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Original Research

## Which Social-Psychological Models Explain Rangers' Participation in Rangeland Management Cooperatives? An Application of Path Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

The highly centralized management of rangelands in northwest Iran has caused their degradation. Rangeland Management Cooperatives (RMCs) have been taken into account by the Iranian researchers and practitioners as the best mode of managing and tackling these resources. In this regard, stakeholders' participation (i.e., the rangers) in such institutions is a substantial issue because without their close collaboration, any management scheme is likely to fail or succeed partially. Therefore, this study investigates the rangers' participation in RMCs using the theory-triangulation method. We developed the main research question: how the explanatory variables, extracted from the social-psychological models, influence rangers' participation in RMCs. A sample of 200 rangers participated in the survey method, of which we received 179 completed self-reported questionnaires. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Kuder-Richardson 21, the metrics that measure the consistency of items in indicator variables with the interval and binary scales, respectively. The results of path analysis unveil that job satisfaction and progressivism have a direct effect on participation, and the improved economic conditions of industries developed by the RMCs, good intrarelational, fatalism, progressivism, optimism, and cost-benefit indirectly influence participation via job satisfaction. On the basis of these results, it is concluded that to increase rangers' participation in RMCs, which is a key factor in preventing the degradation of rangelands, RMCs' officials need to improve the local industries benefiting from the rangelands and upgrade intracommunication skills via training. It is also suggested that all rangers, even those with fatalistic beliefs, need to be included in RMCs' participatory activities. Finally, it is needed to assess progressivist rangers' needs, promote optimism, and visualize the economic, social, and conservation benefits of the participation in RMCs.

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## Introduction

A poor understanding of the social aspects of utilization of rangelands limits their proper management (Dong et al. 2009) and decelerates the achievement of their sustainable development. Participation is a remarkable issue in environmental studies, policies, and schemes (Pellizzoni and Ungaro 2000; Franks and Mc Gloin, 2007; Lubell et al. 2013). Concentrating on the use of participatory approaches in natural resource management (NRM) started in the 1930s (Garforth and Maarse, 1988; Lyden et al. 1990). These approaches enable the public to take greater control on development schemes by improving local knowledge to solve regional problems (Pretty 1995; Zurba and Trimble 2014). This implies that problem cycle life is meaningless and vicious

without involving the stakeholders in decision making (Brown 1995; Holmes-Watts and Watts 2008).

Given the degradation of rangelands in Iran (Ghasriani and Heidari Sharifabadi 2000; Ansari et al. 2008), researchers have regarded the socioeconomic factors that cause this crisis (Roudgarmi et al. 2001; Gheitori et al. 2006) and introduced the rangeland management cooperatives (RMCs) as the best way of managing the rangelands (Mohammadzadeh Chali et al. 2015). Rangelands in the Kurdistan province have an area of 1 400 000 ha, which produce about 620 000 tons of dry grass per year, and approximately 80% of the local animals depend on such rangelands (Jalali and Karami 2006). This province is one of the leading provinces in establishing the RMCs in the country (OAPCS 1996). With the establishment of these cooperatives, rangelands are assigned to the members. They are responsible for using, preserving, organizing the meetings of the general assembly, distributing the inputs (e.g., seed, bran, fertilizer, etc. among the members), controlling the entry and exit of the livestock (rangeland exclusion), collecting, buying and selling the dry grass, buying and selling surplus livestock, and sharing the acquired revenues among the members.

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There is a robust body of knowledge about the participation in NRM (Bagherian et al. 2009; Hayati et al. 2009; Dowlati and Hemati 2012; Lubell et al. 2013), but none of it presents a comprehensive model about the participation in the RMCs. Furthermore, the literature is full of the factors influencing employees' job satisfaction in the organizations (e.g., the effect of participation on job satisfaction), and therefore, there is little research relevant to the effect of job satisfaction on participation, especially participation in the RMCs. In addition to this, we hypothesized that whether or not new concepts (e.g., fatalism, progressivism, and optimism) explain participation in the RMCs. As a result, this study is intended to fulfill this knowledge gap using theory-triangulation, which focuses on the application of multiple professional perspectives to interpret a single set of data or information (Guion 2002). Therefore, the main objective of the study is to investigate what factors influence rangers' participation in RMCs.

## Theoretical Framework

There is a broad knowledge about the participation models, depending on the context under study. For example, Thomas-Slayter (1995) points out three participation models: 1) People's Institutions (PIs), which aim at benefiting the people who have low access to resources, through institutions; 2) Community Development and Rural Mobility (CDRM), which stimulates local people to participate in development measures; and 3) Guided Participation in Large-scale Projects (GPLP), by which development outsiders and insiders contribute in designing, implementing, and evaluating the development schemes.

Mohr (1992) also offers four grand models of participation in the organization contexts: 1) the Socialist Theory Model (STM), which declares that the proletariats should govern the industries with high levels of their participation; 2) the Democratic Theory Model (DTM) (i.e., by training and practicing, a citizen is capable of finding whose competencies to perform the allocated tasks); 3) the Human Growth and Development Model (HGDM), in which more lower-level needs are satisfied—in effect, the higher supreme-level needs (e.g., self-actualization) are given much more attention to be fulfilled; and 4) the Productivity and Efficiency Model (PEM), which rests on the psychological and sociological theories and postulates that participation causes the greater productivity, owing to the appearance of a higher level of moral sense (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment to the organization).

As there are a large number of theoretical models of participation, therefore, we limit the conceptual framework for models, such as RBM, DM, JSM, and RCM.

### Resource-Based Model of Participation

This model includes four external factors: 1) economic situation, 2) size of the union, 3) technology, and 4) social relations (Frege 1999; Shea and Green 2007). It assumes that people's participation in collective enterprises is the result of their demographic, psychological properties, but their structural characteristics (e.g., money, time, knowledge, information, skills) (Shea and Green 2007) also influence their participation.

### Economic Situation

Union members' economic situation determines their participation behavior. For example, when economic crisis arises, members are motivated to participate in unions' schemes. In the case of RCMs, these unions can help rangers improve their economic situation. In research with the aim of investigating the impact of economic factors on womens' participation in production cooperatives, Aazami and Soroushmeher (2011) show that improved household economic situation is positively associated with their participation. Adhikari et al. (2014) report that access to resources and benefits from the resource governing community is a key influential incentive determining the

effective participation of users in such community. Indeed, participation is linked with improved access to information and benefits, which is directly associated with the improved livelihood. Atmiş et al. (2009) assert that members' access to capital and credit affects their participation in forestry cooperatives. In this regard, the economic power of the poor is a key factor to increase their influence and participation in resource governance (Adhikari et al. 2014).

When RMCs improve the economic situation of the local region by developing infrastructures (Shemshad et al. 2011), such as small industries, members indirectly receive benefits from such organizations. At the same time, RMCs may directly benefit members by supplying financial facilities (e.g., loan, credit) (Jalali and Karami 2006; Shahraki et al. 2012). In this regard, members are likely to be job satisfied because monetary incentives link with job satisfaction (Taiwo 2016). In this situation, members play the roles of rational actors who weigh the benefits and costs (Frege 1999) of services delivered by the RMCs. In general, the cooperative's performance, which is the result of collaborative activities between members and components of the organization (Lisbijanto and Budiyo 2014), may create job satisfaction for employees (Perez 2009; Sadighi and Darvishinia 2002). Therefore, we delivered the following hypotheses:

**H1.** The improved economic situation will be positively associated with (a) cost-benefit, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) participation in RMCs.

### Size of Cooperatives

The size of an organization influences its members' participation in organization activities (Defourny and Dethier 2015). The literature shows a negative (Keith and Hilander 1964) and positive (Boynnton and Elitzak 1982; Gray et al., 1990) association of the size of organization with members' participation. Gray et al. (1990), in his study investigating the factors affecting dairy farmers' participation in cooperatives in the United States, reports that positive relationships between farm size and participation are relevant to the type of economic participation—purchasing-marketing, whether the farmer or farmer-member benefits from the membership. The following hypothesis was delivered:

**H2.** Size of cooperatives will be negatively associated with participation in RMCs.

### Intrarelations and Interrelations

Sayles (1958) debates that organizational technology includes personal relations, group cohesion, and power resources. It is assumed that group-based organizations are supportive of collective activities. Moreover, less organized persons are more reluctant to collective interests. Social relationships between managers and labors (e.g., managers' ability to communicate with staff and leadership of members' participation) are debated in models in this category. However, resource-based models may not account for variations in individual patterns of participation. Likewise, these theories do not explain why some people are more active than others (Frege 1999). Mirzaei et al. (2015) conclude that the social capital of cooperative board, as one of the aspects of intraorganizational factors, affects farmers' participation in rural production cooperatives (RPCs) in Boyerahmad Town, Iran. In the study on 147 farmer-cooperatives (FAs) in Zhejiang province, China, Liang et al. (2015) also demonstrate that there is a positive relationship between certain dimensions of social capital and members' participation in training and general meetings of the FAs. RMCs may create the atmosphere in which there exist appropriate relations among the members and board members (intrarelations), as well as suitable interrelations with exterior actors, and therefore this culture typically influences members' job satisfaction. Moreover, literature confirms the positive impact of good interrelations on job satisfaction (Tajvar et al. 2006; Zare Shah Abadi et al. 2012; Raziq and Maulabakhsh 2015). In the

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