

Persian translation of this paper entitled:  
مفهوم طراحی مشارکتی منظر  
is also published in this issue of journal.

## The Concept of Participation in Landscape Design

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Received 2017/12/19

revised 2018/04/16

accepted 2018/05/01

availableonline 2018/07/23

### Abstract

**Problem statement:** The word participation was introduced for the first time in European political affairs for the participation of men in voting and decision-making, about two hundred years ago. Subsequently, the use of this word gradually became widespread in other social and environmental dimensions of Europe. From around 1991 until now in Iran, we see an increasing use of this word in various dimensions. Thus, phrases such as political participation, social participation, civil participation, participatory management and landscape participation become popular over the last few decades. Despite the frequent use of participation in landscape in technical texts, the exact meaning of this term is not specified anywhere, and several texts have considered different meanings for it.

**Purpose:** Given this conceptual multiplicity of participation in landscape, as well as the use of multiple and similar phrases for these concepts, the purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of participation in landscape design.

**Research Methodology:** The research method is qualitative and content analysis. At first, the concept of the word "participation" and similar words have been examined in the Iranian texts. Then, in terms of the word "landscape", the experts view has been considered. Finally, the concepts that can be comprehended from the word "participation in landscape" are explained from the perspective of domestic writers. Also, the concept of participation in landscape design in English has also been reviewed.

**Conclusion:** Finally, a concept was found for "participation in landscape design" through the studies that in addition to considering the objective and subjective aspects of landscape, the concept of participation in landscape design was proposed instead of other similar terms to express this concept.

**Keywords:** *Participation, Landscape, Participation in landscape design.*

### Problem Statement

In Iran, the use of the word participation in technical

texts was first introduced around 1991 in social issues, and gradually the use of this word became widespread in all areas. Today, phrases of participation

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in landscape design, participatory governance, participatory policies and civil participation are familiar for everyone. Despite the frequent use of the word participation and its components, this word is often synonymous in most writings, with similar words including coaction, affiliation, assistance and collaboration. Among these phrases is participation in landscape design. The word landscape in this phrase is a familiar word that has long been used in Iran. Of course, today's concept of landscape architecture comes from European scientific institutions. In this definition, landscape is a subjective, objective, dynamic, and relative phenomena that is the product of human interaction with the environment, and society with history (Mansouri, 2015). Although the concept of landscape is clear to experts, the term participation in landscape design and other similar terms have been used in various concepts in numerous texts. Also, despite the abundant use of these expressions in numerous texts, their exact meaning is not distinguished anywhere, and most of the writings have only had briefly explained the concept of participation in landscape design, and even different meanings have been considered for these terms in different texts. Due to the conceptual multiplicity of this term, and also for the reason that the correct expression for the concept is not clear, the purpose of this article is to examine the concept of participation in landscape design. In this regard, the research questions are as follows:

- What is the difference between the word participation and other semantically similar words?
- What are the similarities and differences of existing definitions for participation in landscape design?

### **Research hypothesis**

Participation in landscape design, refers to the landscape design process that people, professionals, and employers are actively present in all stages of the process; and this, with the goal of self-help which means achieving an optimal design that is satisfactory to all three groups, is obtained and will lead to the improvement of the subjective and objective dimensions of the landscape design.

### **Research Methodology**

This research has been conducted in three stages using qualitative and content analysis. In the first step, the concept of the word participation has been studied. This is achieved by examining and comparing the concept of the word participation and other words that are semantically close to it. Thus, precise differences between the meanings of these words had been recognized. Then, regarding the word "landscape", the perspective of experts is being discussed. Fortunately, in this regard, there is consensus among the experts. Finally, the concepts that can be comprehended from the term "participation in landscape design" are explained from the perspective of domestic writers. Therefore, the terms and concepts used in connection with it are presented. Also, the concept of participation in landscape design in English has been expressed.

### **Research background and theoretical foundations**

As mentioned earlier, this section has been implemented in three phases: Explaining the concept of participation, explaining the concepts of landscape, and explaining participation in landscape design.

#### **Explaining the concept of partnership**

Ullmann, a famous English semanticist, writes in the definition of meaning that: "meaning is a two-way relationship between the mental image and the word" (quoted by Bateni, 1975: 196). As Ullmann also points out, over time, the phenomena of world and our mental image of them, and hence the meaning of words always change (Farhadi, 2002). Today, the use of the word participation, coaction, collaboration, help, accommodation, assistance is commonly used as synonyms in a variety of technical and non-technical texts. The late Professor Mohammad Taghi Jafari (R.I.P) in the article "The Cultural Principles for the Realization of Participation ..." and in the translation of the verses and narrations in which the term coaction has been used, considers collaboration, cooperation and participation as synonyms (Jafari 1986: 280 and 283). In a set of articles in conference on Participation

(October 17-15, 1964, Shiraz) two articles titled “Traditional coaction Patterns in the Transformation of the Rural Areas” by Dr. Hosseini Abri and “cooperation approaches in Rural Societies of Iran” by Dr. Mehdi Taleb, a Geography Professors of the universities of Isfahan and Tehran have been published; they indicate that the authors and organizers of the conference considered these titles synonymous with participation. Mr. Ansari, a professor and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tehran, wrote on the first page of the coaction foundations book: “The coaction (T’avon) which came from the Arabic language, and its Farsi equivalent is collaboration, means helping each other, assisting one another, collusion, supporting and aid, which reveals the concept of participation in a matter and collective action for a given purpose.” (Ansari, 1992: 1). In the same book, he says, “helping others” and “Self-help” are close to the concept of collaboration and coaction (Ibid: 20). Dr. Nematullah Matin also lists the synonyms and similar terms in “Theoretical Foundations of Participation and their necessities”. “This term [participation] ... in Farsi language there are different vocabularies for this word such as coaction, co-opting, helping, treating, cooperating, collaborating, assisting, mutual help ... aid, work, service, assistance, help, self-help ...” (Matin, 1998: 45). In addition to the authors and professors of cooperative in Iran, the authors of the papers and specialized governmental sources have also worked together on writings about coaction, helping and assisting, and considered them as one category; examples of these articles are the “Promotion and popular participation in the Jihad of construction publications” (Estelaji, 1994) and the abstract of the article “Promotion, Participation, People” (Estelaji, 1374), and the “Bibliography of Cooperative of Ministry of cooperatives” (Abbasi, Rostam Nejad, 2001). According to the above, the comments of authors and experts on the concept of participation is shown in (Table1). Now, if we consider the vocabularies as historical and fixed words with their synonyms, we want to know what the term “participation” means and what other similar words mean, and whether there is any subtle difference

between these words. Other words that are used in almost the same way as the word “participation” include coaction, affiliation, help, assistance, and partnership collaboration. We want to see if these words have been synonymous in the past, and if they were synonymous, was it total or partial synonymy. By total synonymy we mean “two or more words which imply a single mental image and are used in all contexts the language in each other’s place without the slightest change in the explicit or implicit meaning or emotional load of the expression. Of course, it should be noted that this phenomenon is very rare.” (Bateni, 1975: 196). By partial synonymy we mean: “The vast majority of words that are commonly understood as synonym are different from one another in terms of their meaning. When there are two or more words that are similar in some ways and different in other ways, there is an partial synonymy relation between them.”<sup>1</sup> (Ibid: 198).

In Table 2, the meaning of similar vocabularies to participation is derived from Dehkhoda dictionary in terms of semantics. According to Table 2, we find that the words such as coaction, aid, cooperation and participation are not exactly synonymous. Assistance (moavenat) is based on mofaela sound, and coaction (taavon) is based on tafaol sound. In each of the sounds which are mentioned in third person, one meaning is used more than other meanings, and “participation” is a meaning that is often considered for both purposes. Participation in this case means an action done by several subjects (Mohammadi, 1984: 60, 65; Al-Arabiya’s works: 34; Reza Tabataba’i: 160). Also, these two words derived from the root “Aoun” which means helping others. The word coaction means mutual help when there is a talk about helping and aiding each other. At the same time, it also means one-way help (helping others) when it comes to helping some people, and others. The word assistance also means helping others. Therefore, coaction and assistance have partial synonymy and both are similar in terms of mutual assistance and joint support. Due to the prefix Co- in the word “cooperation” which means doing together, the translation of the word in the Arabic dictionary is Taavon. Also, the words “help” and “assistant”

Table 1. The concept of participation from the vernacular authors' viewpoint. Source: authors.

<b>the concept of participation</b>	<b>vernacular authors</b>
collaboration, cooperation, coaction	Mohammad Taghi Jafari, 1986
coaction	Hosseini Abri, 1964
cooperation	Mehdi Taleb, 1964
coaction, helping others, Self-help	Ansari, 1992
coaction, co-opting, helping, treating	Nematullah Matin, 1998
coaction	Abbasi, Rostam Nejad, 2001

Table 2. The meaning of similar vocabularies to participation in the Dekhoda dictionary. Source: authors.

<b>the meaning of the world in the Dekhoda dictionary</b>	<b>world</b>
helping others, helping some people and others, mutual help	taavon (coaction )
helping others	moavenat (assistance )
assistance, nursing	yari (help)
assistance	yarigari (helping)
assistant	yarigar (helper)
Partner	hamkar (cooperator)
Compete, engage in business, working together	hamkari (cooperation)
exploitation	mosharekat

the aim of self-help. Although in many writings, participation have also been used with other meanings. The term participation derived from the root of PART, meaning part, fragment and portion, and it is derived from the Latin word PARTICIPA which means having it, in itself having something from others, having a share in other than self which means sharing, or getting something or part of it (Arianpour Kashani, 1994: 285). Also, in Longman Dictionary, this term is also means: Participate: (formal) to take part in an activity or event Taking part which shows the key part of this definition means participating. If we look how this compound verb is constructed, we find that the main meaning of it is the concept of “being a part of a larger process.” That is why cultures consider the term Mosharekat synonymous with participation. Because participation (mosharekat) is rooted in the verb “Sharak” which

have total synonymy. On the other hand, there is also partial synonymy between “cooperation” and “participation”; which means that one of the meanings of cooperation is synonymous with the meaning of participation. Participation means sharing, having a share, interests and exploitation, or “self-help”. It can be said that the coaction and assistance together, and cooperation and participations have partial synonymy and can be used indiscriminately in the language. However, it seems that the two terms of coaction and assistance are not synonymous with cooperation and participation. For general meaning of participating in collaboration and participation is to assist which we use today. Like participating in a quiz, participating in a sports competition, etc., which is different from being a partner in common interests or rights. Thus, participation means the presence of individuals with

means partnering. al-Raed Sharak is defined in dictionary as: “partnering in something” and this partnering describes the exact meaning of take part in the word participation. Writers and foreign specialists have also used the term participation in several concepts which are summarized briefly in (Table 3).

The viewpoint of foreign experts regarding the concept of the word participation can be divided into two general categories of self-help and helping others in the concept of indolence. The process of empowerment, discretion and organization, with the concept of self-help, starts from the bottom, that is, it starts spontaneously based on needs and necessities with the poor and the rural masses and ordinary people. On the contrary, the processes of empowering, giving discretion and organizing with the meaning of indolence begins from the top, and before being actors and constructors of participation, they are the result of the process of participation. However, this result may affect and intensify the progress of participation. In addition, as powering from above can act as a stimulus for participatory work, the feeling of powerlessness and incontinence may also provide the motivation for participatory actions from the bottom. Historical experience shows that this factor is much more effective than giving power, since it has been sustained by persistent pressure and relatively stable social necessities. Also, organizing from top-bottom, although may be carried out quickly, often not only lacks participatory content, but are demonstrative and inefficient, and cannot achieve main goals of participation. While spontaneous participation does not start in specific forms and organization, it steadily grows with the expansion of participatory force.

### **Describing the concept of landscape**

Landscape is a new concept in Europe, and it does not appear until the 15th century in literature. In Renaissance, for the first time after centuries this concept is proposed (Roger, 1994: 118; Berque, 1994: 6). This trend continues until it reaches the modern concept of the landscape, and the beauty of pristine nature is praised after centuries (Berque, 1994: 6). Lizzie believes that in studying landscape, in fact it is

the relationships and developments of the landscape that is intended. Thus, the landscape is the man’s connection with the nature surrounding him from the past until now. The landscape in today’s world is considered a relative and dynamic being that, on one hand is influenced by man and his way of life, and on the other hand, it influences the civilization, cultures and lifestyles of human beings by his form and association with the memories that have taken place over long periods of time (Mansoori, 2004). A landscape is an objective- subjective, dynamic and relative phenomenon which is the product of human interaction with the environment, and society with history (Mansouri, 2015). Landscape (manzar) is from the root of vision (nazar) (Dehkhoda, 1998: 22576). The relative superiority of the word “vision” to the word viewpoint is in its sense of wise view, because landscape is the product of our understanding and experience of space and it is a picture along with mentality and meaning that gives new horizons to the observer (Mansouri, 2004: 69). According to the materials mentioned above, participation is a kind of self-help process that influences the quality of human interaction with the environment and society and, consequently, the landscape that is the product of these interactions. Therefore, it is important to consider the relationship of participation with the subjective aspect of the landscape. On the one hand, with the participation of people in landscape design, the dimensions of the landscape of the region are revealed from the perspective of the target audience and participants, and it contributes to the design of the landscape project. On the other hand, the presence of people in design is effective on the quality of their interaction with the audience of the design and the environment, and it improves the quality of the landscape project for the participating people.

### **Explaining participation in landscape**

The phrase “Participation in landscape design”, a participatory perspective approach is one of the strategies for re-connecting people with the city and emphasizes the audience-centered nature of the

Table 3. The meanings of participation from the viewpoints of the foreign specialists. Source: authors.

the concept of participation	foreign specialists	
engaging stakeholder in decision making	Yamagishi, 2008	helping self-help others
empowerment	Oakley and Marsden, 1984.	
to give authority	Chambers, 1994	
power detection, organization	Oakley and Marsden, 1984.	
power detection	Dopfer, 1998	
shared work, co-operation	I.L.O., 2013	

landscape. Participatory landscape theories were first introduced in the United States in 1998, and this approach continues to expand in the theoretical and practical arenas until the present time. The definition that has been accepted in scientific community for Participation Design is as follows:

Participation design is a participatory and structured process and fundamental through which non-expert users, supervisors, and stakeholders help each other to make the urban space a valuable place (The International Association for Public Participation, 2010).

Although several levels had been considered for it, there is a general consensus on this definition. Also, Participation in landscape design does not have a separate concept and it is referred to a participation that happens in landscape design.

### The phrase “Participation landscape” in the writings inside Iran

In many texts, instead of using participation design directly, terms such as collaborative landscape design, participatory design in landscape architecture, and the participation of space and people have been used. In general, these terms are used in two ways:

In some cases, it refers to the concept of the presence of people in space. For example, in the paper “Reviewing the extent of public participation in the promotion of the lost urban spaces quality,” the phrase “public participation in space” is equated with the terms social participation and the presence of people in space (Inanlou Chowlakhlou, 2016). Also, in an article by Dr. Mahmoud Faizabadi,

the participation landscape has been considered as a landscape that human interaction is seen and the presence of people is bold as a part of the landscape. The article states: “... For commercial complexes that the main principle is based on customer orientation and the participation of individuals in the complex is necessary, landscape participation is important to the extent that the participation landscape connects us with our environment.” (Feizabadi, 2015) or in another article, participation landscape and interactive landscape, have been considered synonyms: “with the use of technology in lighting, it is possible to provide participation landscape and interactive nightlife landscape” (Mehran Nezhad, 2012). As stated in the research background, participation means being involved and doing an activity by multiple subject, and therefore the use of this term for the concept of the presence of people in space without any joint work is not correct. Other items (most texts) consider people’s participation in landscape design, which is closer to the concept. For example, in the article “The Role of Participation in the Design of the Rural Environment”, it is stated that “... it is not possible to design a stable environment without regarding the roles of interest groups in this process ... Achieving this, is only possible in the form of participatory design.” (Darabi, 2000). In this article, the terms of participation in environmental design and participatory design are used. This concept has been used in other articles by using different phrases as presented in Table 4. As you can see, each of the resources have used multiple phrases to express a specific meaning. ost writings that refer to

people's participation in landscape design have not paid attention to the mental dimension of the landscape. In these articles, the participation landscape has been explored as a tool for achieving objective dimensions of the landscape including consistency, audience-oriented, and fostering democracy. While participation landscape design is not only a tool for achieving objective dimensions of landscape, it's also a goal that leads to the highlighting of subjective dimension of the landscape in the eyes of their audience. When landscape viewers participate in the design, their mental perceptions change from a landscape, and social values are added to the environment.

### Conclusion

According to the studies, it was found that participation means participating of multiple subjects in an action with the aim of self-help and has the concept of bilateral presence. This word participation is a good translation for the English word, participation. Because it delivers the concept of taking part completely. The concept of landscape in its modern sense is a subjective-objective phenomenon that arises from the interaction of humans and human societies with the environment around them over time and along the history. Despite the frequent use of the term participation landscape in several texts, the exact meaning of the term is not specified, and various writings have considered different meanings for this term. Also, many different and similar phrases have been used in these texts. These terms are used in a number of sources, in the sense of a landscape that the interaction of humans are high and in other sources, in the sense of a landscape that humans contribute to its design. Among these, the second one is closer to the

word participation design. Participation in landscape design refers to the landscape design process that people, professionals and employers have an active and subjective presence in all stages of the project, with the goal of self-help and achieving optimal design that is satisfactory to all three groups. And thus improves the subjective and objective dimensions of the landscape. Considering the importance of the subjective dimension in the definition of the landscape, participation takes its place inside the landscape and it is very effective on the subjective dimensions of the landscape design and the improvement of interaction between people and society with the environment. Many sources have focused on the objective dimension of participation in landscape design, while the participation of people in the landscape design process is not only a tool for improving the objective dimension of the landscape, but also it is a goal that promotes the objective dimension of the landscape for its audience. Participation is a kind of self-help process that influences the quality of human interaction with the environment, society and, consequently, the landscape which is the product of these interactions. On one hand, when audience of landscape, participate in the design, their subjective perceptions from landscape changes and they bear the social and environmental values that have been obtained through the collective participation of people in the design of space. On the other hand, with the participation of people in landscape design, the subjective aspects of the landscape are revealed from the perspective of the target audience and participators and helps design the project's landscape and enhances its subjective dimensions. As it has been said, numerous writings have used various expressions to express the concept of participation in landscape design. The reason

Table 4. The terms and concepts of participation from vernacular authors' viewpoint. Source: authors.

the concept of participation	the term	vernacular authors
peoples' presence in space	social participation in space	Inanlou Chowlakhlou, 2016
peoples' presence in space	participation in landscape design	Feizabadi, 2015
peoples' presence in space	participation in landscape design	Mehran Nezhad, 2012
peoples' engagement in the process of the design	participation design	Darabi, 2000
peoples' engagement in the process of the design	participation in landscape design	Khademi and Kiani, 2016

for these differences is the lack of a clear term for participation in landscape design and its precise concept. Regarding the concept expressed in this article, it seems that the term “participation in landscape design” is an alternative to other similar expressions, and avoids the ambiguity in the concept. It is not right to bring the participatory adjective to the term “landscape” and it is confused with the concept of landscape that people have in mind. As some articles have made such a mistake, it is correct to bring the participatory design to the phrase design which does not bring uncertainty to its meaning. Landscape in this phrase is a possessive noun which indicates what specialty is related to the design.

## Endnote

1. What we call “synonyms” in Persian literature.

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### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Mansouri, S. A. & Foroughi, M. (2018). *The Concept of Participation in Landscape Design*. *Bagh- e Nazar*, 15 (62):17-24.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2018.66282

URL: [http://bagh-sj.com/article\\_66282\\_en.html](http://bagh-sj.com/article_66282_en.html)

