



COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SELF-DEVELOPED AREAS AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Abstract

Community participation in self-developed areas is a key issue in contributing to the success of public housing. The main objective of this paper is to explore the factors that lead to the success of projects designed through participatory approach and cohousing design and the possibility of applying them while planning and designing new cities in Egypt. Accordingly, reasons behind achieving a highly appreciated housing are highlighted. The idea of participatory design is presented showing its fundamental characteristics and how residents actively participate in the design and operation of their neighborhood. A descriptive analysis of self-developed area in Germany (Southern part of Tubingen) and USA ('The Village' Cohousing project, Wisconsin) are presented. A recent participatory project in Egypt, about Maspero Triangle development urban project, indicating the importance of community engagement in the development process is highlighted. Finally, the means of achieving a successful participatory design in self-developed areas are pointed out, showing the importance of its application in Egypt. Accordingly, it is deduced how the physical design of the neighborhood through community participation encourages both individual space and social contact.

Keywords: Community participation, cohousing, self-development, social interaction.

1. Introduction

Community participation and activity engagement have a positive role in improving the quality of life. Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people connected by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a very powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It involves partnerships that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices [1].

Community engagement requires participation of community members in projects that fulfill their needs. Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility. Among the factors that motivate people to participate are wanting to play an active role in bettering their own lives, fulfilling social and religious obligations, feeling a need for a sense of community, and wanting cash or in-kind rewards. Whatever people's motivations, obtaining meaningful community participation and having a successful, sustained initiative require that engagement leaders respect, listen to, and learn from community members. An absence of mutual respect and co-learning can result in a loss of time, trust, resources and, most importantly effectiveness [2-4]. Community members and organizations will participate if they perceive that the benefits of participation outweigh the effort required [5]. Practitioners

of community engagement need to learn how individuals understand their identity and connections, enter into relationships, and form communities. In general, the goals of community engagement are to build trust, enlist new resources and allies, create better communication, and improve overall health outcomes as successful projects evolve into lasting collaborations [6].

Community participation in development activities such as rural development is a well-known concept that has been recognized in Egypt since the early 1950s. Participation in urban development activities has lagged behind due to different reasons. In rural projects beneficiaries are producers that must be involved in development of production systems, while in urban projects beneficiaries are consumer of services. Activities of participatory housing and urban development projects show that community-based organizations and housing users can make important contributions to the provision of operations and maintenance of housing and urban systems [7].

Objectives of housing and urban development should be justified and fulfilled by participation. Participatory housing and urban management requires that user communities and responsible institutions have both the capacity and the opportunity for participation. Participatory processes have specific requirements in terms of resources, time and skills. Participation is always associated with empowerment of the participant [8].

The concept of community participation in self-developed areas is strongly associated with the cultural level, standard of living, traditions and degree of maturity of the local society. Successful projects designed through participatory approach and cohousing design have been achieved in some developed countries. Residents actively participate in the design and operation of their neighborhood to meet their needs and requirements as demonstrated in the following two study cases in Germany and USA.

In Egypt, recently efforts are being exerted to encourage local communities to incorporate actively in projects aiming at upgrading and development interventions. The capacity of local authorities to provide urgently needed suitable housing and urban services is questionable. Investment in technical facilities alone is not enough to meet the challenge of providing adequate service. This depends mainly on efficient organization of service delivery processes and the optimum use of available material and human resources. It is a question of management, which calls for active cooperation between government agencies and housing and urban services users, as well as private sector actors [9]. A brief over view of developing Maspero Triangle in Cairo is outlined.

2. Participation Concepts

In the field of community's participation, good governance and public awareness the following concepts, terminology and definitions have been used to demonstrate the key issues contributing to the success of public housing.

2-1 Participatory Design

Participatory design is defined as a collection of data and information about local context, needs, wants and environmental conditions that improve the design process. It may lead to fulfill the human needs and aspiration. It includes a group of certain people sharing an almost similar lifestyle conditions. The higher level of participation is enabling citizen power through partnership, delegated power and citizen's control. Accordingly negotiations between

different stakeholders who are involved in the project take place. Joint committees between the community and power holders are responsible of planning and decision-making [10].

2-2 Modes of Participation

There are new roles of designers to carry out design participation. The development of these new roles is based on Henry Lefebvre’s social/spatial concept that the world is divided into two worlds of practice: abstract space for experts and designers and concrete space where people live [11]. These two worlds were separated during the era of modernism. When the two worlds rejoin, a new form of in-between space is created called the ‘realm of collaboration’. Figure 1 shows the interaction of abstract space and concrete space and provide a new way to understand design participation where ‘working with designers’ and ‘working with people’ are opposite poles of an axis that can be mapped parallel to this diagram of the new relationship with the three spaces [12]. Three modes of participation are public participation in abstract space, community participation in concrete space and design participation across the overlap space of the realm of collaboration. The idea is to insert three new steps, three processes, into conventional environmental design projects:

- Preference stage – participants are invited to express their preference through specially designed tools.
- Planning stage – collective brief and self study exercise to help the participant to define their design brief.
- Processing stage - transfer abstract design tools to people-engaged games to let participants experience hands-on design.

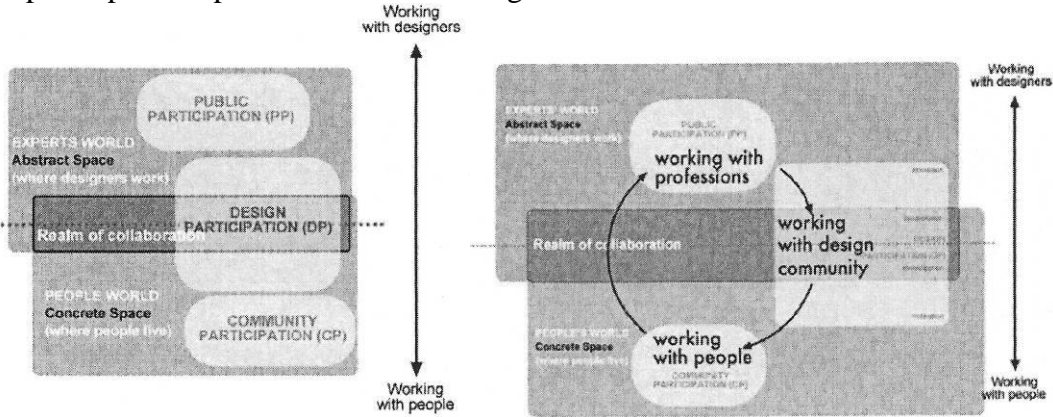


Figure1 Modes of participation and action plan of design participation tactics [12]

3. Self-managed Co-housing

Self-organized co-housing collectives have been reappearing in many developed countries in the last three decades. People join their efforts to create affordable housing. Although co-housing collectives have diverse ideological backgrounds, a common factor is the aim for alternative housing models, often with high ecological ambitions or shared spaces. Citizen groups who take the initiative to develop a housing project are often motivated by special needs or ambitions regarding their environment. Some dwellers group have clearly articulated these needs and developed new spatial models. Co-housing provides solutions for many of contemporary societies’ challenges, which are creating community, building sustainability and enhancing life [13]. A new network is emerging that promotes self-built and self-managed projects as ‘a third way for public housing’ [14].

“Cohousing is a type of collaborative housing in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighborhoods. Co-housing residents are consciously

committed to living as a community. The physical design encourages both social contact and individual space. Private homes contain all the features of conventional homes, but residents also have access to common facilities such as open space, courtyards, a playground and a common house” [15].

The main characteristics of co-housing can be summarized as follows:

- Participatory process: co-housers manage the whole participatory process from scratch. They can be helped by experts.
- Intentional neighborhood design: the design of the co-housing site, the urban space and landscape of the area have a major influence on the quality of the community bond where paths, green zones, benches are identified.
- Extensive common facilities and activities: these are the heart of the co-housing community and must be given vital attention.
- Resident management: co-housers meet on a regular basis to take decisions.
- Absence of hierarchy: the existence of ranking and leaders are acknowledged by co-housers as human processes that naturally occur in community.
- Incomes are separated: every co-houser has to find a way to earn his own money [16].

Cohousing makes life more fun and easier while preserving the privacy of each individual adult and child. Nothing is rigid in such a place: it all depends on what the community can afford and wants to create. What is fundamental is that cohousers themselves are the driving force behind the process. Cohousing communities gather together on average between 15 and 35 families, in order to work optimally. Smaller or bigger ones tend to create problems [17]. To understand the relationship between self developed areas and co-housing these characteristics are examined in the following two case studies; southern part of Tübingen in Germany and ‘The Village’, Wisconsin, USA.

4. Southern Part of Tübingen, Germany

The municipality and city council in the southern part of Tübingen gave a good opportunity for residents to participate in developing their own area. The project objectives and the characteristics of cohousing will be discussed to show the importance of community participation in the project.

4-1 Project Objectives

According to the city of Tübingen, the project objectives are; designing the urban plan of the area while being connected to the rest of the city, creating an enclosed community where citizens can find their requirements and desires and creating mixed-used area with small land parcels within each district [18]. The neighborhood consists of private dwellings which are clustered around shared facilities; cars are typically restricted to the outskirts of the community, allowing the interior of the development to remain a quite, safe place where children and adults can socialize. It offers the best of both, commercial and private life.

4-2 Characteristics of Cohousing

Characteristics of cohousing are: participatory process; intentional neighborhood design; extensive common facilities and residents management. They are outlined as follows:

4-2-a Participatory Process

Residents participate in the design, implementation process and the operation of their neighborhood. The city set out some criteria to allocate the end users and select deserved citizens for the district. For example, people readiness to generate different activities in the

area is one of the important selection criteria. Citizens have to come in groups and define their required plot area and position. The role of the city is to introduce people to each other by creating and organizing platforms and events that give them the chance to meet. Citizens have the opportunity to choose the most matching and compatible people who share common values and ideas (Figure2).

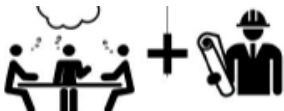


1. Collective Meeting:

The role of the city is to introduce people to each other by creating and organizing platforms and events



**2. Elect Representatives:
Working Team**



**3. Several Meeting of the working group with architects to design their houses and public spaces. Architect directs the citizen to the right path & to respect:
-The concept of sustainability - the rules of the district**



4. Citizen representatives meeting with city council presenting outcome design of building and public courts



5. Design modification by the city following a meeting with all citizens to show results

6. Monitoring and management of the city through:



**7. Coordinator
“Urban Renewal of the City”**

**Project Director
“Urban Development of
the City”**

Figure 2 The Cohousing Process

Each group appoints an architect who directs them to the right path and to respect the concept of sustainability and the rules of the districts. Moreover, the architect implements the demands of the people to fulfill their needs and satisfaction. Several meetings with groups are scheduled frequently. The representative of the group follows up the process with the architect. Finally, after reaching the final design proposal, the rest of the group meet with their architect for any further modification. Then the final version of the design is presented to the city for implementation approval.

4-2-b Intentional Neighborhood Design

The district is divided into plots. Each group determines their needs and size of the plot to build their building. Urban planner designs each block of buildings containing a public court shared among the citizens of the block who are responsible of designing, caring and maintaining the court in good condition (Figure 3).

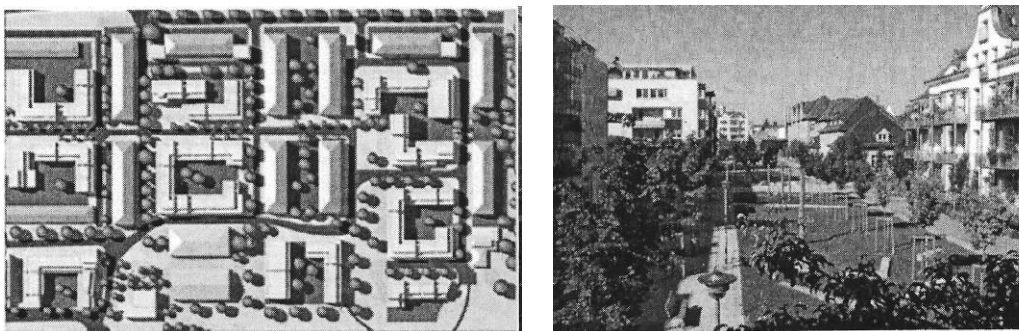


Figure 3 Neighborhood Design [19]

4-2-c Extensive Common Facilities

Ground floor of all buildings hosts different services for the surrounding community. Providing public amenities, such as shops, nurseries, workshops, restaurants and cafes in the neighborhood is very important for the citizens' comfort (Figure 4). As the neighborhood is well connected to the main routes of the city through a bus trajectory, residence can fulfill all their other needs, i.e., hospitals and universities, from the main facilities of the city.

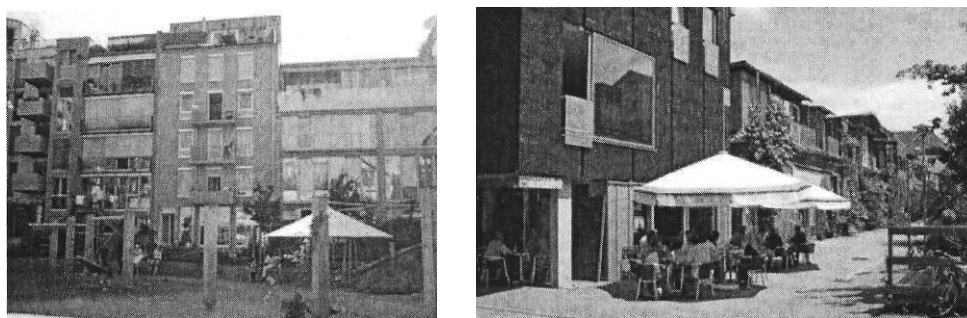


Figure 4 Common Facilities [19]

4-2-d Resident Management

Cohousers meet on a regular basis to take decisions by consensus or by voting. During the design phase each group chooses a representative who is a communicator between the group, the architect and the city council. The architect directs the cohousers to the suitable decisions.

5. 'The Village' Cohousing Project, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

This project is one of the successful cohousing projects in USA. The project objectives and characteristics are briefly outlined.

5-1 Project Objectives

'The Village' Cohousing Project aims to create a cooperative form of housing that accommodates changing families and life styles and provides a balance between personal privacy and cooperative living.

5-2 Characteristics of Cohousing

The characteristics of 'The Village' Cohousing Project are outlined as follows:

5-2-a Participatory Process

Residents of 'The Village' believe that interaction between people of all ages in a community setting is important (Figure 5). Cohousing concept was introduced in Dane County area in 1991 through a series of workshops held by Design Coalition. Three core groups formed immediately. 'The Village' Cohousing group was the only group that kept going strong. The neighborhood is a lively older Madison area with a mix of students and homeowners. It is close to the UW-Madison campus, bus lines, hospitals and downtown offices. In 1997, the group began working with Design Coalition architects to design the project, get city approvals, contract with housing consultant Steve Silverberg and builder Krupp Construction, and begin building. Now, they are finally moved in [20].



Figure 5 People Interaction [20]

5-2-b Intentional Neighborhood Design

The district is planned to locate the parking on the periphery. The heart of the site strictly designed for pedestrians. The main vehicular access is from St. James Court (Figure 6). 'The Village' complex comprises 17 dwelling units. Grade-level units have a patio adjacent to the living/kitchen area and a small garden area (Figure 7).

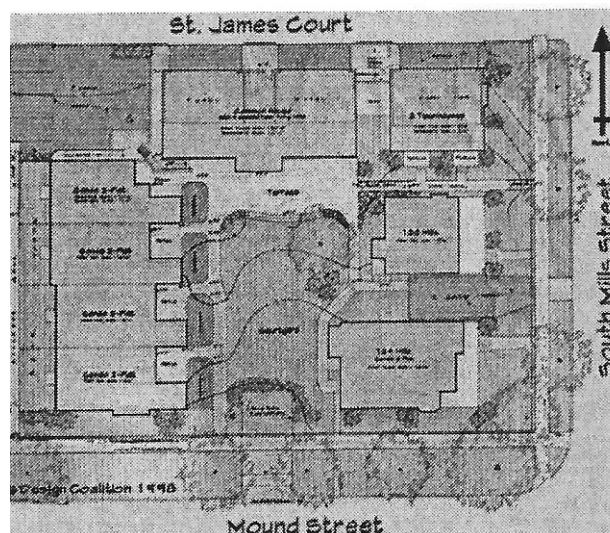


Figure 6 'The Village' Layout [20]

A central terrace, off the Common House dining room, is located in a sunny, protected micro-climate. The site is carefully graded to allow wheelchairs to move smoothly (Figure 8). A drop-off parking area, off Mound Str., is surfaced with porous-paving material that allow grass to grow through. The site landscaping is done by the residents gardeners (Figure 9).



Figure 7 The unit's garden



Figure 8 Carefully graded site



Figure 9 Collective residence gardening [20]

5-2-c Extensive Common Facilities

Individual units are located near a common house which comprises shared facilities, eg., dining/gathering room, big kitchen, children's play room, workshop, laundry and guestrooms (Figure 10). Each apartment is self-sufficient with a complete kitchen where the group would arrange shared meals. Each unit does not require all of the space or possessions that might be found in a typical home because of the shared facilities. Residents manage different activities like arranging for children's sitters and car-pooling.

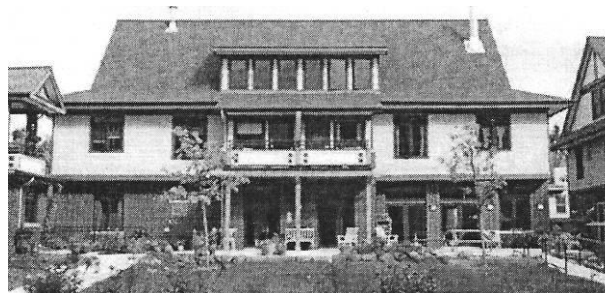


Figure 10 The Common House [20]

5-2-d Residents Management

People belongs to the cohousing community. Belonging to the community results in participating in the management of the property; sharing responsibilities related to maintenance, book keeping, gardening, cooking common meals and serving on committees.

6. Efforts towards Better Quality of Life in Egypt

The full meaning of community participation in Egypt is missing. The society could be divided into three classes: well to do, moderate and poor. In the last few decades the first class has left the main cities and isolated themselves in gated compounds at the outskirts of the cities. Architects and designers simply provide these compounds with assumed and expected needs of anticipated residents. The compounds usually include luxurious buildings, complete services, public gardens, pedestrian paths, play gardens for children, swimming pools and recreational facilities. Recently some ecocities, as Mevieda, in New Cairo are established with environmentally friendly and sustainable buildings without any kind of participation with the residents.

There is a demand for a decent shelter at reasonable price for the vast majority of the bottom stratum of the Egyptian Society. The urban poor have relied on self-build informal housing in meeting their needs and requirements in urban areas. The informal settlements are characterized by narrow streets, poor infrastructure and main services and unhealthy environment. People suffer from lack of education and illiteracy, low-income, unemployment and tough environment. Recently, the government has exerted lot of efforts to treat this severe problem but without any sort of community participation. Ministry of housing is constructing new districts with 5-storey houses to accommodate residents of these informal settlements. Flats are distributed with affordable prices.

7. Development of Maspero Triangle, Cairo

The Maspero Triangle district, Figures 11-12, located in downtown Cairo and situated on the Banks of the River Nile, accommodates around 14000 residents [21]. In 1970s, residents began to suffer from several problems including lack of community inclusion in public and private development projects. The initial plan of Maspero Triangle neglected the community's attachment to the area they live in. The traditional approach of the government to informal upgrading is resettlement, i.e., evacuating the existing community and relocating them in the outskirts of cities and cash compensation.

However, the Maspero Parallel Participatory project led by the Maspero Youth association, the Egyptian Center for Civil and Legislative Reform and the Madd group became the first participatory and community-led in situ urban planning project adopted by the Ministry of Urban Renewal and Informal Settlements (MURIS). Within this project, public hearing and community consultation sessions have been held as shown in figures 13 and 14 [22].



Figure 11 Maspero Triangle [21]

Madd works under a moral umbrella and focuses on four key concepts: community empowerment, community participation, publication of all information related to Madd projects to serve as an open source platform and communicates and works only with grassroots initiatives. Madd communicates with the community through grassroots initiatives to connect the needs of implementing the projects with ideas, proposals and support of experts and craftsmen working under similar moral umbrellas devoted in projects serving the community. Madd works on an alternative participatory project in Maspero which aims to add the aspect of the community in the neighborhood Maspero Triangle as a key aspect in the development process [23].

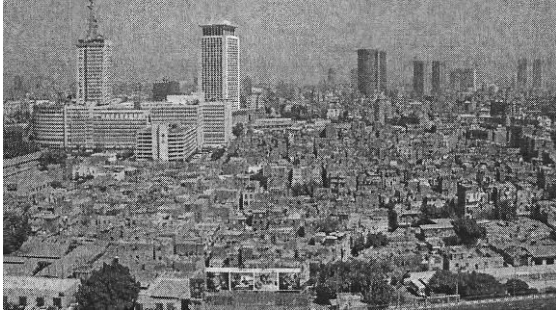


Figure 12(a) Over View of Masperio Triangle [25]



Figure 12(b) Masperio Triangle adjacent to Nile Bank [26]

The project incorporated experience gained from several local and international participatory urban upgrading projects, while considering urban, social and economic aspects of Maspero. The project gave the right for residents to stay in the area. Moreover, the project considered re-zoning the area so that up-scale developments do not negatively impact the zone where residents would be rehoused. It is expected that the project will transform the lives of the people living in this neighborhood, giving them greener community spaces and a better place to live and work, while creating new spaces for offices, retail and residences [24].



Figure 13 Public Hearing session in Masperio Triangle [22]



Figure 14 Community consultation session in Masperio Triangle [22]

8. Conclusion

In the field of architecture, the community participation approach in planning, design and construction is a key issue in achieving successful public housing. The concept and objective of community participation depend mainly on the standard of living, degree of culture and social awareness of the community. In all cases, the target is to achieve a highly appreciated housing to fulfill the needs and requirements of the residents. The descriptive analyses of the two cases in Germany and USA show how residents actively and rationally participated in the design and operation of their neighborhood and how successfully they achieved their goals. In Egypt, the fundamental characteristics and concepts of community participation is still missing. To achieve successful participatory design it is inevitable to enhance public awareness, to establish an appropriate management system, to educate and teach the residents and to convince them about the benefits and welfare that would be gained through community participation.

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