



# Municipal Awareness and Citizen Satisfaction: The Case of Northern Borders in Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT

The literature suggests a strong relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction. This study aims at examining the determinants of municipal awareness, and their impacts on citizen satisfaction. The model of this study was validated in the context of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with 250 inhabitants in the region of northern borders. The study data is collected and processed using exploratory and confirmatory analysis, based on survey methods and structural equations. The results revealed a positive association between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction. Overall, findings suggest that knowledge, discussion, participation and learning about municipal achievements, as indicators of municipal awareness, affect citizen satisfaction with the quality of the municipal services.

**Keywords:** Municipal Awareness, Citizen Satisfaction, Local Development

**JEL Classifications:** H72, O18

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations and local associations are seeking to establish the concept of participation in municipal work and the process of local development. Local government is considered a cornerstone of community development. The importance of local government stems from its increasing role in local development and services. In this regard, successful local development has been identified as essential to meet the millennium development goals, which implies a stronger role of local authorities and municipalities in local development. This includes methods of empowering local authorities and promoting citizen awareness of local affairs in order to foster transparency, accountability and responsiveness of local authorities, and in turn, increase citizen satisfaction with municipal performance and outcomes (United Nations, 2011).

Within this framework, there has been recently a continued advocacy for maximizing opportunities for citizen learning about municipal processes and outcome. This shift in focus altered the attention towards the dynamics of local communities and citizens and the importance of their involvement in local affairs and service evaluation. This role is essential for improving municipal services, as municipal authorities are the closest level

of government to citizens and their interactions and outcomes have significant impacts on citizen's daily lives (Carer, 1991; Wholey and Hatry, 1992). In this sense, citizen awareness of and involvement in municipal affairs are importance mechanisms for aligning municipal outcomes with the needs and demands of local communities.

Citizens' awareness of municipal work, may improve citizen support for municipal outcome. Local outcomes mainly represented by municipal services are often constrained by the lack of knowledge about the local processes and procedures among the public (Callahan, 2002; Ebdon, 2002). Therefore, well-designed feedback mechanisms and positive citizens' perception are critical for effective municipal performance, and more satisfactory service delivery.

Citizen awareness of local government activities and operations through media interventions, and public campaigns and forums can promote the capacity of citizens to advocate for their interests and hold local officials accountable for their decisions and activities. Increasing citizen awareness of municipal matters is an effective tool for promoting citizens' engagement and improving service delivery. An effective interaction between local government

and local community represents a guarantee for the success of any local development work. In this regard, a municipality is an essential foundation in the local atmosphere through the various services it provides for local community; and through its direct communication with citizens within its geographical jurisdiction. Marinetto (2003) stress that the participation of citizens in local development stimulates local authorities to focus their efforts on initiating more ambitious plans for citizen engagement and increasing public access to municipal services. Therefore, promoting the level of municipal awareness among local people is crucial to effective municipal performance and quality local service.

This study is aimed at examining municipal awareness among citizens in Saudi Arabia, as an instrument for determining the responsiveness of municipal authorities to the needs and demands of local communities, as reflected in citizen satisfaction with municipal services and activities. In particular, this study focusses on municipal awareness among citizens in the region of northern borders, and its impact on the public satisfaction with services provided by the regional municipality (Amanah). The main objective of this study is to measure the level of awareness among citizens in the region of northern borders and ways of interaction, communication, and popular participation in the various municipal activities. Thus, the overarching research question examined is: what are the basic determinants explain the relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction in the region of northern borders?

## 2. THE ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN SAUDI ARABIA AND THE CASE STUDY

The Law of Municipalities and Villages of 1976 stated that municipalities are local authorities that exercise independent administrative and financial status within their geographical jurisdictions. Saudi municipalities are responsible for urban planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of municipal infrastructure and local service. These comprise water and wastewater networks, urban streets, in addition to facilities such as markets, slaughterhouses, parks, car parking facilities, and public squares. The municipal sector also assumes urban planning responsibilities for all cities, villages and hamlets. Continuous reform policies since 1993 have eased central control leading to tremendous expansion of the role of municipalities in local development and service provision. More recently the municipal bylaws introduced in 2003 and 2004 granted more powers and assigned more responsibilities to local authorities and provided for the establishment of half elected municipal councils.

Recent reforms in Saudi Arabia aimed at empowering municipal authorities and citizens. They identified municipalities as independent entities and granted them a wide range of authority to raise revenue through collection of service fees, charges, and municipal sales, lease, rent, and investment. On the other hand, the conduction of local elections in 2005, and 2011, provided for institutional mechanisms for citizen participation and promoted public awareness of local affairs and services. Such mechanisms

foster the interaction between municipalities and their constituents, allowing citizens to articulate their needs and demands directly through their representatives in local councils. Municipal councils have been granted authority to conduct a wide range of institutional functions such as monitoring the performance of municipal management with regard to municipal revenue, spending, investment, and sales of public lands. Also, such institutional arrangements granted municipal councils greater role in managing a wide range of municipal affairs related to service provision, local development, and urban planning (Almarshad, 2011).

With expansion of the functions and activities of municipalities, strengthening citizens' awareness and stimulating partnership between municipalities and the local communities can contribute to achievement of desirable levels of local development and services. In this regard, Zamzami (2004) highlights the importance of citizen interaction and community involvement in the management and the evaluation of local programs and activities to avoid random municipal planning and implementation that would result in undesirable local outcome.

This study is aimed at investigating the interaction between local authorities and citizens in Saudi Arabia, through analyzing the link between public awareness and citizen satisfaction with municipal services and activities. The field of research is the northern borders region, particularly, the geographical jurisdiction of the regional municipality (Amanah) in Arar city.

Arar is the capital city of the northern borders region and located in the Northeast of Saudi Arabia. Traditionally, economic activities in the region and the city include handicrafts, wool, textiles, and carpet weaving. Arar is a trade center in the Saudi North, serving as a commercial hub for exchanging goods and products with neighboring countries. Recently, the city has witnessed tremendous growth in the levels of economic and business activities associated with massive national investment in economic development and mining industries in the region. The city extends across an area of 20.55 km<sup>2</sup> and has 166, 428 inhabitants representing 60% of the total population of the northern borders region. The city municipality (Amanah) is supported by a half elected municipal council of 12 members who are in charge of local development and services (Almarshad, 2011).

With the tremendous increase in population associated with unprecedented growing demands for infrastructure and municipal services, the role of city municipality (Amanah) is becoming crucial for local development. This makes interaction between the municipality and local citizens imperative. Citizens' awareness of municipal activities and public involvement in municipal affairs are keystone for effective development process and service delivery in the region.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Municipal awareness is an important concept because it involves citizens' understanding about social and political issues and their perceptions about government performance and services. The concept of public awareness, in general, encompasses

psychological and behavioral dimensions. Milinthaljinda (1999) and Bache (2013) view awareness as a state of mind in which individuals express their feelings, perceptions, and opinions that reflect a level of understanding for surrounding environment or particular situational conditions. Francesca and Natalia (2015) described awareness as a perception based on cognitive approach and ability to be aware of contiguous happenings, and objects.

On the other hand, one stream of research dealt with awareness as a determining factor for citizens' perceptions and social and political actions (Dimitrova and Chen, 2006; Mahadeo, 2009). Khaophon (2008) looks at awareness as behavior that develops as a reaction to occurring events. Events stimulate feelings and perceptions of individuals that lead to a state of awareness and consciousness.

Some scholars concentrate on the impact of social economic factors and educational background of individuals on the level of public awareness (Van Der Meer and Van Ingen, 2009; Wang, 2008; Da Siva et al., 2004). For example, Yang (2008) emphasizes the link between awareness of individuals and their social engagement and public participation.

Mohanti (1993) views municipal awareness as the knowledge of citizens of the surrounding social conditions, and the functional components of local system. Steinem (1983) views awareness as a drive for social change through the knowledge of social and political problems and the development of patterns for expression. Nevertheless, the degree of awareness varies from individual to another, particularly concerning public services where not all people are aware of the scope of municipal functions and services. Consequently, there is a difference between civic, political awareness and social awareness.

Civic awareness is part of a continuous interaction process between the public authorities and organized civil society. This awareness is classified in terms of the combination of all the community organizations, taking the form and status of social partners through social work, education, public engagement, and the values of basic rights.

As for the political awareness, it includes a set of values, attitudes and political principles that allow the individual to actively participate in collective action. Its aim is to be a movement for change and development. Thus, the political awareness is a situation in which individuals or community members representing a specific political culture with various dimensions work together to achieve specific goals and objectives. Political culture, in general, determines people actions towards certain issues, where these issues are perceived in a form of cognitive and emotional attitude in the same time.

Finally, social awareness is an important dimension that contributes to individual socialization and cooperation and community building and development. In this sense, awareness increases when social trust and willingness for public engagement increase. Social awareness is affected by the type of the dominating general culture,

and the role of public involvement and engagement increase with deep foundations of love, tolerance, humility and tender.

### 3.1. Municipal Awareness and Citizen Satisfaction

The literature highlights the importance of citizen involvement in performance measurement through their participation on decision making as well as through their assessment of public services (Berman, 1997; Glaser and Hildreth, 1999; Holmes, 2011). In this regard, many scholars advocate the use of citizen surveys to measure the quality of local government performance and services (Fitzgerald and Durant, 1980; Brudney and England, 1982; De Young, 1986; Folz and William, 1986; Streib, 1990; Watson et al., 1991; Poister and Henry, 1994; Feiock and West, 1996; Rice, 2001; Cusack, 1999; Folz, 1999; DeHoog et al., 1990; Vining and Ebreo, 1990; Berman, 1998; Melkers and Thomas, 1998; Swindell and Kelly, 2000; Link and Oldendick, 2000; Jaramillo and Wright, 2015). The main justification for the use of citizen survey is that the process of citizen's evaluations of the quality of public services can inform about public their priority and concerns. Also, citizen surveys can be use as effective measures for the scope, the effectiveness and the impact of public services (Ho and Coates, 2001; Bouckaert, 1995).

Some scholars have linked citizens' satisfaction with democratic performance of political systems to the trust in government and political institutions (Mishler and Rose, 1998, e.g., Putnam, 1993; Stoner-Weiss, 1997; Norris, 1999; Knack, 2000; Newton, 2001; Mishler and Rose, 2001). However, Margit (2002) notes that most studies were devoted to analyzing and describing the factors surrounding citizens' attitudes and opinion, and less in all this have been devoted for evaluating the performance and services of local authorities. In fact, in such type of analysis, measuring citizens' trust in government is aimed at evaluating the efficacy of decision making process, and, at most, the public reception of the government's general policies, but not at the improvement in the quality of public services that affects people's everyday life.

In this meaning "responsiveness means building trust that government can be counted on to listen to citizens and can be trusted to honor citizen values by acting on what it hears" (Glaser and Denhardt, 2000, p. 73). Responsiveness can be measured by the match between citizen preferences, on the one hand, and actual policy and service outcomes, on the other.

The common sense suggests that citizens as actors and as players in policy making and the receivers of the public services have a voice in constructing performance measures that assess the quality and impact of services. The citizen satisfaction methods stress the importance of the link between a municipality and its constituents and that a well-performing municipal government is the one that can satisfy the needs of local citizens who are the beneficiaries of its services. The perceived quality of government outcomes represented by its services is more important to citizens than the way in which resources are utilized to generate these outcomes. Citizen satisfaction can be used as a measure of institutional performance and how local government can respond to the needs

and demands of local people. Thus, this study places the emphasis on the outcome part of municipal institutional performance.

This study attempts to develop a multi-dimensional theoretical framework of public awareness and its impact on citizens' perceptions of local services. Awareness in this analysis can be described as individuals' understanding and perceptions of particular conditions or events and how these events and conditions can impacts their daily lives. Most importantly here is the citizens' awareness of municipal affairs and their impacts on their perceptions of municipal performance and services. Hence, the main hypotheses can be stated as follows:

- H1: Municipal awareness is positively associated with citizen satisfaction.
- H2: Municipal awareness is negatively associated with citizen satisfaction.
- H3: There is a non-linear relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION METHOD

### 4.1. Methodology

The researcher adopted a quantitative approach to a causal relationship. The study involves a field inquiry, by adopting the technique of investigation through direct interview based on a questionnaire. The analysis of this study is based on a survey of a sample of 250 respondents in the region of northern borders.

### 4.2. Research Model

This model is particularly interested in the relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction. The study proposed the determinants of municipal awareness to evaluate the level of citizen satisfaction with municipal services. Thus, the model is built around the co-variation between constructs which compose namely: civic, political, and social awareness with citizen satisfaction (municipal services, markets, environment, land services, and parks and gardens), as shown in Figure 1.

### 4.3. Measure

The constructs of this study were measured by means of multi-item scales, and the instruments used were adapted from the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Variables in the research model are two in number: the independent variable is municipal awareness which is described by the civic, environment, political and social awareness. The dependent variable is citizen satisfaction which is reflected by service, environment, markets, parks and gardens and land service.

These variables were operationalized with various items, formulated as questions, and measured based on four-point Likert scales (ranging from "not satisfied" to "satisfied") for citizen satisfaction, and Likert scales three points (ranging yes, no, don't know) for the extent of municipal awareness. The quality of the measurement scales used is provided by two successive optimizations. First, a factor analysis of type principal component analysis was performed to verify the validity of the scales and thus confirm the sought after factors. The second phase of optimization scales is a confirmatory

structural analysis performed with the AMOS software. The model of structural equations is used to test the research proposition. The structural model is as follows in Figure 2.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs were ranged from 0.658 to 0.887, which denoted that reliabilities were excellent (Table 1). All items loaded significantly on their corresponding latent construct. Once the exploratory analysis is completed, we move to confirm the internal validity of the scales, where a confirmatory factor analysis is required. The author have

Figure 1: Research model

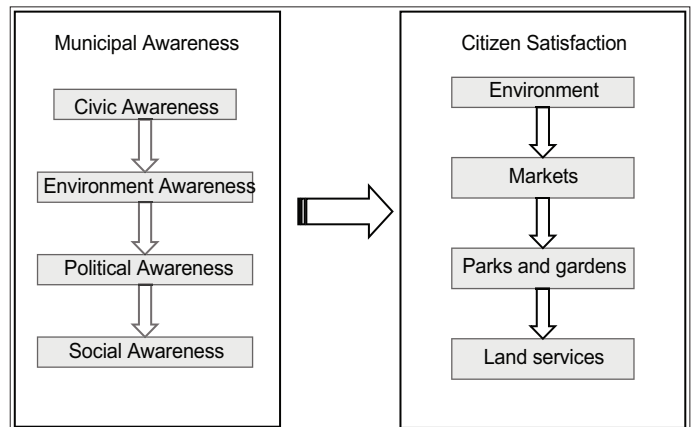
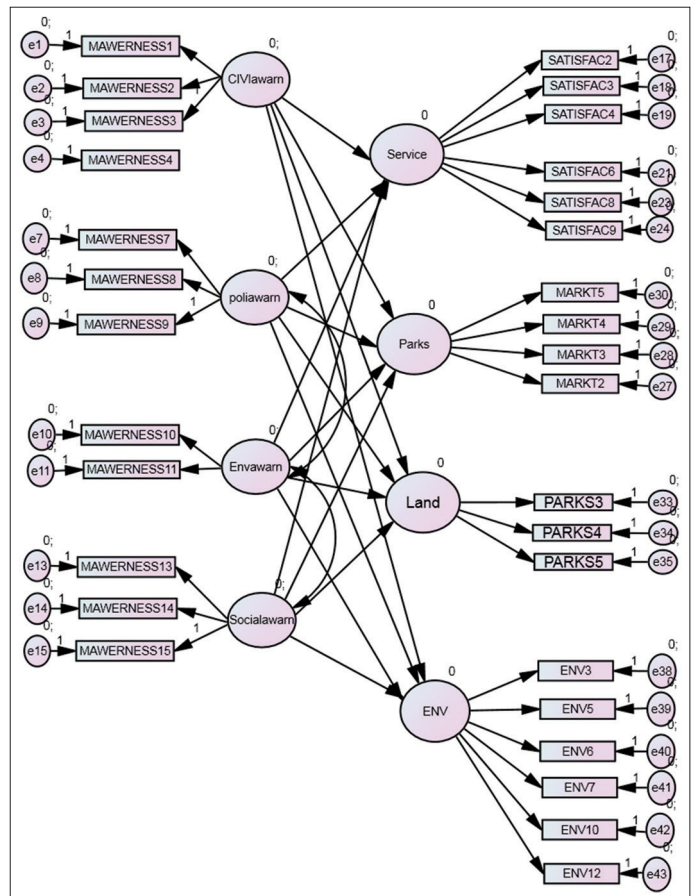


Figure 2: Structural research model



adopted in this case the different indices of adjustment provided by the AMOS software namely index root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean square residual (RMR), comparative fit index (CFI), goodness of fit (GFI), consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC), etc.

**5.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

After testing the model using structural equations, it appears that the conditions tested model fit the data are generally observed: the associated  $P = 0.068$ , which is  $>0.005$ . GFI coefficient is higher than the norm (0.9), the GFI = 0.985. This value reflects a good “fit” between model and data. At this level, the two research hypotheses and the overall hypothesis can be broadly adopted. In addition, the RMR index (in terms of residual variance, that is to say, unexplained variance) is very low, it is equal to 0.040. Side indices to judge the quality of fit of the model such as the CFI = 0.995. The RMSEA = 0.041; Akaike information criterion = 75.083 strictly less than the saturated model (94,000). The values of  $\chi^2$  (37.053) and CFI (0.994) estimated by AMOS indicate that the level of overall fit of the model is very high. We can therefore conclude that the fit of the proposed model is acceptable according to the results, indices assessment used.

**5.3. Testing the Structural Model**

To test the structural model, we transformed models measures containing items retained in the factor scores by adopting the method of Anderson Rubin. This method provided by the SPSS statistical software to calculate factor scores for each measurement scale based on items selected. The structural model is shown in Table 2. Thus, the following Table 2 with the test results of the structural model show a very good fit judged by indices.

*5.3.1. Analysis of the significance of the model parameters*

The results of the analysis of the structural model of Table 3 ride all the coefficients are significant at the 5% level. Indeed, the results express a strong and significant relationship between municipal awareness and citizen’s satisfaction evidenced by a positive regression coefficient.

With a coefficients regressions equal successively to (1.253, 2.145, 2.192, 2.364, 1.369, 2.741, 1.498, 1.498, 1.364), these relationships are represented by a successive positive relationship

**Table 1: Results of the exploratory factor analysis**

Indices of GFI	KMO indice	Cronbach alpha	Significance of Bartlett
Municipal awarness			
Civic	0.770	0.887	0.000
Cultural	0.557	0.658	0.000
Political	0.613	0.749	0.000
Environment	0.742	0.817	0.000
Social	0.597	0.697	0.000
Citizen satisfaction			
Service	0.886	0.788	0.000
Environment	0.889	0.838	0.000
Markets	0.779	0.821	0.000
Parks and gardens	0.744	0.856	0.000
Land services	0.827	0.884	0.000

KMO: Kayser-Meyer-Olkin, GFI: Goodness of fit

between municipal awareness (civic, political, environmental and social) with citizen satisfaction evidenced by satisfaction with services, environment, parks and gardens, lands services and markets).

This confirms the first hypothesis which states that municipal awareness is positively associated with citizen satisfaction. These results confirm those found by the Zamzami study (2004) in the context of Saudi Arabia, and Mishler and Rose, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Stoner-Weiss, 1997; Norris, 1999; Knack, 2000; Newton, 2001; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Jaramillo and Wright (2015).

Subsequently, the same results suggest a positive and significant relation at the 5% level between civic, political, environment and cultural awareness to the determinants of citizen satisfaction.

Finally, the study concludes the rejection of the non-linearity between the municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction variables.

**6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The overall results obtained from the fit indices of the global model, the significance test of the model parameters (correlation coefficients standardized and associated CR), the coefficients of determination (relating to variances explained), and finally the verification of causal relationships between the model and the variables associated with it, confirm that the model tested is acceptable. In addition, the quality of the fit (the fit) between the data and the conceptual model of the research is confirmed by the significant coefficients of determination of the dependent variables of the model and the existence of a significant causal relationships direct links between variables. This brings us to confirm the initial research proposition that argues that municipal awareness impact positively citizen satisfaction in Arar city, and the northern border region. This is oriented in the context of:

- Learning about the achievements of the municipality
- Knowledge of future municipal projects
- Knowledge of the services provided by the municipality
- Discussion with others regarding municipal development issues
- Participation in the municipal elections
- Use of the services provided by the website of the secretariat of the northern border region.

**Table 2: Test results of the structural model**

Indices of goodness of fit	
$\chi^2$ (value p associated) $\chi^2$ /ddl	0.197
GFI	0.997
TLI	0.996
CFI	0.995
RMR	0.009
CAIC tested model	85.340
CAIC saturated model	97.166

GFI: Goodness of fit, TLI: Tucker Lewis index, CFI: Comparative fit index, RMR: Root mean square residual, CAIC: Consistent Akaike information criterion

**Table 3: Analysis of the significance of the model parameters**

	Regression coefficient		Estimate
MAWERNESS13	←	Socialawarn	1073
MAWERNESS9	←	Poliawarn	1.715
MAWERNESS7	←	Poliawarn	-2.026
MAWERNESS1	←	CIVIawarn	1.369
MAWERNESS3	←	CIVIawarn	2.741
MAWERNESS10	←	Envawarn	1.182
MAWERNESS2	←	CIVIawarn	2.364
MAWERNESS11	←	Envawarn	1.182
MAWERNESS14	←	Socialawarn	1.249
MAWERNESS2	←	CIVIawarn	1.364
MAWERNESS11	←	Envawarn	1.182
MAWERNESS14	←	Socialawarn	1.249
MAWERNESS8	←	Poliawarn	1.270
ENV3	←	ENV	-1.582
ENV6	←	ENV	1.988
ENV7	←	ENV	1.333
ENV12	←	ENV	1.988
ENV10	←	ENV	-1.582
ENV	←	Envawarn	1.224
ENV	←	CIVIawarn	1.498
ENV	←	Poliawarn	1.137
ENV	←	Socialawarn	1.116
ENV	←	Envawarn	1.224
ENV	←	CIVIawarn	1.498
ENV	←	poliawarn	1.137
Service	←	Envawarn	1.270
Land	←	Envawarn	1.184
Service	←	Socialawarn	1.138
Service	←	CIVIawarn	1.253
Parks	←	Socialawarn	1.129
Parks	←	Envawarn	1.222
Parks	←	poliawarn	1.127
Land	←	poliawarn	1.110
Land	←	Socialawarn	2.114
Land	←	CIVIawarn	2.145
Parks	←	CIVIawarn	2.192
Service	←	poliawarn	1.136
MARKT4	←	Parks	1.156
MARKT5	←	Parks	1.156
MARKT2	←	Parks	1.355
MARKT3	←	Parks	1.355
PARKS4	←	Land	2.172
PARKS5	←	Land	2.240
SATISFAC3	←	Service	2.174
SATISFAC9	←	Service	1.559
SATISFAC4	←	Service	1.559
SATISFAC4	←	Service	1.559
MARKT3	←	Parks	1.355
SATISFAC3	←	Service	1.174
SATISFAC6	←	Service	2.559
SATISFAC2	←	Service	1.174
SATISFAC8	←	Service	1.174
SATISFAC6	←	Service	2.559
SATISFAC2	←	Service	2.174
SATISFAC8	←	Service	2.174

These factors impact citizen satisfaction by:

- The clarity of systems and procedures for municipal services, and satisfaction with these services
- The competence and experience of municipal workers
- The quality of services provided by the municipality
- The opening and paving of new streets
- The afforestation of Arar city
- The market organization

- The cleanliness, washing and maintenance of waste containers
- The cleaning of shops and areas
- The performance level of cleanliness in the city.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study attempts to shed light on the link between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction with municipal services in the city of Arar and the region of northern borders in Saudi Arabia. The study identified and analyzed the determinants of municipal awareness and their implications for citizen satisfaction. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire and processed using exploratory and confirmatory analysis by the methods of structural equations. The survey covered a sample of 250 inhabitants of the city of Arar, the capital city of the region of northern borders in Saudi Arabia.

The results show a strong relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction in the city of Arar. The municipal awareness is strongly connected to citizen satisfaction with the quality of the municipal services. The study, in general, suggests that knowledge, discussion, participation and learning about municipal activities and programs, as indicators of municipal awareness, have positive effects on citizen satisfaction with the quality of the municipal services. In particular, the results showed that citizen satisfaction is clearly reflected in the clarity of municipal systems and procedures concerning municipal services.

The results of this study confirm the positive linear relationship between municipal awareness and citizen satisfaction in the context of northern borders region, in general, and in Arar city in particular. These results are consistent with the findings of earlier studies such as Zamzam (2004) in the context of Saudi Arabia, and Newton (2001); Mishler and Rose (2001); and Jaramillo and Wright (2015) in different national contexts.

Overall, the study indicates that knowledge and awareness of local affairs can be used as practical tools for evaluating municipal services and determining priorities and concerns of local citizens and communities.

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