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POST-REVOLUTIONARY URBAN EGYPT: A NEW MODE OF PRACTICE?

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis la révolution du 25 janvier 2011, l’Égypte a vu se manifester une mobilisation croissante, en particulier concernant les questions d’urbanisation. Cette mobilisation trouve des échos dans la relation qu’entretiennent les citoyens ordinaires à leurs quartiers et à leurs villes. Parallèlement, nombre de professionnels se sont engagés plus avant dans ce champ, et en appellent au ‘droit à la ville’, demandant que nos politiques et pratiques de l’urbanisme laissent plus de place à la justice sociale.

Peut-on appeler cela une « nouvelle façon de faire » ? La révolution a-t-elle été ce moment décisif où les pratiques de l’urbanisme en Égypte ont pris une nouvelle direction ? Cet article veut montrer que ce n’est pas le cas, et que la mobilisation actuelle n’est qu’une nouvelle étape dans un mouvement qui a plaidé depuis les années 1940 pour une pratique alternative de l’urbanisme. Ce mouvement résiste au paradigme du développement urbain post-moderne et « par le haut » qui prévaut en Égypte.

Cet article retrace le cheminement de ce mouvement, son évolution à travers trois transitions majeures, chacune sous l’influence d’acteurs différents. Le texte décrit aussi comment Takween Integrated Community Development – un bureau d’études créé en 2009 – s’est construit sur l’héritage de ce mouvement alternatif, réunissant des professionnels en lutte pour changer la manière d’envisager l’urbanisme en Égypte. Enfin, cet article tente d’identifier quelques-uns des défis qui attendent encore ce mouvement alternatif, et la manière dont les praticiens, les militants associatifs et les défenseurs des droits peuvent travailler ensemble à y répondre.

MOTS CLÉS :

Mobilisation urbaine, droit à la ville, urbanisme alternatif, activisme urbain, pratiques professionnelles.

ABSTRACT

Since the 25 January 2011 Revolution, Egypt has been witnessing increased mobilization especially when it comes to urban development. This has reflected on the relationship between ordinary citizens, and their neighbourhoods and cities. In parallel, many professionals have become more engaged in this field – calling for the “Right to the City” and demanding more social justice in our urban development policies and practices.

Can this be called a «new mode of practice»? Has the revolution been a decisive moment when urban development practices in Egypt shifted from their path? This article argues that this is not the case, and that the current mobilization is just another milestone on the path of a long movement calling for an alternative urban development practice since the 1940s. It is a movement that stands against a high-modernist top-down urban development paradigm that still prevails on the scene in Egypt.

This article seeks to trace the path of this movement and how it evolved over three major transitions – each shaped by different factors. The article also traces how Takween Integrated Community Development – an urban development firm established in 2009 – has been building upon the legacy of this alternative movement among other professionals – all striving to change the way we approach urban development in Egypt. Finally, this article tries to identify some of the challenges that still face this alternative movement and how practitioners, community activists, and rights groups can work together to overcome these challenges.

KEYWORDS:

Urban Mobilization, Right to the City, Alternative Urban Development, Urban Activism, Professional Practice.

Since the 25 January 2011 Revolution, the Egyptian society has been witnessing massive mobilization in many different fields. When it comes to urban development, the relationship between academics, practitioners, and even ordinary residents on the one hand, and their neighbourhoods and cities on the other, has been greatly affected by this mobilization. This has resulted in a new phenomenon where dialogue on our cities, their realities and their futures has expanded beyond the limited academic and professional circles. This dialogue now incorporates community activists, new social movements and local residents in different neighbourhoods who are gradually becoming new active players in shaping our cities. In parallel, and since the 2011 Revolution, the academic and professional circles in this field have been witnessing an increasing number of voices that call for the “Right to the City” and demand more social justice in our urban development policies and practices.

Some call this a “new mode of practice”, considering the 2011 Revolution as a decisive moment when the practice of urban development in Egypt drastically shifted from its path. This article argues that this is not the case. It argues that the current mobilization and discourse is just another milestone on the path of a long struggle for an alternative urban development practice that began in Egypt many decades ago, in the 1940s. It is a movement calling for a practice that is more contextual; realistic; socially and economically inclusive; and environmentally sensitive. This movement was, and still is, in conflict with another high-modernist top-down urban development paradigm – that prevails on the scene in Egypt and still shapes our policies and practices. However, since the 1940s, this movement has been gaining more ground, inspiring more people and shaping the practices of many professionals today.

This article seeks to trace the path of this movement and how it evolved over three major transitions – each shaped by different factors and circumstances. The article also traces how Takween Integrated Community Development – a firm established in 2009 focusing on integrated urban development – has been building upon the long legacy of this alternative urban development movement, trying to become a part of it, exploring new avenues for a different professional practice, and striving among other Egyptian professionals and activists to change

the way we approach urban development in Egypt. Finally, this article tries to identify some of the challenges that are still facing this alternative movement and how practitioners, community activists, and rights groups can work together to overcome these challenges.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTERS

Between 1945 and 1947, and based on his successes in using mud brick as a low-cost building material, Hassan Fathy – an acclaimed Egyptian architect – was commissioned by the Egyptian Department of Antiquities to build a village. At the time, the department was looking for a low-cost option to relocate the Village of al-Gourna, near the Valley of the Kings in Luxor. For decades, inhabitants of the existing village used to tunnel into the slopes beneath their houses and rob the royal tombs.

The Egyptian Government, in its attempt to put an end to this destruction, asked Fathy to plan and build a new village where the inhabitants of al-Gourna could be relocated. To this effect, the Government acquired fifty acres of agricultural land near the Nile from a local landowner through eminent domain. This site is currently known as the New Gourna Village. The original project entailed the relocation of almost seven thousand Gournii who represented five major tribes that used to live in four district zones on the hillside. Accordingly, Fathy's plan for New Gourna responded to this social challenge where this four-part division was retained in the design of the new Village. (Steele, 1997).

The original plan included the construction of specially designed houses for the Gournii that respond to their special needs while fitting into the complex village street network. In addition, the plan also involved the construction of some public buildings and facilities for the inhabitants. Despite the completion of most of the originally planned public buildings and a significant number of the houses, the project activities came to a complete halt in 1947 due to various problems with the government and the Gournii who resisted the government's offer to relocate them and did not consent to move to Fathy's New Gourna. For several years, many of the village houses remained empty, but, with increasing urban growth and pressure from the government to evict the old Gourna Village, residents gradually started to move into the New Gourna village. (Taragan, 1999).

Almost six decades after the partial completion of the New Gourna village, Timothy Mitchell critically examined Fathy's masterwork in his seminal book *"Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity"*. Mitchell shed new light on Fathy's work by looking at the New Gourna

project within its social and political context.

Mitchell's examination reveals that when it comes to actual implementation, most of Fathy's ideas about community participation and being more socially sensitive were not put into effect. Rather, Mitchell argues that Fathy used an existing political opportunity to implement his ideas, regardless of local community's consent or approval of the entire project. In addition, Mitchell also argues that Fathy, given his aristocratic background and rich clientele, had an elitist attitude towards al-Gourna's simple peasants whom Fathy described as unable to express their basic needs and considered them as a clear threat to his plans. However, Fathy's endeavour in New Gourna remains one of the earliest documented examples of Egyptian architects' direct engagement – whether positive or negative – with their local communities in the twentieth century.

Fathy was not the only Egyptian architect to address social and environmental issues in his works and writings at that time. Ramses Wassef (1911-1974) – an Egyptian architect and professor of art and architecture – also played a major role with Fathy in establishing a new Egyptian vernacular style that was relatively based on traditional Egyptian architecture and the use of local craftsmen and materials. In 1951, Wassef also founded his masterwork: the Ramses Wassef Art Centre near the Giza Pyramids to teach young villagers how to create their own art and tapestries. The Centre –still active today – consists of workshops, exhibition spaces, and residential buildings all originally built in mud brick.

Indeed, for decades, the work of both Fathy and Wassef was a source of inspiration for generations of Egyptian architects and practitioners. Fathy and Wassef's social engagement; their call for increased awareness of local community needs in the planning and design process; their use of local materials and craftsmanship; and their cultural and environmental sensitivity were all revolutionary ideas in the mid twentieth century.

However, the mixed messages about Fathy's endeavour – including Mitchell's critical view – stem from judging Fathy's work in the light of today's standards and perspectives. For instance, the New Gourna project can be seen today as a major breach for the Gournii's right to secure tenure and their right to adequate housing. In fact, Fathy designed houses that were not flexible enough to cater to the Gournii's demographic growth or their need to accommodate their extended families within these houses. This shortcoming resulted into severe urban pressures that still negatively affect the village today. Another fact is that until today none of the Gournii have received legal titles to their new houses. As a result, the Gournii's tenure status is still legally precarious.

In the Egyptian context, the work and ideas of Fathy and Wassef represent the first known documented encounters between professional architects and their local communities in the twentieth century – marking the first important transitions to this alternative practice. However, for decades their work and ideas were also fiercely resisted in the Egyptian academic and professional institutions even up to the 1970s and early 1980s. And despite this criticism and resistance, both Fathy and Wassef were swimming against the tide trying to establish a new alternative practice that is more socially engaged, environmentally sensitive, and deeply rooted in Egyptian culture. However, this alternative practice was in flagrant contradiction with the mainstream high-modernist top-down urban planning paradigm that prevailed in the Egyptian scene from the first half of the twentieth century until today.

This mainstream conventional planning paradigm strongly believed in high modernity and the ability of planners and schemers to change the lives of millions of people through physical planning. To this effect, this planning paradigm promoted colossal development endeavours and ‘*Grand Projects*’ as a tool to change the face of Egypt. And it is not surprising to know that the roots of some of these ‘*Grand Projects*’ that still surface from time to time until today are five decades old, or even older. For example, the idea of the Qattara Depression Project – that is still proposed today – dates back to 1912 when it was first proposed by a German geographer. Another example is the Toshka New Valley Project that was initially proposed as an idea in the 1960s under Nasser. This project never came to life until 1997 when the Egyptian Government decided to implement it. However, the project was not well studied or planned and turned from a ‘mega-project’ to a ‘mega-failure’.

This high-modernist top-down paradigm echoed itself in the urban planning and urban development practices in Egypt. From modernist planning ideologies in the 1960s, to the government policy to build new urban communities in the desert in the beginning of the 1980s, ending with grandiose plans such as Cairo 2050 and Egypt 2052, it is possible to trace the evolution of such a paradigm. What started as a quest for modernity in the 1960s, turned into a capitalist dream in the 1970s and 1980s, then into a neo-liberal planning paradigm that dominated the Egyptian scene for the last two decades.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In the mid-1970s this alternative urban development practice in Egypt witnessed a second transition. In 1975, the Egyptian Government embarked on the Ismailia Master Plan (IMP) to guide the reconstruction efforts of the city of al-Ismailia along the Suez Canal. This process started after the city of al-Ismailia was considerably damaged during the

1973 Arab-Israeli war. The government perceived this reconstruction process as a national priority to resettle thousands of residents who fled the city during the war, and as an opportunity to boost the local economy. In line with President Sadat's 'open door' policy towards the West, the Egyptian Government commissioned the plans for the reconstruction of the canal cities to British consultants in accordance with the United Kingdom Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

In 1976, together with some Egyptian professionals, the project consultants completed a conventional Master Plan that followed an integrated multi-sector planning approach. However, the IMP was over-ambitious and did not give enough consideration to scarcity of available resources or implementation complexities. As a result, the implementation process remained on hold without any progress for almost a year. To reactivate the process, the Governor of al-Ismailia asked the same planning team in 1977 to select few strategic sites and implement some demonstration projects. The decision by then was to start upgrading a few dilapidated areas in the city. Consequently, the Ismailia Demonstration Projects (IDPs) were conceived to begin the implementation process and to give some positive examples of strategies that can be successfully implemented citywide.

This more realistic approach was finally materialized in 1978 with the proposed "Hai al-Salam" project in al-Hekr area, located at the northern limit of the city. Al-Hekr area – as described in the IMP – was an "unplanned progressive urban settlement" perceived as the largest informal settlement in the city. The IMP also recorded that al-Hekr area had the highest concentration of owner-occupied informal housing in the city. The implementation of the "Hai al-Salam" project in al-Hekr area was conceived as a model to demonstrate how the policies defined for the entire city IMP would have been implemented.

By then, the official policy towards informal areas such as al-Hekr – and in fact until very recent times – was to demolish such neighbourhoods and relocate their inhabitants to remote and inadequate public housing projects. However, the consultants of the project, together with some enlightened officials in the public administration of the city suggested something different. What they did was to bring a new vision to develop the city and a radically different concept about the role of informal housing dynamics. Based on their observations of the actual housing dynamics in the city, they realized that in order for residents living in informal areas to improve their houses they needed two things: security of tenure and basic services.

Therefore, instead of implementing the conventional top-down governmental housing policy of direct provision of housing units, the consultants proposed a new strategy that supported the residents to in-

crementally build and own their dwellings. This radically new concept for governmental authorities of that time helped save scarce public resources and followed a much more effective approach. And as a result, these public resources were utilized to finance the upgrading of existing informal areas through expanding the supply of land with minimal services. By doing that, the consultants were hoping to regularize informal construction while inhibiting speculative pressures in real estate markets in the city.

To this effect, this new approach adopted a set of policies that were new to the Egyptian context at that time. These policies included: provision of land to low-income families, incremental provision of infrastructure following the actual demand, and improved supply and distribution of building materials. This new set of policies also addressed other logistical issues such as providing a finance mechanism based on a micro-credit system to support low-income families to build their houses, and the simplification of construction standards and procedures. (Matteucci, 2006).

The Hai al-Salam project – considered as the first project in Egypt to upgrade a large informal settlement – was a major success for the IMP efforts that continued until the early 1990s. The rapid development of this project and residents' positive contributions to it presented a successful alternative to the top-down government housing policies. Its success simply stemmed from its realistic and socially engaging approach, and the vigilant observation of the real housing dynamics in our cities. But more importantly, the success of the Hai al-Salam project laid the foundation of a new era – the institutionalization of the alternative urban development approach in Egypt.

In the 1990s, and parallel with the repeated failures of the conventional urban planning paradigm to present viable solutions to the rapidly aggravating problems of urban Egypt, the alternative paradigm continued to evolve. The efforts this time were spearheaded by two groups of actors. The first group included international development agencies such as the 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – the German Development Cooperation' (GIZ) and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). The second group included the efforts of pioneer local individuals as well as some local collective efforts.

In response to the Egyptian Government's request to find sustainable solutions for the informal areas in Egypt, in 1998 the GIZ launched a programme for participatory urban development in Manshiet Nasser in the Cairo governorate. The project expanded in 2002 to cover Boulaq el-Dakroun in the Giza governorate. Soon the project evolved into the 'Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas' (PDP). The PDP was the result of cooperation between the GIZ, the German Financial Cooperation Developing Bank (KfW), as well as the Egyptian

Ministry of Local Development, local NGOs, and the Governorates of Cairo, Giza, and Alexandria.

Initially, the PDP activities consisted of three phases between 2004 and 2014 and have expanded to cover more areas in the three governorates. The primary goals of the programme are to achieve sustainable urban development, alleviate poverty in urban areas and attain social inclusion, good governance and democracy. The PDP is active in different fields including upgrading informal areas, capacity building of local partners, and promotion of active citizen's participation and decentralization.

The PDP efforts succeeded into drawing the attention of many practitioners and decision makers to the governance aspect of urban management in Egypt and the value of citizens' participation in the decision-making and urban planning process. It also highlighted the need for policy change and a good level of decentralization in order to address the complex issues of Egypt's informal areas (PDP, 2013).

Simultaneously with the PDP efforts, AKTC embarked upon the revitalization of al-Darb al-Ahmar district of Historic Cairo in late 1997, aiming to build upon the creation of the 30-hectare Al-Azhar Park. Following its completion in 2004, the Park has proven to be a successful project receiving almost two million visitors annually. The Park also became a catalyst for urban renewal in the adjacent al-Darb al-Ahmar area.

However, al-Darb al-Ahmar area – despite its central location, strong socio-economic networks, and considerable number of historic buildings – has witnessed a continuous deterioration of living conditions over the past three decades. The immediate causes were lack of maintenance of infrastructure, low family incomes, and the severe deterioration of monuments and private housing.

In order to reverse this deterioration process, AKTC launched its al-Darb al-Ahmar Revitalization Project in 2000, aiming to improve living conditions in the area and its physical assets through greater public and private investments, and raising family incomes through extensive socio-economic programmes. The project adopted incremental change and strengthening of the available socio-economic capital as strategies towards the desired change. The project also aimed at the capacity building of local stakeholders to achieve long-term sustainability either through working closely with responsible government officials or building the capacity of some local NGOs in the area.

Al-Darb al-Ahmar Revitalization Project operations followed a long-term approach that expanded for more than a decade, trying to interweave planning, rehabilitation, and conservation activities, with socio-economic initiatives. Accordingly, the project encompassed the rehabilitation of important monuments and landmark buildings

in al-Darb al-Ahmar, together with extensive social development programmes, including apprenticeship, micro-credit, healthcare, and housing rehabilitation (Ibrahim, 2007).

Most of the project's physical activities continued until 2012, leaving behind a rich experience that unfortunately was not thoroughly documented. Over a decade of concentrated work, the project managed to rehabilitate more than a hundred houses in the area, upgrade several public open spaces, restore and reuse many public buildings and monuments to serve the needs of the area inhabitants, and establish health and education programmes. The project also created thousands of job opportunities, and boosted economic opportunities in the area through vocational training, business development services, and microcredit schemes.

Therefore, and despite the fast deterioration and widespread building violations that al-Darb al-Ahmar witnessed after the 25 January 2011 Revolution, this project is still considered as a milestone in the alternative urban development paradigm in Egypt. This is particularly due to the strategies the project followed during its lifetime to achieve its goals. Contrary to the government conventional urban development approach; the project relied on incremental change; participatory planning and design; integrated socioeconomic and physical interventions; and innovative financial schemes as instruments to achieve tangible successes. But more importantly, the project managed to build the capacity of dozens of young professionals, and inspired the urban planning and development debate in Egypt for more than a decade.

The work done by the GIZ and AKTC for more than a decade in the field of urban development in Egypt still needs to be seen in a more analytical, if not critical, light. Through its work, the GIZ managed to establish two informal area Urban Upgrading Units (UUUs) within the Cairo and Giza governorates. The UUUs are now governmental units within the official administrative system responsible for addressing urban upgrading issues in their respective governorates. Through its work, AKTC managed to present a viable model for integrated urban development of historic areas. It also managed to build the capacity of dozens, if not hundreds, of young professionals and government officials through actual implementation of many successful interventions.

However, it is difficult to trace effective changes in the existing urban governance structure in Egypt due to the work of the GIZ and AKTC. These organisations successfully managed to have some impact on the technical capacity of the local administration. However, they did not achieve a similar impact on the administration's responsiveness to local community needs nor its accountability towards the citizens. This is primarily due to the impermeable nature of the existing urban governance structure in Egypt.

On the local level, it is evident that local communities did not initiate any of these development projects; however, they had a say about the identification of their problems, priorities, and what needed to be done in their areas. Moreover, the participation process adopted by the GIZ and AKTC was economically beneficial to these communities either through direct engagement of community members in the implementation process, or through utilization of existing resources in a much more effective manner. However, and despite these successes, it is difficult to see real change in terms of better community mobilization, organization, or 'democratization' from below.

Besides the efforts of these international agencies, the period between 1990 and 2001 witnessed some important projects led by prominent Egyptian architects and planners. These projects further enriched the debate about the viability of this alternative approach. Some of these projects were 'Al-Sayda Zeinab Cultural Park for Children' by Abdel-Halim Ibrahim in 1990. The Park, built in this popular part of Cairo, was one of the first projects especially built for children in Cairo. The project did not limit itself to the park site itself, but expanded in the neighbouring Abul-Dahab Alley and engaged the local inhabitants in issues that related to the upgrading of the surrounding area.

Between 1994 and 1999, Al-Darb Al-Asfar area in Historic Cairo (a small alleyway off al-Mu'izz Street) witnessed another important effort – the Al-Suhaymi House Area Conservation Project. This project that started by Asaad Nadim as an attempt to restore the 17th Century Al-Suhaymi House, soon expanded to restore two other adjacent monuments, and rehabilitate the entire alley including the upgrading of its infrastructure and the renovation of all its houses, engaging the local residents living there. This in itself was an important shift in official practices addressing historic areas in Cairo which usually focus on the restoration of listed monuments while ignoring the local residents living around them – if not seeking to evict these residents.

A similar project, and on a larger scale, took place near Coptic Cairo in *Masr al-Qadima* area between 1998 and 2001. The Old Cairo Development Project (*Mugamma' al-Adyan*) led by Mona Zakaria involved the construction of a market complex, a bus station, and a fire station in the area between 'Amr ibn al-'As and Coptic Cairo. The project also included the renovation of almost 350 houses and the upgrading of infrastructure networks. The project heavily involved the local residents in its activities and managed to present a successful model in this regards.

And last but not least, the end of the 1990s witnessed a relatively small but important project – the Cairene Houses Rehabilitation Project in al-Darb al-Ahmar. This project that started as a personal initiative by Salah Zaki, soon managed to rehabilitate a group of late 19th and early

20th century architecturally significant houses in al-Darb al-Ahmar. This project, that engaged the residents of these houses in the rehabilitation process, again, drew the attention to the importance and potential of engaging local inhabitants in urban rehabilitation projects.

Besides these important individual efforts, the year 1997 witnessed the establishment of the Egyptian Earth Construction Association (EECA) by a group of young Egyptian architects and planners. This NGO – influenced by the ideas of Fathy and Wassef, advocating for the adoption of sustainable building technologies and active community involvement in urban and architectural projects – was one of the very early collective and institutional efforts to promote this alternative urban planning paradigm in Egypt. Over more than a decade, the EECA managed to design and implement various participatory projects in different locations all over Egypt – attracting and inspiring dozens of young Egyptian professionals. The EECA is still active today, especially in the field of training and capacity building of young Egyptian architects.

The journey of the protagonists of this alternative urban development approach was not an easy one. Despite all of their efforts, their projects and ideas remained the exception to a practice and academia mainly dominated by high-modernist top-down urban planning and design ideas. Moreover, and despite the more institutionalized nature of their efforts, the work of these institutions and remarkable individuals did not manage to change the failing public urban policies in Egypt. While they were advocating to pay more attention to the real problems a majority of Egyptians endure in their cities and villages, and trying to find viable solutions to these problems, the state was busy drafting imaginary urban master plans and directing the majority of its resources to building new cities in the desert that serve the better-off minority of Egyptians.

THE CONTESTATION YEARS

In 2004, the creation of the Egyptian Movement for Change called *Kefaya* (enough) stimulated political mobilization in Egypt after years of stagnation. The movement opposed the continuation of the Mubarak rule and the inheritance of authority by his son Gamal. Despite the fact that the movement depended on street demonstrations to express itself, it remained largely elitist and failed to acquire a significant social base. However, the debate this movement stimulated marked the beginning of a cycle of purely political protest between 2004 and 2006, paving the way for other cycles and forms of protest in Egypt.

Another cycle of protests began in 2005-2006 with a more social and economic nature. This cycle began with a massive strike which

brought 24,000 workers to halt for three consecutive days in the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company located in the city of el-Mahalla al-Kobra. The workers were mainly demanding their bonus and wages they should have received. The strikers' determination was communicated to the authorities, but it also inspired more workers, civil servants, teachers, and many other suffering groups of Egyptian society to stand up and express demands of social and economic nature (such as increased social welfare and wages).

Fuelled by pressures of economic liberalization policies and lack of real political change, the mobilization of labour has had a domino effect on social protests. It started an unprecedented number of protests that increased dramatically between 2006 and 2010. The snowball effect of these protests affected large sectors of the Egyptian society. As a result, protests have become a general phenomenon in Egypt to the extent that social mobilizations have increased from 266 in 2006, to 614 in 2007, and to 630 in 2008. (Abdalla, 2012).

But what was happening during these turbulent times on the level of urban development practice in Egypt? In fact, the urban development practice over the past 10 years was to a great extent affected by various factors that were closely linked to this political and socioeconomic context. Some of these factors were neoliberal and commodification urban policies adopted by the state: increased urban challenges and pressures; rise of environmental, social, and economic rights movement in Egypt; and the global economic crisis in 2008 that severely affected the global real estate market.

During its last decade the Mubarak regime adopted a neoliberal economic policy that left its traces on the urban development context in Egypt. The state followed aggressive urban policies where it shifted its role from supporting low-income and vulnerable groups, to becoming a key player in the real estate market through the continuous commodification of land and housing. And instead of controlling the land and housing market, the state contributed to deepening the housing crisis through denying the majority of Egyptians' access to affordable land and housing, supporting crony capitalism through the allocation of cheap land and resources to key real estate developers, and directing the majority of the country's resources to such real estate development projects in the new urban communities.

On the other hand, Egypt was – and still is – facing colossal urban challenges and pressures. Egypt is rapidly urbanizing, where in 2010, 43% of the population were living in urban areas. In 2011, more than 12 million people were living in informal settlements, over half of them in the Greater Cairo Region (Amnesty International, 2011). More than 60% of Egyptians are under 30 years old –looking forward to more housing and job opportunities. Meanwhile urban disparities between

the rich and poor continue to rapidly increase.

For example, while the state was directing scarce resources such as water to rich new communities to irrigate golf courses or fill artificial lakes, millions of Egyptians were suffering from decreased access to potable water. As a result, in 2007, an uprising that can be termed “the Revolution of the Thirsty” broke out. The inhabitants of Burg Al- Burullus, a village in the Kafr al-Sheikh governorate, cut off the coastal road in protest against the shortage of water in their village, a shortage that forced them to drink polluted water. The action by these inhabitants was one among several protests that have prevailed across the country in demanding a more equitable distribution of utilities and urban services (TADAMUN, 2013).

The governmental response to these challenges and pressures exacerbated the situation and even increased the gap between urban and rural sectors; between existing urban areas and new urban communities; and between poor and rich neighbourhoods within the same city. The existing highly centralized urban governance structure in Egypt does not allow local residents to voice their needs, hold the government accountable for its acts, or support the local level of administration to address the needs of the residents especially in underserved neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, the top-down planning and urban development paradigm of the government continued to thrive. The apex of this paradigm was the state-led “Cairo 2050” urban development plan that soon evolved into “Egypt 2050”. The plan had the following vision: “By 2050, Egypt is to become a socially and economically developed country, active on the regional and international levels”. This plan – developed by the General Organization for Physical Planning with the help of some local professionals and international organisations such as the UN-Habitat – had a positive side to it by focusing on aspects of urban governance and its relation to urban deterioration. This is an issue from which the Greater Cairo Region is suffering. However, the plan also included a set of ‘interesting’ projects mainly aiming at giving the Greater Cairo Region a face-lift. Most of these projects proposed the demolition of large segments of the existing urban fabric (to the extent of wiping out entire neighbourhoods), relocating thousands of residents to desert areas, and selling their lands to private investors and developers.

The Cairo/Egypt 2050 plan coincided with the establishment of the Informal Settlements Development Facility (ISDF) in 2008. The ISDF was established as a funding agency to support the identification and development of unsafe and unplanned urban areas in coordination with different governorates and ministries. Initially, the ISDF followed a cost recovery mechanism aiming at capturing the revenue generated

from relocation of residents from informal areas, selling their land to private investors, and reinvesting this revenue in housing projects and provision of services to these relocated residents. This approach raised legitimate concerns among many practitioners and housing rights groups given its potential violation to the residents' right to adequate housing and security of tenure.

2008-2009 also witnessed another controversial governmental endeavour when the then Governor of Luxor adopted an aggressive upgrading plan for the city. The plan, originally aiming at the development of the city and increasing its role in the tourism industry, resulted in massive demolitions of significant portions of the city's urban fabric, the eventual loss of valuable architecturally significant buildings, the expropriation of hundreds of private properties, and the relocation of hundreds of families to areas outside the city. This project – representing a mini experience or model – showed how existing urban areas would have been affected and how residents' rights would have been violated if plans such as Cairo 2050 had been implemented. This was a real-life demonstration of top-down urban planning paradigm coming into practice.

Another important factor that shaped the urban development practice during these years was the rise of an active environmental, social, and economic rights movement in Egypt. This movement was spearheaded by a group of individuals and local organisations who were inspired by the rise of the global social and economic rights especially by the end of the 1970s following the adoption of the "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966 and its coming to force in 1976. This list of organisations includes, but is not limited to, the Egyptian Centre for Housing Rights (established in 1997), Habi Centre for Environmental Rights (2001), the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2002), the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (2009), and the Egyptian Centre for Civic and Legislative Reform (2010). These organisations along with many individuals, labour movements, local residents and community organisations have been working together on issues related to labour, health, education, housing, and environmental rights. The struggle of these groups has informed many urban development practitioners and raised awareness on the importance of the rights-based approach towards solving the problems of our urban areas.

Finally, another factor that influenced – one way or another – urban development practice in Egypt and the choices of many individual professionals was the 2008 global economic crisis. The crisis that ironically began with a housing mortgage problem and as a side effect of the inflated real estate markets, soon started to hit the Gulf markets resulting in the shutdown of major real estate operations there. As a result,

thousands of professionals suddenly lost their jobs. Slowly, this phenomenon started to affect the Egyptian market. Following the 25 January Revolution in 2011, the real estate market in Egypt slowed down even further following the eruption of various corruption scandals related to real estate transactions supported by the Mubarak regime. From an ethical point of view, this crisis forced a lot of practitioners to rethink the role of real estate business in Egypt, the need to reform this practice, and their professional role to support the neediest sectors of the society who have long been neglected. Some others were simply looking for job opportunities in community-related urban development projects since the real estate markets were almost closed. Regardless of their motivations, this situation directed attention of an increasing number of professionals – especially young graduates – towards community development projects in the urban sector.

THE THIRD WAVE

It is during these contestation years that a “third wave” of the alternative urban development movement started to take shape and develop. This “third wave” grew in response to this evolving social, economic, and spatial context, but also in continuum with the previous transitions that started in the 1940s and the 1970s. Despite some traces of elitist thinking and “social engineering” fantasies that tinted the first transition in the 1940s, the first encounters between professional architects and their communities brought about to this alternative movement environmental sensitivity, attention to community cultural aspects, and respect of local building crafts and materials.

The second transition that started in the 1970s contributed to the institutionalization of the alternative urban development efforts in Egypt and had a different nature in terms of the involvement of a considerable amount of foreign funding and technical support. It also tried to follow a more realistic and incremental approach towards solving the escalating urban problems in Egypt. Finally, it raised awareness on issues of active community participation, building on existing community assets, and the beginnings of a trend that focused on aspects of urban governance in terms of building the capacity of state institutions and to some extent the responsiveness of these institutions to local community needs.

Building upon the legacy of the 1940s and 1970s transitions, and contrary to the prevailing perception, the “third wave” took shape a few years *before* the 25 January 2011 Revolution, not *after* it. The interaction between different urban activists, rights groups, and local communities during the contestation years along with the different factors mentioned earlier influenced a small group of professionals – including Takween Integrated Community Development. This small group of professionals

became convinced – either individually or collectively – that in order for this alternative urban development paradigm to move forward, it has to address issues that are beyond the 1940s and 1970s contributions to this paradigm. They became convinced that the crisis is much deeper, and that in order for this alternative movement to become more influential it needs to address more critical issues such as social justice, equitable distribution of resources, the existing economic structure, democratic management of the city, and urban governance in terms of state accountability to its citizens.

In 2011, and following the 25 January Revolution, urban Egypt started to witness some important developments. Among these developments is the rise of new forms of community activism such as the Popular Committees – formed during the 2011 Revolution to secure their neighbourhoods following the withdrawal of security forces from the streets. These committees, mainly comprised of local youth, soon started to build upon the momentum of the 2011 Revolution and the success of their collective action. And as a result, they directed their efforts to monitor the distribution and provision of governmental services in their neighbourhoods. Some of them started to implement actual interventions in their neighbourhoods and even propose development plans to the authorities which were open and responsive to the efforts of these committees at least until mid-2012.

Another important development was the excessive use of social media by millions of Egyptians. This contributed to improved communication between different activists, practitioners, and community groups. Social media also contributed to raising awareness about the efforts of the different groups working on the grassroots level of the urban development sector in Egypt. As a result, people came to realize the polycentric nature of urban movement either in different neighbourhoods of the same city, or across the entire country. People started to become aware of the persistent efforts of local groups in Greater Cairo neighbourhoods such as Mit Uqba, Ard el-Liwa, and Izbet Khairallah. People also became aware of the struggles of active groups in other cities outside of Cairo such as Alexandria, Port Said, Mansoura, and el-Minya, all trying to improve their built environment and the living conditions in their cities.

However, and despite this mobilization, it is difficult – or at least too early – to say that what we are witnessing right now can be considered as a “new mode of practice” or a fourth transition on the path of the alternative urban development paradigm in Egypt. Rather, it is a continuum of the efforts of groups of professionals, community activists, and rights groups – many of whom started this “third wave” years before the 2011 Revolution. The list of the protagonists of the “third wave” is long, and before the 2011 Revolution it included blogs such as the

“Shadow Ministry of Housing” (launched in 2008), professional entities such as Takween Integrated Community Development (2009), and the efforts of individuals such Khald Abdel-Halim¹ and Dina Shehayeb². After the 2011 Revolution the list expanded to include another group of actors including entities such as CLUSTER – the Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training, and Environmental Research (2011); Megawra – the Built Environment Collective (2011); Madd Platform (2011); Save Alex (2011); The Egyptian Urban Action Initiative (2012); Takamol Foundation for Sustainable Development (2012); blogs such as Cairo from Below (2011) and Cairoobserver (2011); and many other active groups and individuals.

THE ROLE OF TAKWEEN INTEGRATED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In 2008, a group of seven young Egyptian professionals decided to work together in an attempt to address the escalating problems of existing urban areas through a different approach. This group encompassed architects, planners, and social development professionals – all coming from a non-profit background. But in 2009, instead of founding a new non-profit organisation, they decided, and managed to establish an urban development for-profit social enterprise: Takween Integrated Community Development.

They established Takween in response to a foreseen growing demand for innovative urban solutions in a world that is rapidly urbanizing. Through the establishment of this social enterprise they were aiming to develop integrated solutions for the problems of existing urban areas, and to complement efforts of other groups tackling urban challenges. To this effect, Takween started to focus its work under three thematic areas of interventions – built environment development, social development, and economic empowerment through integrated urban development interventions.

The decision to establish a social enterprise instead of an NGO – or any other form of non-profit organisations – was unorthodox in 2009, especially given the co-founders’ non-profit background. Howe-

1. Abdel-Halim is currently the director of the Local Administration Reform Unit, a UNDP program supporting the Ministry of Local Development advising on measuring good governance and local development. He is also an assistant professor of urban policy at the Public Policy and Administration Department, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, the American University in Cairo.

2. Shehayeb is a professor in the Institute of Architecture and Housing, at the Housing and Building National Research Centre (HBRC) in Cairo, Egypt, as well as the director of her private consultancy firm Shehayeb CONSULT.

ver, they decided to follow this path – despite the limitations it might impose on them in terms of funding opportunities – for many reasons. These reasons included the need to foster better accountability and a sense of ownership in the newly established firm. But more importantly, they wanted to challenge the prevailing perception that differentiates between the “efficiency” of the private for-profit sector on the one hand, and the “social purpose” of the non-profit sector on the other. They wanted to present a model that is different from the conventional Corporate Social Responsibility approach. They wanted to present a model that is collaborative, efficient, and financially sustainable, while maintaining a social purpose where integrated urban development is the core business.

Similar to other small entities trying to adopt alternative approaches towards urban development, financial sustainability was a crucial issue facing Takween. The dilemma was – and still is – how is it possible to adopt principles such as the “right to the city”, work closely with local communities in a real participatory process, and experiment new ideas, while maintaining successful business operations? More importantly, how is it possible to realize such principles on the ground?

To address this dilemma, Takween tried to develop a cross-subsidy model where revenue from for-profit operations and consultancy services is reinvested into testing new ideas or supporting local communities through planning services. And to adhere to its principles, Takween has been focusing its efforts on mediating between local communities and the state institutions, trying to give local communities a voice, recognizing local communities’ contributions and building on their assets, and influencing policy making through shedding light on new forms of local initiatives. However, implementing this model and trying to adhere to these principles was not an easy task. This was evident through the different challenges Takween faced during the actual implementation of its various projects and interventions.

One of the projects where the conflict between the high-modernist top-down planning paradigm, and the alternative approach adopted by Takween manifested itself was the development of an urban regeneration of the historic centre of the City of Esna in Luxor. In December 2009, the Egyptian Government decided to establish a new governorate that encompasses the cities of Luxor, Esna, and Armant under the name of Luxor Governorate. Esna – a historic city located 64 kilometres to the south of Luxor – was long neglected by the authorities until it became part of the newly born governorate. For centuries, Esna was an important economic centre and played a major role in serving its local region. Therefore, its urban fabric still maintains rich Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic, and modern layers of history.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, Esna continued to be an

important economic centre, especially for trade of textiles, traditional clothing, and its famous oil mills. This economic prosperity empowered the local families' structure and strengthened the existing social networks. In the second half of the twentieth century, tourism started to become a major source of income for the city. Hundreds of Nile cruises on the way between Luxor and Aswan had to stop by Esna for at least half a day to cross the old Esna barrage built in 1908. Tourists used this waiting time to visit the Esna Temple and wander in the city markets – boosting the local economy. However, in 1994 the Egyptian government built a new barrage that significantly reduced the waiting time. As a result, more than 95% of the Nile cruises passing by Esna ceased to stop by the city on their way to Luxor or Aswan. The city economy that had become largely dependent on mass tourism was severely affected due to this tragic shift. Consequently, the city centre surrounding the Temple – once thriving with tourists and visitors – suddenly fell into decay and became a dilapidated and under populated urban area.

In response to the rising attention given to Esna following its incorporation within the new Luxor Governorate, the ISDF commissioned Takween team in early 2010 to develop an urban regeneration plan for the dilapidated historic centre of the city. This effort was taking place in parallel with the implementation of the controversial projects of the then Luxor Governor. The Governor by that time was busy excavating the Avenue of the Sphinxes connecting the two major temples on the Eastern bank of Luxor. To implement his ambitious “vision” he also expropriated plenty of private properties and demolished hundreds of buildings in Luxor to reshape the city and make it more appealing to tourists.

It is within this context when the Takween team – supported by a team of young architects from the ISDF – started to work with the local residents in the Esna city centre to produce this plan. The project targeted an area of 11 Hectares (26 Feddans) surrounding the Esna Temple, bordered by the Nile from the east, and encompassing *al-Qisariyya* – Esna's main commercial spine. However, the area was mostly identified by the ISDF as an “unsafe area” given its severely dilapidated housing conditions. In order to avoid the “conventional” approach in such projects that usually ends up with some recommendations to support mass tourism, the team spent some time in Esna trying to understand from different stakeholders the root causes of its severe deterioration.

The preliminary findings were shocking. Out of more than 1,000 properties in the study area, only 417 buildings were inhabited. There were only 692 families living in the study area, out of which 595 families were living in unsafe buildings. To develop a better understanding, the team had to draw a plot-by-plot map of the entire area (since no maps were available for the city centre), conduct a physical survey for

all the properties, and carry out social surveys and interviews with all the families in the area – not just a sample of them. The findings of this in-depth understanding process were quite interesting and guided the proposed intervention plan.

First of all, it was evident that the way Esna is promoted and perceived as if it is “only about the Temple” was completely wrong. To the contrary, Esna city centre enjoys a multi-layered and complex history of different eras. When better understood, Esna represents a unique urban centre in Upper Egypt with magnificent architecture that provides a far richer experience for visitors when compared to the “one and only” Pharaonic image promoted by the state. Moreover, Esna enjoys a distinguished intangible heritage either in terms of the Sufi spirit prevailing the city and its surroundings making it an important religious centre, its unique social structure where the city centre is subdivided into invisible spatial domains controlled by powerful and deeply-rooted Esna families, and last but not least, its traditional crafts serving the local needs – all on the verge of extinction.

But what were the real reasons behind the severe deterioration of this sophisticated and once vibrant city centre? The first answer that came from many officials was lack of mass tourism after the 1990s. But a deeper investigation revealed that for Esna, mass tourism was not the solution, rather, it was the problem. Working closely with local stakeholders revealed that under the “illusion” of encouraging mass tourism as the only viable source of income for the city, for decades, the state adopted a set of policies with the aim to make the city more appealing to tourists. Consequently, the state worked on isolating the touristic zone of the city centre around the temple from its local environment through urban planning, administrative, and security control measures.

For example, the local authorities relocated the main transportation hub feeding the city with local visitors from nearby villages – the main clients of the city markets – in an effort to keep the villagers away from tourists. In addition, police check points were introduced around the Temple along vital commercial spines, where local visitors to the city markets were regularly stopped and checked by the police forces to “secure” the perimeter of the Temple. And despite all this attention given to tourism activities, until 2010 Esna city centre lacked any sort of functioning sewage network or paved streets. Moreover, the Antiquities department imposed a building moratorium on the entire city centre in order to “protect” the Temple.

These policies led to a situation where the local economy was almost destroyed, local residents lacked basic services or any kind of attention to their needs, and they were deprived from restoring their houses or building anew despite their strong social ties with the area and willingness to invest in improving their living conditions. Simply,

the Esna city centre was reengineered by the state to solely serve foreign tourists during their short visits to the Temple, through a controlled environment where the state made sure they did not mingle with local residents or villagers. As a result, local residents – especially the well-off – started to abandon the city centre, the whole area became a frozen asset, and the local economy was severely hit, mainly by lack of local clients, and to a less extent, by a lack of tourism.

At that point, it was evident for the Takween team that the solution for Esna’s city centre problems was not “more mass tourism”, rather, how would local residents of Esna reclaim back their city? Therefore, the team proposed a multi-faceted urban regeneration plan, primarily dependent on the local community and its assets aiming at restoring the physical and socioeconomic vitality of the city centre through three main strategies.

First, was to inject life in the local economy of the city markets through encouraging local trade, re-establishing transportation connections with adjacent villages, and facilitating local trade activities through more tactful policing measures. Also to give a balanced attention to commercial facilities serving tourists on the one hand, and the ones serving local residents on the other.

Second, is to strike a balance between heritage preservation requirements, and modern development needs of local residents. This balance can be achieved through greater public investments in public open spaces, basic services, and utilities needed by the residents, effective housing rehabilitation programmes, and better urban governance and planning measures aiming at responding to the residents’ needs while marinating the integrity of this important historic area.

Third, is to promote “responsible tourism” as an alternative to the one and only “mass tourism” model promoted by the state and tourism agencies. The regeneration plan aimed at increasing the time tourists spend in the city, encouraging them to explore it to discover its multi-layered rich urban heritage, and creating welcome opportunities where tourists mingle with the real residents of the city and benefit its local economy either in terms of local restaurants, cafes, or shops.

To this effect, the team prepared, with the ISDF, a comprehensive regeneration plan where clearly identified intervention packages along the aforementioned strategies were developed. The plan also included detailed descriptions of associated costs, responsibilities and contributions of different stakeholders including local residents, required administrative and legal actions, urban planning and management policies, and project management structure.

This comprehensive regeneration plan was presented to the Governor of Luxor in mid-2010. However, following the presentation of the

plan, the Governor revealed that during that time he had commissioned another group of consultants to prepare a parallel plan. The approach of the Governor's parallel plan was similar to many of the proposals of the Cairo 2050 plan and the intrusive urban plans he was aggressively implementing in Luxor. The Governor's plan was so simple. It proposed the demolition of the entire city centre of Esna encompassing more than 1,000 traditional buildings, relocating its residents, shifting the location of some monuments so they would look visually more dramatic, excavation of the entire city centre for almost 5 to 9 meters below the existing level to expose the Esna Temple from the Nile, and reconstruction of some buildings on terraced plateaus that mimic the traditional architecture of the city. The only goal of the governor's parallel plan was to restore the Esna Temple and its surroundings to their "acclaimed" Pharaonic setting to attract more tourism.

In a later stage, the two plans were presented to the Prime Minister in 2010 who selected the ISDF plan given its more realistic approach and less disruptive social impact. In early 2011 the Revolution erupted, and many of Luxor citizens reclaimed back their properties that had been expropriated by the state, and neither of the two plans was implemented. However, until today, the ISDF plan remains the 'official' plan for Esna's city centre. The conflict that erupted between these two plans was just another manifestation of the differences between the high-modernist top-down urban planning approach on the one hand and an alternative and more vigilant urban planning approach on the other.

In fact, Takween projects were not only limited to consultancy services for government or international development agencies. Through its cross-subsidy mechanism, Takween was able to engage in projects directly implemented with local communities such the renovation of a limited number of houses in Izbet Khayrallah – one of Cairo's largest informal areas. In 2011, Takween funded and implemented an initiative aiming at improving the facades of a group of houses there. This was an effort to shift the negative image promoted by the media about such neighbourhoods and prove that a little investment and attention can reintegrate these neighbourhoods into our city. The initiative engaged the residents through sharing the renovation cost and deciding what needs to be done to their houses, while using low-cost environmentally friendly materials. The initiative proved to be successful and encouraged another foundation to request Takween services to repeat the same experiment on a larger scale in Manshiet Nasser – another large informal area in Cairo – in early 2012.

What was really important about such initiatives is that they started a direct dialogue between Takween and the local community members. In Izbet Khairallah, this little intervention and continuous dialogue gave Takween some credibility to discuss with the local activists

and concerned citizens on issues related to the larger urban context and problems of their neighbourhood. These interactions also explored possible avenues to upgrade the area through partnerships between local community groups, the government authorities, and Takween as a professional entity.

Another trajectory that Takween follows is advocacy on issues related to the Right to the City through initiatives like TADAMUN: The Cairo Urban Solidarity Initiative. The TADAMUN Initiative is the result of collaboration between Takween and the American University in Washington D.C. (AU). The TADAMUN initiative tries to encourage citizens of Cairo as well as other Egyptian city dwellers to claim their “right to the city”. The initiative is based on the assumption that solidarity among citizens is the only way to achieve social justice and a decent standard of living, particularly for many who have been ignored for too long such as the residents of the dilapidated inner-city quarters or informal areas.

Through its first phase completed by mid-2013, TADAMUN focused on the documentation and dissemination of case studies from the Egyptian context that have to do with actual improvements of the living conditions of residents of urban and peri-urban areas. Through this documentation, TADAMUN tried to see how these successes are linked to different urban and environmental rights and how they can impact existing urban policies. During its second phase planned until end of 2014, TADAMUN addresses issues related to institutional reform and working with other partners to establish a National Urban Reform Coalition – encompassing interested urbanists, rights groups, and concerned citizens – aiming at the reform of urban development policies and practices in Egypt.

In 2013, TADAMUN also launched an ‘Urban Constitution Campaign’ with other partners³. The campaign aimed to familiarize Egyptian citizens with a set of urban and environmental rights, which are directly related to the quality of life in our cities. The campaign encouraged citizens to demand their different rights to the city and to strive towards including as many of these rights as possible into the newly drafted Egyptian constitution. The campaign was based on previous documents addressing the same issues such as *Mithaq al-Tanmiyya wa al-Omran* (The Charter of Development and Urbanization) and *al-Ommal wa al-Fallahoun Yaktoboun al-Dostour* (Workers and Peasants Write the

3. Besides the main TADAMUN collaborators (AU and Takween), the ‘Urban Constitution Campaign’ partners included the Egyptian Center for Civic and Legislative Reform, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, the Housing and Land Rights Network – Habitat International Coalition, Shadow Ministry of Housing, and Al-Shehab Institution for Promotion and Comprehensive Development.

Constitution)⁴. The campaign also relied on extensive research by TADAMUN over one year to analyse more than 120 constitutions in light of the different aspects of the right to the city.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of Takween and many other entities supporting the alternative urban development paradigm in Egypt has been thriving since 2008. But does this mean we can see a real shift in the urban development policies and practices in Egypt? It is not easy to find a quick affirmative answer to this question. It was hoped, following the 25 January 2011 Revolution, that the state planning approach would become more realistic and deliberative. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Despite the fact that most of pre-revolution megaprojects were put on hold, the planning paradigm relying on such projects as the “only” solution to Egypt’s urban problems remained intact. Therefore, it was not surprising to see that plans such as Egypt 2050 have become Egypt 2052. It was not surprising either to see that governmental plans to build one million housing units or dozens of new cities in the desert (all inherited from the Mubarak era) are still promoted by post-revolution governments as the solution to our urban problems – while ignoring millions of inhabitants living in the existing urban areas.

Following the events of 30 June 2013, the newly appointed government started to pay some attention to the escalating problems of the existing urban areas, especially the informal ones. Perhaps this was because of the increased, though unfulfilled, expectations of their inhabitants following the 2011 Revolution. For example, the constitutional document ratified in January 2014 includes unprecedented articles about development plans for informal and remote areas. And perhaps it is a coincidence that the state – just 10 days before constitution referendum – pledged the investment of EGP 350 million to upgrade 30 informal areas in Cairo and Giza Governorates through the ISDF as a financing facility and the Armed Forces as an implementing agency (Farid, 2014). And finally, during several popular meetings in early 2014 with residents of informal areas such as ‘Izbet Khayrallah, we see state officials such as the Governor of Cairo or the Minister of Housing shying away from relocation plans long adopted by the state, or condemning negative labelling of unplanned urban areas as ‘informal’.

4. In 2012 and 2013 along with the constitutional reform process, Egypt witnessed the efforts of several groups all trying to positively contribute to the constitution drafting process in several aspects. The result of these efforts was a wealth of constitutional documents and proposals that engaged large segments of professionals and concerned citizens.

Can this be considered a real shift from the state's long-adopted top-down urban planning policies? In fact, to answer this question we need to investigate some aspects that shaped and nourished this top-down approach in the first place. First and foremost is the urban governance structure in Egypt – has it really changed? Has it become more deliberative? Do residents of different areas have the means to voice their real needs in an institutional manner? Can they participate in urban development plans and monitor the expenditure of public budgets in their neighbourhoods? Do they have access to these plans and budgets in the first place? Can they hold the state accountable to its acts? Can they shift the existing disparities in allocation of resources between different neighbourhoods? And are they finally able to elect their governors and district managers?

The second point is the existing economic structure: have we really moved away from the neoliberal economic policies adopted by the Mubarak regime? Have we stopped supporting big industry tycoons, and started to support small and medium enterprises? Are we engaging small-scale contractors and professional firms in the new housing and upgrading projects, or are all of these projects appointed to gigantic companies and the Armed Forces? Do local communities and small-scale enterprises capture the revenue and profits of these projects, or do they all go to the “usual” key players in this game?

Third, and last, has the professional urban development practice really changed? How were urban development plans such as Cairo 2050 – resulting into the displacement of thousands of residents – produced in the first place? Were they produced by state officials and governors, or by professional planners and architects? Have these massive relocation plans and violations of residents' rights been shamed by the professional community? Do architects and planners feel more responsible now for their acts towards their local communities? Has planning and architectural education shifted from high modernist and neoliberal fantasies, to a more bottom-up and grassroots approach that realistically responds to the problems of our cities and the needs of our local residents?

The aforementioned questions have their own reflections on the daily practices of the professionals striving to promote the alternative urban planning paradigm. For instance, activists, urbanists, and professionals face an escalating problem in terms of representing their local communities vis-à-vis the state or trying to find sustainable entry points into state institutions. Following the 2011 Revolution – and for a couple of years – there was a window of opportunity where local communi-

5. For more discussion on this topic, see the Ibrahim/Singerman's article in this issue.

ties, Popular Committees and professionals were able to approach state officials and find listening ears to their upgrading proposals. Unfortunately, as the revolutionary moment fades away and the state reclaims its powers, this window of opportunity is closing down before the chance to turn it from an ad-hoc project-based exceptional practice, to a normalized communication channel and institutionalized entry point to state institutions.

Another challenge facing professionals working on the alternative urban development movement today is the question of patronage and financial sustainability. How can these small entities and professionals survive financially through these turbulent times? In fact, for the time being, many of their activities are financially supported by donor groups and development agencies who believe in the same principles they are trying to promote and live by. But what would be the situation if this funding was not available anymore? We also witness various positive initiatives from these entities and professionals working for free trying to voluntarily support local communities to develop urban development plans and interventions. For how long can these entities and professionals continue this practice before they are financially exhausted and psychologically burnt out?

And finally, how can these entities and professionals get their efforts recognized beyond the closed professional circles, conferences, events and academic publications? How can they reach out to more communities? How can this alternative practice become adopted by more professionals and organisations? How can these ideas influence the academic practice, and the architectural and planning education? Simply, how can the alternative urban development paradigm become mainstream and have a real impact on our cities and urban areas?⁶

The newly emerging entities and professionals including Takween and many others are trying to address some of these challenges. They try to engage with state officials in their practices to better understand and try to change the way the state functions in terms of urban planning policies. They are trying to advocate for the need for more open, deliberative and accountable urban governance structure. They are trying to develop cross-subsidy models where income-generating projects within their entities can finance their voluntary work with local communities. They are disseminating their work either through direct encounters, social media, or writings to outreach to more people. And finally, they are trying to institutionalize their efforts and build upon the polycentric nature of the "third wave" to create networks of influence, support, and collaborative work among each other.

6. See Elhady/Nagati and Safey Eldeen in this issue.

Despite these important developments the “third wave” brought about, the protagonists of this wave still need to do more. They need to actively address the state, its policies, practices, and its stagnant dysfunctional urban governance structure. They need to question the existing economic structure and call for a more equitable distribution of resources, effective development policies that support small and medium enterprises, and a better distribution of revenues of development within local communities.

They need to hold the state accountable for its responsibilities towards investing more resources in informal areas rather than relying on self-help initiatives. And last but not least, they need to develop and disseminate a code of professional conduct where urban planning practices violating the basic rights of local residents are shamed, if not prohibited.

What we are witnessing right now is another transition on the path of the alternative urban development movement in Egypt that began in the 1940s. Despite massive mobilization by local residents and urban activists in different neighbourhoods that boosted this movement over the past few years, protagonists of this movement still need to think beyond this mobilization. They need to think: what is next?

How can the supporters of the alternative urban development movement shift the attention from Cairo 2050 to the critical problems of Cairo 2014? How can they shift existing urban planning policies from “eradication of the poor” to “eradication of poverty”? How can their isolated little-known experiences evolve and have a real impact? And how can their practices move from being a sort of “activism” or an exception to the rule, to become the mainstream?

Perhaps there are some answers to these questions and challenges. But definitely one of these answers would be moving beyond creating a parallel practice, to renegotiating the rules of the game.

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