Sociocultural Restrictions and Difficulties

of Social Science Research in Iran

(Case Study, Hamadan Province)

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Abstract

The rapid progress of the sciences can be observed in all the aspects of man's life in the last few decades. The sovereignty of science appears in most social systems' decision making. Today the efficiencies of scientific attitudes are the focal point of attention in developed societies. Over a period of time progress and development of sciences have been a desire for Iranian researchers. In fact, scientific pathology and identification of restrictions and difficulties of research is considered as a duty for all researchers in different disciplines. In this research, an attempt has been made to study science in its historical context and cultural complex based on an anthropological approach that is the relation between science and culture. This study follows to get the aim, factors like belief in research, institutionalization of research, cultural dynamism of society, cognition of social sciences, capability of social sciences in solving society's problems as variables whose role upon social sciences research are considered. The Hamadan province in western part of Iran is selected as a field for the case study.

Keywords: Belief in research, Institutionalization, Cultural dynamism, Social sciences capability, Cognition of social sciences

1. Introduction

One **of** the agencies and qualitative objectives of development and progress in today's world is to pave way for scientific structural research and institutional foundations.

It is obvious nowadays that without considering research, any attempt at sociocultural and economic development would be futile. Thus, the socioeconomic status in each society is an index of the scientific level of that society.

Moreover, scientific and cultural development, along with changes in circumstances depends on the rate of scientific research carried out in that society (Shahidi, 1989). Therefore, any attention devoted to scientific research results in multilateral progress of the society.

Moreover development of scientific research leads to the improvement of, well-being and better services in man's life (Mohseni, 1993). Research is also a mechanism which primarily needs equipment like identification (cognition), thought design for production, and its final outcome is regular progress (Qanbari and Tonkaboni, 1994).

Nowadays, sovereignty of societies upon each other in the world pledges their sagacity and ability.

In this situation, only those societies who value research and sciences gain the opportunity to access prosperity in the research field that needs facilities like capital, social and human investment, planning, policy making equipment, research priority, and paying attention to researcher's status which are needful. Ignorance of these factors causes damage to scientific and cultural progress (Mansouri, 2003).

Research in general and social sciences in particular have not gained prominence in Iran yet. There are many restrictions and difficulties, overt and covert, which cause such obstacles, whose identification is an important task for researchers. These attempts enable researchers to operate within their disciplines. Although, in Iran the attention toward the research in recent years, due to increase of social problems has increased slightly (Lehsaizadeh, 1995); but the amount of budget

allocated to research annually is 0.7% of the country's Gross National Product (GNP). The share of social sciences research is a small part of this allocated budget. The status of research in Iranian society is apparent from this fact. Limitations of research facilities, cultural and structural difficulties result in irregular research, that is, parallel works and repeated research. This situation has led to mortality and a weakness in rationalism (Rafipour, 2002).

The present research attempts to investigate the sociocultural restrictions and difficulties faced by social sciences research in Iran. Consequently, the role of factors such as belief in research, institutionalization of research, cultural dynamism of the society, capability of social sciences to solve the social problems are elaborated. This study is conducted in the Hamadan province, located in the west of Iran. This country is located in the Middle East and it is one of the ancient civilizations of Asia. Iran is a multiethnic society. The estimated population of Iran is 70 million, with an estimated area of 1 648 000 square kms. The purpose and justification for the selection of Hamadan province as a field of study is that it is recognized by the researcher as a model province and it shares similarities with other Iranian provinces.

2. Literature review

Developments in today's global system are dependent on the foundations of research structures and scientific institutions. Without research, access to development is not possible. Restrictions on research and development in Iran have been a source of disturbance to Iranian researchers for many years.

Although some attempts for a decrease in these restrictions have taken place, there are still cultural and structural hindrances to research in Iran. Some of these attempts are as follows:

1). In a research paper entitled "Cultural restrictions to the development of research in Iran" (2001) by Ali Taeifi, the author views science as a problematic phenomenon. Research materials are viewed from the genealogical and historical point of view, so that science and research are seen as phenomenon with a time limit in the historical process. The author claims that without historical cognition, the identity, nature, problem factors and hindrances to research and development remain resulting in neglect and ambiguity.

The author arrives at appropriate definitions of related sociological theories of science, with the aim of cognition of the law governing these values, norms, their quality of evolution and the development of science and research in the world. The author looks at culture and research in Iran from a pathological angle. Taeifi believes that a cult urological study of Iranian society is needed to arrive at the idea of a common culture. According to him the need for a scientific culture will be discovered through coordinate signs of common culture pathology; then cognition of scientific culture pathology will be discovered.

2). in a paper published by A. Lahsaeizadeh entitled "Social science research restrictions in Iran" (1996), in a Persian language journal, the author has tried to point out the weaknesses and deficits of research in Iran. Lahsaeizadeh claims that it is the task of the researchers to study the research restrictions in their disciplines. The author is optimistic that the social sciences will ultimately be accorded their rightful status in Iran, because phenomena like development justify this need. In this paper, the author describes the nature and characteristics of social sciences research in Iran. He has not ignored the restrictions and hindrances to such research in contemporary Iran. The author has tried to explain the need for research in the social sciences in Iran with the objective of arriving at a more fruitful social science research directory in Iran.

3). Another research paper entitled "Determinants of scientific development in Iran" (2002), by Faramarz Rafipour, searches for an appropriate methodology to explore and study the different variables at the micro level in society. Moreover, the author introduces an analysis model to find the interrelationships between the variables. Actually his model rests on the intersystem theory methodology model, with which the author attempts to study the interrelationships that exist between different factors at the cultural, social, political, and the organizational levels of Iranian society.

In this study, the author found the role of traits such as despotic behavioral, normative behavioral, emotional behavioral contradictions, individualism, and self-display that is important to scientific development in Iran. The author points out that at the social level, the incorrect external developmental polices of the Iranian administrators lays emphasis on credentials, not on specialization at the organizational level. The author concludes that due to the multiplicity of decision making authorities at the macro policy making level, society is faced with multiplicity.

4). in a paper (1991) published in a Persian journal, by Reza Mansouri, the author insists on the need to establish the mechanisms for science, technical and scientific planning in Iran. He then compares the research situation in Iran with the situation in the developed countries. Based on qualitative and qualitative characteristics, he concludes that in Iran, research is in a state of underdevelopment. The author explains the role of factors like the problems of the system of higher education, financial and official problems that restrict research in Iran, and the factors that have lead to a deficit in research.

3. Methodology

This study is based on an essential objective: the study of sociocultural restrictions and difficulties to social sciences research in Iran. A list of researchers in organizations and institutions in Hamadan city, the capital of Hamadan province,

were approached by the researcher. This study employed the interview technique for data collection purposes. The statistics for this research pertain to respondents who are engaged in academic and research work. Two prerequisites were identified for the selection of respondents: a) minimum qualification was a bachelor degree and b) five years of research experience. It covered all the researchers in Hamadan city, who possessed the two qualifications mentioned above. About 400 researchers were identified, but only 150 participated in the interviews. Of this number, 64 individuals had a social sciences and humanities background, 23 had a degree in the natural sciences and 14 had an engineering background. The educational breakup of the respondents in percentage terms was as follows: 37% held bachelor's degrees, 30% held postgraduate degrees and 33% held PhD degrees. The population distribution in this study, based on their sex, was 14% female and 86% male, in the age range of 31 to 60 years. The respondent's details are shown in the table 1.

4. Findings

In this section we consider the role of variables such as belief in research, institutionalization of research, cognition of social sciences, cultural dynamism, and capability of social sciences on the research growth in Iran.

Research is not anarchism, but it is a doubt about the reality of a problem. A researcher looks for order within disorder, and his/her aim is to solve the problem by recommending appropriate actions to address it. Therefore, research first of all requires a belief in it; that is, by performing sociocultural research, man can overcome narrow passes.

The experiences of developed nations demonstrate that belief in research and its utilization is an essential factor in their development and progress.

Each discipline's task is cognition of a related phenomenon to it. And real cognition can be achieved through multilateral attitudes.

The discipline of social sciences is the bedrock guidance of other sciences, and social science research can help and find solutions for the society's problems.

But in Iran and other third-world countries it has not gained as much importance as other sciences. Among these nations the material problems take precedence over sociocultural problems, so attention toward social sciences is also proportionally less than that toward technical and natural sciences.

The research system of Iran was developed long ago, but in various periods it was subjected to many changes. At present, the main research system is concentrated in Iran's *scientific consultation of research Institution.* The task of this institution is research planning and control of the budget allocation. Actually this institution does not have the sufficient authority to perform its task well as it is just a coordinate mechanism.

Just as industrial product is dependent on the equipment, human investment, and capital, and its progress is gradual and endogenous, in the same manner cultural products also need these facilities. In producing cultural goods, macro capital investment version is necessary. A remarkable point is that the cultural product in a similar manner like the material goods should have a tendency toward global market. Cultural production will be abundant in societies where the production is directed to the needs of all human beings (Mohammadi, 1998). So cultural dynamism needs a researcher's motivation, financial support, and utilization of research results.

The social sciences are pioneers of consciousness, change, and movements. One observes that technical and scientific progress in Europe is synchronized with the progress of social sciences. It is not desirable to expect only material efficiency from social sciences or to pay attention to its applied aspect and one should also not have precocious expectations from its results. In today's advanced societies, the role of social sciences is clearly defined, and this discipline has found its right status.

Science and culture have strong links with each other. Science is a part of cultural traditions' perfection in different civilizations, and makes strong integration with value systems (parsons, 1951). The respondent's opinion about research variables is shown in Table 2.

5. Data analysis and conclusions

Research is not chaos or disorder; it is governed by rules, and begins with a doubt about the reality of a problem (Barber, 1952).The task of research is to solve problems and provide suggestions for solving them. Data of this study show that in the society that has been studied, there is an absence of the belief that social sciences research can overcome various problems. Despite significant progress and development in research, administrators in Iran consider research a lengthy procedure and a waste of money. Research performance needs faith, that is, society should believe in the need for research and pay attention to its findings. As data from this research show, the administrative body of the country does not depend much on research results for its decision making, because they do not believe that research can lead to correct decision making. Once there is lack of belief in research among the administrators, one cannot expect facilities and opportunities for research. Ultimately, research results are not always performable; even if these results are performed they will not be effective. Since belief in social science research in Iranian society has not evolved, non-specialists have occupied the place of social scientists. In fact, social scientists have the potential of performing their function effectively, but because

of the lack of attention from the administrators; these disciplines have not garnered sufficient data and equipment to perform their tasks. The amount of budget allocated to social sciences research and failure of the sociocultural decisions which were adopted without taking into consideration the research contexts, which ultimately in the processes of performance faced difficulties, leading us to believe that there is no belief in research.

Spending on research is not a waste of money but is actually a form of savings, and the final outcome is overcoming the defects of developmental, technical, economic, and cultural projects. The allocation of a modest budget, that is, less than one percent of the country's GNP to research tasks annually (the share of social science research is a small part of this one percent) [Mansouri,2003] shows a clear picture that there is no belief in research in general, and particularly in social sciences.

This observation on research is not confined only to Iran. A similar attitude toward research can be observed in most of the developing countries, for example, in 1979, 97% of the allocated research budget in the world belonged to industrial nations, while only 3% was provided by non-industrial nations (Shahidi, 1989).

In Iran, the credence of research in social sciences in comparison with natural and technical sciences is not worth noting, in spite of the fact that social comprehension is necessary to construct the base and guide lines for other disciplines, like technical and natural sciences. No separation exists as such between social sciences and natural sciences. These sciences appear in relation to each other in history and have also developed a relationship with each other. The main point is that we should not expect the results of social science research to be similar to that of a natural science like physics, for example, which involves the construction of models that may then be converted to projects. Disciplines like sociology and anthropology cannot reach the grade of causation of physics. But we should remember that each of these sciences is a member of the same family. As Descartes said, if knowledge can be compared to a tree, then the humanities are its branches, and the mechanical disciplines are its fruits.

European development synchronized with the emergence of social sciences as a discipline, in eighteen century Europe, influenced by the thoughts of Montesquieu, and also of Newton in physics, as well as in the other sciences. Therefore, we can conclude the social sciences are not secondary sciences, but have helped pioneer social movement and social change. Therefore, social sciences are important because of their social aim and general strategies in society and should be considered important sciences. But this carelessness about social sciences in Iran has resulted in ignorance of basic human needs.

Dispersed research based on personal desires does not lead to change and dynamism in society, but results in repeated and parallel works, the consequences are the destruction of research facilities. To pay attention to research facilities and equipment restrictions, Iran requires a nodal research organization of some sort, until the desired usage of facilities matches that of society's difficulties and needs, because Iranian society first of all needs an integrated research system to organize research activities. Secondly, this system needs an appropriate research policy to direct research facilities toward society's needs which should be accorded priority.

Thought design and the production of cultural goods in Iran is mainly based on excessive generosity, rather than normal processes and institutionalized plans. Research institutions in Iran belong to ministries which are not covered by specialists and professionals. This is one of the reasons that one does not witness qualified research and many spontaneous researchers. Due to maladministration, research organizations and the present staff members do not perform their task well, because, in Iran, there is no punishment for non-performance or encouragement for performance in the system.

Cultural goods production in Iran, with a few exceptions, culture is directed towards an internal market. For this reason, distribution of its end products faces difficulties in the global market.

The structure of the Iranian society hinders the progress of specialized scientific associations. Scientific associations in Iran do not have admitted understanding of their jobs and professions in sociocultural products area. These associations even deny each other's ideas. Everybody considers themselves as being true and perfect, so he/she does not feel the need to discourse. The result of this non-discourse is that people's ideas are not clear to one other and are not subjected to test. In this situation, a peoples' entire social, cultural, and economic forms of capital, are not present in the field. Ultimately social consensus is not accessible, and common principles that facilitate national advantages are not gained, as a result, diversity and moderateness is not accepted as a principle. Its outcome is no progress of scientific associations in Iran. These scientific associations in comparison with economic and political institutions are very weak, and they cannot establish exchange programs with other institutions of the society. Ultimately, they face a shortage of budget and research restrictions.

Due to lack of unique research organizations in Iran, we are now witnessing dispersed and parallel research. As a result, many researchers do not have enough information about their own society's software and hardware facilities. Although research is an individual matter and does not need strong regulation and administration, and it depends on the researcher's interests, today we know that research is considered as a social activity, and it needs characteristics as regulation, planning, management, information, and education in order to be institutionalized. It is evident that no researcher without affiliation

to earlier research does this enterprise, as R. Merton says; scientific findings are products of social cooperation and belong to society (1968).

This research findings show that a kind of data concealment between organizations and researchers can be observed and its outcome are partial results of growth and progress of research. In fact, moral scientific work requires the exchange and publishing of research results. The roots of the phenomenon of data concealment in Iranian culture goes back to factors like emotionalism, individualism, skepticism, and particularism (Taefi, 2001). Characteristics like individualism in the Iranian culture are a kind of reaction against foreign threat. This tendency arises from the Iranian attitude toward the world. Based on their beliefs, others look for their interests only, and each person continuously faces characteristics like panic, interpersonal mistrust, and skepticism in his confrontation with other individuals. For the individual, the mentioned characteristics are survival conditions. The result of these factors is deinstitutionalization of research in society, which restricts and hinders scientific institutions. Iranian society has been shaped by different racial and ethnic groups, each with its own cultural traits, elements, rituals, and traditions, without a singular cultural fit. Basically, these groups adopt an ethnocentric view in their relations with each other, in such a manner that a pluralistic social system cannot develop. These ethnic groups have preserved their historical and cultural identity while living side by side. Although, nowadays, ethnic prejudices have broken down, sometimes we still do witness residual ethnocentric prejudices among these ethnic groups in relation to each other. This trend has caused cultural contrasts among the ethnic groups, so that sociocultural macro policy making has become difficult. In this situation, cultural patterns have been rendered dysfunctional within the structural system. Such a structure causes rigidity in cultural attitudes, within which small, narrow passes are invented; it hinders social and economical growth for the remaining common groups. The results of this situation are that opportunities are available for particular persons and groups. In such a situation, any attempt at behavioral change is not only unstable, but also some people try to adopt deinstitutionalization (Taefi 2001).

These negative approaches arise from a group's typology and kinship relations, who gain a lot of advantages from research. Therefore, they do not have tendencies for diverting research to a general field. Research findings show that in this society, experts in one field are not very much welcome. For instance, social scientists' academic positions usually are occupied by non-experts.

The gathered data show that this society's problems are more culture-based than material. The belief exists that cultural research is not applicable to society's problems. The origin of this idea stems from the expectation that exists from social sciences as a savior of tangles and the numerous social sufferings in today's society. This misunderstanding actually originates from the concrete outcome of natural sciences in daily life, which leads to the well-being and provides more comfort for mankind. In fact, the comparison between natural and social sciences creates confusion because the latter is a science in a particular sense, but is not identical to the natural sciences. This shows that Iranian society does not sufficiently recognize the social sciences.

The delusion that arises out of this comparison stands as a restriction for research growth in this field. Moreover, natural sciences are explained quantitatively and their methods are objective that is, cause and effect relations, therefore they can be diverted to law and formula, which can be in control of everybody.

This kind of a view to social sciences research leads to a low status for social scientists in the society. Research is a dynamic complex, it involves: budgeting, the creation of facilities, manpower, planning, and subject and research priorities. Usually these parts are considered as necessary elements of research and development. Manpower is trained in the universities. Due to budgetary constraints and the lack of facilities for research students and teaching staff, in Iran, few have a tendency to opt for research activities. Educational centers and universities in Iran are tutorial based, not research-centered, so very little attention is paid to research projects. Even university staff are not obliged to perform compulsory research tasks. Whereas, in developed nations, academics at universities, beside tutorial task, are also busy with research projects. Therefore, to reduce its sociocultural problems, Iranian society needs to reinforce the orientation towards research in academic institutions.

Another important point that may act as a restriction for social science research is the lack of motivation among researchers in these fields. Hence, factors like lack of motivation, insufficient equipment and budget, difficult financial and official bureaucracy for funding of research projects cause great difficulties and restriction for researchers in the social sciences. Lack of meritocracy in scientific and research administrations and the lack of assessment of merit is a trait that it is ingrained in the scientific and cultural establishment of the country. So, the chief of a cultural institution may be a physicist. In such a situation, meritocracy and specialization are not valued; instead kinship and economic links come into play in the appointment of a research administrator (Taeifi 2001). Some scholars believe that in the Iranian cultural structure, the emphasis is on relationships, so the function of a research institution is dependent on the opinion of the individual heading it and is not dependent on the laws of governance. In such a situation, instead of paying attention to fostering the research activities of the organization, attention is directed towards whatever appeals to the research administrator, approved laws and principles are not taken into account (Lahsaeizadeh 1995).

In general, social sciences in Iran have encountered a phase of vulgarization, so in this situation anyone becomes eligible to tackle social problems without possessing specialization.

Not utilizing the results derived from research is another reason for the poor status of research in this field. The gathered data show that there is no tendency and optimism to use the social sciences research findings in society and at present there is no capacity to link the research results of social sciences with the problems in the society. In fact, this culture is unable in production of new cultural levels. This situation is a residue of feudalism and the cultural non-discourse capacity of society.

Therefore, its output comes out as repeated in art and culture, production crises, copying, cultural mediator/parallel works etc.

Another outcome of this autocratic tradition (feudalism) is the ethnocentric belief within the Iranian culture, and this has long roots in Iran's ancient civilization. As a result, Iranian culture does not have the tendency to borrow other civilization's experiences, and social structure of the society is nonflexible in accepting other cultural experiences.

This research shows that since cultural dynamism is not at work; characteristics like meritocracy, cleverness, and opportunism are not valued. The lack of attention to social science research, to some extent, is the consequence of technological crises in the world. For instance, crises like slum settlement and racial discrimination are the heritage of a new civilization. Finding solutions to these kinds of problems may be the task of social scientists and enterprises, but society's cooperation of an adequate time is also needed to effectively solve it. The inability of social sciences in Iran to solve sociocultural problems goes back to society's expectations for this discipline to act as the natural sciences, when they are by no means comparable

6. Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of this study show that research in the social sciences in Iran encounters basic challenges and involves several issues. There are many overt and covert hindrances in the path of social sciences research. This study points out factors such as lack of faith in social sciences research, disorganization of research, the non -dynamic nature of Iranian culture and society's non recognition of the nature and importance of the social sciences, which act as restrictive factors that affect the development of social sciences research in Iran. Based on the results of this research, the following suggestions have been made to overcome issues and challenges identified based on the data collected by this study.

1). Creating public consciousness and recognizing the advantages of social sciences research. This task is to be undertaken by social sciences scholars who should attempt to change the existing culture in society.

2). Administrators involved in the development of research in general, and social sciences in particular, should establish a strong, unique nodal research organization. This organization should supervise other research bodies and guide them with the aim of producing reliable data. Establishment of a rapport between research organizations, directing them to cooperate with each other for purposes of data exchange instead of data concealment, this should be the task of this unique research organization.

3). Government should establish information banks and create networks for the benefit of researchers.

4). To reduce particularism in research scientific, associations involving different disciplines should be developed with the aim of creating competition that is healthy and dynamic.

5). To reduce imitation, copying and parallel research, a punishment and reward system for research should be introduced, placing emphasis on evaluation based on creativity to reduce work that is imitative. This task requires the cooperation of research administrators and researchers.

6). Meritocracy in research should be encouraged and assigning research projects to family members should be avoided. This requires the appointment of strong researchers as research administrators.

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Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Population	Age (years)	Sex %	Qualification %	Educational background %
150	31–60	14 female 86 male	37 graduate 30 postgraduate 33 PhD	64 humanities and social sciences 23 sciences 14 engineering

Table 2. Distribution of respondent's opinion about research variables

Items	No	No Idea	Yes	Total
Do you agree that society's administrators favor social sciences research in theory, but in practice they do not?	6%	8%	86%	100%
Do you think administrators consider expenses on social sciences research as money wasting?	16%	11%	73%	100%
Do you believe that multilateral developments in society need the growth of social sciences?	86%	6%	12%	100%
Do you believe that attention toward social science research in society is absent?	18%	6%	76%	100%
Do you think the growth of basic research is the prerequisite of applied research growth?	30%	8%	62%	100%
Do you believe that lack of unique research organization in society is responsible for deinstitutionalization of social science research?	30%	14%	56%	100%
Do you agree that the lack of data exchange between researchers and official organizations leads to deinstitutionalization of social science research?	17%	12%	71%	100%
Do you believe that characteristics like skepticism, emotionalism, particularism, and individualism of Iranian culture has a role in the deinstitutionalization of science research	20%	4%	76%	100%
Do you agree that people of this society do not have enough cognition of social sciences?	4%	6%	90%	100%
Do you believe that society's problems are more cultural than material, while social scientists can do nothing?	14%	9%	77%	100%
Do you believe that the lower status of social scientists in comparison to other scientists is the result of non-cognition of this field?	40%	17%	43%	100%
Do you agree society's formal education system direction (which merely focuses on teaching) leads to poverty of social sciences research?	17%	13%	70%	100%
Do you believe that the lack of motivation among social scientists results in restriction of research growth in this field?	14%	4%	82%	100%
Do you agree that the lack of reliable data is a cause of the low level of	20%	9%	71%	100%

social sciences research?				
Do you accept that financial and official bureaucracy is a factor for low rate of social sciences research?	13%	7%	80%	100%
Do you agree that non-utilization of social sciences research in society diminishes social sciences research?	23%	18%	59%	100%
Do you accept that impotence of society's culture in new cultural producing levels is a factor of low rate of growth of social science research?	47%	7%	46%	100%
Do you agree that lack of attention toward meritocracy in social sciences field is the cause of research poverty?	3%	%1	96%	100%
Do you agree that the expectation from precocious results of social sciences research has any role in efficiency of this field of research?	12%	3%	85%	100%
Do you accept that the lack of interest of social scientist to society's current problems is a cause of poor status of research in this discipline?	43%	17%	40%	100%
Do you believe that critical nature of social sciences restricts its research growth?	27%	10%	63%	100%