system, and this system has always been under the influence of the political changes in the power system and the central government, this could be a related and important issue. However, working with nomads needs a separate research endeavour.

It is important to add that these two limitations did not impair the capacity of the research to generalize. This is because of the representation of the case studies, using a method of purposive sampling, which covered a range of spatial and class and ethnicity issues.

Chapter Four

Urban Case Studies

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, four case studies are provided. All four cases are urban communities: Oudlajan in Tehran, Bardasht in Sanandaj, Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee in Kiashahr and Salemi Yek in Roudbar. The research focuses on these communities attempting to find out more about the councils and their relationship with the system as well as the people in communities; it portrays the "input" process from the community to the council and the system. The chapter goes further to find out more about the decision-making process and the outputs while also studying the council's relationship with the higher councils as well as the system. In each case study, a historical background is also included.

In each case study, the following five questions that are related to the research questions are addressed. At the same time, based on the interviews and observations at different levels, certain explanations and descriptions are provided.

a. Questions on "past" and "present" comparison, to study the development of the community, devolution of power and changes from the pre-revolution time to post-revolutionary period and the present time. The answers show the process of change as well as how the power has been decentralized from the agencies to sub-agencies. Also responses to these questions have to provide information about the environment (the context).

b. Questions about decisions taken by the councils will be raised, including about the origin of these decisions, i.e. whether it is requested by the government or if it is an initiative by the councillors, or if it is a need of the community, giving

the researcher more knowledge about the nature of inputs (support and demands).

c. Questions about actual role of councils, about the appointment of the mayor or the village governor (dehyar) or other roles.

d. Questions about the structure of the decentralization, how it has been framed (this will help the researcher to design the structure) and how power is devolved from a central agency to sub-agencies.

e. Questions about the effects of the policies and the response of the communities.

4.2. Case study: Oudlajan

4.2.1. Introduction

Oudlajan[18] is an old community (or mahaleh) in District 12[19] of Tehran with about 21,250 citizens[20]. In fact, in the 1750s, Oudlajan was one of only four communities[21] of Tehran. It was once an affluent community[22], but now it is a downtown community. Oudlajan was adopted as a historical community in 2005 with 44 registered sites by the Organization of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism and therefore certain limitations on construction have been imposed on the community by the Tehran City Council on its renovation. A special office in the Tehran Municipality supervises any construction and development activity over there.

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[18] Oudlajan means "A place of water division". The ending part of the name "an" means "a place"; "ou", in the beginning, is the local pronunciation of "Aab" which means water in Persian; and "dlaj" comes from "drajidan" or "drajin" which means to divide water of a river in smaller streams. In fact, Oudlajan was a place to divide water coming from the neighbouring community, Sarcheshmeh, which means "the source of water". In some texts, Oulajan has been mentioned as "the heart of Tehran" since it brought life to the whole city.

[19] It is limited to Naser Khosro Street from the West, Rey Street from the East, 15 Khordad Avenue from the South, and Amir Kabir Street from the North. It has three sub-communities, i.e. Imamzadeh Yahya, Pamenar and Naser Khosro.

[20] The community is located in the north of Bazaar in Tehran and that is why there are 2,850 commercial units which are more than the existing 2,246 houses.

[21] The four communities, or mahaleh, are Oudlajan, Sangelaj, Bazaar and ChalehMeidan (Shahidi Mazandarani, 2004).

[22] Oudlajan was once an affluent area, with many gardens and luxurious houses belonging to rich people. Among them were the Garden of Malekolshoara (a famous poet in 1940s), Modaress House (popular religious politician) and Golestan Palace, all popular historical sites. Golestan Palace was built in 1760 by King Tahmaseb (Safavid dynasty), and it was used by Qajar and Pahlavi. Both Reza Shah and Mohammadreza Shah had their coronation ceremonies in this Palace. There are many other historical buildings in Oudlajan such as the Dabirolmolk building, Kazemi House and Memarbashi School.

Oudlajan is under the supervision of the Tehran City Council. This council is politically different from other urban councils since Tehran has been the capital city since the second half of the nineteenth century and, therefore, it has always played an important role from an administrative point of view. Tehran is a political city[23] too and its administration has always been under the influence of the political system. In fact, most influential political movements have started from Tehran, and they have affected the political system[24], considering the fact that it is a metropolitan city with a population of about 13 million people[25].

4.2.2. Historical Perspective

Tehran has been Iran's capital over the past hundred years, but has never been targeted to experience a decentralized system. However, decentralization has seriously been requested in the form of "elected councils" since the Constitutionalism period. Constitutionalist revolutionary leaders in 1905 demanded the establishment of councils. A law was then added as an annex to the Constitution at that time (adopted in 1907). The country was then divided into four Ialats, or states, with an independent ruler directly connected to the centre. Each state was divided into various smaller parts called Velayat. Each Velayat was supposed to have a council elected by people and a council of councils was deemed to be established at the state level. The functions of these councils were focused on public interests, with full powers to decide about people's affairs. The ruler, however, could protest a decision within a 20-day deadline to the National Consultative Parliament. If the decision was against the law, it could be annulled within two months. In fact, the council was planned to be at the service of the

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[23] It is the house of Parliament, where the Cabinet and Ministries, the Leader, the Guardian Council and Experts' Assembly and other important governmental organizations are located.

[24] Among these influential movements include the Regie Tobacco Revolt in 1891-2, the constitutional revolution that occurred between 1905 and 1910, and the movement of oil nationalization in 1949 to 1951 and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Tehran has also been the primary area of numerous political unrests after the Revolution.

[25] According to the 2010 statistics.

people. However, the King could dissolve a council after approval of the Interior Minister based on strong reasons or order a new council to be elected.

Two points are important here: First, Tehran was not targeted in such decisions since it was the capital (or the centre). Second, the establishment of these councils was only on paper. Councils were not established in all states in Iran, and established councils had a very short life due to various reasons such as political turmoil. Reza Shah reinforced a centralized system as he could not tolerate any decentralization of power. In 1954, during Shah's rule, the law of the Municipality was adopted and city councils were again prescribed therein. These councils had extensive functions and only political decisions or decisions affecting the economy could be protested by authorities in the government. The councils had the duty to administer the city. Once more these councils were not taken seriously. Some cities had councils while others did not.

In 1962, a new law was adopted on the Ialat and Velayat councils but again this law was never implemented. The then government again offered another bill to the Parliament and at last in 1970 the law on the establishment of councils at township and province levels was adopted. It seems that this law was also only something that was stated on paper, not actually implemented.

Sanjabi (1955), in his analysis of the reasons behind the non-establishment of councils in Iran, especially during the first Pahlavi Shah, refers to three major reasons for this. He writes that the law was actually taken from other countries and therefore was not appropriate to the conditions then; people were not accustomed to administering their own affairs through their own representatives, while the government authorities were not familiar with new regulations and styles of governance and they did not believe in such councils. Sanjabi's contentions might be true but many other rules and regulations were implemented (even by force) which both people and officers did not like, such as

the one on Kafsh-e Hijab or uncovering of women. In fact, what was needed was the political will to move forward to establish councils and maintain them.

Imani Jajarmi (2010) believes that reforms in administration were an up-to-down process and severely dependent on the policies of the central government, especially the Interior Ministry. He continues that political underdevelopment in the Pahlavi period is a major reason why the micro and macro institutions of political participation (such as the consultative assembly or city councils) did not have the needed effectiveness while they had always surrendered power to the centralized government; they were entities without independence and choice. Sabouri Kashani (1975) believes that a strong centralized system did not let any participation take shape at local or macro levels while existing institutions were only confirming (or supporting) what authorities ordered. Another reason was government intervention in the election process, a reason why the elected councillors were not effective as true representatives of the people.

Tehran enjoyed a city council before the Revolution for a very short time but the council was very weak. When the 1979 Revolution happened, a short period of populism started. In most communities, local committees comprising inhabitants of the same community established. They were mostly responsible for maintaining order. However, the establishment of councils was prescribed in the new 1979 Constitution with an aim to give more power to people but this was only realized 20 years later.

4.2.3. The System

At the present time, the city has to be legally run in a decentralized way, by a council of thirty-one members elected by the direct votes of Tehran citizens every four years. However, most decisions taken by Tehran councillors and even the selection of its

mayor[26] are affected by the political atmosphere[27]. Tehran can be regarded as a sub-system highly influenced by the political system, since this sub-system embraces the major body of the political system. And, any political problem created in this sub-system and within the support loop may damage the political system. Tehran is the centre of the political system and therefore has geopolitical significance for the system and political parties.

At the same time, there is another decentralized sub-system, initiated by the Tehran City Council, and it has been implemented only in this city. The municipality has divided the city into 374 communities[28] (or mahaleh as it is called in Persian), and each community has an elected council (which is called shora-yari, which means "councillors' friends"). This means that all 374 communities in Tehran have one local council, or as Sobout (2009) puts it "Neighbourhood Council" whose members have to live in the community and are elected by the people from that community.

A new entity was created by the Municipality in 2010. Each community has a manager or a head or "modir" (as called in Persian). To appoint the manager, each community should have one Trustees' Committee. The Committee is composed of the members of the neighbourhood council (7 members), representative of the Municipality at sub-district level, one representative from a governmental or public institution which offers services to the community, two persons from specialized groups in the community (selected by the neighbourhood council) and representatives of two community-based organizations (such as charities, mosques, or local NGOs). However, in Oudlajan, the

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[26] According to the Article 71 of the Law on Islamic Councils, the mayor is to be selected by the Islamic Council for a period of four years. The mayor cannot be chosen from among the councillors. After the selection of the mayor, he will be recognized formally by the order of the governor.

[27] Tehran's mayors have been influential figures. Mohammad Tavasoli, the city's first mayor after the Revolution has been arrested several times for various political reasons, mostly because he is the head of the political office of Freedom's Movement. Gholamhossein Karbaschi was dismissed from the post due to political tensions between the conservatives and the left wing; he was in prison for several months. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who became the president of Iran, had been the mayor of Tehran for 26 months; as mayor, he had numerous challenges with the then President of Iran. The present mayor is Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, a former Revolutionary Guards air force commander, who had been chief of the Tehran police during reformist Khatami's presidency. He ran unsuccessfully against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2005 and was later elected mayor of Tehran.

[28] Such division is legally supported by a circular of the Tehran City Council though it is not part of the decentralization policies of the government.

composition of the Community is as such: Neighbourhood Council members, one representative from the municipality at sub-district level, one representative from Bassij and Imam of the Mosque (major mosque of the community). The Trustees Committee has the mission to appoint a manager for the community and to have oversight of his or her performance. The manager has to work closely with the Neighbourhood Council to help develop the community.

In fact, Oudlajan is under three decentralized sub-systems: it has its own Neighbourhood Council; it is under the Tehran City Council too; and there is one Trustees Committee in the community. Decisions of these three sub-systems affect the community. These three may be regarded as local institutions, however, as Tehran is a metropolitan city and the capital. Therefore, the Tehran City Council has to be regarded as an institution at macro level while the Neighbourhood Council and Trustees Committee are both considered local institutions.

The three sub-system institutions have different functions. The city councils are part of the urban management system of decision-making and, therefore, they are involved in policy-making, monitoring and coordinating municipal affairs. The councils have no power to monitor or supervise other governmental organizations of urban management such as those involved in electricity or power supply. In brief, the urban councils have four types of functions: 1) policy-making, legislation and planning and monitoring; 2) finance and administration in municipalities; 3) city development; and 4) service-providing activities. The first type of activities includes electing a Mayor, addressing deficiencies and urgent needs of the people and preparing plans and solutions, and enforcing the council's approvals; cooperation with authorities; planning to increase peoples' participation and establishing councils and NGOs. The second type of functions related to the municipalities. The councillors have the duty to approve the municipality's budget, distribute grants proposed by municipalities, and determine the

rate of taxes (for the services provided by municipalities) as well as to monitor their contracts. They have to approve the companies and organizations affiliated to municipalities, after the agreement of the Ministry of interior. The third type includes approving the boundaries of the city, based on the city's comprehensive maps, and supervising development plans in the city. Services are the fourth part, but these services are different from those of the government and mostly include public services such as provision and maintenance of theatre and art centres, cinemas, parks, libraries, and children's playgrounds. It appears that the council's two most important functions are selection of the mayor and approving the budget.

The neighbourhood councils have limited functions. They have the duty to prepare a data bank of the community, to identify strengths and potentials of the community and to report deficiencies and needs. They do not have any decision-making power, while they have the duty to be in contact with the City Council and the sub-district municipality office, on one side, and the citizens in the community, on the other side.

Functions of the Trustees' Committee are more comprehensive. Apart from selecting a manager for the community and an inspector, the committee has the duty to help the manager to carry out his or her duties and responsibilities. The committee is responsible for encouraging participation of the community's inhabitants in cultural and social issues. The committee also has to promote the activities of the popular specialized working groups; it has the duty to study and approve the plans and to determine how the manager has to carry out his or her duties; and it is responsible for identifying the communities' capacities and to attract active participation and cooperation of other related governmental bodies at the local level[29].

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[29] Qalibaf, Tehran's mayor, in an interview with Mehr News Agency on 28 April 2010 announced that these committees are only active in social and cultural issues while the neighbourhood councils are oversight bodies that look into what services are being delivered by the municipality at the local level.

Oudlajan has been targeted by various empowerment projects implemented by NGOs, the Municipality or other governmental bodies. Since the priority in Oudlajan has been the renovation of the community, therefore the Renovation Department has already started a project through a contractor to prepare a new master plan of the community. The contractor has assigned an NGO to implement a local empowerment project to encourage residents in the community to cooperate with them in renovating the community. As no construction is allowed in the community, most of the old houses that cannot be rebuilt or renovated have been rented by private companies to be used as warehouses and this has become a point of dissatisfaction for the residents.

An NGO has facilitated the establishment of a community-based organization (CBO) composed of young people. The CBO tries to show the people how valuable the community is, and if they come together and cooperate with the Renovation Department and the contractor, the community can be renovated and changed into a tourism site. The project is successful since it has been able to encourage young people to be involved in running a local office of community development, but they have not been successful in gaining the stakeholders' participation in the project. Apart from the NGO that works for renovation of the community and has helped to establish a CBO of young people in the community, there are other active NGOs on children's issues, entrepreneurship, addiction and cultural heritage.

The municipality runs a public space in the community (Sara-ye Mahaleh or Community House) that acts like a meeting venue or a place where training courses for different groups of people are administered by the municipality. Other active government bodies in the community are the disciplinary forces, since there is one police station in the community, within the hierarchy of the Ministry of Interior, Health Department (Ministry of Health), State Welfare Organization (since there are on-going projects for empowerment of women's headed households, active social clinics under

the supervision of this organization, and services given to the drug addicts), and the Organization of Cultural Heritage and Tourism for maintaining historical buildings in the community which is under the supervision of the President Deputy for Cultural Heritage and Tourism. Some of the governmental organizations have offices in the community, like Disciplinary forces and the Organization of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, and others are offering services through contractors. The Education Ministry has its own public schools in the community.

The Leadership office has its own system of power. On at least two issues, Oudlajan has been the final point of the hierarchy of the leadership. One major organization under the leadership is Bassij (or Mobilization Organization). Of course it is not directly under the supervision of the leadership. Bassij is administered by the Revolutionary Guards Corps. It was established after the Revolution and comprised the volunteers who wanted to defend the country in the war between Iran and Iraq. Bassij is present everywhere in the country, in factories, communities, departments, universities, markets, etc., and they are not only involved in ensuring internal security and acting as a law enforcement unit, they provide social services and hold religious ceremonies. In most communities, there are two bases of Bassij, one for men and one for women, both located in Imamzadeh Yahya. In Oudlajan, the women Bassij base hold Quran classes, offers courses of self-entrepreneurship, carries out cultural activities and holds religious ceremonies. The local neighbourhood council is under the influence of Bassij in Oudlajan.

Another organization that is under the supervision of the Supreme Leadership is Vaghf. As there are old buildings and monuments in Oudlajan that were donated as Vaghf[30], therefore, this organization is a major stakeholder in the future of the community.

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[30] Vaghf or waghf that can be spelled as waqf or wakf is a religious endowment in Islam. Vaghf is typically a building or a land donated for charitable purposes. Oghaf Organization in Iran manages the donated assets. It is a governmental body under the supervision of the leadership and administered by clergies.

Figure 4.1 shows governmental service-delivery institutions, the municipality, councils and Bassij in relation to the community in three levels: macro, meso and micro. As illustrated in Figure 4.1, the people are receiving services from the governmental bodies (outputs). They have their own representatives in two elected bodies, the local council and city council. The Municipality has its own hierarchy and delivers certain services in the community while trying to renovate the community through its Renovation Department (outputs).
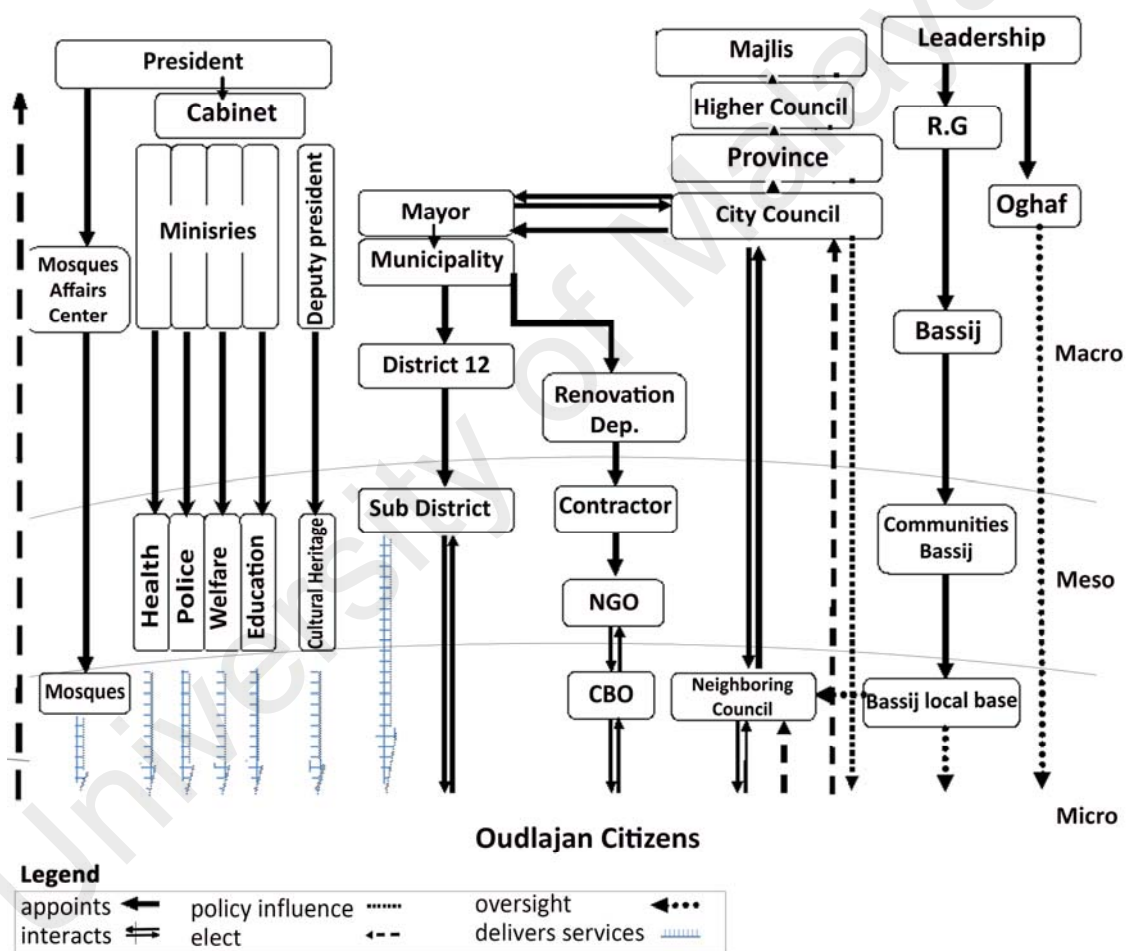
Figure 4.1: Oudlajan community within the system (Source: Designed by the researcher)

Most decisions on services, the future of the community, financial issues and religious issues are taken outside the community, up there at Macro level. For Oudlajan, the Meso-level for the government is a group bodies that facilitates the delivery of services to the community. Their offices are outside the community. Civil society institutions are

active at this level, and they offer certain services to the community. At the local level, four kinds of institutions can be distinguished: institution of religion (Mosques); civil society institutions (NGOs and the CBO); consultation institutions (neighbourhood council, trustees committee, community manager); and Revolution institution (Bassij). Except for civil society institutions; there is a centralized feature in each of the other three institutions.

At the Micro level, the local institutions are not involved in decision-making processes. In other terms, decisions that directly affect citizens' life in Oulajan are not taken by their own local council, while the existing local group is only assigned to encourage participation (in renovation) and the local Bassij office is involved in cultural activities and oversight duties rather than taking decisions. The local governmental offices only deliver services and are not involved in empowerment activities.

Services are delivered through a top-down hierarchy, while there is no bottom-up connection between the people in the community and the macro system. This means that a centralized system is in power, while no services are managed by the decentralized entities. It also means that services are not based on people's demands. There is no systemic relationship between the two institutions of "City Council" and "Neighbourhood Councils", in terms of the election of their members. This is because the members of the two councils are separately elected in two different elections. However, they may have an administrative relationship since the regulation regarding the neighbourhood councils have been adopted by the Tehran City Council and they have to be under the supervision of that Council. They act at local communities parallel to the sub-offices of the Municipality at District level in Tehran.

The city council, as the most significant decentralized sub-system, plays no serious part in service delivery while it has interaction with the Municipality and selects the Mayor. The mere selection of a mayor in a political city like Tehran has political implications,

and each time when the Mayor is appointed, the Tehran City Council is not politically influential in the process of selection. The Tehran mayor is a highly political person with much power in the administration of the city. That is why all political parties, factions and influential governmental bodies challenge each other and use all powers to influence the process of selection of the Tehran mayor. Each time when it is time to appoint a mayor, whether after the city council elections or when the Mayor resigns to become a candidate for the presidency, in particular in the case of Ahmadinejad, the conflict starts. According to the law, the Tehran City Council has a deadline of three months to appoint the Mayor.

There were two failed attempts in the Parliament in 2010 to change the process of the selection of the Tehran Mayor, one by the government in the form of a bill to Parliament giving the duty to the Ministry of Interior to appoint mayors in bigger cities (with a population of more than 200,000). The second was a proposal by the Majlis itself to give the right of the Mayor's election to the people. Both were rejected by MPs, primarily because, according to the law, urban councils are the most important decision-making institution in cities and any change in the law would be in contradiction with the spirit of the law.

During the elections of city councils in 2006, the three winning factions were the Reformists[31] (four persons), Ahmadnejad's faction or supporters of the government (two persons) and the Qalibaf's faction[32] (nine persons). Before the elections, Qalibaf was elected, in September 2005, by the previous Tehran City Council to succeed Ahmadinejad as Tehran Mayor, with eight out of 15 votes of the councillors. Along

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[31] Here, "reformist" means groups of reformist parties. It is worth mentioning that the reformist parties came together and became united to have a unified list of candidates for the election, contrary to the previous election where every reformist party had a separate list, some not even sharing a single candidate

[32] Qalibaf was appointed by the Tehran City Council to succeed Ahmadnejad as Mayor. Again, in 2006, when the City Councils members were elected by citizens, he was among the potential candidates to become a mayor. He does not have a political party, but as an influential individual, he has his own faction.

with <u>Karbaschi</u>[33], he has been referred to as one of the most successful mayors of Tehran, although he is not supported by Ahmadinejad's administration.

During his re-election (Qalibaf), each of the three political groups used all its powers and influence to affect the process so that they could have their own mayor. As the Reformists were weak (only four people out of 15), they supported Qalibaf, a reason why supporters of Ahmadinejad were not powerful enough to win.

Each of these factions pursues their own political plan to gain the top position in the Municipality. For Ahmadinejad (on the government side), such a position in Tehran means more systematic access to citizens and the whole Municipality system that might facilitate his possible electoral victory in the future. It seems that he does not have any clear agenda for decentralization. During the time when Ahmadinejad was Tehran's mayor, no concrete step was taken to strengthen or facilitate the process of decentralization or even people's participation in Tehran. He also closed down NGOs offices in the local municipal buildings and limited the activities of cultural centres.

Qalibaf has a different agenda. He lost the 2005 presidential elections in competition with Ahmadinejad, but took control of the Tehran Municipality due to his political influence. He is one of the supporters of need for local governments and he has been the only mayor with a community-driven attitude, while his adversaries claimed that Qalibaf aimed to create his own system of vote-collecting for the presidential elections in 2013, in which he was defeated by Rohani.

Reformists have never drafted any clear plan for Tehran's administration while they would certainly support civil society participation in urban management. However, as they are politically under pressure, they are not well represented in the City Council.

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[33] Karbaschi was the Mayor of Tehran from 1989 until 1998. He was reformist and is a close ally of former president Mohammad Khatami. He was arrested and imprisoned on corruption charges, as part of the conservatives' attacks on reformists. Karbaschi was the leader of Executives of Construction Party from 1996 until 2011.

In such a political system, the members of the City Council voted for the mayor based on many political considerations rather than finding the right person to become mayor; they consider what would be the position of various institutions such as the Leadership, the Guardian Council, Revolutionary Guards, and even the influential clergies. However, it appears that Qalibaf has the support of the Leadership that is the highest in the Power System in Iran, and the votes of councillors are claimed to be affected by such strong support[34]. The same happened when Qalibaf became the mayor in 2013 after the city council elections in May 2013. In that time, once more he experienced a competition in the city council. After the failure in his presidential campaign (gaining the second place after Rohani), Qalibaf was again raised as a possible candidate to become Tehran's mayor. On voting day, the votes were cast two times. The first time, the results were equal: 15 for Qalibaf and 15 for Hashemi – reformist candidate) and one white vote. The second time he gained 16 votes (out of 31) while his competitor, Mohsen Hashemi gained only 14 votes[35]. It has been claimed that two of the councillors who voted for Mohsen Hashemi – in the first round changed their views in the second round and voted for Qalibaf. Meanwhile, the person who had abstained in the first round, voted for Qalibaf in the second round[36]. Reformists claimed that two councillors who were on the reformists candidates list, and entered the city council with the votes of the reformists, voted for Qalibaf in the second round on voting day. There were political rumours that one of the councillors (Elaheh Rastgoo) has been fired from the Islamic Labour Party[37]. It is not clear how much they have been influenced by the ruling political trends.

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[34] There are various pieces of news on that, while there is no source to approve such claim. However, Qalibaf has always mentioned his obedience to the leader in his interviews or speeches.

[35] See ISNA news agency, news code number 92061710322, dated 8 September 2013 (equal to Iranian date of 17 Shahrivar 1392) http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/92061710322/قالیباف-شهردار-تهران-ماند last viewed on 10 October 2013.

[36] See Entekhab news agency, news code number 128011, dated 8 September 2013 (equal to Iranian date of 17 Shahrivar 1392); retrieved from http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/128011 - last viewed on 10 October 2013.

[37] See EdalatPress news agency, dated 10 September 2013 (equal to Iranian date of 19 Shahrivar 1392) http://etedalpres.ir/3885/ قالیباف-به-طلب-اصلاح-یک-رای-سر-بر-جنجال.html Retrived at last viewed on 10 October 2013.

The Oudlajan case shows a major challenge is that the centralized power system in a city like Tehran cannot open the path for a decentralized power distribution through giving the council a voice in the selection of the mayor. At the same time, most services are delivered by centralized governmental bodies, while people or their representatives are not involved in decision making. The result is a dual system of centralized and decentralized at the same time, while the centralized system is dominant and the decentralized system is weak enough to be overlooked. Meanwhile, there is an increased political fragmentation (executive body, municipality, and leadership system), which is clear in Figure 4.1, and therefore, it has resulted in a highly complex system (Akhoundi et al., 2006).

The administration of Oudlajan suffers from certain problems that are caused by a lack of the macro-strategic plan. Iran does not have a system of federalism, but the policies of decentralization have been followed by various governments. However, such policies are not well defined to empower people enough to give them the right to have more participation in the management of their own community. That is why the new weak decentralized system (both the city council and neighbourhood councils in Tehran) cannot be involved in decision-making. If a decision has to be taken (like the selection of the mayor), it cannot remain far from the political power and of course the local sub-councils have no major role in such decisions.

4.2.4. Inputs and Outputs

People in Oudlajan receive services (mostly distributive) from different governmental bodies as well as the Tehran municipality. They also receive the services of NGOs (mostly social and empowering services). The neighbouring council does not have any special services to offer, while it monitors whether the services (especially by the municipality) are offered in a proper way. This can be regarded as "monitoring"

services. These three kinds of services are outputs (with regard to the related community).

The inputs can be reviewed in two forms: demands and support. Most references of people in the community to governmental departments are in the form of individual demands (that can be categorized as distributive). But when people are together in a community meeting, then demands form in four categories: distributive, regulative, communicative and participatory. This could be very helpful if the neighbouring community acts like an "articulator of demands" since it will be easier to know how to deal with each of them.

People support the neighbouring council by voting to them; the same support would be for the city council. However, people may vote through other macro entities such as the Parliament, the Experts' Council and the Presidency.

A glance at the system shows that the feedback loop (inputs – environment – outputs) – as much as related to services, is not a complete one. People do not vote (inputs) to those who produce outputs (services), and to those who produce the policies, and those who are voted are not those who produce outputs in the form of services. Those who produce the outputs in the form of services are mostly those who are appointed.

Also, as is clear in Figure 4.2, there is no link between the Tehran Provincial departments and the Tehran City Council. This suggests that the Tehran City Council is not accountable to a higher body, i.e. the Tehran Provincial Departments. There is a feedback loop from the neighbouring council to the people in the community and from the people to the neighbouring council. The loop provides the council with four kinds of distributive, regulative, communicative and participatory demands from the community. There is also another feedback loop from the Tehran City Council to the Municipality and from there to the community and the loop continues from the people to the council

in form of support (mostly during elections) but there is no direct demand feed. The demands are articulated through neighbouring council. There are also two other feedback loops from the Macro System as well as the Provincial Departments to the people in the community, but again the feed is in form of support, and demands are not articulated. A filtering is active on the inputs which means only selected support enters the system.
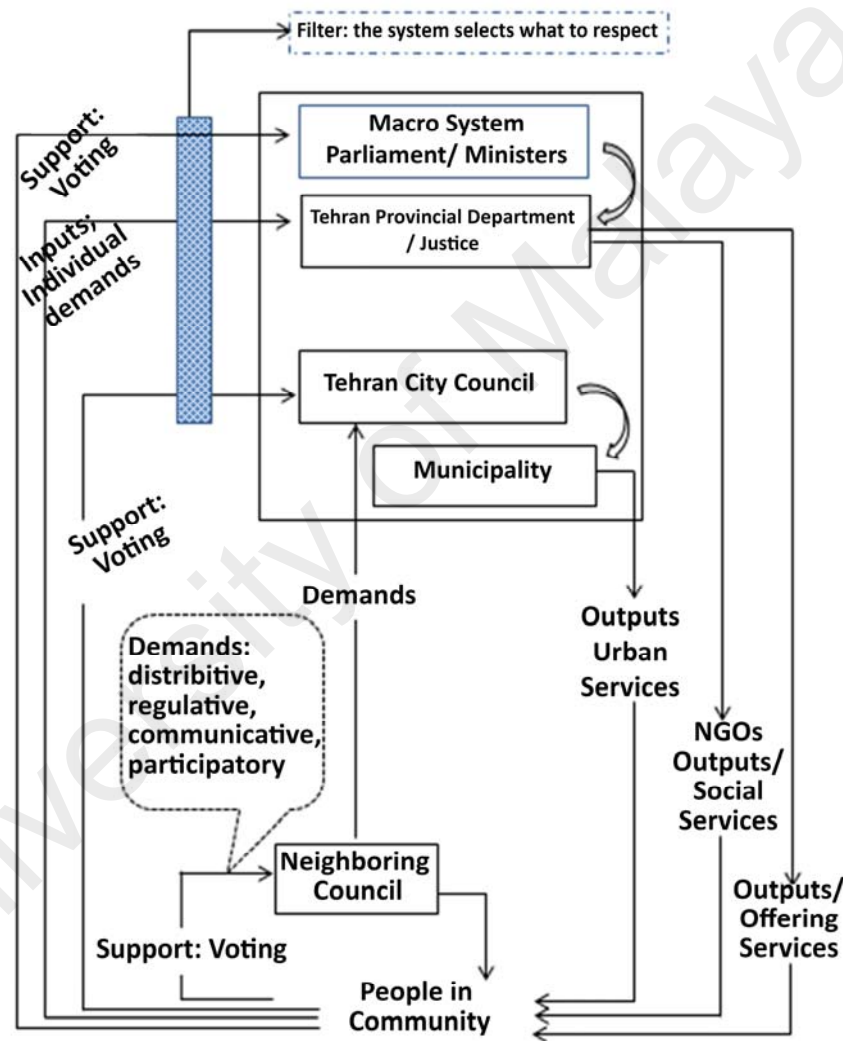
Figure 4.2: Oudlajan - Output and Inputs Loop (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

4.3. Case study: Bardasht

4.3.1. Introduction

Bardasht is a poor community[38] in Sanandaj, the capital city of the Kurdistan Province in the west of Iran. The population of Bardasht is about 6,000 people (1,400 households)[39]. The residents are mostly Kurd. However, there are some migrants from Kermanshah, the neighbouring province. The community is called *Bardasht* since it was once like a vast plain area (*Bardasht* in Kurdish language means "in front of a plain"). Before the Revolution, there was one water spring in this community where the sheep belonging to people from the nearby villages (Agheh Zaman and GalehKhan) used to drink water and graze in this plain area. During the Revolution, as a result of migration from Kurdish villages, the plain area was gradually divided among the newcomers and houses were built (some of these houses do not even have an official property document). Early Revolution, the main slaughterhouse of Sanandaj city was located in this community, the reason why the main street over there is still called "Koshtargah", which means "a place of slaughtering" in Farsi.

The community is managed by the Trustees' Council of the community mosque. There are also four self-help groups in this community (Ettehad, Isar, Hessam and Zana) with an average of 12 people as their active members. These four self-help groups have been created with the assistance of an NGO in Sanandaj, with the aim to decrease poverty in the community. These groups have generated income through entrepreneurship activities such as producing local breads. The mere existence of these groups shows that the people would like to change their life and have better access to resources.

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[38] The poverty line in Iran is US$10 per day for an urban family, based on the indicators of the Welfare Ministry. 4.2 per cent of household heads in Bardasht earn less than US$1 per day, 16.6 per cent between US$1 to US$2, 13 per cent between US$2 to US$3, 25 per cent between US$10 to US$12, 25.4 per cent between US$15 to US$17, 6.2 per cent between US$18 to US$20, and 5.2 per cent earn US$30 or more per day. (These statistics belong to the poverty eradication project, 2010, and the currency rate is US$1 =Rial30000). This means that one third of the population in this community live under the poverty line.

[39] These statistics were taken from the documents of the poverty reduction project in Iran.

Kurds are an ethnic group in Iran and can also be found in its two western neighbouring countries (Turkey and Iraq) and in Syria. This ethnic group has its own language (Kurdish) and its members are mostly Sunnis. That is why the Kurds are considered a religious minority in Iran, since the majority of this country's population are Shia Muslims.

4.3.2. Historical Perspective

The political status of the Kurds has always been an issue. They have persistently fought against the ruling regimes since two centuries ago. The first rise of the Kurds was against the Ottoman domination in 1880, by Sheikh Abidoolah Nahri. Since then, there have been armed movements for autonomy in various Kurdish cities. On some occasions, they were successful in gaining autonomy but afterwards they were ruthlessly suppressed.

At the present time, the Kurds in Iraq have a dominant status since they enjoy a certain amount of autonomy after the US intervention in this country. There is a new federal system in Iraq and the Kurdish region in this country is administered under the Kurdistan Regional Government. In fact, the Kurds are considered a major political actor[40].

In Turkey, which has a larger Kurdish population than Iraq, Syria and Iran[41], any political movement of Kurds has been suppressed during the past thirty years. In recent years, particularly after 2007, the Turkey government changed its policies towards the Kurds, to pave the way for it to join the European Union (EU). In Syria, the Kurds are

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[40] It is important to bear in mind that that Jalal Talabani, the current President of Iraq, has been a prominent Kurdish politician. Meanwhile, Iraqi Kurdistan is a rich region: located there are certain oil fields (Kirkuk) and mineral deposits (such as copper and iron). And since it is a mountainous region with rivers, it has the potential for generating electrical power while it has enough resources for irrigation (Kinnane, 1964).

[41] It has been estimated that Turkey has between 14 and 19 million Kurds, while Iraq has only 6 to 6.5 million, Iran 6.5 to 7 million and Syria about 2 million Kurds.

among the armed opposition groups in the north involved in fighting against the ruling regime.

During World War II, for a short period, a republic was established in Mahabad, a Kurdish town in Iran, with the help of the Red Army but it was suppressed after one year. Before announcing the republic, in September 1942, the first political party was organized with an aim to create an "independent Kurdish state" (McDowall, 1997, p. 237). A Committee for the Revival of Kurdistan (Komala-i Jyanawi Kurdistan, or JK society) was then established. In April 1943, the leaders in Mahabad established contacts with the Soviets and in 1944 they communicated with the Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey. Later, Qazi Muhammad[42] joined Komala[43]. Later, Komala was dissolved and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDPI) was formed with the following aims: to gain "autonomy for the Iranian Kurds within the Iranian state"; "the use of Kurdish as the medium of education and administration"; "the election of a provincial council for Kurdistan to supervise state and social matters"; "all state officials to be of local origin"; "unity and fraternity with the Azarbaijani people"; and "the establishment of a single law for both peasants and notables" (from the KDPI manifesto, see Arfa, 1966, p. 80)[44].

It was in January 1946 that Qazi Muhammad announced the Mahabad Republic, in a gathering with the presence of the chiefs and other important Kurdish leaders. The new government in Mahabad had so many challenges, while the central government in Tehran could not tolerate such action within its territory. After the collapse of Mahabad, the KDPI could not continue in Iran. Some years later, when Musadegh became the Prime Minister, a period of democratic atmosphere started in Iran, which lasted for

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[42] Qazi Muhammad, born in 1893 and died in1947, was a Kurd leader. He was the head of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946.

[43] Komola, or Komeley Jiyanewey Kurd, was a secret entity that existed before the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDPI).

[44] In the book written by Arfa, seven aims are listed. There is one more aim regarding the revenues. The revenues collected in Kurdistan have to be spent in that region. And, the last aim has a different wording, mentioning that the party has to work for the "improvement of the moral standards, health and economic situation of the Kurdish people" (Arfa, 1966, p. 80). However, in another book written by Ghassemlou et al., an eighth aim has been mentioned, that "We desire that the peoples living in Iran be able to strive freely for the happiness and progress of their country" (Ghassemlou et al., 1980, p.141).

some years until the American *coup d'état* occurred. During this period, the KDPI became active in Kurdistan (McDowall, 1997).

During the second Pahlavi era, all traces of democratic actions and movements were suppressed in Kurdistan. The KDPI started its underground activities and even the aims changed: the KDPI wanted to overthrow the monarchy. The regime feared the Soviet influence and, therefore, security measures were followed up in Kurdistan province. Afterwards, the regime had a series of mutual agreements with neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Iraq to limit the Kurds political activities. At the same time, the regime changed its attitude towards the Kurds, replacing religious attitudes with a nationalistic approach, and helped the Kurds to be a part of Iran and of the same race (Mohammadi, 2010, p. 345). At the same time, after the land reform of 1962, mostly a process of tribal collapse started (Arfa, 1966, pp. 46-47). In fact, the tribes had once their own system, especially after Reza Shah came to power, and they were even armed.

Early Revolution, political tensions emerged among Iranian Kurds. Certain political parties in Kurdistan demanded autonomy but they were not successful in their armed struggle against the central government. With the breakout of Iran-Iraq war, the Kurdistan autonomy issue was gradually forgotten (Mohammadi, 2010, p. 345).

Throughout all this history, one important point has to be considered: the Kurdish political groups have always looked for a decentralized policy so that they could have powers to decide on their own affairs; for them, the best option was for a federal system that was to be shaped in Iraq. However, this was not acceptable by the centralized power in Tehran during the past century. For instance, when the KDPI was shaped before Mahabad Republic, one of the requests by the party leaders was that all officials have to be of local origin. During the whole Shah period and afterwards in the Islamic Republic, the general rule was to appoint non-local officials everywhere in Kurdistan. During Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza, Kurdistan in Iran was divided in

different provinces with an aim that Kurds do not remain united in one province. Even, forced migration was imposed on Kurds and many of them were taken to other towns and rural areas in other provinces.

Given this history and for these reasons, it is important to remember that a city like Sanandaj is highly politicized. This fact has to be considered in any research on decentralization in Sanandaj.

4.3.3. The councils

Bardasht is under the city council of Sanandaj. However, based on the existing tradition in Sanandaj, the people in communities traditionally select their representatives as the Trustees' Council of the community mosque who are responsible for the Mosque affairs, though, at the same time, they deal with common issues of the community. This informal council is highly received by residents and even people get introduction letters for the governmental bodies when they need them[45]. In new communities, such a council is only responsible for mosque affairs and not for community issues. As Bardasht is a relatively old community, the council is powerful enough to deal with both affairs, of the mosque and the community. Meanwhile, as a result of a project to reduce poverty, these local councillors have established a centre for local development (located in the mosque) in 2008. Through this project, they have been able to contact the governmental offices and departments to follow up on problems raised to them by the community. The councillors have, in fact, been successful in following up certain community demands. In this regard, the local council has acted like a demand articulator.

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[45] Generally, the stamp of the community council is credible, particularly when a citizen plans to claim something from a governmental body.

The establishment of councils in towns and villages is a significant political step in permitting Kurd citizens to be involved in the administration of their own towns or villages. In fact, this is the first time that representatives elected by Kurdish people can be involved as councillors. Of course, since the Revolution, all Kurdish constituencies could elect their own candidates; therefore, the Parliament was open to them. However, they were not appointed to high positions in the executive or the judiciary. That is why the councils created an opportunity for the Kurdish people to be elected as members.

In Kurdistan, the councils have appointed mayors from among the Kurds. This is the first time that Kurds have held such positions. Prior to this, there was an unwritten rule that the person selected by the council for this position should be a non-Kurd. This meant that the Kurds had to be controlled and the system could not find trustful persons among members of this ethnic group. But the approach has recently changed and all mayors in Kurdistan Province are Kurd. This has to be regarded as a political success for the Kurds. Meanwhile, and this point has to be emphasized, mayors selected by the council in the central city of each province have to be accepted by the Minister of Interior (in Tehran), while those mayors proposed by the councils from other towns of a province, have to be accepted by the Governor General of the Province[46]. Both the Minister of Interior and the Governor General of the Province are non-Kurd, but they have approved Kurd mayors[47]. It should be reminded that other important political positions belong to non-Kurds selected by the central power in Tehran.

The reason for such lack of trust toward the Kurds goes back to the early Revolution days, when some Kurdish political parties entered in real armed conflicts with the ruling power demanding political autonomy in Kurdistan. Those in power believed that such

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[46] Paragraph 3 of the Article 71 of the Law Regarding the Organization, Duties and Elections of Islamic Councils and Appointment of Mayors reads as follow: Appointment of mayors in cities with a population of more than two hundred thousand as well as the province centres will be through the proposal of the city council and the order of the Minister of Interior and in other towns will be through the proposal of the city council and the order of the Governor General of the Province.

[47] For instance, the mayors of the first three populated cities (Baneh, Marivan and Saghez) after Sanandaj are from their own cities (Nejad Jahani, the mayor of Baneh since 2006; Mohammad Ali Baghani, the mayor of Marivan; and Osman Rahimi the mayor of Saghez, are all Kurd citizens from their own cities; as of 22 December 2012).

conflicts were to separate Kurdistan from Iran or that the Kurds were trying to create the country of Kurdistan and that was why the armed forces controlled the whole province. When the war between Iran and Iraq broke out, such conflicts gradually decreased, primarily because the Kurds in Iraq were against the Iraqi ruling regime; they therefore supported the Iranian government.

This change was not only for Kurdistan province. It happened in Sistan and Baluchestan province too. In that province, Baluch people had never been permitted to hold political positions, but at the present time, mayors are Baluch. In fact, the councils have exerted pressure on the Minister of Interior or the Province Governor General (Ostandar) to approve only local mayors who not only know the city's problems, but can establish better communication with local people. Prior to this, the mayors in Sistan and Baluchestan were mostly from Sistan but now all Baluchestan towns have their own Baluch mayors. The Baluch people are another ethno-religious minority group in Iran.

Like other provinces, a council of the Kurdistan Province, with the selected members from the urban councils of the province, has been established. This council has a monitoring and coordination role and therefore its decisions can be analysed to better understand the status of the councils. The council has emphasized the cooperation of governmental bodies with the urban councils; for instance Paragraph Six of its Seventh Session requests the Governor General of Kurdistan Province to emphasize the cooperation of other governmental bodies with councils based on the agreements of the Higher Council of Provinces with the Ministries. This means that if councils are there to realize a policy of decentralization, then they have to influence the policies of those governmental departments that provide the citizens with services. However, these councils are only dependent entities of the municipality that are merely limited to certain municipal duties. That is why the Council of Kurdistan Province has requested the Province Governor General to give more emphasis to the cooperation of the

governmental bodies with the councils in the province. In fact, in this case, the two aspects of decentralization are: 1) the membership of the Council of the Kurdistan Province in the Planning Committee of the Province, since this committee can decide on the projects at the provincial level; and 2) the cooperation of the governmental bodies at the provincial level with the urban councils. If the policies are decided at the centre, then councils do not have any role in the orientation of the policies towards the demands of the people.
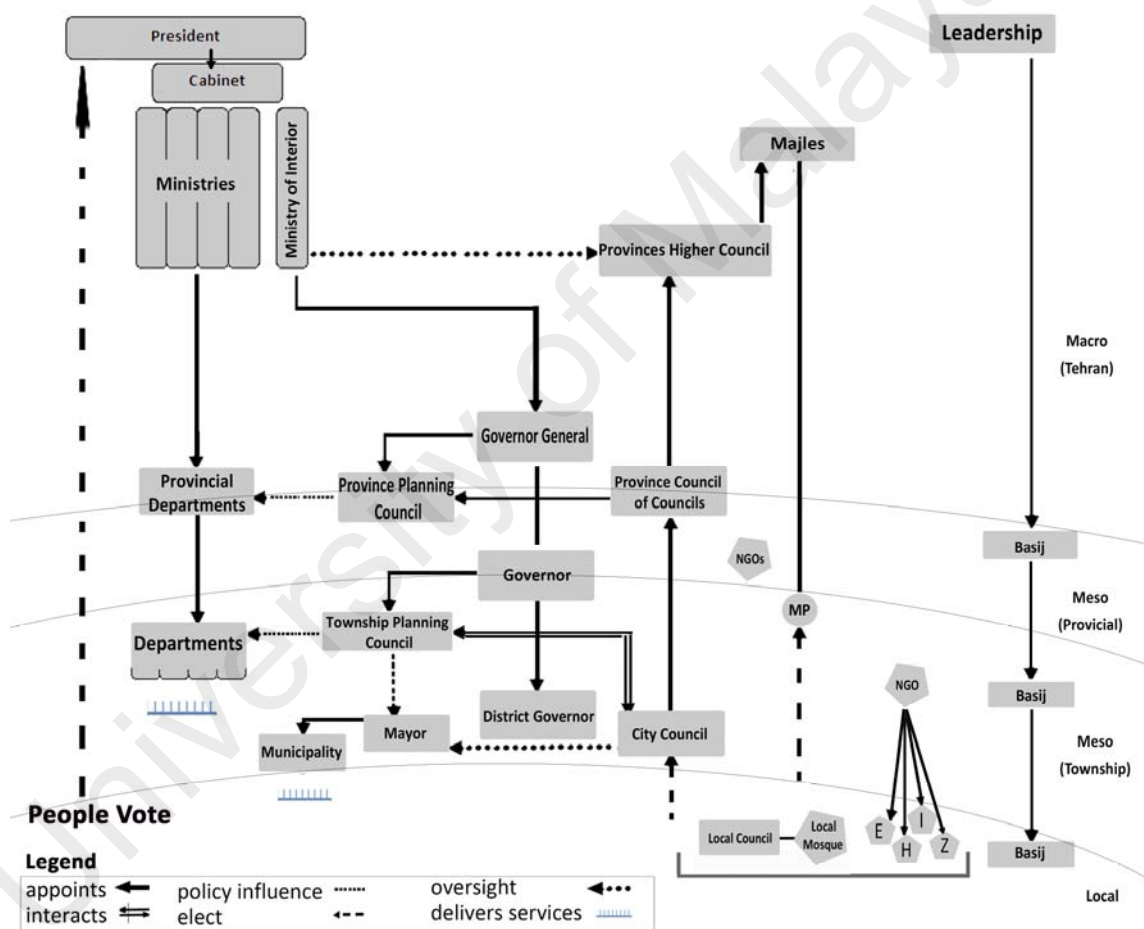
Figure 4.3: Bardasht and the system (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

The local council in Bardasht has access to the Sanandaj council but still they believe that the city council cooperates with them in providing any support for them. The problem is that the other governmental departments do not respect the city council. The councillors are invited to most of the seminars and events organized by the

governmental departments, but they cannot take decisions on activities related to the other departments. In fact, this means that the city council acts like a "separate island", not connected to the other parts of the system, while it is only related to municipality with certain limited services.

Meanwhile, decisions taken by the city council are mostly developmental[48] rather than community-based, and therefore, the life of people in Bardasht has not been influenced by the decisions taken by the Sanandaj Council. Of course, the people in Bardasht can boast of their beautiful Sanandaj since development decisions are changing the city. However, these are politico-economic policies decided by the government in the centre that affects the life of the people in that community.

The council does not have a community-based approach to the city. They have only focused on common problems of the whole city like the streets. For them, there is no difference between the poor and rich parts of the city. At the present time, streets have been repaired, the entrance of the city has been designed with flowers, most parks have been equipped with sports tools and some new construction plans to facilitate access to the city have been started. Most water channels have been repaired. Some of the sidewalks have been paved with new stones. In total, the focus has been solely on the infrastructure, not on any community.

4.3.4. Inputs and outputs

The three councils at three levels have different inputs and outputs. The local council has direct inputs from the people in the form of support and demands, and its direct outputs affect the environment and the people within; however, it is weak and limited. It

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[48] In an interview, the head of the Sanandaj City Council announced that the budget of the Sanandaj Municipality is 62 per cent developmental (see the interview of Jalal Shariati on 2 May 2011). He said that the municipal budget for the previous Iranian year was 40 per cent developmental, and he wished that this would help the city to be more developed. Based on this budget, a movement to renovate the streets and alleys of the city commenced.

is important to add that people in local community trust their council. The local council receives and categorizes demands (see Figure 4.4). At this level, the demands are distributive (distribution of services) and people look for a better life. While the elective council at the city level has direct inputs from the municipality rather than from the people or even the system, the outputs are certain common grounds at the general urban level. Although citizens enjoy the outputs provided by the city council, he or she may not be satisfied since the councillors are not responding their demands at the local level. The city council may receive individual demands or complaints.

The council at the provincial level has its inputs from the councils but its outputs affect possibly the general policies of the province. From a systematic point of view, the councils are not acting as sub-systems while this council is reproducing the same behaviour of the macro system in Tehran. The connection between the demands at the local level (inputs) and the decision-making black box is not established while their outputs affect the whole society.

It is important to add that the city council in Sanandaj acts like a part of the civil society (as if it is not part of the system). The council receives people's support and at least in the case of selecting a local mayor, the council has tried to move towards devolution of power, giving more powers to local people. While the local council and the city council receive demands, there is a filter between the departments at the provincial level as well as the higher levels. This means that the demands are not received or if received, only selected demands based on the priorities of the government are received (see Figure 4.4). Meanwhile, if the people participate in voting (to support the system), they only vote for the qualified candidates approved by the system.
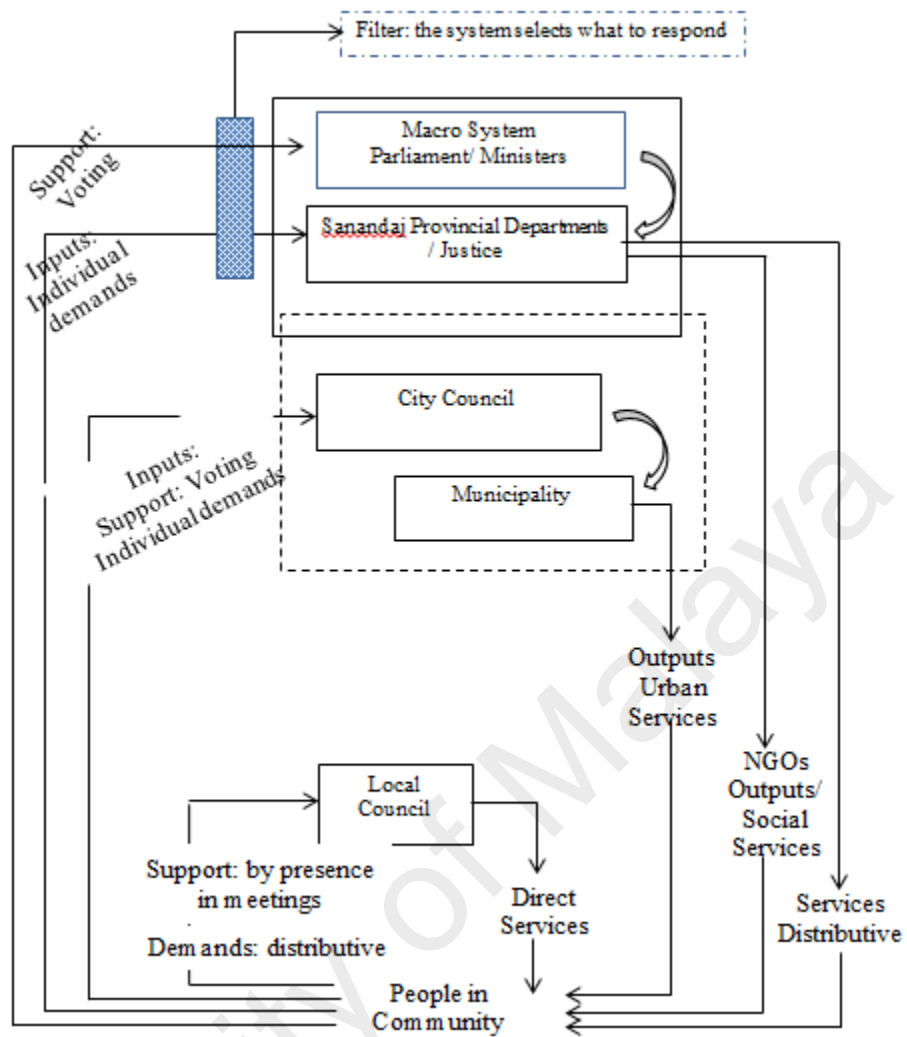
Figure 4.4: Bardasht - Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

4.4. Case study: Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee

4.4.1. Introduction

Mahaleh Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee is a poor community in Kiashahr[49]. Kiashahr is a small town under the supervision of the township (Farmandari) of Astaneh Ashrafieh[50], a town in Guilan Province, in the north of Iran[51].

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[49] Kiashahr has been spelled in English as Kiya Shahr, and it is known as Bandar Kiashahr, or Kisahshr port.

[50] Astaneh Ashrafieh, or Astaneh-e Ashrafiyyeh, is a town close to Rasht. It is a religious city since the mausoleum of Seyed Jalal od-Din Ashraf, Imam Reza's brother, is located over there. As Iranians are Shia followers, they love Imam Reza (the 8th Imam) and therefore, his family members are important to them too.

[51] Astaneh Ashrafieh, Kiashahr and the villages close to these two towns make one township (Shahrestan) of which the centre is Astaneh Ashrafieh.

Kiashahr has four communities: Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee (or Bala Mahaleh or KSR), Koo-ye Imam (or Mian Mahaleh), Koo-ye Shahid Beheshti (or Turk Malaleh) and the town centre. Residents of Koo-ye Shahid Rajaee are fishermen who are always in conflict with the Department of Environment and the sea guards for their illegal fishing in the estuaries of Sepidrud River. Koo-ye Imam is also a poor community and the residents are workers in orchards or farms or even seasonal workers. The town centre is mostly a market with its shops and the government buildings. Turk Mahaleh is a community of migrated Turks.

KSR has a population of 312 households (about 1,070 people) which is a small community in comparison with the whole town that has 4,071 households (about 13,772 people)[52]. The unemployment rate in KSR among men aged 15-24 is 19.7 per cent which is two per cent more in comparison with the youth unemployment in Kiashahr. Most of the male population are involved in fishing and only less than five per cent are involved in agriculture (mostly rice-cultivation[53]).

Kiashahr is an important town for three major reasons: 1) fishing; 2) National Park of Boujagh; and 3) agricultural production such as peanuts and rice. Fishing is mostly done in three ways: National Fishery Company (or Shilat), Fishing Cooperatives (Pareh-daran); and independent trappers. The Fishery Company and the cooperatives work on pre-planned fishery in defined areas, while independent trappers act based on their own personal initiatives. These fishermen require permissions from the Fishery Company (which is a governmental body). Illegal fishermen, mostly those residing in KSR, do not request for permission, and they continue their local way of trappings as they have extensive access to the sea and the Sepidrud Delta to trap caviar fish[54].

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[52] These figures belong to the National Demographic Census of 2006 (taken from the website of the Centre of Iran Statistics).

[53] It has been claimed that Kiashahr rice is one of the best; however, it is mostly sold in the name of Astaneh.

[54] Kiashahr caviar has gained international fame.

The National Park of Boujagh[55] was announced by the Department of Environment as a protected area in 2002. It is in fact an important site for migrant birds during the winter and the visitors rush to Kiashahr for bird watching. At the same time, this has affected people's livelihood in Kiashahr, especially KSR fishermen who depend on Sepidrud Delta as the river passes through the National Park. Since it is a National Park, there have been certain restrictions on illegal fishermen's access to the Delta. The fishermen have continued their fishing, and each year, the conflicts arise between fishermen and the guards of the National Park when the fishing season starts. Sometimes, they are stopped by the Fishery Guards (or as they are called Sea Guards). The fishermen always complain about these limitations.

4.4.2. Historical Background

Kiashahr is an old town. It was once a small village in the estuaries of Sepidrud (White River) entering the Caspian Sea, a great lake located in the north of Iran. Gradually, the Turks were migrated forcefully to this place during the Reza Shah period and a town was formed. Russians who came to Kiashahr following the fishing concession[56] in 1927 remained, even after the concession was removed in 1953.

Kiashahr was first a village called Hassan Kiadeh, but when it was upgraded to the status of a town, it was called Bandar-e Farahnaz (after the princess Farahnaz) in 1965. As a result of Shah's wife visit to the port in 1976, the road between Astaneh and Kiashahr was asphalted and the port was connected to the national telephone system. After the 1979 Revolution, its name was changed into Kiashahr.

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[55] Boujagh is an invaluable site for birds. Out of 519 bird species identified in Iran, 242 species live in Boujagh (whether permanently or temporary during the winter migration). Boujagh is also the only site of winter migration for Caspian seals.

[56] The fishing concession (see Mamedov, 2001) which was provided by Iran under the Agreement on Development of the Fishing Resources of the Southern Coast of Caspian Sea (concluded on the first of October 1927) was much more lucrative for the Russians since it was like a monopoly for the Soviets in the Southern part of the Caspian Sea. One of the best caviar was produced in Kiashahr in that time. The concession remained for twenty-five years and expired in January 1953. Mossadegh, the nationalist prime-minister at that time, informed the Soviets that the concession would not be renewed.

4.4.3. The Council

In KSR, there is no local council or neighbourhood council. In fact, this community, like the other three communities, is under the supervision of the Kiashahr council. The members of the council are elected by the direct votes of Kiashahr residents.

The people in Kiashahr believe that it has enough potential to be a town and it has to be promoted to a higher level in administration. Attempts to promote Kiashahr into a Shahrestan (with a township office) have been hampered until now[57]. Others mentioned that if the people in KSR are still poor, it is because this town has been "kept" underdeveloped. They claimed that "Kiashahr is only a big village" and that is because Astaneh does not want Kiashahr to become a powerful neighbouring town to compete with Astaneh. As mentioned before, Kiashahr is a "bakhsh" or District covering certain villages around it.

The most important administrative departments are based in Astaneh. There are, of course, the two departments of education and fishery[58], but other departments, especially electricity, gas, telephone, social security and telecommunication are all located in Astaneh. Some of them, like Behzisti (Welfare Organization) and Physical Education have only a representative office in Kiashahr without any decision-taking capacity. During the Shah Monarchy, Kiashahr had a better status with certain administrative departments.

It is also important to add that the town is in a mutual constituency with Astaneh. This means that both Kiashahr and Astaneh have one representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, or Majles (Parliament). More important is that the person who

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[57] See the related speeches of Seyed Mehdi Sadegh, the previous 8th Majles Representative from Astaneh and Kiashahr. The new representative is not following the plan to promote Kiashahr to a Shahrestan.

[58] The Fishery Department was established in 2011. Before that, Kiashahr fishermen had to go to Astaneh to get their fishing permissions.

is always elected to the Majles is from Astaneh, except for the first run when the elected Member of Parliament (MP) was from Kiashahr. The MP has an office in Kiashahr, and he is available to meet his constituents on certain days every month. Since he should evidently have better relations with the people in Astaneh, this has created tensions between Astaneh and Kiashahr.

Such political domination of Kiashahr by Astaneh has affected the councillors and their decisions in Kiashahr, especially when it comes to issues such as the appointment of this town's mayor. All mayors selected by the Kiashahr council have not been from this town, and this proves that they have been under the influence of the policies by Astaneh. People in Kiashahr believe that mayors have to be from Kiashahr, and when a mayor is not from the town, this means that he does not have the same sensitivity of the citizens over there. People are astonished why the council in Kiashahr has to appoint a mayor that is not from Kiashahr.

Meanwhile, the councillors seem to be mostly affected by what happens in Astaneh. However, when decisions of the Kiashahr council are analysed, it is found that during a period of two years, the Kiashahr council had 18 decisions out of which 13 have been initiated by the Kiashahr Municipality, three by the governor and two based on the people's demands. The council is mostly a municipal council which means it only deals with the issues related to the municipality and does not decide on people's issues. At the same time, it seems that the council is not powerful enough to carry out whatever the people demand. The council has certain contacts in each community with an aim to study the people's demands while KSR has no representatives to be in contact with the council.

4.4.4. Community-based organizations

In KSR, there are two local groups. The first is an active Narcotics Anonymous (NA) group established by a group of recovered drug addicts. They act as a branch of the National Narcotics Anonymous organization. Although the group has been under some pressure by the local authorities due to the fact that NA accepts no support from the government, their weekly meetings have been regularly held in Kiashahr Forest Park. The second group, the Hazrat Zeinab, is a cooperative established by women involved in informal training of pre-marriage skills for young couples.

There is a self-help group of women-headed households called the Ghasr Sadaf Morvarid, and located in the town centre but not in KSR, established by the Behzisti (Welfare Organization) with an aim to empower their members. A member of the group is from KSR, and the group is involved in preparing and selling food stuff. From the theoretical point of view, this self-help group should be able to become an independent group with empowered members, but in fact it is still dependent on the Behzisti.

There is also a cooperative in Kiashahr called the Ehyagaran Boujagh which is involved in recycling. This group is an outcome of the Healthy Town project of Kiashahr, implemented by an NGO in Rasht called the Sabzkaran Guilan. This group has been active in KSR too, and two of the board members are from this town. The Municipality did not support the group when it was first established. Subsequently, however, it has obtained the support of the municipality since it is a project supported by the Small Grant Programme of the Global Environmental Facility (SGP/GEF). The NGO from the Rasht held meetings with the Mayor and the councillors to persuade them to support the people of KSR. The town council is not very active in Kiashahr, and sometimes they are only active in adopting the policies or decisions dictated by the Municipality.

Another local group established in Kiashahr is the Institute of the Pishgaman Mohit Zist Kiashahr. This environmental group has been shaped as part of the project to protect the Siberian Crane. The group organizes periodic cleaning programmes in Boujagh Park. But the capacity of the Institute to institute real change is very limited. In fact, the capacity of the Department of Environment in Astaneh to protect the environment is also limited and it cannot support the group in Kiashahr; therefore, the group did not grow and remained a local group with limited resources.

4.4.5. The system

Figure 4.5 reveals the relationships of the institutions in Kiashahr, from the local level in KSR to Kiashahr, Astaneh and Rasht and up to the macro level in Tehran.
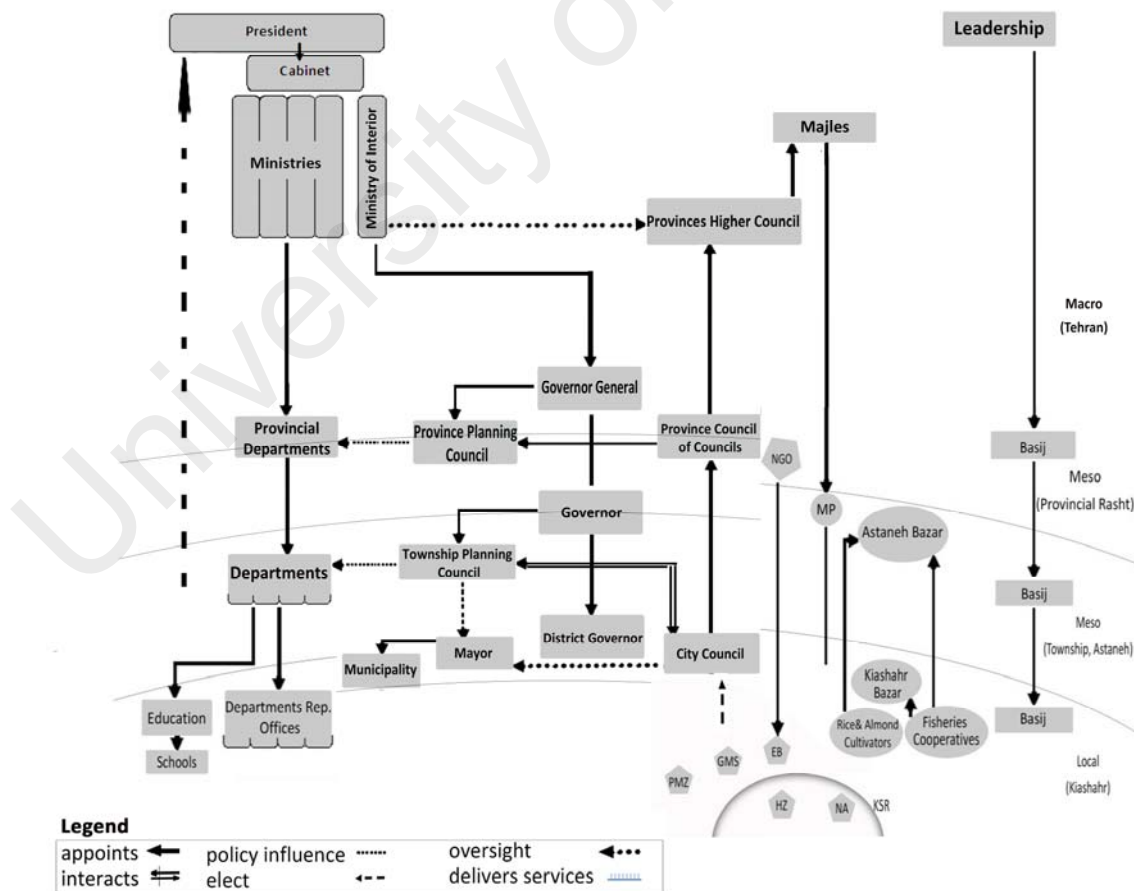
Figure 4.5: KSR and the system (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

What is obvious from Figure 4.5 is that those groups in Kiashahr are like small islands separated from the whole system. They have no input for the council in Kiashahr or other governmental departments. The council is inclined primarily towards the institutions outside Kiashahr; possibly the councillors are looking for "money" and "facilities" in Astaneh where part of decisions are taken or in Rasht where more decisions are taken. Even the Kiashahr Bazaar has a big competitor in Astaneh and that is why the farmers and fishermen are connected to Astaneh Bazaar too. The real inputs for the council come from the municipality's demands or from the information or decisions taken outside Kiashahr. The outputs are the plans and the projects with certain interests for the elites. Meanwhile, Kiashahr, and even Astaneh, have no representative on the Provincial Council and therefore, their voice is not reflected over there, and thus the council in Kiashahr is more like an island.

Such non-connection and as a result the existing lack of budget has kept Kiashahr "underdeveloped", like a village, while the councillors do not have the same power as a village council (village councillors have more powers). It reveals another significant point that the councils at the district level are facing: major problems due to the fact they are under pressure from upper-level councillors or decision-makers or are a victim of competition at the upper-level town.

It is true that Kiashahr has a council as a result of decentralization policies. However, the process of decentralization in Kiashahr has created an island, or even islands, without a systematic connection with the people or the system at the upper levels. Meanwhile, the people in Kiashahr do not see any changes in their life. It is true that the councillors are elected by the people, but the councillors without power are not capable enough to change the environment for the sake of the people.

4.4.6. Inputs and outputs

The council in Kiashahr seems to act like a separate island; it is detached and disconnected from the system. This is possibly because Kiashahr is a "district" and suffers from the rivalry with Astaneh Ashrafieh which has the upper hand in the administration system.

Individual demands and complaints may be submitted to the council, and the council may study them. However, the council is not an implementing body; this is only the municipality that listens to the council. However, the municipality is limited to urban services while in certain cases, it will enter into social issues such as planning and implementing social activities for attracting tourists to the town in the summer.

A careful scrutiny of Figure 4.6 indicates that people's demands are not followed, but still people vote for the system through the existing filter. The feedback loop is not complete since the connection between the council at the local level and the council in Astaneh are disconnected (due to the existing rivalry). There is a loop inside the community but this loop is not strong enough to respond the demands. However, in various elections, people are requested to vote for the candidates, to provide support for the system. It has to be added that they cannot vote for any person since the candidate has to be approved by the system. Therefore, there is a filter here. Meanwhile, even simple individual demands have to pass through the filter. At least in one case, when the local women wanted to register their own cooperative, their request was rejected at the first instance (in the related department in Astaneh) for the simple reason that they are illiterate. Then, they followed up with their case in Rasht (a higher level) and again they were not successful in registering their cooperative. Later, through the pressure applied by one NGO in Rasht, these women were able to follow through on their demand. With certain changes in the form of their cooperative, it was registered.

This case and many similar cases show that the loop of the inputs (policies) and the outputs (demands) are not related (see Figure 4.6).
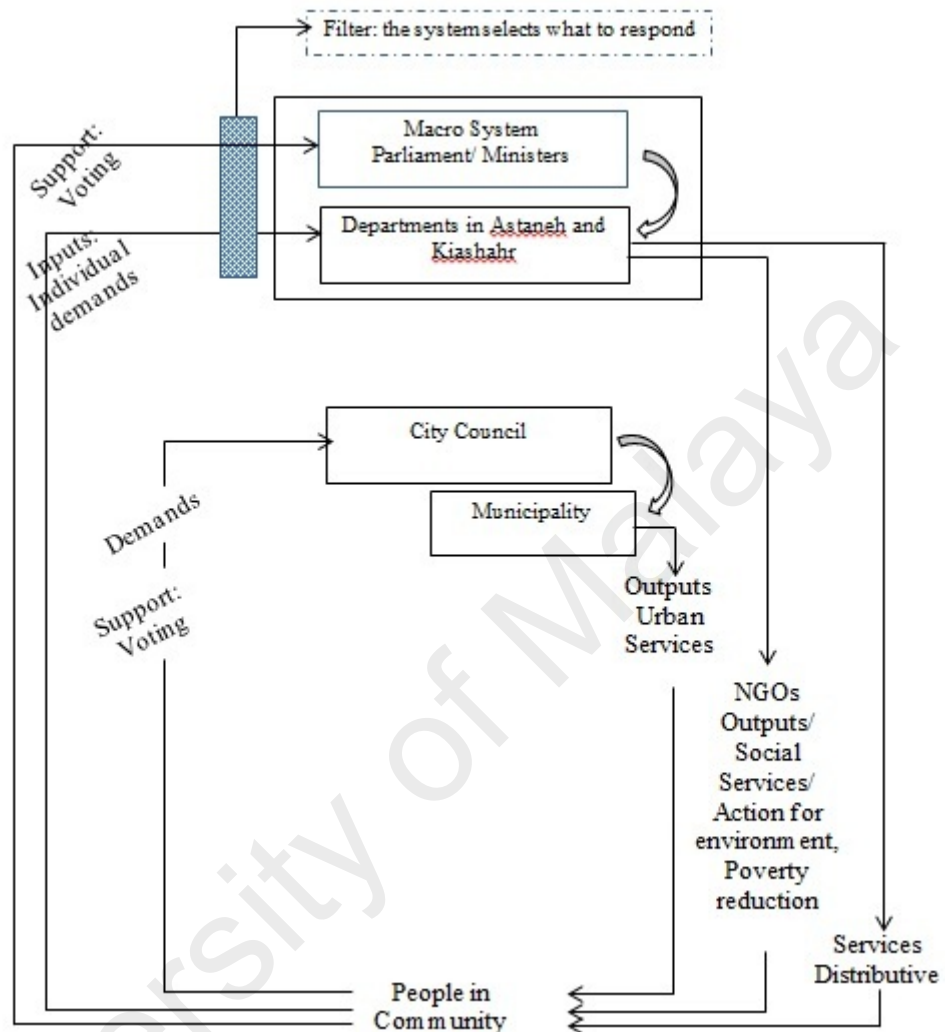
Figure 4.6: KSR and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

4.5. Case study: Salemi Yek

4.5.1. Introduction

Salemi Yek, or Salemi One, is a small community in Islamabad in Roudbar County located in the Southern part of Kerman province[59]. The whole county of Roudbar is

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[59] Kerman, the second largest province with a population of three million, is in the south-east of Iran and its centre is Kerman.

considered a poor region[60]; most of the people are farmers. Before the Revolution, Roudbar had been just a rural area, the site of different tribes who gradually selected this county as their place of residence. Roudbar or as some people say Roudbar Jonoub[61] (or South Roudbar) became a township in 2005 (at the end of the eighth government). The centre of this township is Islamabad which was once a village called *Mish padam*. Although its name is Islamabad, it is called Roudbar too. It is a new town while it is still like an enlarged village. People feel that they have got their independence from Jiroft which is the centre of agricultural activities in Kerman province. The civilization of Roudbar is one of the oldest and came into existence concurrent with Mesopotamia and Jiroft[62] civilizations.

Roudbar is composed of eight communities (mahaleh). A poverty reduction project has been implemented since 2010 by an NGO with the support of the government (Welfare Ministry) and with the cooperation of local groups in four communities in Roudbar: Salemi Yek, Salemi Do, Imam Khomeini, and Shahrak-e-Enghelab[63]. The project aimed to shape small groups of interested people in each community and empower them so that they could enter a participatory decision-making process to change their community by encouraging people's participation. The groups had to be in communication with the town council and the councillors so that they could draw the attention of the mayor and the municipality to the projects they wanted to implement in the community to reduce poverty. The whole project had to increase local capacities.

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[60] Kerman is also considered a poor province; Nosratabadi et al. have done a research on poverty in urban and rural areas of the province and have shown that poverty reduction policies have not been implemented in a sustainable way and therefore, there have not been satisfactory results (Nosratabadi et al., 2011).

[61] As there are two Roudbar towns in Iran, the one in the south is called Roudbar Jonoub. In this thesis, whenever "Roudbar" is discussed, it refers to Roudbar Jonoub, or South Roudbar.

[62] The Jiroft civilization goes back to the Bronze Age. This could be important because it was once located between the Indus Valley civilization in the east and the Elamite in the West. For more information, see Lawle (2003).

[63] This paragraph has been taken from the unofficial report of Fereshtegan Social Work Clinic in Bam which is the implementing body of the project in Roudbar.

Tribal life still exists in Roudbar[64]. Salemi is among the major tribes of the town. That is why there are two communities with the name of Salemi in the town; however, Salemi members live in other communities too. Tribes play a major role in the life of people, especially when issues such as maintaining security are considered. There have been tensions between tribes that have ended in violence[65]. Although they are now residing in a city, they were once pastoral nomads or were living in villages earning their life through agricultural activities.

4.5.2. The Council and its challenges

The town council is composed of the members of Salemi family. The mayor selected by the council is also from Salemi tribe. In fact, Salemi has a larger population in the city in comparison with the other tribes. They have an active network and support their members. There is a strong relationship between ethnicity and political administration of the town. The Salemi tribe has been a political tribe since 1963. It was reported that they participated in the uprising in that year against the Shah regime. Meanwhile, they have fought against the Khans before the Revolution and have requested for more land, especially during the land reform. They have been among the participating tribes during the 1979 Revolution and, therefore, they have been trying to obtain a share in political power. When Roudbar became a town, the Salemi tribe did try to play a major role in the political administration of the town and the council could be a suitable place for them to move forward.

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[64] Among the tribes, we can refer to Maleki, Mahimi and Shambooee (in the east of Roudbar), Salemi (in the centre) and Barahoui in Tammiri village, Reissi in north eastern of Roudbar (comprising families of Reissi, Javidan and Dadkhodaee), and the Faramarzi tribe at the end of Roudbar in borderline mountains of Namdad. Other tribes are Narouee, Bameri, Saleki, Sabeghi, Sohrabi, Zaboli, Darvishi, Hajeb, Falahi and Khavari. This data has been taken from the official website of Roudbar township (Office of Governor General of Roudbar) - http://roodbar.kr.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3:1387-10-15-14-11-09 (extracted on 10 January 2013). Most of the tribes are no longer nomads. Only the Tayari Tribe moves between pastures, from one place to another.

[65] In October 2012, a seminar was organized by the Governor's office to promote friendship among the tribes. Most of tribal heads were invited to the seminar. See the following link for more information: http://kerman.irib.ir/news/socialnews/14231-1391-07-10-04-46-37 (visited on 20 December 2012).

Two communities, Salemi Yek and Salemi Do, are located in the marginal part of the town and are separated by a seasonal river which is now dry due to the recent drought. In Salemi Yek, most of the streets are not paved. In certain places, people have built small houses for themselves using the loan from the governmental banks while still they have their own "Kapar" in the yard. It is important to remember that these people were once called "Kaparneshinan", meaning those living in Kapar. Kapar is a form of one-room circular structure which has been built by the people living in the southern part of Iran. It is made of the leaves of palm trees woven into each other. This form of house construction is very effective in keeping homes habitable during the warm weather. However, Kapars are vulnerable houses and heavy rains, wind and storms can destroy them; it does not let the natural light come in and it does not have a good ventilation system; meanwhile, snakes or scorpions might crawl in the Kapar. There is also the danger of fires. The leaves dry and after some time they might break and that is why they have to be rebuilt or renovated after three or four years. Therefore, experts of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, the major governmental charity organization, decided to implement a project of Kapar elimination in the southern part of Kerman province in 2005; the aim was to build houses for poor people. Loans were provided by the governmental banks to offer people an opportunity to build houses for themselves. The project helped the people to build their houses but it did not increase their income since they had to return the loan to the banks. This project has changed the total appearance of the region. Kapar, as a sign of poverty, was removed without a change in improving the livelihood of the people. In fact, people's sources of revenue to improve their living conditions have not been fully considered by the decision-makers in Tehran.

It has been reported that dozens of houses have been built but still there are people living in Kapars. In certain cases, while some people are in new houses, they have built their own Kapars inside the yard of the house or in front of it. This means that, for

them, Kapar is a part of their culture that cannot be easily eliminated. In Roudbar, Kapars are decreasing these days. However, in general, the life style of the residents in Salemi Yek is mostly rural; some people even have goats in their houses. About 25 per cent of the population is illiterate though there are young educated people in the community too. The established group for the poverty reduction project is composed of young educated people and these people are supporting a change in their own community.

At the provincial level, the introduction of a Steering Staff in south Kerman was another strategic measure to decrease poverty in this part of the country. The role of the Staff is to try and find solutions for water supply which is a major problem in the region for the simple reason of droughts and lack of a network of drinking water. 60 per cent of the villages in Roudbar lack drinking water. Most people use the existing unhealthy water from the natural springs and wells[66]. Meanwhile, the level of water has decreased in the traditional underground channels (Qanats). There is a belief among residents that Jiroft is using most of water resources in Kerman due to the different dams that have been built upper stream. Therefore, "access to water" has changed into one major problem in this town and the nearby villages. Shokri writes that drought in this part of the country has affected negatively on pastures and ranges, livestock, agricultural crops and gardens and it has led to increased desertification and saline-water intrusion (Shokri, 2011). Decisions regarding how to deal with the droughts could be the responsibility of the government at the macro level (for example, deciding to give loans through the governmental banks to help the affected people or even improving the infrastructure to ensure adequate supply water), or the responsibility of leaders at the provincial level (for example, to strengthen entrepreneurship activities). Mostly decisions are not helpful; they are superficial and temporary, and more important, the people who are

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[66] http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/1355147

affected by the on-going drought have no voice in decision-making bodies in Kerman. The councillors in Roudbar have a good relationship with people, but the council is too weak to do something regarding the drought; the most important reason could be the limited budget of the municipality. The councillors have welcomed the government-funded poverty reduction project in the town and have attended related meetings in the hope that this project may change the people's life. The role of the councillors have not been recognized yet.

Access to a higher level council at the provincial level is much more strategic for the councillors in Roudbar since it will help them to follow-up on their problems at a higher level through the connections that the provincial council may create. However, they have no representation at this level (see Figure 4.7). Meanwhile decisions taken by the Provincial Council affect the council in Roudbar and the people living in Salemi Yek. Therefore, there is no feedback loop here and the demands that the local council in Roudbar receives from the people cannot be articulated to the Provincial Council in Kerman.
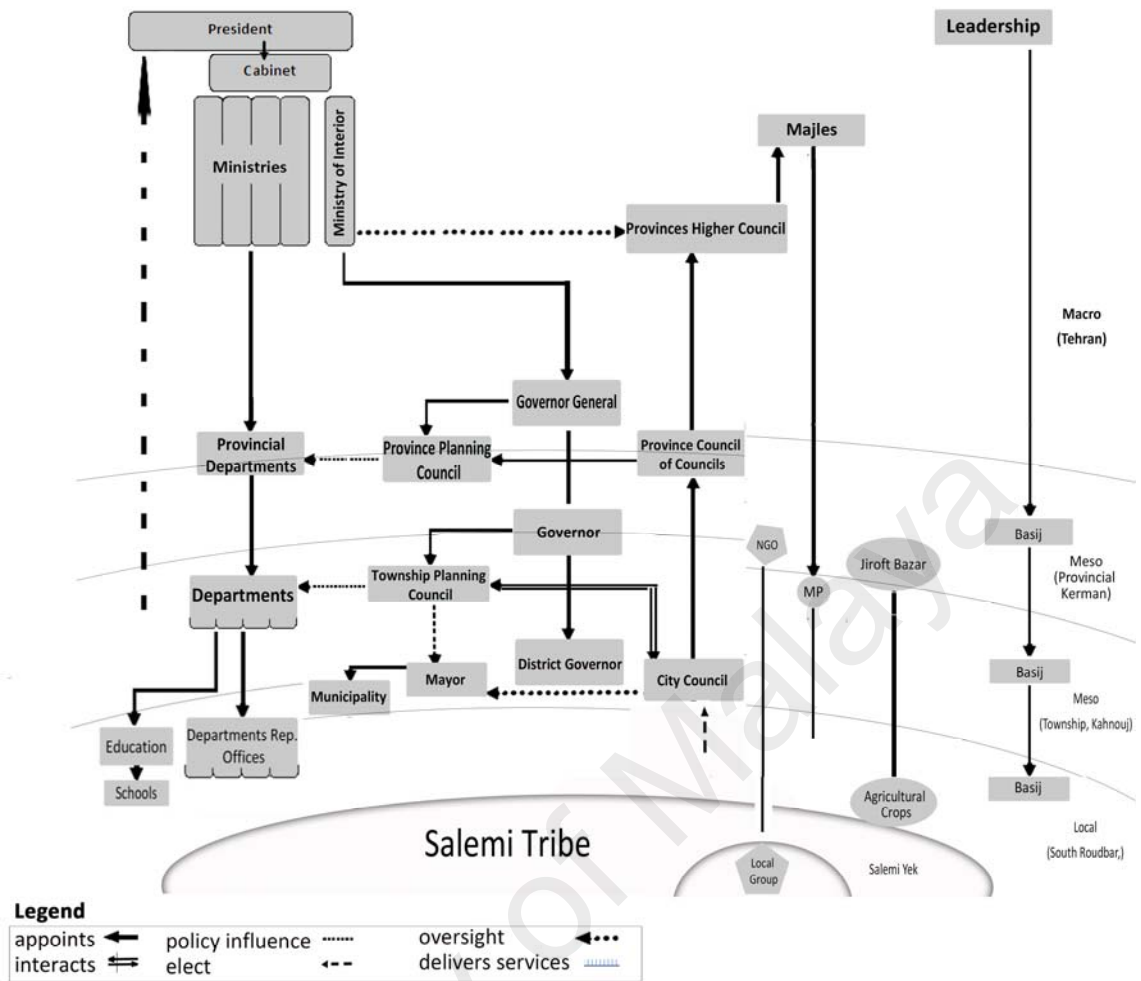
Figure 4.7: Salemi and the System (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

In fact, there is a decentralized system as Figure 4.7 indicates, but it is not at the community level, and works mostly at provincial level which is still far from the communities. This means that certain decisions are taken in Kerman (and not in Tehran) which further indicates that part of the responsibilities have been delegated to the authorities at the provincial level but not those at local level. Meanwhile, it is not obvious whether those in the provinces can take any decision which is non-consistent with the decisions taken at the macro level. Such practices have not yet been observed. It appears that the same practices that the system at the macro-level are following are replicated at the provincial level. Inevitably, the inputs for the Province Council are

from the higher system while the inputs for the council in Roudbar are from the Province Council.

4.5.3. Inputs and Outputs

The input-output loops can be easily marked in the community in two forms: the local group that works in a participatory manner, and the tribal loop, since it forms part of the identity of the people in the community. The interaction is alive and a loop is evident indicating a connection between people's support and the tribe's services as well as the group's services (see Figure 4.8). However, the scale of such services is very limited, due to the limited vision and scope of these two structures. At the same time, the Municipality offers urban services and some NGOs (for example, the clinic from Jiroft and the Farhikhteh Empowerment Society from Ardebil) offer certain social and empowerment services (outputs) to empower people in the community (see Figure 4.8).
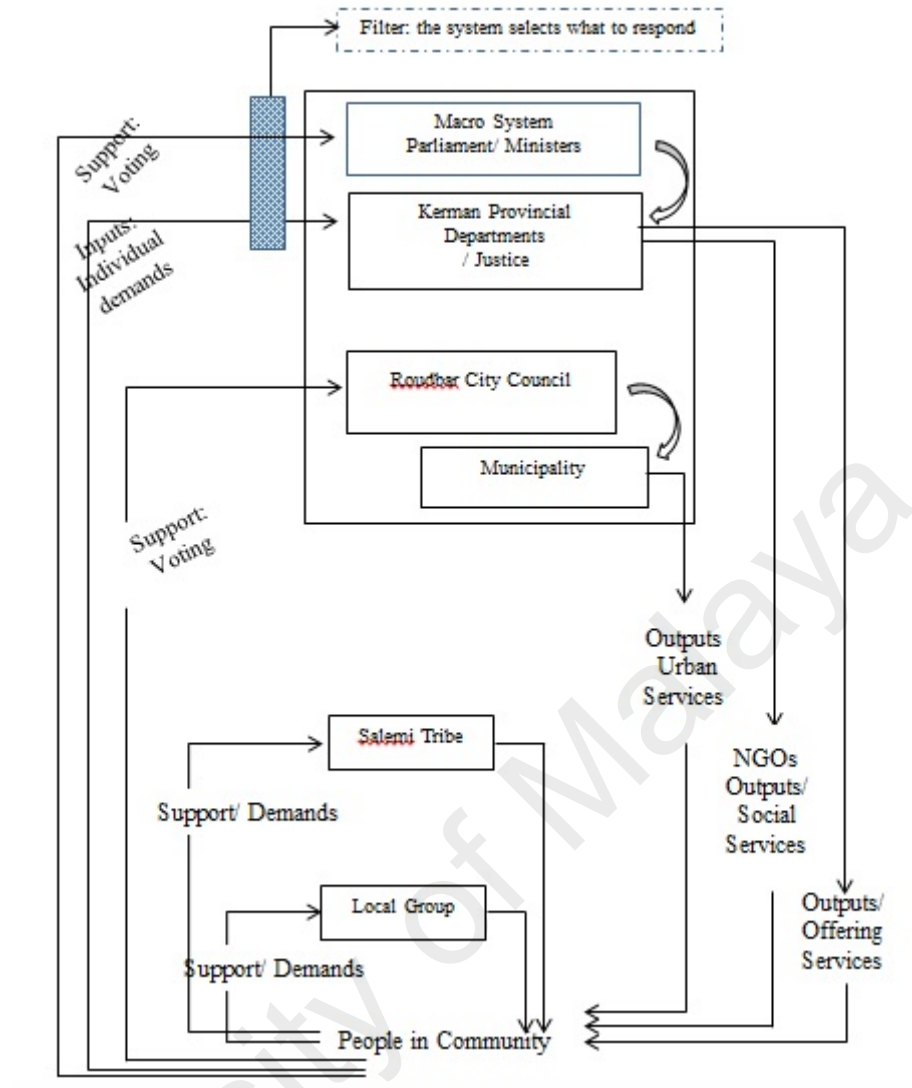
Figure 4.8: Salemi and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Drawn by the Researcher)

The system does not receive the demands as inputs; they cannot easily pass from the filter since the system selects what to respond. Mostly the individual demands are received. This means that the feedback loop is not complete.
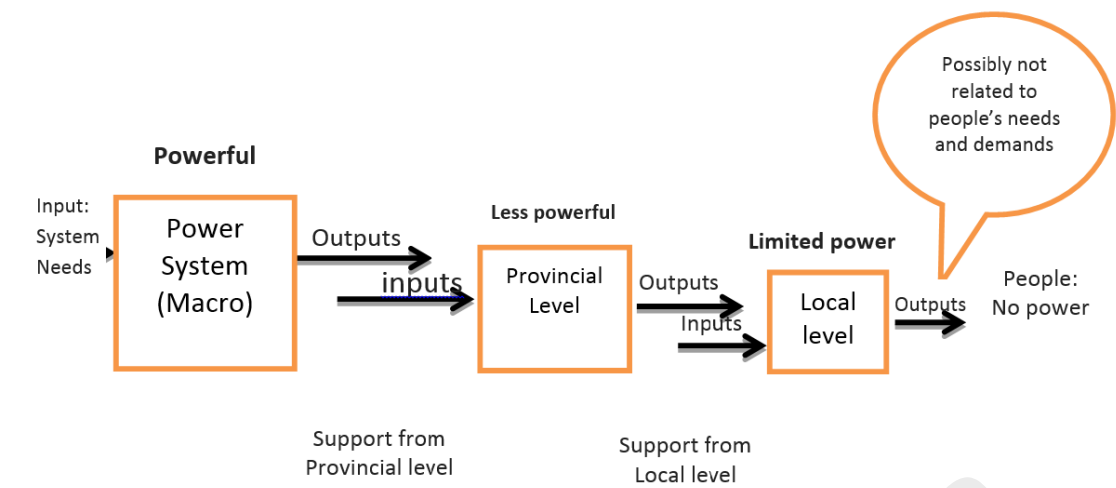
Figure 4.9: Inputs and outputs and the power hierarchy (Source: Designed by the researcher)

Figure 4.9 illustrates the way the system has decentralized itself. It has devolved some power to the provincial level, but at the same time wants its support. The inputs for the system to decide at the macro level are not based on the demands of the people in the communities but from the need to survive. The system's outputs at the macro level change into the inputs for the system at the provincial level. They need such inputs to make decisions. The provincial level has given some limited power to the local level while it demands its support too – exactly a replication of what the system does at the macro level. The whole system disregards the needs and demands of those who are powerless and voiceless at the bottom. But why do the people at local level go to the ballot boxes and continue to vote for the candidates in local council or to the candidates at provincial level?

There are certain decisions that consider the general needs of the people. These are taken because the system wants to survive; they are not taken to respond exactly to people's needs and demands. As such, decisions are taken in a centralized way are only replicated in such decentralized system, primarily to suggest some devolution of power. While people's interest may be considered in the short term, this is only the system which survives in the final run. The "Kapar" elimination is a good example in the

present case study. The system has taken a decision in the people's interest (since Kapars are vulnerable to changes in the weather), disregarding the fact that "Kapars" are a cultural resource of people at local level. The people at the local level are happy since they can have easy access to loans though only effective in the short term since the loans have to be returned to the banks. The system requires the support of the people (especially the government) and such decisions guarantee people's votes. Loans may not be a viable solution but for people in that poor area, it is very important since it decreases the economic pressure on them. Examples such as the on-going subsidy system and the activities of the charity foundation of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation[67] that can be categorized as "support generators" are not sustainable but helpful in responding the urgent needs. In fact, a weak feedback loop shapes that creates the support the system needs.

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[67] The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation was founded in 1979 just one month after the Revolution as a charity organization. Its mission is to support poor families, especially in villages. It has been reported about 700,000 families are under the coverage of Rajaie plan that offers certain social security services to old people and nomads.

Chapter Five

Rural Cases

5.1. Introduction

The present chapter discusses the councils in six villages in four case studies. To understand the cases, there is a need to review the context of the villages, especially to see what exactly "a village" means in Iran. A historical review of the rural institutions and of village management is required. It is also important to know more about the general policies of the government towards villages (as the most important outputs of the system into the environment of villages).

"Roosta" is the formal word for a "village" in the Persian language. According to the existing regulations, any established group of people with a maximum population of 3,000 people is called a "roosta". There are more than 55,000 villages in Iran.

There are villages with only some households, while there are also villages with hundreds of households. There are many small-sized villages with limited agricultural production, though there are also villages with hundreds of hectares of agricultural land.

From a statistical point of view, "population" was once a major indicator to recognize the difference between a village and a town (see the Statistics of 1957 where any place with a population below 5,000 was regarded as a village). It was afterwards that other indicators such as livelihood were used. The Legal Bill of Establishing Councils of Villages and Reform of Social and Development Issues of Villages adopted on 1st September 1963 defined villages as "village (deh or gharyeh) is a population centre and a residence location of at least 250 persons or 50 families whose income is from agriculture. Meanwhile, in the Law Regarding Land Reform, the village is defined as

"a population centre and residence place and work for a group of households that are involved in agricultural activities and most of their income is from agriculture – is customarily called 'Deh' or 'Gharyeh'".

During the past fifty years, there has been a constant migration of rural inhabitants to towns and cities and this movement has not stopped. The rural population before the Revolution was about 65 per cent; based on the last census, this percentage had decreased to 31.5 per cent in 2011. As the villagers play a major role in agricultural and livestock production, improving the general status of the villages, focusing on rural development, and promotion of the quality of life of people in these areas should be regarded as a priority political strategy for the country. Such migration, if it continues, will end in having villages with no productive labour force, and this will devastate the production economy of the country.

Two factors, "bureaucracy" and "centralism", have always affected the planning for rural development, before and after the Revolution (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2007). In fact, the policy of centralism and monopoly of decision-making power has always been in the hands of the governing political regime and they have always resisted any distribution of power at lower levels of the governmental hierarchy. It is in the capital, Tehran, that all strategic decisions have been taken; the oil income has given more powers to the rich government who can act like a "father" for the whole society. At the same time, there have been political movements and interested elites since the constitutionalism to decentralize the power, though there have been limited achievements. After the 1979 Revolution, there were hopes that such a monocratic and despotic political system would change, and democracy would prevail, and a policy of decentralization would start.

The Kadkhoda institution was ended after the Revolution, and gradually a new system of Dehyari was started in 1998 (twenty years after the Revolution). Three significant

measures have to be considered as important: 1) adoption of the Law of Self-Sufficient Dehyari; 2) adoption of the Law Regarding the Accumulation of the Taxes (that gives 30 per cent of the accumulated taxes at provincial level to the villages); and 3) creating the necessary grounds for establishment of Dehyari in villages (after the elections of the councils). Such new institutions opened a new chapter in rural management. Before the Revolution, villages went through two important phases: before the land reform (where villages were in the hands of the feudal or big-land owners) and after the land reform when villages were part of the centralized system with Kadkhoda as the representative of the political system in the villages. The present system in the village is based on the "rural council" with an appointed "dehyar" as the village governor or manager. These two institutions work with other governmental institutions at the local level such as the Bonyad Maskan (Housing Foundation) and the Agricultural Jihad (the Ministry involved in policy-making and management of agriculture).

Such new structures at the local level could act as agencies of change in the villages, but as the planning system is still a centralized one, it is the government bodies at the macro level (in Tehran) and in certain issues, the planning council at the provincial level, that decide about priorities and how the budget has to be allocated. Azkia and Ghaffari (2007) review the planning system before the revolution (since 1948 to 1977) in five development programmes and their strategies for the villages and conclude that development plans often followed a pattern of industrialization while the programmes were centralized and top-down, without relying on local research and data, with a shallowness in analysis and understanding of diversity of rural units and issues; they were also non-effective in implementation (lack of responsibility among authorities); lacked appropriateness with ecological features, cultural and social structures, economic conditions and physical fabric of the rural communities, and last but not the least there was limited allocation of budget for the agriculture sector. After the Revolution, the

policies changed and more attention was given to rural development. However, the increasing number of migrants to towns and cities proves that the social and economic development patterns have not ended in rural development. Within the first development plan (1983-1987), three policies were followed: establishment of seven-member boards of land transfer (deciding how to transfer land in categories of offering national and governmental-owned barren lands; confiscated lands; barren or cultivated lands; temporary cultivation lands); encouraging cooperative production (prevention of the land segmentation, prevention from water being wasted; and effective use of agricultural machinery); and establishment of agricultural service centres.

In the second programme (1994-1998), a drastic change appears in the rural development policies. "Research" enters into the planning for the first time and a series of policies for increasing production capacities in the villages were incorporated in the programme.

In both programmes, the rural sector has not gained an independent and appropriate position and therefore, the government still "played the role of a father" (Azkia and Ghaffari, 2007, p. 133). The programmes could not encourage rural participation in the process of rural development and no participatory entity was established in villages. In fact, the system moved from the early revolution populism to an organized centralism.

The councils (a policy of decentralization) appeared in the Third Programme (1999-2004), and the first elections were held, and the first entities of decentralization established in villages. According to the regulations, the functions of the rural councils are:

A. "Monitoring and following up the implementation of the decisions of the Islamic Council of the village.

B. Offering proposals to the related authorities for meeting shortages, insufficiencies and needs. The authorities have to study the proposals and give a response within two months. If the response is not provided within the due date, the council can inform the superior authorities.

C. Forming public gatherings for reporting to people, or receiving suggestions, or responding questions, or attracting participation or assistance of the people for improving the village issues – at least two times in a year with a 15-day pre-announcement.

D. Explaining the policies of the government and encouraging the villagers to implement these policies.

E. Monitoring and following-up the development projects allocated to the village.

F. Cooperation with the related authorities for establishing, managing, maintaining and using of public, economic, social and welfare facilities needed in the village within the possibilities of the council.

G. Helping and providing aid in emergencies such as war, or in case of occurring unexpected disasters; helping to those in need and unattended families through using local assistance.

H. Trying to resolve local differences among individuals and communities through arbitration between them.

I. Following up the villagers' complaints in the related departments through responsible authorities.

J. Cooperating with the disciplinary forces for establishing public security and order if requested by District Manager (Bakhsh-dar).

K. Creating the suitable ground for public participation in implementing productive activities of the ministries and governmental organizations.

L. Providing the grounds for people's participation and cooperation for creating and developing civil society organizations, library, cultural centres, cultural promotion of various groups of people, especially young people and women, planning for carrying out social, economic, developmental, health, cultural, educational and literacy services or other services with acceptance and coordination with the related authorities.

M. Appointment of a competent person as Dehyar for a period of four years based on the related regulations and introducing him/her to the District Manager (Bakhsh-dar) for issuing his/her letter of appointment.

N. Creating the grounds for increasing employment and attracting public participation for developing productive activities.

O. Participating in preparation of the Village Design and reconstruction of old buildings.

P. Monitoring the implementation of the regulations related to environment protection and improvement in the village, using natural resources, and prevention of soil degradation, and protecting the fields, gardens, orchards, ranches, forests, protected areas, dredging water canals and deserted rivers, and provision of proposals and suggestions in these regards to the District Council.

Q. Studying whether the suggested programmes and plans of the executive bodies in social, economic, developmental, health, cultural and educational fields, and other welfare issues are appropriate with the existing necessities in their constituency and provision of insufficiency reports to the superior councils and other related executive bodies.

R. Monitoring the maintenance of the public and developmental facilities and other village properties.

S. Every tribe of nomads with at least twenty families is regarded a village and the nomads' council with the same duties and powers of the village council will be established. The nomads' council will participate in the establishment of the District Council of the place where the nomads. Cooperation on issues of livestock, ranching and migration will be among the duties of the nomads' council."[68]

A look at the above duties will show that seven of them (D, E, F, J, K, P and R) are somehow the continuation of the government departments' policies in the village. In fact, the council acts like a connected entity in the centralized hierarchy. It has no independence and follows what the central or provincial government requires. Four duties (B, C, I, Q) have remained at the proposal level which means that the council does not "act" on its own, but it can "propose" to the government or "collect" suggestions or proposals or "follow up" complaints or "give comments" on the government's policies. Four other duties are about giving a service to the village (G, L, N and O) that are restricted to assisting in emergencies, cultural activities (with acceptance and coordination of the related authorities), employment and participation in the design of the village. The three important decision-making powers (H, M, and L) are appointment of Dehyar, resolution of differences and carrying out certain cultural activities in the village. In fact, the powers of the rural council are limited and under control by the authorities and it cannot act independently from the centralized government bodies. Of course, it is a good practice for the rural inhabitants to be involved in a process of candidacy, voting, council establishment and various other activities at community level for changing their situation, but if the councils do not have powers to actually change the situation, then the people will become depressed and will not vote anymore.

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[68] Article 68 about the Duties and Powers of the Rural Islamic Council of the Law regarding the organization, duties and elections of the Islamic Councils and Appointment of Mayors (2007) – published in Nasr, 2010.

Meanwhile, the reports of the nine selected rural councils in the villages of Daryan (Eastern Azarbaijan), Gogtapeh (Ardebil province), Mazinan (Khorassan Razawi province), Abouhomaizeh (Khuzestan province), Takhteh (Kurdistan province), Sahnaleh (Kermanshah province), Miandoreh (Golestan province), Noghreh Deh (Guilan province), Ezbaran (Mazandaran province) provide good lessons. These villages were selected by the Ministry of Interior in 2004 as "Model" villages (Nasr, 2010). A review of the reports shows that whenever a rural council acts successfully and proves that it is an empowered council, it has passed the boundary of defined tasks and duties and acts like an "independent entity" from the government. These nine councils have done activities that are duties of governmental bodies. They might have coordinated these activities with the related governmental body, but it is not their duty to do something that has to be done by the government.

The other lesson is about the related Law of the Councils. Drafting a comprehensive law that defines all possible duties of a rural council is not logical when there are different conditions in different villages. In fact, the law should categorize the duties and specify which of them should be carried out by the rural councils, and the law should also give enough powers to the councils to be able to decide based on their local conditions. To give an example: the council in the village of Miandoreh has focused part of its activities on agriculture, while in the related Law of the Councils, nothing can be found on agriculture.

Imani Jajarmi (2010) refers to the same point in his article and argues that the administration system in Iran is a centralized one and, therefore, the democratic local structures are new elements in this system. Most of those who work in the public sector are from the government. This is the government who provides various services such as education, health, security and police services. Relying on oil revenues has led the government to rely less on taxes. The general behaviour of the people is not to pay taxes

or to take it as a serious issue. Within such a system, the local councils rely on local taxes, and therefore, they do not have an extensive scope to work. The powers and duties of the councils are only restricted to monitoring the programmes by the departments that act based on the plans, without considering the needs and the priorities of people in communities.

Farhadi (2009), in his book on the issue of cooperation among villagers in rural communities, has shown various forms of cooperation. He has shown that how this has been institutionalized within the structure of the village and that it can also be found among nomads. In fact, one major duty of a council in any village is to strengthen these forms of cooperation among people. These are traditional ways of participation of people in their own issues. Such aspects of rural life have been ignored within the related law of the councils. In fact, one can easily deduce that the law of the councils has been written in a way that councils act as part of the government as if the government has a certain number of representatives among people who are elected by the people. Farhadi (2009) studied various forms of cooperation and shows how they are different from one place to another. He showed that in certain villages, such forms still are in place, while in others such forms have been forgotten. Farhadi (2009) also shows that such cooperation and participatory life among nomads are still strong.

This chapter discusses the conditions in six villages and analyses the power system within these villages, based on Easton's theory of political system.

5.2. Case study: Ahmadabad Village

Ahmadabad is a village in the central desert of Iran, about 120 kilometres from Biarjomand (the district), within the territory of Shahroud township in Semnan province. Ahmadabad is a small village with a population of about 250 households (850

persons)[69]. The village is located in an area called Khartouran[70]. It is on the borderline of the Touran National Park which is one of the important protected areas in Iran, where certain valuable species such as Asiatic cheetahs and wild asses live.

The people in Ahmadabad are mostly farmers who rear goats and sheep. Some of the villagers are involved in breeding camels. Some women are carpet-weavers. In the past, these people had been nomads[71], living on their livestock and moving from one place to another. After the land reform, they settled down in a village called "Khar". But after sometime, Khar was surrounded by sand dunes and very soon it was buried under the sand. Then the people moved to the present place since land and water was available for agriculture. Before the Revolution, the villages in the area were mostly deprived.

In fact, an important feature of the life in this region is the transition from nomadic life to permanent settlements, especially after the land reform of 1962. Certain tribes still exist in Rezaabad and the southern parts of Khartouran[72]. Others preferred to settle down where they could find enough water to work on their own lands.

There is a formally registered women's cooperative with seven members which is involved in the empowerment of women in their own village. They have held certain classes and courses for other women. The cooperative was created in 2009 within the framework of an empowerment project to conserve the Asiatic Cheetah by a non-governmental organization (NGO) supported by the UNDP Small Grants Programme (SGP) of the Global Environmental Facilities (GEF).

The number of eco-tourists and visitors to the villages in the desert is also increasing due to the implemented projects in various villages of this area (Ghaleh Bala,

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[69] 2006 Census (Iran's Statistics Centre).

[70] Some environmentalists believe that Khartouran is a small Africa in Iran, mostly because of the presence of cheetahs and wild asses. It is the second protected biosphere in the world, after Serengeti in Tanzania.

[71] There are still nomads in Khartouran, living mostly in its southern part. It has been reported that Rezaabad, another nearby village, has a nomadic context but people started to settle there about 45 years ago.

[72] According to the statistics of the Organization of Nomads Affairs (Sazeman-e Omour Ashayeri), there are 1,712 nomadic households in Shahroud County (in the north and the south).

Khankhodi, Zamanabad and Ahmadabad). Most of the tours are planned by the ecotourism agencies or even by the NGOs in Tehran.

A series of problems threaten the village: migration of young people to towns and cities (Biarjomand or Shahroud, Semnan or Tehran) is increasing; young people would like to be in towns where they have better access to public services. Lack of enough water, which becomes scarce in dry years, is another major problem. The village is threatened by desertification and, therefore, a series of measures have been adopted by the Department of Natural Resources to stop the dunes from moving towards the village. Moreover, the village is located in the vicinity of the Touran National Park and it limits their livestock activities for they cannot take their cattle inside the Park or their camels are prohibited from using the same water resources used by the wildlife; meanwhile, the village cannot be extended because of the National Park. Importantly too, the village is far from other villages – the nearest village is 30km away – as are towns such as Biarjomand (75km) and Shahroud (200km), where they can have access to better services, such as health or education, that are not easily available in their own village. There is a primary school in the village but the secondary school is located in Zamanabad which is 30km far from Ahmadabad.

5.2.1. The village council

The village council has three members. The construction of a sports complex as well as a health centre has been their most important activities during the past six years (both were opened formally in February 2010).

The village council and the Dehyar have always had the same problems encountered by many other villages: limited governmental budget for creating change in the village. Most of the projects are not finished. As they are far from the city, they cannot follow

every issue every day, and that is why there is the feeling that the village has been forgotten.

5.2.2. Inputs-outputs

The policies and activities of the governmental bodies have affected the village. From one part, the village is surrounded by certain limitations due to the National Park, desertification and lack of water. The general policy of the government is to maintain the status quo (outputs). The people want more and they have their own demands. A small group of women was established to respond to part of the demands of women in the village, especially the demands related to sustainable ways of income-generation of women; however, this group has limited resources. By the time this research was conducted, the group has been successful in training women as carpet weavers; two of the women even obtained the nationally valid license for training (outputs of the small group).

The important thing is that there is always a filter of selection by the system, while in the small group there is not such an approach. In the small group, these are the members who decide, based on their own capacities and priorities about themselves. They sit in groups, talk to each other, find the gaps and look for solutions; these gaps are common to all members. They decide whether this or that gap is of great priority and, therefore, by responding to this demand, they resolve one of their own problems. Within such a limited scope of the group, with such limited power, they have found out how to decide. This is a form of a very small devolved power in a small village.

In the group, the members might respond to some of the women's needs in the village, but within the system, it is they – and not the people in the village - who decide which one has to be responded to. This is true for all the levels, from the council (which

belongs to the system rather than to the people) to departments at district people (departments have their own priorities – coming from the centre); or at the provincial level or even at the macro level in Tehran. In fact, without listening to the voice of the people, the authorities look at the policies adopted at the national level based on the national priorities and not based on the exact characteristics, conditions and real demands of people. This is the filter that works between the demands that might be voiced out, but the system only selects – at lower levels – those that they would like to respond to. This filter comes from the upper levels of the system based on the policies and strategies the system has already taken for granted.

For instance, Zamanabad, a village in the vicinity, has been selected as a tourist-targeted village by the authorities and receives some budget for certain improvements in the village; but Ahmadabad has not been selected for such a target. This is a decision taken at provincial level. Possibly these are the authorities at the district level who have provided information for such decisions. People in Ahmadabad believe that their village has the potential of being a tourism-targeted village and they prove it by showing the number of tourists who have come to the village, slept in the village, and even have been taken to different places nearby (sand dunes, historical places, green places in the desert, etc.). There is now such a demand, but their demand is not seriously considered by the related authorities, since the decision targeted village had been taken before.

Furthermore, for issues such as desertification, these are the government authorities who decide what has to be done in the desert. However, such decisions can be taken by the people in the village in the way they think would be more beneficial for them. The same approach can be used for water supply. The villages in this area use the same water reservoir deep in the ground, and if they are going to use the water in a sustainable way, they have to form a partnership between all the villages which are using the same reservoir through their wells. However, such programmes are missing.

While the Touran National Park has no management plan, the plan can be written in a participatory manner with the representatives of all the villages located around the park so that the people can be involved in the management of an eco-system that has been recognized by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve. However, the policies are all dictated from the top management and therefore, it is not possible to have people as protectors of this region (se Figure 5.1). Therefore, as outputs, what remains for the people are the "limitations" and, as inputs, what remains for the system to respond are the people's demands for "removing the limitations". The system acts based on the policies from the top, and therefore, will not listen to the demands, since the filter acts like a barrier between the voices and the ears. The system selects the demands which may not be the people's priorities.

The council, as the decentralized part of the system that should act for the people, cannot decide easily and independently since it has to move within the budget framework and the policy framework of the system. More importantly, these are the system's choices that have to be followed up. That is why the council cannot help to devolve power; instead, it has become the ending part of the existing centralized hierarchy (see Figure 5.1).
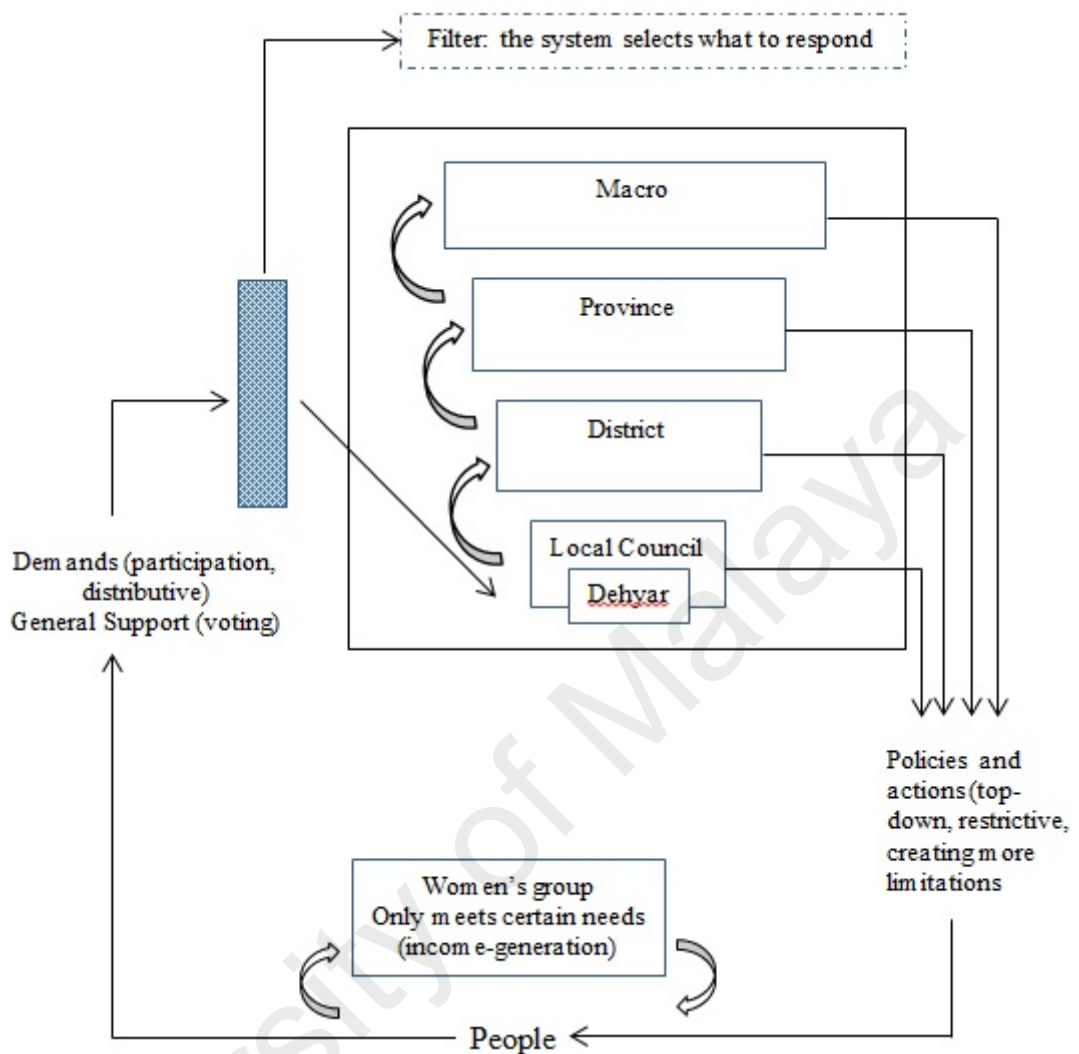
Figure 5.1: Ahmadabad and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Designed by the researcher)

5.3. Case study: Three villages of Houkard, Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No

The three villages of Houkard, Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No are located near each other in Jiroft (a city in Kerman province). A project of poverty reduction was implemented in these three villages by an NGO (Farhikhteh Empowerment Institute, located in Ardebil in cooperation with the State Welfare Organization in Tehran and a local Social Work Clinic of Hazrat Rasoul located in Jiroft) to empower the communities to increase their capacities. As a result of this project, a steering committee has been formed with representatives from their local councils to deal with their common problems. Two

major problems of the villages are drought and flood (both are natural disasters), and these two have seriously affected their livelihood. They are poor people and work hard to earn a living. The three villages suffer from drug addiction problem, mostly involving young people.

In the hierarchy of the power in Kerman province, these villages are under Halil Dehestan, central district (Bakhsh-e Markazi) of the city of Jiroft, an agricultural town under the central city of Kerman. Jiroft is of strategic importance since the agricultural crops and products have a great share in Iran's production. In the following section, the context of each village will be presented and then inputs and outputs based on the theory of the political systems will be analysed.

5.3.1. Houkard

Houkard is located 9km far from the town of Jiroft. Its population is 385 families (1,764 persons, with 884 women and 790 men). Most of the villagers are involved in farming (citrus fruits, dates and summer crops such as cucumber, watermelon, tomatoes, cantaloupe and eggplant) and breeding livestock. Before the Revolution, the village belonged to two feudal owners, Shapouri and Forouzan, who were still in power (sixteen years after the Land Reform). But after the Revolution, their lands were taken from them and divided equally among farmers. For irrigation, they use wells and water pumps. Before the Revolution, they mostly used the water from the nearby Halilroud River but due to the drought, there is not much water in this river. In this region, the weather is often hot and dry, however, in summer, the humidity increases.

The village has two mosques, a religious gathering centre (Hosseinieh), and a health centre with a general physician, one midwife and two health workers that offer services. There is also a pharmacy (belonging to the private sector), and a cooperative. There are

schools for different levels (primary and secondary) for boys and girls. The houses have access to the piped fresh water and the electricity. There is one bakery and some other shops that provide the basic needs of people.

5.3.2. Posht-e Lor

Posht-e Lor is located five km far from Jiroft, with 193 households (985 persons, with 499 women and 486 men). Like Houkard, the people are involved in farming and livestock. They have the same problem of water supply for their farming. There are certain facilities in the village such as a telecommunication centre, one cooperative, one water supply reservoir (used jointly by the two villages of Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No), a health centre with three nurses (two female and one male health workers), a mosque and a religious gathering centre (Hosseinieh), a volleyball court for men, a general library and a park for children with some limited playing equipment. There are schools for primary and secondary levels.

5.3.3. Ghaleh-No

Ghaleh-No is a small village with 88 families (with a total population of 425 persons – 204 women and 221 men). It is located 8km from Jiroft. Before the Revolution, there was a thick forest of tamarisk and willow trees that were destroyed years ago, due to the continued drought. Most of the people are involved in farming and livestock. There is no school in this village and students go to the schools located in neighbouring villages (Posht-e Lor and Deh Sheikh). There is an old mosque in this village, one telecommunication centre, a cooperative, and a health centre (with two health workers – one man and one woman).

5.3.4. Three councils together

While the councils of the three villages work based on their formal agenda (as the system expects them to do so), they have shaped a steering committee composed of ten members with two representatives from each council, Dehyar of Houkard village, and one trustworthy person from Houkard (Houkard is a bigger village), with two representatives from the Welfare Organization (based in Jiroft) as an observer and a representative of the Jiroft Social Work Clinic of Hazrat Rasoul as the facilitator. They have the capacity to discuss common issues of the three villages in a participatory manner and find practical solutions and design effective projects that help the people to come out of the poverty cycle. They try to attract funds for their own projects through governmental bodies, private sector and banks. One project is focused on forming a poultry farm. Other projects focus on training people and promoting a spirit of entrepreneurship among people in these three villages, especially among women.

Such partnership at local level is not a policy encouraged by the authorities at higher levels (district, provincial or macro levels). This is an initiative shaped at the community level. But as the councils found themselves entangled within a closed formal level, they have created an informal entity, composed of representatives from three villages, because this will provide them with more informal powers and the capacity to respond to some of the local demands. However, this might be fragile since with the elections, the composition of the village councils may change. What is more important is the result of the work (the poultry farming) which will be in the form of a cooperative and will be sustainable in that area with long term implications for the people. Meanwhile, the people have experienced a new pattern of cooperation at the community level. They have found that the local councils, as decentralized entities, if they have more powers, can act more effectively. A pattern of partnership has also been

experienced, and at least for those involved, there would be a "decentralization" model for their future cooperation.

5.3.5. Inputs-outputs

Drought and flood are the two priority issues for the people in this region, since these two natural disasters have affected their life to a great extent. They cannot continue without water while in winters there is always the risk of destructive floods. Certain preventive measures have been taken by the local government to tackle the flood problem (constructing preventive soil dams and protective soil walls), but still people do not know whether such measures are effective or not. Unemployment is another social threat that affects younger people and that is why drug addiction is increasing among them. Such demands are putting a great deal of pressure on people.

The steering committee has tried to consider these demands but it is not an easy task. They are now trying to create new possibilities of working for the people and the poultry farming community is going to respond part of these demands.

One major problem is the existing drought that started 16 years ago, in 1998. The Halilroud River, an important river in Kerman province with a length of 390km, is drying up. This river irrigates Jiroft and Kahnouj and then pours into the international wetland of Jazmourian. Certain experts believe that the dam-building endeavour of the Ministry of Energy has been the major cause why this river is drying up so fast. The Jiroft dam, built by this Ministry and completed in 1992, is the biggest dam in the southeast of Iran. There are many other small and big soil dams on the river too. Most of the water is used up in the upper land in Jiroft and there remains no water for villages located downstream in Jiroft and nothing in Kahnouj. This can be considered as one

major input of the political system into the local environment of Jiroft and the three villages in the case study.

Certain economic policies – as other inputs from the system - such as the National Reform Plan of Subsidies have affected the life of people, ending in increasing inflation. While people in villages receive monthly direct cash, they have to face the increasing prices for most basic goods. Fuel prices doubled and this has affected the whole economy[73] and has decreased the purchasing power of the people, especially in villages.

It is evident that the policies are top-down without any consultation with people and not focused on what people need in the villages (see Figure 5.2). Some of the policies are short-termed and unsustainable, which means they have a certain positive impact when implemented, but in the long term, they will have certain devastating results on life of these people. In fact, when the system is deciding about policies, it has to consider the priority needs of the people in this region; this will not happen until decision-making power is devolved. The local councils do not have sufficient powers to act on issues such as drought or flood, and decisions on these important matters are primarily taken at the provincial level. Figure 5.2 provides more details about the system in these three villages and how their partnership has created an independent sub-system.

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[73] See the report of the Global Subsidies Initiative of the International Institute of Sustainable Development in October 2012, prepared by Elham Hassanzadeh at http://www.iisd.org/gsi/sites/default/files/pb14_iran.pdf (retrieved on 23 May 2013). For more detailed information, see Guillaume, Zytek & Farzin (2011).
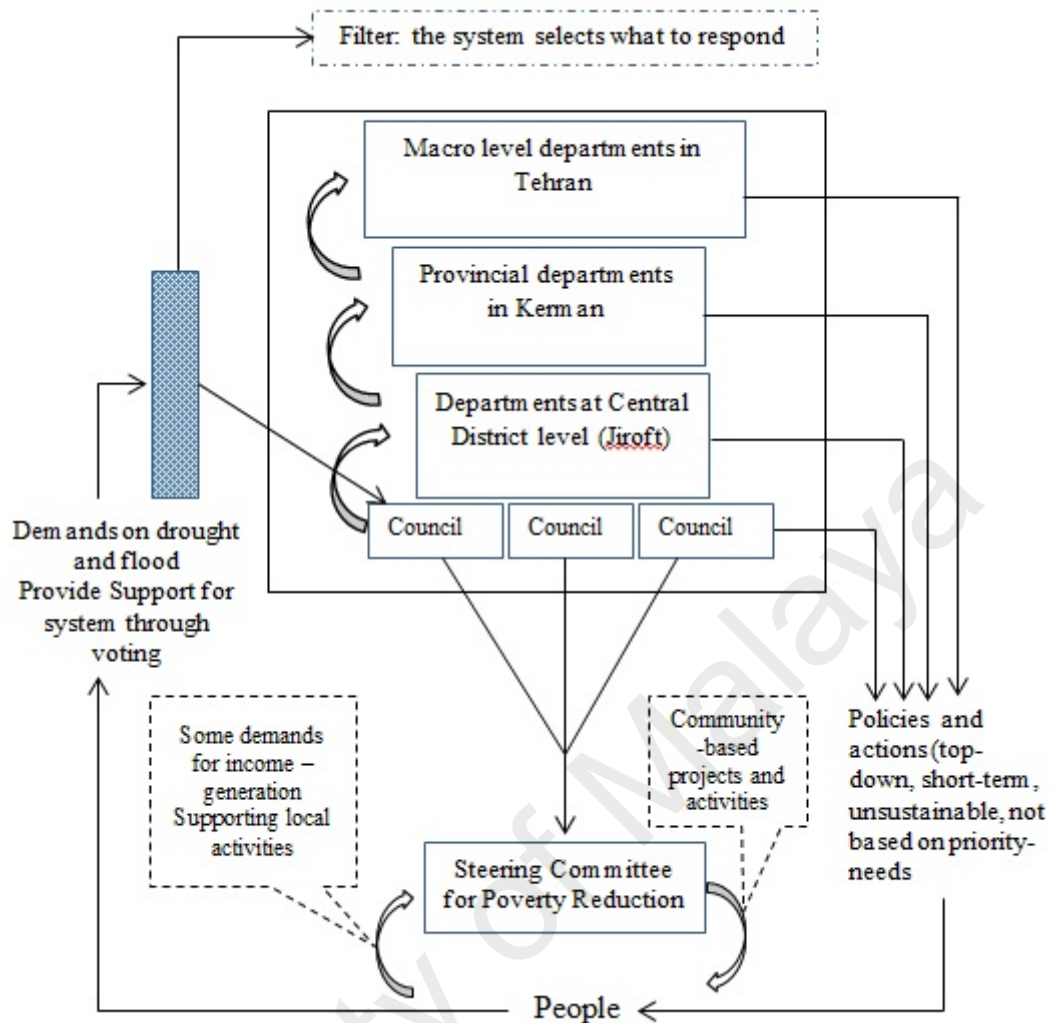
Figure 5.2: The three villages and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Designed by the researcher)

5.4. Case study: Tajabad village

The village of Tajabad Sofla (or Rasoulabad)[74] is located in the township of Bahar, in Hamedan province, just beside the road from Hamedan to Kermanshah. It has a population of 2,320 persons[75]. Most villagers are farmers and they have some livestock. Their farming depends on rain and when there is no rain, most people go to Hamedan or Tehran or other cities to work. The people in the village talk in Kurdish. There is one

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[74] The village is called 'Tajabad', however, its exact name is Tajabad Sofla, or Lower Tajabad, since there are two villages with the name of Tajabad. The other Tajabad, i.e. Tajabad Olya, or Upper Tajabad, is located within a 5km distance with a population of 35 households. In this case study, when we refer to Tajabad, we are talking about Tajabad Sofla. Meanwhile, there was an endeavour to change the name of the village to Rasoulabad, but the people still call the village Tajabad. "Taj" in Persian means "crown" and it might be a reference to the pervious monarchic system; that is why rural councillors wanted to change it in Rasoulabad. "Rasoul" refers to the Prophet Mohammad. "Abad" as a suffix means "developing" primarily used in the name of villages showing that the place is a village.

[75] This statistics belongs to 2011 census and has been taken from the website of the National Centre of Statistics.

historical monument in the village, Karevan Saraye Shah Abassi – registered on the list of the National Heritage List[76] - that can be considered a historical attraction.

The village suffers from critical problems such as water supply, poverty and unemployment (especially among young people and women) and inflation has put a lot of economic pressure on people. The existing conflicts among inhabitants of the village are another important issue (there is not sufficient solidarity in the village). The rural councils of the third elections and dehyar (the village governor) have always tried to resolve these issues, but part of the problem requires the cooperation of the governmental departments in Bahar (the district) or Hamedan (the province). Migration from the villages occurs mostly due to unemployment (only 30 per cent are involved in agriculture); lack of fuel (winters are cold); lack of security; low quality of education (teachers have been recently changed and there is little hope for a better quality of education); degrading behaviour with villagers (especially when rural people go to the governmental departments, they are not behaved like citizens; that is why people prefer to leave the village); lack of water supply and lack of quality health services.

Another problem of the village is the increasing number of the drug addicts, especially among depressed young people. Moreover, the education system has a limited budget and this has created certain problems for the students in the village.

However, two positive outputs of government policies in the villages have been a reinforcement of rural houses and access to piped liquid gas. In 2008, a major policy of the government has been to provide villagers with rural housing loans, mostly used for reinforcement of rural houses. This policy has been effective in this village. Some people have renovated their houses. Connecting the village houses to the piped liquid gas has been another positive action, which means the problem of fuel in winters have been resolved.

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[76] It is registered on list as No. 1872 in 1997.

The village has a public library that has been established and run in a participatory manner since 2007. The decision to establish the library was taken by the cultural society of the village (later it was called Dehyar's advisors society). In fact, this was an initiative by the Dehyar. The process of building and running of the library is of great importance since this proves a recognized form of cooperation among a group of the villagers. By 2012, the library had obtained more than 4,000 books with more than 100 constant users.

The Loan Fund for Village Students is another effective initiative by the Dehyar of the village to assist those students who are studying in universities. However, the Fund cannot afford to pay for these students' tuition fee or their expenses in other cities. This would encourage the village students not to forget their village when they complete their studies and try to be involved in the community when they return to the village.

5.4.1. The village council

The council (especially the third council) has had an active and cooperative relationship with the Dehyar. The Dehyar has also been an active and serious man who once left the village to work in a brick-production factory near Tehran, but came back to the village to change his own birthplace to create a better life for its residents. The Dehyar created certain advisory groups (composed of people in the village) to assist him and the council in implementing various kinds of projects in the village. He has acted like an agent of change in his own village and many positive changes have been created in the village.

Impeding women's participation is another issue of the village. For instance, Ms M. was nominated as the Dehyar but it was faced with the objection from the district and provincial levels, simply because she was a woman. The objection lasted eight months, but as the council and the people wanted her to become the Dehyar, the district and

provincial authorities accepted her under the village pressure. She is the only female Dehyar in all province villages. Meanwhile, Ms A., another active woman in the village, registered her name to become a candidate for the village council (for the elections of 2013), but her competency was only approved at the district level with difficulty. Ms A. was among the three winners and is now a member of the village council.

Meanwhile, the previous Dehyar, who was mostly supported by the villagers, became a candidate too, while again his qualification was rejected, but people wanted him. The authorities accepted him with the hope that he would not have the votes of the villages, but he won the elections in 2013 with an absolute majority of votes; in spite of this, the authorities at the District level still rejected him again. They accepted the results only following pressure applied on them by the village, and he could become a member of the council too. In the previous elections (third run), he was appointed by the council as the Dehyar, but the period of his Dehyari was not very long. His qualification was rejected by the governor general of Hamedan province and then by the Ministry of Interior. He was fired from the Dehyari. While the council and the people in the village wanted him to continue his work, the upper governmental system did not want him to work. He was also always checked by the police, whether he continued to go to the office or not.

5.4.2. Inputs-outputs

While there are people in the village who try to get their desired "outputs" from the system, the system seems to be very slow in responding to the demands (inputs). A behaviour of selective response seems to be part of the governing process. If a demand cannot be responded to at the district level, it has to be addressed at the upper provincial level. But it will not be addressed by the time those responsible in the village (such as

the village governor) can follow up on it. The local authorities at district level cannot respond to all demands and have to adopt a selective policy. The demand articulators are weak and that is why certain demands remain unmet for years, such as water supply. In certain cases, people have requested for "support" from their council or their choices or they have demanded "change of decisions" at district level. In fact, such changes may easily happen at the district level through negotiation and discussion, while it might be more difficult at the provincial level (more formal level) or at the macro level.

Figure 5.3 shows how the system is acting in this community. While it seems that the council acts outside the system, it has been successful in responding to part of the demands of people, and of course, it has gained the support of the people in the village. Other demands go into the system, but there is a filter here, and only those demands that can be responded to enter the system. In fact, the system selects what it should do and what it should not do. That is why the people provide no support to the system while they have certain outputs from the system in their own village such as the loans for house renovation and access to piped liquid gas. Another point is the form of participation in the village and the formation of certain advisory local groups that guarantee the participation of the people in decision-making. Moreover, the role of the Dehyar has been important since he has some kind of agency for change in the village. In fact, the Dehyar, the people, the council and the local groups act like a civil society body in the village that pave the way for changes in the village and at the same time, the system resists such changes. The challenges in the village still exist, and the council and the groups need to have more capacity for an independent role playing.
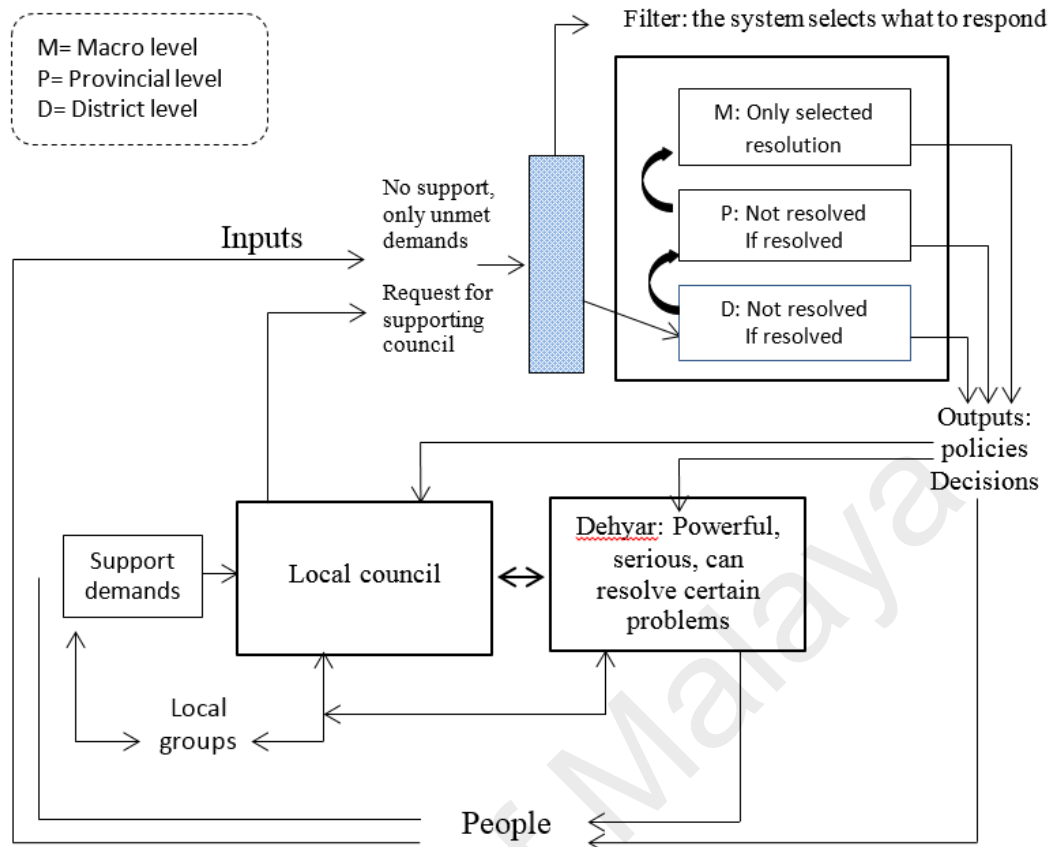
Figure 5.3: Tajabad and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Designed by the researcher)

5.5. Case study: Sarab Karyan village

Sarab Karyan is a small village located 83km far from Kermanshah, the centre of Kermanshah province in the west of Iran. The village is located in the oak forests of Zagros mountain chain. It has a population of 130 people with 35 families. Most of the villagers are ranchers; they breed cows, sheep, goats and poultry. They also have limited rain-fed agricultural lands. The people talk in "Lak" dialect which is a sub-language of Kurdish language. Most communities, who speak "Laki", consider themselves Kurdish.

The village suffers from a series of related problems. The village is far from the city, located in the mountains, and therefore the people face various problems. Lack of sufficient water is one major problem in the village. They are now trying to find another place for digging a water well while the government is bringing in water through a pipe

to the village. The project is incomplete since the contractor is not working any more, due to their conflicts with the government. They also have land problems. All their lands do not have an official property document; and charges for getting such property documents are very high that they cannot afford to pay them. Meanwhile, they do not have enough agricultural land. There is only a primary school in the village, though they do not have access to a secondary school. During the winter months, the people need fuel, if they do not want to use the wood from the forest. At the same time, the forest fire in the summer is another problem. When the fire starts from somewhere, it is very difficult to stop it, and it takes a long time for the emergency forces reach there. There is also the problem of communication, since there is no cell phone coverage too.

5.5.1. A village without a council

In Sarab Karyan, there is no rural council. The governor's office had suggested the people in the village obtain the "code for elections" and join other villages and hold their own elections to elect members of their own rural council at the pre-determined date but the people have refused this, preferring to continue without a council. In fact, Sarab Karyan is not a nomadic village or tribe. While they have livestock, they do not move; they have now settled down in the present mountainous place of Sarab Karyan for years. Within the existing power system in the village, there are certain people (men and women) who are more active in the village and who have taken the responsibility to deal with the common problems of the village. The government policy is not to allow the villagers to have a council, while the government encourages them to have one. Meanwhile, there is no mechanism in place to make it compulsory. However, the villagers believed that they did not need a council, since the council – if they decide to have one – might be an up-down governmental mechanism to influence the village, something, they did not like. They even did not vote in the elections (there might be

persons who might have voted in another place – in a village or a nearby town). This should not be considered a political act on the part of the villagers, but a very simple behaviour due to their non-interest to attend elections.

In the absence of a council, the decision-making process in the village is not a difficult task. People gather together and think together, to see if they can find a solution for a problem. If there is no problem, there is no need for a gathering.

However, there are local traditions of "cooperation" among the villagers. At least, one tradition is the group ranching of livestock, called "Nobah". In this tradition, every day, one person is responsible to take the livestock that belong to a group of villagers, to the ranch and take care of them during the day and bring them back to the village before dusk. In this way, those who have not so many sheep or goats can enter into the "nobah" for ranching collectively their livestock, which is beneficial to each of them since it will save their time and energy.

The villagers take care of their natural resources, especially their ranches and the oak forest, in a voluntary way and the area around the village can be regarded as an unofficial community-conserved area. There is one voluntary game guard, assisted by other young people in the village, that tries to protect the area from the illegal hunters. This guard has been accepted by other villages too. As the guard is not armed, he tries to use all his power of persuasion to make illegal hunters not to enter their ranches or the oak forest.

An NGO, the Society for Protection and Revival of Mountains (Parow), that is a women's environmental organization, from Kermanshah with support from the Small Grant Programme (SGP) of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) has tried to empower the villagers through a community-based project. A series of activities have been implemented through this project to change the place of the manure of the cows

and keep it a distance from the water well, and start a vermicompost production using the manure. All villagers have contributed to the implementation. As a result of the project, they have access to clean water and a new source of income, by selling the bio fertilizer.

Women participate in village affairs, just like the men, and there is no restriction for their participation. Through the NGO project, they have established a local fund with 18 women members (half of the adult women are members of this fund). The fund gives loans to the members for income-generation activities. The money in the fund comes from their monthly payments. Therefore, through this voluntary system, they are helping their members to be empowered to generate more income for the family.

5.5.2. Inputs-outputs

Before trying to find out the loop between the outputs from the political system and the inputs from the community into the system, there is an important fact to illustrate here. The village has its own system; decisions are taken in a participatory manner by people without having a council, with the outputs (decisions) that affect the village and with the inputs (needs and support) from villagers (see Figure 5.4). The people support this micro-system in the village, since the outputs are focused on meeting people's demands. This micro-system has been shaped in the absence of the political system within the village. The activities and decisions of this micro system are limited only to those issues that are possible to meet in the village. For instance, the villagers cannot do anything for the secondary school or for mobile phone coverage.
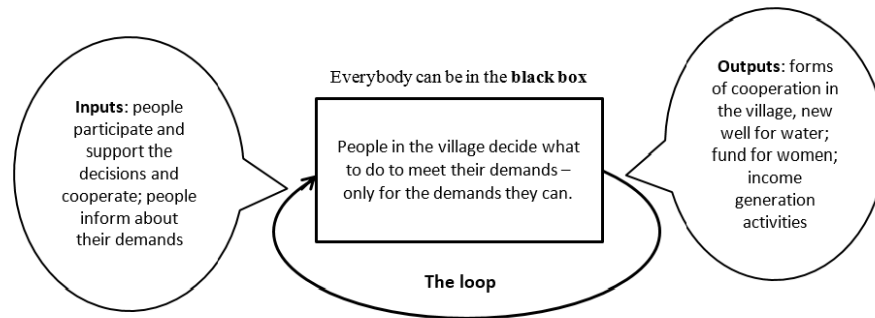
Figure 5.4: The Loop in the village of Sarab Karyan (Source: Designed by the researcher)

However, the village is not an island and it has to be seen within the existing political system. No doubt, the decisions taken or policies decided in the ministries and departments or in the Parliament in Tehran (Macro level), or by the governmental departments in Kermanshah (provincial level) or in Firoozabad (District level) affect the village and its inhabitants to a large extent. For instance, if people receive an "allowance" everywhere in the country[77] based on the National Plan of Subsidies, it will mean that the inhabitants of Sarab Karyan will receive the allowance too. However, these are very general policies. On specific policies related especially to this village, most authorities at Kermanshah level or at Firoozabad town (district level) decide for the village. These decisions affect the village too (such as the water pipe installation – if finishes, the people will benefit from it – but the construction work was stopped for unknown reasons). For instance, the Natural Resources Department supports the villagers in their activities for protecting the resources.

Figure 5.5 illustrates the inputs and the outputs based on the interviews and observations in the village. Two feedback loops can be distinguished: the one from the

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[77] The Parliament adopted a reform plan for the subsidies, entitled "Tarh-e Hadafmandsazi Yaraneh-ha" or "the National Targeted Subsidy Plan", in January 2010. The plan has stopped the payment of subsidies on food and energy (which is 80 per cent of the total paid subsidies) and replaced it with targeted social assistance (which means people receive cash payments from the government), while the country moves towards a free market (with less government intervention). This is an important economic plan that has affected the life of the people in Iran. While they receive monthly allowances from the government, they are paying more for their bills of electricity, gas and water.

macro system that does not create support as input while there are filtered demands. The second feedback loop is inside the village; they decide by themselves, actions are devised and implemented, while new demands shape. This second feedback loop has been explained in Figure 5.4. It shows that the model initiated by the people in this village is working.
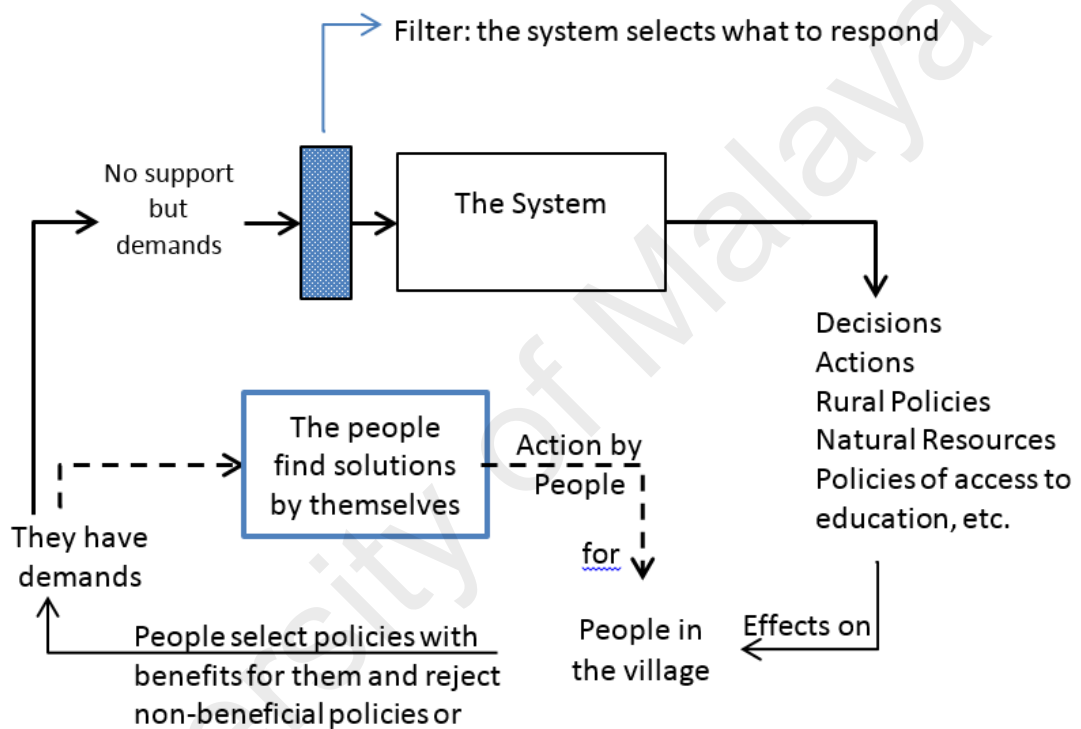
Figure 5.5: Sarab Karyan and Inputs and Outputs Loop (Source: Designed by the researcher)

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, the councils in six villages were discussed. After giving a historical context of rural life in Iran, and review of rural institutions, the cases were reviewed one by one and the related collected information about the rural decentralized system was provided.

In Ahmadabad, the three-member council, as the decentralized part of the system that should act for the people, cannot decide easily since it has to move within the budget framework and the policy framework. That is why the council cannot help to devolve

power; instead, it has become the ending part of the existing centralized hierarchy. There is a small group of women in the village with limited resources that is responding part of the demands of women in the village, especially the demands related to other ways of income-generation of women. The voice of these people are not heard in the centre of the province or in Tehran and the policies adopted at the national level are not responding their real demands.

The next case was about the three poor villages of Houkard, Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No that are located near each other in Jiroft in Kerman province. A steering committee has been formed with representatives from their local councils to deal with their common problems. Such partnership at local level is not a policy encouraged by the authorities at higher levels. This is an initiative shaped at the community level. As the councils found themselves entangled within a closed formal level, they have created an informal entity, composed of representatives from three villages, because this will provide them with more informal powers and the capacity to respond to some of the local demands. The case shows how the steering committee deals two issues of drought and flood.

The next case depicted the village of Tajabad that suffers from critical problems such as water supply, poverty and unemployment. The village has an active rural council that has always tried to resolve these issues, but part of the problem requires the cooperation of the governmental departments at district or provincial level. It is interesting that the village governor, the people, the council and the advisory local groups act like a civil society body in the village that pave the way for changes and at the same time, the system resists such changes.

The last case was about Sarab Karyan which has no rural council. The villagers believed that they did not need a council, since the council – if they decide to have one – might be an up-down governmental mechanism to influence the village, something, they did not like. In the absence of a council, the decision-making process in the village is not a

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difficult task. People gather together and think together, to see if they can find a solution for a problem. If there is no problem, there is no need for a gathering. An NGO from Kermanshah has tried to empower the people. Meanwhile, women participate in village affairs, just like the men, and there is no restriction for their participation.

Chapter Six

Cross Comparisons and Data Analysis

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the collected data will be analysed through cross comparisons for a better understanding of the process of decentralization. Three sets of comparisons have been done: the comparison among four urban councils studied here; the comparison among rural councils; and the comparison of urban-rural councils. These comparisons are done with an aim to find out more about the process and to understand the post-revolution decentralization system and to find out why such processes have not enabled people to participate in decision-making.

For the organization of the present chapter, the research will apply the conceptual framework, based on Easton's theory of the political system, presented in Chapter Three. Each comparison focuses on the following factors: 1) inputs (nature of inputs, demand articulators); 2) outputs (nature of outputs, encouraging or limiting policies, policies affecting local institutions, feedback loop); 3) the black box (decentralized bodies and the hierarchy, the position of the councils with regards to the system: within the system or in the environment, interactions, check and balances, political obstacles, decision-making); and 4) the environment (context, civil society, functions of the councils, changes in the environment). At the end of the chapter, there will be a re-organization of the findings based on the key questions posed in this study and as outlined in Chapter One.

6.2. Cross-comparisons in urban cases

The four selected communities are from four different contexts, with an aim that the selection covers a wide range of interests and creates maximum variation. The community in Tehran belongs to a metropolitan city, while the community in Kurdistan belongs to a town where linguistic-religious minorities are living. The community in Kiashahr is about the people who are living in the small town at the district level and the community in Roudbar has two different characteristics: it is a new town, and secondly where a nomadic tribe has settled.

6.2.1. The environment

The environment within the following four communities is totally different. Table 6.1 offers a cross comparison of urban communities in terms of the environment. As Table 6.1 indicates, Tehran is a metropolitan political city, while Sanandaj is the centre of a province where Kurd minorities are living. Kiashahr is a district (lower in the hierarchy) town with bad economic conditions and suffering from a severe competition by the nearby town (Astaneh Ashrafieh). Roudbar is a new town facing challenges such as poverty and drought. The first and foremost question coming to mind is whether the councils in these cities are different or not, since the context is different. One difference is the number of the councillors (Tehran: 31; Sanandaj: 13; Kiashahr: 5; Roudbar: 5). There is no difference in functions, based on the law, and the structure is the same, except for Tehran that has organized neighbourhood councils (see Table 6.1).

According to Table 6.1, Tehran is different for one more reason. The political elites are powerful in this city and they affect almost all decisions of the council. This was shown in the appointment of the mayor. This issue will be discussed later in the discussion

below on political obstacles. In Tehran, NGOs are active and this city's council has a special committee for the participation of NGOs in the administration of the city.

The two smaller towns of Kiashahr and Roudbar have one major similarity and that is the unmet demands of people in the selected communities. It may have certain political reasons but one major reason that will be discussed in this chapter is that the demand articulators are weak in these two towns. The councils themselves do not play such a role, while there is no neighbourhood council or representative body to be connected to the local council to follow the people's demand; and, the local council is not connected to the people in the communities (cases of KSR in Kiashahr and Salemi Yek in Roudbar), to listen to their concerns.

Table 6.1: Urban Communities Cross Comparisons - The Environment

	The environment
Tehran – Oudlajan	- A metropolitan city, a political city, the centre - Influence of political elites - Active NGOs - Renovation problems in the old community of Oudlajan - People have unmet demands (in four categories of distributive services, communication, regulation and participation) - Neighbourhood councils were established
Sanandaj Bardasht	- Sanandaj the central city of Kurdistan - Kurds are minorities. - They compare themselves with the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan who have a federal territory. - Their request for more powers. - The city and the community both need more renovation and developmental actions
Kiashahr – KSR	- Worse economic conditions - Existing competition with Astaneh Ashrafieh, the town above them in the administrative hierarchy - People have unmet demands (removal of limitations on fishery, limitations for non-local fishermen, more distributive services in the town, etc.)
Roudbar – Salemi Yek	- Roudbar, a new town (since 2005) - Facing many challenges - Existence of a powerful tribe (Salemi Tribe) - Lack of water (this is an urgent need) - People have unmet demands (water is an urgent need; unemployment especially among young people)

Source: Designed by the researcher

6.2.2. Inputs

The inputs are studied and compared in two parts: support and demands. Support may take different forms (such as voting or political support) and demands may be in form of individual demands (mostly complaints) or collective ones articulated by institutions. The collective demands may be about distributive services (such as fresh water, health, education), participation (people demand to have votes or participate in a meeting or institution), regulative demands (such as the request for a change in policies or a regulation), or communicative (voices to be heard). The comparisons here are primarily about the demands regarding distributive services and individual complaints. Table 6.2 compares inputs in terms of support and demands in the four urban cases.

Table 6.2: Urban Communities Cross Comparisons and Inputs

	Inputs	
	Support	**Demands**
Tehran – Oudlajan	Through five elections people show their support of the system: People participate in Tehran City Council elections, community elections for neighbourhood council, elections for Parliament, Presidency, Experts Council All candidates have to be qualified.	The neighbourhood council acts like a demand articulator of the Tehran City Council but there is no established mechanism. However, the neighbourhood council has had meetings with people. Individual demands / complaints Not every demand is accepted (unseen filter).
Sanandaj – Bardasht	Support of the local council by attending the meetings in the community Support through voting All candidates have to be qualified.	The local council holds meetings with people to set demand priorities (mostly distributive demands) Individual demands or complaints may be submitted to the City Council Individual demands or complaints may be submitted to the Department in Sanandaj or the Justice system in the city Not every demand is accepted (unseen filter)
Kiashahr – KSR	Support through voting All candidates have to be qualified.	There is no mechanism for demands categorization or prioritization Individual demands and complaints are mostly submitted to the city council or the departments/Justice System in Kiashahr or Astaneh Not every demand is accepted (unseen filter)
Roudbar – Salemi Yek	Supporting their own tribe Supporting their local group through attending the meetings Support through voting All candidates have to be qualified.	The tribe and the local group may act as demands articulator. The city council only received individual demands or complaints, the same is with the governmental departments. Not every demand is accepted (unseen filter)

Source: Designed by the researcher

One major similarity that is obvious in Table 6.2 is the unseen filter for the inputs. Not all the inputs can enter into the system and be accepted as a demand. In fact, nobody can support any person or any policy he or she would like. The people are only able to support the "people or policies qualified by the system". For all the elections, there is always a system of "qualification" to have only those candidates on the list that best fit the system. This filter is not only for the support. The filter is applied for demands too. Not all demands are studied or accepted to become a motivation for a new decision or a new policy. Even if demands are accepted (they can pass through the system), there is always a filter that governs the selection of the demands. These filters were reviewed in the previous chapters in case studies and will be discussed more in the present chapter.

One core missing element is "demand articulators". For demands to be seen by the system or to be articulated within the system (to obtain a chance to be discussed or, if needed, decisions can be taken), there is always a need for demand articulators. This role can be played by the civil society organizations. Neighbourhood councils in Tehran can have such a role but this role has neither been formally recognized nor institutionalized. Civil society organizations can act professionally as demand articulators since they have connections with the people and are able to receive the priority demands and categorize and rationalize them and present them in a language and format that the system can accepts as requiring a decision or a response. This is exactly what is missing in urban communities. Another point to add is that those NGOs active in communities are primarily concerned with delivering certain services to people; they are not focused on the demands side. They have, however, the potential to collect demands and to articulate them in a proper way. It seems that they have collected the information somewhere out of the community, and even the delivered services may not respond to the existing demands or at least they do not meet the priority needs.

Political parties, or it would be more appropriate to say political factions, may play the same role as demands articulators. However, political factions are still weak; sometimes they look like interest groups that support the interests of one group of elites or even one social or economic group. At least, in Tehran, the city council should follow a policy of "openness" and try to listen to the demands expressed by these political factions.

6.2.3. Outputs

According to Easton's theory, the outputs are in various forms of decisions, policies, regulations and actions. Table 6.3 compares the outputs based on the information of the cases from Chapter Four. It helps us to understand the outputs from the system and to compare them in the four selected urban communities.

Table 6.3: Urban Communities Cross Comparisons - Outputs

	Outputs
Tehran – Oudlajan	• Policy of dividing Tehran into communities (a top-down division in Tehran) • Services (mostly distributive services) by provincial departments • Social services by NGOs (especially on cultural heritage in Oudlajan since it is an old community with historic monuments) • Urban services by municipal units (approved by the city council)
Sanandaj – Bardasht	• Services (mostly distributive services) by provincial departments • Services directly offered in the community by the local group • Social services by NGOs • Urban services by municipal units (approved by the city council)
Kiashahr – KSR	• Policies on limited access to the Boujagh National Park; and limitations on fishing • Services (mostly distributive services) by governmental departments in Kiashahr and Astaneh Ashrafieh (and in certain cases by Rasht departments) • Social and environmental services by NGOs • Urban services by municipal units (approved by the city council)
Roudbar – Salemi Yek	• Water policy in Kerman • Services (mostly distributive services) by town departments • Limited social services by NGOs • Services by the tribe and the local group • Urban services by municipal units (approved by the city council)

Source: Designed by the researcher

From Table 6.3, it can be understood that three kinds of services are delivered to the citizens: services by governmental departments, services by the municipal units, services by NGOs or other local entities (such as local groups or tribes). It has to be added that the NGOs are not very active in Roudbar and Sanandaj, while the tribe (in Roudbar) and the local groups (in Roudbar and Sanandaj) may deliver certain services. Roudbar is a new but deprived town, which is going through a transition from rural life to an urban one. The politics has been limited to the tribal activities (as it has been explained in the case study), and therefore, the social institutions are still weak.

The first point regarding the output is that the councils in cities are limited to decision- or policy-making within the limited scope of the municipal services. They cannot move more than their limited functions and, therefore, they cannot respond to various demands of people in communities (some people in Iran refer to the councils in Persian as "shoray-e shahrdari", or councils of municipality).

The second point is about policies adopted at the national or the provincial levels, without considering the conditions at the local level. Such outputs create limitations for people in communities without considering any compensation plan or designing any alternative livelihoods for the people involved. In fact, the policy or the decision has been drafted without any research on the possible disturbance of people's life at local level. One example has been the announcement of the Sepidroud Delta as the National Park in 2002 that has had many negative feedbacks in communities. This is while there has been no mechanism to deal with the complaints or demands that gradually form in the community.

The last point regarding outputs is about the kind of services. Most services are limited to distributive ones. For instance, there are not outputs that facilitate participation of

people or services that provide people with more information or knowledge. It is taken for granted that the national radio and television should play such an informative and awareness-raising role. It is obvious that the mandate of such media is to follow national issues and they focus on national priorities. Certainly, such priorities are different from those of people in communities that are suffering from poverty. Meanwhile, it is expected that the political groups, or even NGOs, will fill such a communication gap, but this mission does not exist for the mere reason that the civil society organizations in Kiashahr, Roudbar and Sanandaj are weak.

Table 6.3 also tells us about the role of NGOs in delivering the services; in Roudbar, that is far from the centre and located in south Kerman, NGOs offer limited social services while in Kiashahr, a series of social and environmental services are offered by NGOs. In Tehran and Sanandaj, NGOs are offering social services. This comparison reveal that NGOs are not equally active in all parts of Iran.

6.2.4. The Black Box

A. Decentralized bodies and the hierarchy

There is an old hierarchy of governmental bodies from the centre (ministries and departments in Tehran) down to the levels of provinces, townships and districts and to villages at the end. When the law of the councils was approved, there was no change in the hierarchy and, moreover, the councils are not defined in this system; they have to be in connection with municipalities that are responsible for certain municipal services. Politically, they are not defined as decision-making organisms. When a policy of decentralization is initiated in a country, the legislators should consider integrity in their approach to decentralization. A new structure with new institutions has been framed, and therefore it is needed to reform the previous centralized political system. While the

previous system was in place, a new decentralized system had been framed. What is clear is that this new sub-system is not inside the black box. And, the "black box" wants the local council to be loyal to the system and uses it as a sub-system to explain its policies to the people. In fact, this is another political obstacle, i.e. that the councils are more or less politically entities that to be depended to the system rather help to decentralize the system.

In a comparison of the four communities and their related councils at city level, the two councils in Kiashahr and Roudbar are somehow at the end of the hierarchy. Even people do not have access to certain departments since they are not located in their city and they have to go to the city, that is in the upper end of the hierarchy. Such feelings of inferiority would be of no value, if the councils could have been accorded with more powers. However, the decisions are taken in Tehran and partly at provincial level in Rasht (for Kiashahr) and Kerman (for Roudbar) and later followed up one level down the hierarchy at the township level in Astaneh Ashrafieh (for Kiashahr) and Kahnouj (for Roudbar). Therefore, the decentralized body has remained without power. In Sanandaj, the mere factor of being a Kurdish city may be sufficient for not having the power (this issue has been discussed when the case study of Bardasht that was presented in Chapter Four).

B. Who is inside the black box?

A comparison of the selected communities reveals that the same decision-makers at macro level are in the black box (the government composed of the President and the Cabinet, the Islamic Assembly or Majles, and the Supreme Leadership office). The Higher Council is not in the black box and cannot influence the policies decided by the Majles in future, since it is not still powerful and has not shown any political motion.

Moreover, the provincial councils are less powerful and have a weaker position in relation to the decision-makers in the black box. Still, they can participate in the provincial planning committee. Those in the meso level (departments at provincial level and other institutions) are only implementers of the decisions. From this comparison, it can be understood that the power has been centralized in the upper hierarchy of the political system; this means that while the system has supported the policy of decentralization, the power has not yet devolved and only certain municipal decisions are voted in the councils. An overview of the four figures of the hierarchy drawn for each case study in Chapter Four demonstrates a hierarchy within the system in which the councils are at the bottom of the pyramid with little power to influence the decisions.

C. Within the Black Box or in the environment

In the cases of Kiashahr and Sanandaj, the local councils are both out of the black box (they are in the environment). In case of Kiashahr, this is mostly due to the rivalry by the near-by town (Astaneh Ashrafieh) that tries to prove that Kiashahr is only a district, while in case of Sanandaj, it can have ethnic reasons. The councils are close to the people rather than to the system. Tehran council is within the system, primarily because of the political atmosphere of the city. In the case of Roudbar, the council regards itself as part of the system to gain more opportunities and resources for their disadvantaged town. Being within the black box does not mean it is involved in decision-making, but it is very influenced by it. As it was explained, there is a hierarchy of power and they are at the bottom of that pyramid.

The councils, when they are in the environment, act as demand articulators, but they are not still a sub-system that contributes to the devolution of power. When they are inside the system as a sub-system, they are limited by the boundaries of the black box and cannot contribute to the devolution of power. This inconsistency, of being within the

black box or in the environment, has happened because the local councils are not still institutionalized in Iran.

D. Interactions

A comparison of the interactions of the councils with government departments, NGOs, higher council, political parties and local neighbourhood councils and of course their constituency reveals whether councils are effective institutions or not. For Easton, the interactions of the system's elements are a vital part of the theory. Interaction is the heart of the system. Table 6.4 describes the interactions of the four local councils with the five institutions of the government departments, NGOs, the higher council, political parties and local neighbourhood councils, as well as with the constituency.

Table 6.4: Urban Communities Cross Comparisons - Interactions

	Government departments	NGOs	Higher council	Political parties	Local neighbourhood councils	Constituency
Tehran – Oudlajan	A major defect – recently, a meeting was held with the Minister of Interior on this issue.	A committee of NGOs and a website	Higher Council is in Tehran; there are interactions	Members of the council are from political parties or supported by them	A system of neighbourhood councils exists in Tehran with interactions – not institutionalized	Through neighbourhood councils
Sanandaj – Bardasht	Only invited for ceremonies and meetings (not for consultation)	Not organized interactions	There are interactions	Members of the council are from political parties or supported by them	There are local councils in certain communities (not all), when invited, the councillors welcome.	When invited to communities, councillors welcome.
Kiashahr – KSR	Weak interaction, departments are mostly in Astaneh Ashrafieh	Weak interactions with NGOs at provincial level; there is interaction with one Kiashahr NGO	Weak interaction	Weak interaction	No neighbourhood council	Weak interaction
Roudbar – Salemi Yek	Weak interaction	No Active NGOs	Weak interaction	Weak interaction	No neighbourhood council	Weak interaction

Source: Designed by the researcher

The Tehran council seems to have a high interactive profile but it has weak interactions with its constituency (see Table 6.4). If the Tehran council can create a high interactive profile for the neighbourhood councils (at least interaction with people, but if possible, with the other actors such as the governmental departments, NGOs, Tehran council, and other neighbourhood councils), then it is certain the "demands" from the environment (local communities) will be articulated (transferred to the Tehran City Council). It is important to add that Tehran has 374 neighbourhood councils for a population of more than eight million people, and therefore, these local councils can play a major role in reflecting the demands. At the same time, these neighbourhood councils are still weak and without the power to decide. Therefore, even if they have such an interactive profile, they cannot use it to resolve common problems in their communities (this was clear in the case of Oudlajan). Even when the new system of community management was in place, other local players were involved and that was clear proof of the weak position of a representative body. While a decentralized body has been shaped at local communities in Tehran, they are not interactive and have no legal powers, so no devolution of power can occur.

The Sanandaj Council is weaker in comparison with the Tehran city Council; however, with the selection of a Kurd mayor, it has been brave enough to guarantee minorities' rights to their self-determination (as explained in the case study, the Kurds are minorities in Iran). The council has not been successful in establishing connections with the other departments (primarily in the hands of non-Kurds in Sanandaj), and this is an important issue endorsed by the Sanandaj council too (see the case of Sanandaj in Chapter Four). The model applied for interaction with the NGOs in Tehran is an effective model and it can be used by the Sanandaj Council. While the limited resources

in Sanandaj may not permit the councillors to act like Tehran, they can have their own initiatives for strengthening the interactions with civil society organizations.

In Kiashahr, the Council interactions are much weaker. It is a district council and it is logical that an active and interactive council be in place in Kiashahr. But, as it is considered "not needed and (an) extra" body by the higher council in hierarchy of the councils, the council has been kept limited. Even if this is the case, it is expected that the Council in Kiashahr can be more interactive. The Roudbar Council has the same conditions and the major reason for such weak interaction is that the town is a new one, and the councillors need more knowledge. There have been (one) tribal structures in place, though now it is a multi-tribal town.

E. Checks and Balances

As the urban councils are not part of three branches of the state, a system of checks and balances has not been forecast in law, though they are part of the public system. Meanwhile, the councillors work on a voluntary basis (according to the Article 14 (repetitive) of the Law on Urban and Rural Islamic Councils, membership in the councils is honorary and is not considered an employment), but any complaint about their decisions can be raised in the Court of Administrative justice. This court is under the supervision of the head of the Judiciary and it has the mandate to investigate any complaint or objection by individuals with respect to government officials, organs and statues. This Court is the only court that accepts complaints against a decision of an Islamic Council, if the decision violates the rights of a person or a company. The court is not a "check and balance" body, but it can limit the power of the councils. However, it cannot start a case by itself.

In Tehran, the city council is informally controlled by the power system (mostly by the government) and therefore, it is always under supervision. The mayor, when selected by the council, has to be approved by the Minister of Interior. However, formally, no system of checks and balances has been legally defined. At the provincial level (here in case of Sanandaj) too, there is not such control. The mayor selected by the council in Sanandaj, has to be approved by the Minister of Interior too. But in the smaller cities, the mayor has to be approved by the Province Governor General.

F. Political Obstacles

Within the whole process of decentralization, there have been certain political obstacles that have been revealed through this research. These are the obstacles that do not let the process of decentralization and devolution of power to move smoothly.

Tehran is a different case in comparison with the other three cities. It is a highly politicized metropolitan city. It is expected that the city council remains apolitical. However, the entity is inside the political playground. The process of appointment of the Tehran mayor in 2009 went through a heavy-political atmosphere where elites influenced the process. In 2013, the same atmosphere was experienced. In other words, Tehran is the centre of a centralized political system, and the system monitors every single decision of the council. The council has to move within the political outputs (policies within the defined frameworks) of the system. This makes the council a fully political entity, even if it tries to be unconcerned. This is a major political problem for Tehran city council.

Moreover, the process of candidacy and elections go through a political atmosphere. This means that it is important for political parties to win chairs in the council, especially now that the number of the chairs has increased to 31. Any access to this

highly political entity in the capital would mean "a share of power". Therefore, even with this definition, the Tehran council takes a distance from its real nature, which is to be a decentralized entity.

In addition, for a devolution of power to occur, at least in Tehran city with 374 communities, a solution would be to strengthen neighbourhood councils and provide them legally with enough powers for decision-making at the local level. However, not only do neighbourhood councils have no such discretion, the city council itself lacks the power for decision-making out of the limits of the municipality. This could be mainly because Tehran is the centre and any delegation of power can become a possible problem for a centralized system.

Another political issue is the way the system deals with the inputs. Any kind of input should pass through an unseen filter. This filter is applied for the supports as well as the demands. Only supports for those that are "qualified" are accepted while only demands that the system recognizes as "demands to be studied" will enter the system agenda. Therefore, there is a "filtered democracy" that controls the inputs, i.e. support and demands.

Last but not the least, a system of the council of the councils has been defined with the aim that this higher council at macro level prepares bills for the Parliament. The bills possibly would be mostly focused on common problems and not on issues related to the community level. In its best possible form, this council can complete the feedback loop and brings the demands within the political system. This has not been the case till now, and the reason for this is clear: this is a dual system, a kind of concurrent system of parliament (representatives of the people, elected by the people everywhere in the county) which the existing parliament will not easily tolerate. Even if the higher council of councils pretends that they are only "articulators of people's demands", they have shaped a new parliament. This system of council of councils is still not active (no bills

have been prepared and submitted to the Majles by the end of 2013 and the new Higher Council took some time to be established after the 2013 elections).

G. Decision-making

This section is not exactly about decision-making, but responds to the question why people are not involved in decision-making. This is part of the second key question of the research. It will help the reader to better understand the process of decentralization. A study of the results shows that there is no defined mechanism for people to be involved in decision-making in city councils. In certain countries, even decisions by urban councils are open to the people's votes.

It also merits mention that urban councils focus on areas that are not priorities of the people. Municipal issues are of course important issues. But people expect the councils to be more than a municipal council.

Table 6.5 offers comparative information on urban communities in terms of decision-making. In fact, it responds to the question why people are not involved in decision-making. In most cases, it has been shown that there is no mechanism for involvement of people as decision-makers. For instance, in Tehran, the neighbouring councils are only helpful for monitoring and they do not have any mechanism for decision-making. In Sanandaj, the people in the community are in contact with their own local council and the local council works in a participatory manner, but there is no initiative for involvement of people as decision-makers. In Kiashahr and Roudbar, there are similar conditions and no mechanism has been defined for people's participation in decision-making.

Table 6.5: Urban Communities Cross Comparisons - Decision-Making

	Why people are not involved in decision-making?
Tehran – Oudlajan	• The Neighbouring Council has no mechanism for decision-making. The neighbouring council is only a monitoring local entity with limited powers; they receive inputs (demands), but their outputs should be passed to the Tehran city council. However, they do not act effectively. • The people in the community do not have direct access to the Tehran Council. The access is through the neighbouring communities (structural reason). • Community people vote for candidates (31 for Tehran city) to decide on their behalf, but the constituency for a metropolitan city like Tehran is very big. • The Tehran city council has limited powers; it is only a council of the Municipality.
Sanandaj – Bardasht	• The people in the community are in contact with their own local council. The local council works in a participatory manner. • The city council accepts individual demands; but mostly is focused on urban issues (especially developing the city) done by the Municipality. • There is no mechanism for the involvement of people as decision-makers.
Kiashahr – KSR	• The council in Kiashahr is weak (mostly because of the power of the Astaneh Ashrafieh Council). Kiashahr is a district and therefore, it has not enough power. • No mechanism has been defined for people's participation in decision-making. • The council is mostly focused on what the Municipality does.
Roudbar – Salemi Yek	• No mechanism has been defined for people's participation in decision-making. • The council is mostly focused on what the Municipality does. • The council is Roudbar is weak (mostly because it is a new city and the councillors might not have enough experience). • Members of the council belong to Salemi Tribe and therefore they are under the influence of their own tribe.

Source: Designed by the researcher

6.3. Cross comparisons in rural cases

The rural context is, naturally, different from the urban context, especially when one understands that the rural councils may exceed its functions without any political implications. A village does not have the same political importance as a town and, therefore, not much political attention is paid to it. This is why the selected case studies in the villages open up other aspects of decentralization and devolution of power in Iran

that have to be considered. For comparisons, the same model based on the conceptual framework is used here.

6.3.1. The environment

At village level, there is one important factor: no politics exist here. However, villages play an important productive role in the economy (livestock and agricultural crops and fruits). This is an important sector that has to be one of the top priorities in any development agenda. In the introduction of the Chapter Five, it was shown how the villages were not seriously considered in pre-revolution development programmes, while after the Revolution and a period of populist approaches towards the villages, the only important policy has been to establish Islamic rural councils in villages.

In Chapter Five, four cases studies in rural areas were presented, but in fact there were six villages. The three villages of Houkard, Posht-e Lor and Ghaleh No in Kerman province have been studied together. Villages have a different environment while the people are primarily involved in agriculture or breeding livestock. However, each village has its own features and these have to be considered in planning. Ahmadabad is located near a National Park and, therefore, it has different opportunities and threats from the three villages in Kerman that are located near a dried-up river. These three villages together have shaped a steering committee for partnership. Sarab Karyan is a mountainous village far from the city with no council, while Tajabad is only 23km far from the district of Bahar and not far from Hamedan (the centre of Hamedan province).

Table 6.6 gives an overview of a cross comparison of the rural communities in terms of their environment. "Environment" is an important element of the political systems theory since it can force the system to change, while the system produces change in the environment too. In the cases in Table 6.6, there are certain "social environment" in which people have been organized in cooperatives with a spirit of trust and cooperation.

This social environment, if mobilized, may be helpful in creating a change in the micro systems of villages.

Table 6.6: Rural Communities Cross Comparisons - The Environment

	The environment
Ahmadabad (Semnan province)	• The people had previously been nomads • They earn their livelihood primarily through agriculture • A village in the desert • In the vicinity of a protected National Park • Existence of a women's cooperative
The three villages (Kerman province)	• Three villages located near each other • Villages near a dried up river (still there is underground water) – threatened by drought and flood • Targeted for poverty reduction • Three councils together (partnership)
Tajabad (Hamedan province)	• Rain-fed farming / Seasonal workers • Suffering from poverty and lack of water • A spirit of trust and cooperation
Sarab Karyan (Kermanshah province)	• Mountain village • There is no council here • People involved in breeding livestock; farming • A deprived village • A spirit of trust and cooperation

Source: Designed by the researcher

In Ahmadabad, women have shaped a cooperative. In Tajabad, there is a spirit of trust and cooperation and the previous Dehyar met the people in advisory groups. In Sarab Karyan, there is no council, while people cooperate with each other in the administration of the village and resolving the common problems. Three villages in Kerman province have shaped a partnership for finding solutions to come out of the poverty cycle (see Table 6.6). In fact, in all these four villages, there is a spirit of trust and cooperation (a similarity among these villages). Before the Revolution, this spirit was much more pertinent and even there were many forms of cooperation in rural areas. However, such a spirit has still remained in the villages, while many villagers have migrated to bigger cities in pursuit of better prospects.

6.3.2. Inputs

In Ahmadabad, besides the local women's group that can act as a "demand articulator", the council does not play an active role and therefore the demands are in form of individual demands or complaints. Even if people raise their demands in upper sections of the administrative hierarchy in Biarjomand (the District) or Shahroud, they are individual demands. Normally, people vote and participate in the elections (about 50 per cent); but this is not an important issue for them. The case is different in the three villages in Kerman where a partnership has been shaped. Therefore, the support of the people is important for the councils (whether by participating in the meetings or voting to the candidates of rural council). While it is not important whether the people vote for candidates of national elections (presidency, Islamic Assembly, etc.), it is vital to them to have people in their meetings and to listen to their voices. Meanwhile, it is only in this case that the people's demands in their village become noteworthy (see Table 6.7).

In Tajabad, people have another form of demand: they want the District or the provincial authorities to support their council and their selected Dehyar (village governor). In fact, the council, as was explained in the case study, approved a woman to be a Dehyar. This had created a difficult situation for the District authorities who were reluctant to accept the woman as the Dehyar. People supported the council's decision; they resisted the authorities' decision and insisted on conformance with their demand several times (by attending in the meetings and preparing written requests). After applying a lot of pressure on the authorities, at last, the demands made by the people were accepted. The council, the Dehyar and the people were all satisfied with the success of their struggle. The council deals with the demands in an organized way. In Sarab Karyan, there is no council. They have their own system of dealing with their demands. Table 6.7 depicts cross-comparisons of rural communities in terms of inputs. A study of this table shows that demand articulation is also an important part of a

complete feedback-loop. In case of the three villages in Kerman province and also in case of Tajabad, there are organized and categorized demands while they are articulated by the steering committee or advisory groups. In Sarab Karyan, the system is different, since people are directly connected to their decision-making body.

<div align="center">Table 6.7: Rural Communities Cross Comparisons - Inputs</div>

	Inputs	
	Support	**Demands**
Ahmadabad (Semnan province)	Support the local council through voting Support the system through voting	Individual demands / complaints Local group receives certain demands (on income-generation of women)
The three villages (Kerman province)	People support the partnership through attending the meetings Support their local councils through voting They support the system through voting	Organized and categorized demands through the steering committee of the three villages (due to the approach used in community-building)
Tajabad (Hamedan province)	People support their own council and the Dehyar by participating in meetings, supporting their local council through voting They support the system through voting	Demands for supporting the local council and the Dehyar Organized and categorized demands through the advisory groups in the village, meetings with people.
Sarab Karyan (Kermanshah province)	People support their village by attending the meetings No support by voting	People sit together and demands are discussed and prioritized.

<div align="center">Source: Drawn by the researcher</div>

As discussed in the urban case studies, there seems to be an unseen filter between the inputs and the black box[78]. This means that the people have to vote for the "qualified persons" and, at the same time, only demands that are the "system's priorities" will be heard, discussed and decided; therefore, the system protects itself by this unseen filter. The filter acts on "inputs", which means that only those demands and candidates (for elections) that are accepted to pass through the filter.

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[78] The black box in the rural areas will be discussed later, in Section 6.3.4.

The concept of "demands articulators" in rural areas has to be different from those in urban areas. Villages are not populated like cities, and people know each other. They live very close to each other; many of them are members of one family or more, and the resources are common properties. Thus, demands are at least known to the villagers. But how are these demands articulated so that they can go through the black box? NGOs enter the village with their own plans, and therefore, they cannot be too much helpful. The visits of the local authorities to villages have not led to any concrete action. The only group that represents the village is the council and this is the council that has to take the responsibility of demand articulation. In a cross comparison of these six villages, except for Tajabad, the other councils have not played such a role. Of course, Sarab Karyan does not require such demand articulation since they try to resolve the problems in the village, and with their own resources. In Ahmadabad, only members of the women local group have felt their own members' demand for income-generation. In the three villages of Kerman, a structure was shaped with participation of the representatives from the three villages to help to respond the existing needs. This structure has not taken the role of demand articulation and is involved in a process of problem finding – not for articulation – but to resolve the problem by themselves.

6.3.3. Outputs

Since rural policies cover all villages, they have the same outputs from the system. However, when these similar outputs merge into the different environment (context) of villages, they create different feedbacks and inputs.

There are two types of policies: supportive policies and restrictive ones. Examples of supportive policies are "direct subsidies", "loans for renovation of the houses", "training services by the governmental departments", and "buying certain government-supported crops from the peasants". However, the restrictive policies are not the same in villages: for instance, in Ahmadabad this is the Touran National Park regulations that restrict the

people in certain areas; in Kerman, the regulations on water resources; and in Kermanshah, the natural resources regulations limit the people. While these regulations may be effective for protection of the resources, they are top-down policies that may not be welcomed by people.

In all these villages, there have been outputs by the local sub-system that are welcomed by the villagers and help them to be empowered. In Ahmadabad, this is the women's group with its outputs for women to be involved in income-generation; in the three villages, this is the poultry-farming that will assist the people as an output; in Tajabad, the library, the local fund for students and the advisory groups are the outputs; and finally in Sarab Karyan, the decisions and the actions taken by the people are the outputs that are benefiting the village (see Table 6.8). Most of these actions are local initiatives. In Table 6.8, the cross comparisons of rural communities in terms of outputs have been illustrated. General supportive policies in all villages affect the people's life, livelihoods and their agriculture. The system outputs are top-down, restrictive that create more limitations in four villages (Ahmadabad and the three villages in Kerman) while in Tajabad, the outputs are only limiting the council.

Table 6.8: Rural Communities Cross Comparisons - Outputs

	Outputs
Ahmadabad (Semnan province)	General supportive policies affecting people's life, livelihood and agriculture Policies on the protected areas (Touran National Park) Top-down, restrictive, creating more limitations Women's group: opportunities for certain women in village for income-generation.
The three villages (Kerman province)	General supportive policies affecting people's life, livelihood and agriculture Policies on water supply / Jiroft dam / Top-down, short-termed, unsustainable (especially regarding flood prevention) Community-based project for income-generation through the partnership
Tajabad (Hamedan province)	General supportive policies affecting people's life, livelihood and agriculture Decisions to limit the council Certain activities in the village to empower people (such as the library, the fund, and the advisory groups)
Sarab Karyan (Kermanshah province)	General supportive policies affecting people's life, livelihood and agriculture Policies on natural resources No council - Decisions and actions by people themselves

Source: Designed by the researcher

6.3.4. The Black Box

For the villages, as the context is more limited in comparison with the urban communities, we will not discuss all the aspects of the black box. The discussion here will focus primarily on who is in the black box and the decision-making process within the village.

A. Who decides for the villages?

There was a long discussion in Chapter Five on planning for villages. If we consider the villages as sub-system within the larger political system, then we have to admit the policies and decisions that affect the villages have been decided in the centre. General policies regarding different aspects involving agriculture, health and the like are decided by the related ministries in Tehran. Certain general policies have already been determined in the five-year cultural, social and economic plans. Other regional issues, such as fresh water, are decided in the Provincial Planning Committee. Rural people are in no way invited to be part of the decision-making process. In fact, those who are in the black box for decision-making are part of the bodies appointed by the elected bodies. It can be argued that these ministries are part of the government whose President is elected by the people and the Cabinet ministers are all approved by the elected body of the Islamic Council; thus, any decision taken by the government is part of the an indirect democracy system. However, as we discussed certain issues in unique cases, we found out that while certain policies have been in favour of the villagers (such as the policy of public subsidiaries), others (such as the policy of eliminating Kapars in South Kerman) have not been welcomed by the rural people. The decision-makers need to involve people, consider the context and move towards the decentralized forms of policy-making.

B. Decision-making process in villages

The decision-making in the villages is examined here with an aim to find why people are not involved in this process. This is also a main part of the second key question of the research. The results show that, in most of the cases, there is no formal mechanism for the involvement of people at local level in decision-making (see Table 6.9). Meanwhile, in Kerman province (the three villages), the people have informally created an operational mechanism for people's participation through a partnership between the three villages. In Tajabad, the council has created informal advisory groups (due to the high population of the village) for consultation on village issues; and, in Sarab Karyan, there is no council, but the people themselves participate seriously in decision-making on their common issues. Table 6.9 shows the reasons why people are not involved in decision-making in the targeted villages. No mechanism has been in place for people's involvement in decision-making, however, in Sarab Karyan, where there is no council, people are fully involved in decision-making at least for the issues they can afford to resolve. It is clear from the table wherever the council creates initiative for people's participation, certain mechanisms for people's involvement shapes. However, this is not a general policy for all rural councils.

Table 6.9; Rural Communities Cross Comparisons – Decision-Making

	Why people are not involved in decision-making?
Ahmadabad (Semnan province)	• There is no mechanism for decision-making.
The three villages (Kerman province)	• There is no mechanism for decision-making in these three councils. • People are invited in decision-making processes through their steering committee (the partnership between the three villages).
Tajabad (Hamedan province)	• The council and the Dehyar have shaped advisory groups in the village to make people to be involved in decision-making.
Sarab Karyan (Kermanshah province)	• Sarab-Karyan has no council. • People are fully involved in decision-making for those involved in leading the village; invite everybody to be in the process of decision-making.

Source: Designed by the researcher

The case of Sarab Karyan and other cases of nomad villages prove that villagers themselves have the potential to decide for many issues related to their life. However, when they are not involved and the decisions are taken somewhere in the centre in a ministry, it is not clear whether the decision is in favour of people or not. A devolution of power is possible at the rural level and can be in favour of people in these areas.

6.4. Urban-Rural Comparison

Urban councils have more potential to play political roles rather than rural councils, while the latter has a major role in the national production of crops and livestock. Therefore, it is important to compare both kinds of entities. However, the processes they have shaped are different. In certain cases, the rural councils have contributed to the devolution of power while in an urban context, this has never happened, except for the case of Sanandaj (in Kurdistan province) where the council has introduced a local mayor (a Kurd mayor of Sanandaj) who has been later approved by the Ministry of Interior. This has, in fact, helped, to some extent, to contribute to the devolution of power since the Kurds themselves are represented in the council or act as mayor for their own town.

One more comparison of rural and urban council is the fact that the councils in certain villages have shaped particular patterns of people's participation, especially when they have exceeded the limits of their defined functions. They have initiated their own mechanisms for people's participation while in the cities, this has not easily occurred. In Tehran, a pattern of neighbourhood councils has been shaped, due to the overpopulation of the Metropolitan Tehran, that has not been experienced in other cities[79].

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[79] As mentioned earlier, a model of neighborhood councils has been formed in Zahedan (that is different from the neighborhood councils in Tehran). Zahedan is the centre of the Sistan and Baluchestan province.

When demands are organized, categorized and prioritized, and are expressed in a rationalized language, they might have more possibilities to pass through the filters of the system. Sporadic and individual demands do not have any chance to be taken into the system. That is why "demand articulators" play a major role. In cities, such demand articulators are more accessible than the villages. At least, in Tehran, the neighbourhood councils can play such a role, and in the smaller cities, the city council can be an articulator to transmit the demands into the black box of decision-making. While for the fourth run of councils, the number of members in the Tehran Council was increased from 15 to 31, but still neighbourhood councils are needed to play the role of a bridge between the people and the city council. However, if the city council cannot connect itself to the system, it is ambiguous what would happen to the people's demands. The council of the councils has been shaped bottom-up, however, it is not clear how this higher council can connect itself to the legislative or executive branches in the country. If such connection is established, a feedback loop from the outputs to the inputs will be shaped. Such a connection is still missing.

In villages, councils are busy with the village routine affairs, and are less involved in the system. That is why the councils over there may not play such a role. If we re-read the functions of the councils, in the wording of the theory of the political system, then it can be deduced that urban and rural councils are, in fact, the entities to monitor the system's outputs. This is the least possible functional duty a decentralized entity can do. However, these councils, as elective entities, can be more than a monitoring body and enter into the decision-making processes. This happened in villages to some extent, and the results have shown certain improvement in the life of people.

The civil society organizations are important elements of society to monitor what the councils are implementing. They can increase the capacity of the councils and even the people's capacity in communities when dealing with social issues or the common

problems of the communities. Active and knowledgeable members of these organizations can be candidates for urban councils. They can also increase the capacity of the councils in villages too, through training courses or even providing them with best practices that can be implemented. These organizations can also play the role of demands articulators and help the environment (and the people) to convey the demands to the related governmental departments. They can help the villagers to organized powerful councils too. Thus, these organizations are vital in the process of democratization and decentralization. In fact, they can facilitate the process of power devolution.

As noted in the case studies, NGOs have been active in all urban communities. But they are not well connected to the councils. In Tehran, the city council has created a website for NGOs trying to cooperate with them. Certain plans have been supported by the council, but still there is no organic relationship between these two. This is because the council looks at the NGOs as implementer of the local projects in Tehran while NGOs demand more from the council and advocate for changes in policies. However, the local NGOs – those active at the community level – are not connected with the council and more or less, are in conflict with the neighbourhood councils.

At the rural level, as the case studies have noted, certain local groups have been established or active or in two cases, NGOs have had empowerment projects. The point is that NGOs have not been in close contact with the councils, somehow even disregarding this organization. NGOs are not well informed about the role that such institutions play in democratizing the villages. If NGOs accept the councils as democratizing entities, then they have to produce guide books for councillors, implement projects of empowering the councils to increase their potentials, or to devise initiatives for advocating more power for councils.

6.5. Assessing the results

After presenting the cross comparisons of rural and urban cases according to the conceptual framework and the political systems theory, the results can be organized based on the objectives of the study. This initial organization of the findings and results will be helpful for responding to the key questions in the next chapter. As the study has three objectives, the section has three parts. The first part summaries the findings on the process of decentralization. The second part focuses on the actual role of the councils and the third part explains why the policy of decentralization has not led to devolution of power and the empowerment of people.

6.5.1. Decentralization Process

The first objective of the study is to understand the reality of the process of decentralization. The following results can be listed here:

The government since Khatami has supported a major policy of decentralization. The results of related regulations, planning and elections have ended in the formation of rural and urban councils. These councils have not been politically institutionalized in the power structure. That is why, in certain cases, the councils have become like a monitoring sub-system to the system. In others, they are like an entity in the environment without powers. The hierarchy of power has not been modified to give an appropriate position to the councils. The civil society organizations have not taken the councils as serious institutions of decentralization. The higher council of councils is still inactive and the provincial councils have not been a major actor in provincial planning committees.

Neighbourhood councils were created in Tehran during the second run of the Tehran Council and that was a move forward. These neighbourhood councils are still weak and

have not been able to connect the Tehran council to its constituency. Neighbourhood councils, if acting powerfully at the local level, could have articulated "demands" from the environment (local communities) to the Tehran City Council.

The rural councils are a major factor of the process of decentralization. The councils in villages are in a position to mainstream the rural population into the decision-making processes. In certain villages, the councils have gone further than their defined functions and have contributed to the development of their village. In others, the councillors have considered their position as a governmental one and have acted as a governmental body to monitor the activities of the village governor (Dehyar).

6.5.2. Actual Role of councils

The actual picture of the councils in cities and villages contributes to our understanding of whether these councils, as decentralized entities, are playing a role in decentralization or not. One actual role of the urban councils is to act as "municipal council" – approving the municipal budget and monitoring municipal projects and services. However, in Tehran, the council is a political institution and, therefore, it plays one more role which is to control the power of the municipality, while, the council itself is under the political supervision. In Kurdistan province, the urban councils have played a strategic role in self-determination of the Kurds. For the first time, Kurd mayors have been appointed in all cities of the province. This has to be recognized as a new wave of devolution of power. The same has happened in Sistan and Baluchestan. This will give more powers to religious minorities in Iran.

In villages, the councils, where acted on their own discretion and independently from the system, have been able to create mechanisms of people's participation in decision-making (such as advisory groups in Tajabad, partnership in the three cases of Kerman or

the case of Sarab Karyan). Indeed, the independence from the formal system will create an "openness" for the entity to approach the people, and to find out the appropriate mechanism for their participation and for them to experience empowerment. In others, the rural councils may become a part of the governmental system (like Ahmadabad).

6.5.3. Why policies have not led to devolution?

The councils can be helpful if they can be elected in a proper manner and if they can receive and respond to people's demands in an appropriate way too. However, people are only able to support candidates or policies qualified by the system. For all the elections, there is always a system of "qualification" to have only those candidates on the list that best fit the system. This filter is not only for the support. The filter is applied for demands too. Not all demands are studied or accepted to become a motivation for a new decision or a new policy. Even if demands are accepted (they can pass through the system), there is always a filter that governs the selection of the demands. The "filtered" inputs can impair policies of decentralization. A filtered democracy is in power.

Apart from the filters, demand articulators are weak. The councils themselves do not play such a role, while neighbourhood councils, wherever established with the purpose of demand articulation, are weak too; civil society organizations are not still demand oriented. When demands are not well articulated, then the system cannot respond well to the demands.

In the case of the Tehran city council, this metropolitan city is the centre of a centralized political system, and the system monitors every single decision of the council. The council has to move within the political outputs of the system. This makes the council a fully political entity. Also, the process of candidacy and elections go through a political atmosphere. It means that it is important for political parties to win chairs in the council,

especially now that the number of the chairs has been increased to 31. Any access to this highly political entity in the capital would mean "a share of power". Therefore, even with this definition, the Tehran council takes distance from its real nature, which is to be a decentralized entity.

The council of the councils has been shaped bottom-up; however, it is not clear how this higher council can connect itself to the legislative or executive branches in the country. If such connection are established, a feedback loop from the outputs to the inputs will be shaped. Such a connection is still missing.

6.6. Summary

Cross comparisons of the case studies are the core part of this chapter. The comparisons, while showing certain uniqueness in certain cities (such as Tehran) and villages (such as Sarab Karyan), proved certain generalizations on issues such as filtered inputs, weak demand articulators, an impaired feedback loop and certain political obstacles. The councils have limited power and they have to be more than the municipal councils. Higher council of councils is still inactive and the provincial councils have not become an indispensable member of the provincial planning committees. Also, in Tehran, the politicization of the council has put the entity under a high political supervision. In Kurdistan, a new wave of Kurd mayors is leading the municipalities that can be regarded as a positive step.

<center>**Chapter Seven**</center>

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of the research. It starts with an overview of the whole research and continues with responding to the two key questions of the study. The next part focuses on the contributions of the study and presents the notion of the filtered democracy. It also presents a critical review of the theory of political systems. The next part of the chapter is a list of recommendations in two categories. The first part is addressed to the researchers, especially those working on democracy and decentralization in Iran. The second part is addressed to the practitioners and activists of the civil society in Iran, since these recommendations will assist them to better revise their programmes for the empowerment of people in communities and to increase the capacities of the local government as well as the local councils in Iran. The chapter continues with certain limitations of the research as well as certain hints for future studies in this field. The chapter ends with a summary.

7.2. An overview

The research focused on the issue of democratisation through decentralization in Iran. Through an approach of multiple case studies, and by collecting data from the urban and rural communities, and by applying the political system theory – as raised by Easton – the researcher tried to answer the two key questions raised in the first chapter: 1) how is the structure of the post-revolution decentralization system framed? Why has it not

enabled people to participate in decision-making?; and 2) why has the policy of decentralization not led to devolution? What are the political obstacles?

Through an analysis of the data collected from the field and cross comparisons, a series of results were found. The councils were studied within the political structure of Iran. The research studied the administrative hierarchy but it did not stop there and moved forward to study and analyse the power structure. The theory helped the researcher to review the interactions between the outputs (such as policies decided by the system), the inputs (in form of demands and support), the process of decision-making within the black box and the feedback loop and the environment, as the important elements of a theory of systems.

7.3. Findings and conclusion

The first key question is about the structures of the post-revolution decentralization or in other words about the way the institutions have been defined to realize decentralization. The key institutions in this structure are the councils that are elected by the people every four years. The government since Khatami has supported a major policy of decentralization. The results of related regulations, planning and elections have ended with the formation of rural and urban councils. These councils have not been politically institutionalized in the power structure. That is why, in certain cases, the councils have become like a monitoring sub-system to the system. In others, they are like an entity in the environment without powers. The hierarchy of power has not been modified to consider an appropriate position for the councils. The civil society organizations have not taken the councils as serious institutions of decentralization. The higher council of councils is still inactive and the provincial councils have not been a major actor in provincial planning committees.

In Kurdistan province, the urban councils have played a strategic role in self-determination of the Kurds. For the first time, Kurd mayors have been appointed in all cities of the province. This has to be recognized as a new wave of devolution of power. The same has happened in Sistan and Baluchestan. This will give more powers to religious minorities in Iran.

Within the process of decentralization, neighbourhood councils were established in Tehran after the second run of the Tehran City Council, possibly because a small council could not deal with all the issues of an eight million population city. This was an important positive action. However, the neighbourhood councils that are expected to play the role of "demand articulators" are not powerful enough to connect the Tehran City Council to its constituency.

There are more than 35,000 rural councils and it is clear that these local entities are a major factor of the process of decentralization. The councils in villages are in a position to mainstream the rural population into the decision-making processes. In certain villages, the councils have gone further than their defined functions in the law and have contributed to the development of their village. In others, the councillors have considered their position as a governmental one and have acted as a governmental body to monitor the activities of the village governor.

In response to the second part of the second question about the reasons why it has not enabled people to participate in decision-making, it has to be clarified that the urban councils are in fact "municipal councils" – limited to approving the municipal budget and monitoring municipal projects and services. They could have more powers of decision-making. The councils are not linked in with the governmental departments.

However, in Tehran, the council is a political institution and, therefore, it plays one more role which is to control the power of the municipality, while the council itself is

under high political supervision and is influenced by political factions. The process of candidacy and elections also go through a political atmosphere. This means that it is important for political parties to win chairs in the council, especially since the number of the chairs has recently been increased to 31. Any access to this highly political entity in the political capital would mean "a share of power". This has made the Tehran city council a political entity rather than a council that focuses on the process of decentralization. As the council is placed in a highly political centre, it is not easy for it to decentralize and act as an independent entity.

In villages, the councils, which act on their own discretion and independently from the system, have been able to create mechanisms of people's participation in decision-making (such as advisory groups in Tajabad, partnership in the three cases of Kerman or the case of Sarab Karyan). Indeed, this independence from the formal system has created an "openness" for the entity to approach people, and to find out the appropriate mechanism for participation and to experience empowerment. In others, the rural councils may become a part of the governmental system (like Ahmadabad).

The second key question was about the reasons why the policy of decentralization has not led to devolution with an aim to study the political obstacles. It has to be emphasized that the councils can be helpful if they can be elected in a proper manner and if they can receive and respond to people's demands in an appropriate way too. However, due to the existence of a filtered democracy – that will be dealt in the section below on the contributions of this study – people are only able to support "candidates or policies qualified by the system". A filtered democracy is a key feature of the power system.

Apart from the filters, demand articulators are weak. The councils themselves do not play such a role, while neighbourhood councils, wherever established with the purpose of demand articulation, are weak too. In addition, it was found that the civil society

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organizations are not still demand oriented. When demands are not well articulated, then the system cannot well respond to the demands.

The council of the councils has been shaped bottom-up; however, it is not clear how this higher council can connect itself to the legislative or executive branches in the country. If such a connection is established, a feedback loop from the outputs to the inputs will be shaped. Such a connection is still missing.

7.4. Contributions of the Study

The study has two major contributions. The first is the concept of the filtered democracy, as it was the result obtained from the analysis of this political system. The second contribution is about a critique of the theory of the political systems in cases of "resistance" and "persistence". Both contributions have been explained here.

7.4.1. Filtered democracy

When the cases studies were presented in Chapters Four and Five, one issue was continuously repeated in each case: filters that the system used for the inputs. As inputs are the elements that may change the system, the political system has always used an unseen filter. Not all the inputs can enter into the system and be accepted as a demand. In fact, nobody can support any individual or any appropriate policy he or she would like. The people are only able to support the "candidates or policies qualified by the system". Such filtering in certain cases has put in place its own processes, while in other cases this has become a normal behaviour of the system in its hierarchy. For instance, during all the elections, there is always a system of "qualification" to have only those candidates on the list that best fit into the system. This filter is not only for the support but applied for demands too. Not all demands are studied or accepted to become a motivation for a new decision or a new policy. Even if demands are accepted (they can

pass through the system), there is always a filter that governs the selection of the demands (an example is the case of the dam in Jiroft). This filtered democracy does not allow for the decentralization process to be fully implemented. However, in certain places, the councils have insisted on their choices. The example of Kurd mayors in Kurdistan province is an example where the filters could not work.

Kiraly et al. (2015) in their research on political leadership and system thinking, refer to three interrelated filters on the information that feeds into the system: cognitive, institutional and political. They believe that the first filter is the result of eco-psychological perspectives while the second studies the institutional capacities to receive information. The third is a significant filter since it affects the other two filters too. The authors have used selectorate theory, raised by Siverson et al. (2003), to explain why the political system and especially the political leaders survive. The theory is formed on three important bases: 1) the incentives related to their political survival are the most important for political leaders; 2) the political context is regarded as an important factor in taking any decision about strategies to remain in power; and 3) they do whatever they can do to increase their chances to survive. In fact, Kiraly et al. (2015) think that political leadership will apply the filters and the selectorate theory to remain in power. Meanwhile, Pache and Santos (2010), also in studying the dynamics of organizations for responding the conflicting institutional demands, refer to filtering. In fact, organizations have a new function: to filter the institutional demands, which depends on the nature of the demand and internal representation. By internal representation, the authors believe when one demand is received by the organization and the demand is in conflict with the existing thinking of the organization, then it is the duty of those who represent the new demand in the organization to talk about that. Without the presence of supporters of the new demands, it has a low chance to be dealt with. Therefore, the filter obstructs the new demand.

It is obvious that the decentralization cannot be a separate policy from the process of democratization. The decentralization process should be fully connected to the democratization process. This was exactly the issue when the literature regarding the decentralization in other Asian countries was studied. Without a proper decentralization process, democracy is not possible while without a democratic approach, decentralization is not possible. A filtered democracy cannot help decentralization to be institutionalized and mainstreamed in Iran.

After the 1979 Revolution, the political structure changed with an aim to facilitate the process of democratization in the country and at the same time, the Islamic Revolution institutionalized the concept of authority based on the principle of the "rule of the theologian" as the agency of the Imam. In fact, the democratization process was always under the influence of the religion of the governing elites. This is in fact part of the reason why such filtered democracy has been shaped. However, this is not the only reason. During the whole past four decades, Iran has been in a transit from a non-democratic system to democracy. Naturally, incomplete forms of democracy shape during the transition time. For greater democratization, two key factors are the people's demands for more accountability, freedoms, and participation, and at the same time, the role of the reformers in its various political forms (political parties, independent Majles deputies, journalists, and NGOs). In this study, we found out that the process of demand articulation is not well established especially the local councils are not powerful enough to be the key part in the feedback loop of the political system, and this could be a reason why filtered democracy has persisted. Meanwhile, the hierarchies act like filters on demand articulation and in certain cases, they block or even transform demands. It can be called institutional filters. Take Tehran for instance. As we showed in the case of Oudlajan, a demand that has been recognized by the neighbouring council has to be reflected to the Tehran City Council and if this is a demand that has to be dealt in a

governmental department, then the connection between the City Council and the departments are not well established. However, if this demand is articulated by this higher council to the departments in Tehran, then it has to be transmitted to the higher level or the related Ministry. Within the Ministries, there is another complex hierarchies. While not each and every demand is not accepted, the hierarchy acts like a filter. That why "decentralization" and "devolution of power" could be an effective solution for the present system.

The concept of the "filtered democracy" can be raised in another way. The outputs shape the inputs in a way that helps the system remain and creates a new sequence that is different with what Easton raised. Instead of being (Inputs-Black Box-Outputs), it has become (Black Box-Outputs-Inputs) which is an authoritarian order of the system. This means that the Black Box does not need inputs from outside and continues with its own resources that it makes. It does not require the inputs from the environment. If it is required to have inputs from the environment, then it is done through a filter.

As Mosalanejad (2008) has concluded after an invaluable research, the political culture has always been influenced by political power in Iran. But it is not clear how much the people have influenced political power. In fact, this is the political power that decides how the inputs can take shape; however, it does not need these inputs. It would be good for the political system to have desirable support with less demands but if there were excessive demands with undesirable support, then the system is not concerned since it does not enter into the system to create stress.

7.4.2. A critical review of the theory

The theory of political systems is a powerful means for understanding a system by studying the interactions among its different elements. As it is a theory of science, it

approaches the political inquiry from a scientific view. However, the theory suffers from the analysis of "resistance" in a political system, whether the resistance occurs within the black box or in the environment. It was well illustrated in the case studies how the system reacts to this resistance. However, political systems theory does not provide an analysis how this resistance is shaped. It is logical that any action or policy that may create a resistance will end with a change in "inputs". Therefore, new decisions are taken in the Block Box or the previous decisions will be revised so that new actions or policies are adopted that create less resistance; this will help the system to persist. However, the resistance is a reality and happens.

The resistance can be a major factor to create "stress" for the system; it weakens or destroys the balance within the system. It is not only an issue of "excessive demands". Moreover, it is resisting a policy or an output of the system. In this state, the outputs are not decided based on the inputs; they are not responding to the existing demands in the society. The system continues the same behaviour. The resistance is not only for meeting a demand but it may be created by unmet demands in the society. The political systems theory mentions that for a system to persist, there should be a feedback loop that connects its outputs to the inputs. The question then is this: how does the system persist if the outputs are not meeting the demands, and the resistance is taking shape. It seems that there are other elements besides the demands that create the change in the system. The theory is true by the time the system persists and responds to the demands in society. However, it does not mention how the resistance forms. If the resistance starts when the demands are unmet, then the system adapts, and no resistance shapes and if the demands are met, there is not any resistance.

Easton studies this change in his paper in a reaction to Miller's critical views on systems theory. He argues that the system changes its behaviour when the inputs change. But he does not explain how these changed inputs are created, especially if we consider the fact

that the outputs are delivered because the system wants appropriate inputs. Elites or those who would like to have a new behaviour other than the behaviour that the system reproduces, can be an origin of a change. Regional political processes may create a new behaviour. However, the point is that a resistance can change into a social or political protest movement, which is not demanded by the system. After all, the outputs of the system are such that they will contribute to the persistence of the system.

Two examples of resistance in the case studies were presented in this research. In Sarab Karyan, the village in Kermanshah, the people did not want to have a council. For them, the traditional system of decision-making in the village is more effective. For them, the behaviour of system to create a council in the village was not accepted. They resisted reproducing the behaviour. Moreover, in Tajabad village, in the province of Hamedan, the council resisted to accept the decision of the upper political system. Why did the council react in this way? It can be due to an awareness and the increasing knowledge in the village that is different from the one that upper political system promotes. The theory does not explain why such local resistance emerges; since the outputs of the system are the result of the inputs. Easton refers to the "adaptive system" that may cope with such excessive demands or insufficient supports. Such an adaptive system tries to decrease demands and increase supports. However, it cannot create a resistance when the outputs are to meet the demands, decrease the stress and increase the support. If the outputs are not related to the demands, then how does a system persist to exist? This is exactly true when there is no resistance. People support the system that is not in their interest and continue to do so. Logically, the feedback loop should not continue to create supportive inputs when the system is not in the interests of the people. However, the system continues to gain people's votes without creating a favourable life for people. One may argue that people "hope" that the system changes itself. However, this "hope" is not the result of the outputs of the system. Or it may be argued that a group of

elites that are out of system (within the environment) may produce such supportive behaviour since they have compromised or agreed on a new approach. An example is the presidency elections of 2013; the people's attitude towards the system changed only three days before the day of the elections; they welcomed the existing choice, attended the elections and voted extensively for Rohani. In fact, the outputs of the system due to the turmoil of the presidential elections in 2009 (the political restrictions and limitations) should have created unsupportive inputs but this did not happen – as it was explained in case of Tehran. A new behaviour shaped because the people were influenced by a group of elites. Such "unsystematic" behaviours have not been explained in Easton's theory of political systems.

7.5. Recommendations

7.5.1. Policy-Makers

The provincial councils and the Higher Council in Tehran are two mechanisms that are closer to the "Black Box" of the political power and decision-making process. They have to persuade the elites and the authorities as well as the parliamentarians about the advantages of the power devolution in the democratization process. In fact, these two representative entities are legitimate bodies at the macro level, stemming from the local councils in a bottom-up process. Thus, they may use their agency for appropriate changes within the system so that the councils become more powerful at local level. At the present time, the provincial councils have been limited to participating in the sessions of the provincial planning committee and the Higher Council has a working relationship with the Majles in Tehran. It is necessary for the provincial councils to become an indispensable part of the planning committees and also the Higher Council should move forwards with plans to reform the existing decentralization process.

The establishment of the councils is a milestone in the process of democratization, if their functions within the legal framework can be modified; with more power at the local level, especially in issues directly connected to the life of people, they can contribute more to the well-being of the citizens. At the present time, in urban areas, the councils are limited to the municipal services.

7.5.2. Practitioners and Activists

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may play different roles for strengthening the process of decentralization. They can train the councillors how to monitor or plan. They can act as demand articulators and facilitate the process of demands into the system, somehow trying to go through the filter. NGOs have ignored the role that councils can play and therefore, it is recommended that they can play the role once more.

7.6. Limitations and future study

This research did not focus on nomads in Iran while studying the community in Roudbar and the case on Sarab Karyan; only certain information on nomads was presented and analysed. A separate in-depth research is needed to study the power structure and decentralization among nomadic tribes. This can be important since they have their own traditional power system, and this system has always been under the influence of the political changes in the power system and the central government.

A comparison study on the neighbourhood councils in Sanandaj city and Tehran city is necessary with an aim to create a framework of local governance in bigger cities. A council of 31 members cannot manage a city of eight million people. It could not be a participatory model, though it is a representative body. Therefore, neighbourhood councils play a major role to guarantee people's participation in decision-making.

However, this experience in Tehran and Sanandaj is a recent one. There should studies with an aim to work out effective models of interaction and participation for connecting people to the city council in bigger cities.

7.7. Summary

The research concludes that the filtered democracy could be one major political obstacle in the way of devolution of power. This research found out that the filters are mostly in the way of inputs into the system using a conceptual framework based on political systems theory. People's demands are ignored or are not well followed up to result in decisions (outputs) in favour of people. Demand articulation processes are weak and civil society is not involved in strengthening the process of decentralization although NGOs have made contributions to the democratization process. It was also found that a decentralization system has been formed through the elections and the establishment of local councils in rural and urban areas while this system is not politically institutionalized within the power system. They are more or less the municipal councils rather than powerful local councils that can facilitate the process of devolution of power.

This form of democracy can be categorized as a transitional model within the process of democratization. It could be of high importance since the system creates the institutions that are needed for democratization but at the same time filters the process of inputs into the decision-making and policy system. This filtered democracy does not allow for the decentralization process to be fully implemented.

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