

Residents' willingness to participate in neighborhood development and upkeep initiatives

-The case of neighborhood park upgrade in New Cairo, Egypt.

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Abstract— Over the past decade, the World Bank has assigned nearly \$85 billion to participatory development initiatives. Underlying this enormous funding is the idea that involving beneficiaries in any development initiative phases would be a progress towards sustainable urban development. Several benefits derive from integrating residents in development and upkeep initiatives, benefits derive not only from cost reduction and resource mobilization, but also enhancing the residents' "ownership" of the facilities ensuring more extensive and efficient use of facilities, better maintenance, and more reliable operation. In most developing countries, such as Egypt, the dramatic pace of demographic, economic, and social changes severely overburden the capacity of local authorities to provide adequate urban services. The required funding for the provision of appropriate services is mostly unavailable. In recent years, a shift has taken place to incorporate local communities as active partners into urban upgrading and development interventions. Therefore, the more knowledge drawn on the current participation potential, the more public could be effectively engaged in future neighborhood development initiatives. This research aims to explore the residents' willingness to participate in neighborhood development and upkeep initiatives. To explore the different aspects, a case study approach was undertaken. The study showed residents' potential willingness to participate, it also derived a clear picture on the preferred participation methods and perceived barriers. This in return, can hopefully help practitioners and policy makers decide on the type of interventions needed to engage residents in future development attempts in response to the current economic situation.

Index Terms— Public Participation, Neighborhood Development, Neighborhood Parks, Cairo, & Egypt.

1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of the study presented in this article is to investigate the willingness of residents in Cairo, Egypt to participate in neighborhood development and upkeep initiatives. More specifically, through a case study, the research investigates the attitudes of residents in New Cairo towards participation in the upgrade of neighborhood parks. The study also investigates residents' preferred methods of involvement as well as perceived barriers and reasons that might hinder participation.

The term "participation" refers to an organized process, in which the public can communicate their needs and values towards influencing decisions that affect their lives, ensuring

accountability from public officials [1], [2]. This process emerged from sociology, international development and the sciences. In the past, public participation did not play a part in the planning or decision-making processes [3]. According to planners, the 1960s was a particularly challenging time for them, because their roles were shifting from agency advocates to neighborhood representatives. Due to the increased demand for "planning with people", local officials were obliged to share power with residents [4]. The main problem that was developed for planners in the process of encouraging the citizens to participate in decision-making was, the choice of an appropriate strategy. Studies showed that the usage of certain strategies could solve this problem and emphasized the importance of applying strategies built on the unique characteristics of the case within hand [5]. In developing countries, incorporating local communities through public participation could contribute beyond the decision-making process [6]. The engagement of participants as active partners in urban upgrading and development interventions, whether through financial contribution or as human resources might help solve the challenges local authorities face nowadays to provide adequate urban services.

Experience with participatory urban development projects

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demonstrate that integrating residents and community organizations could make important contributions to the provision, operation and maintenance of development initiatives. Benefits derive not only from cost reduction and resource mobilization, but also from better targeting of project measures to residents' real needs through their involvement in the planning phase. User participation is an integral aspect of demand-oriented urban development. Furthermore, participation enhances the residents' "ownership" of the facilities and thus ensures more extensive and efficient use of facilities, better maintenance, and more reliable operation [7]. Moreover, considering residents' experience, and opinions is important for implementing successful user-friendly spatial planning. When discussing open public space development, several authors have determined that actively integrating residents in the spatial planning process is highly recommended from the preliminary stages of development and result in successful open public spaces developments [8]. Another importance of integrating the community in redevelopment is linked to the local knowledge residents possess over their community. Some researchers argued that the public hold information that is locally specific and most of the time unavailable or unknown by developers [9].

Therefore, developing a clear picture on the current public participation potential in the Egyptian context, and trying to understand residents' attitude and point of views towards participating in a development initiative towards bettering residential neighborhoods, helps in understanding where residents' stand today in terms of their willingness to invest and methods by which they would like to contribute in redevelopment initiatives.

2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

As previously mentioned, in the context of utilizing public participation in developing countries, there are five main objectives by which public participation might contribute with within a development initiative:

1. Sharing project costs: participants are asked to contribute money or labor (and occasionally goods) during the project's implementation or operational stages.
2. Increasing project efficiency: beneficiary consultation during project planning or beneficiary involvement in the management of project implementation or operation.
3. Increasing project effectiveness: greater beneficiary involvement to help ensure that the project achieves its objectives and that benefits go to the intended groups.
4. Building beneficiary capacity: either through ensuring that participants are actively involved in project planning and implementation or through formal or informal training and consciousness raising activities.
5. Increasing empowerment: defined as seeking to increase the control of the underprivileged sectors of society over the resources and decisions affecting their lives and their participation in the benefits produced by the society in which they live [10].

There are different strategies of public participation in urban development projects. Each strategy includes a variety of processes of relationships between participants, government institutions, and private sector actors. There are four participatory approaches proposed as a general framework for considering and comparing options for participatory urban development approaches (figure 1). Participation exists in a wide variety of forms, ranging from government involvement in a community-based development project, to community's participation in a government-directed development initiative [11].

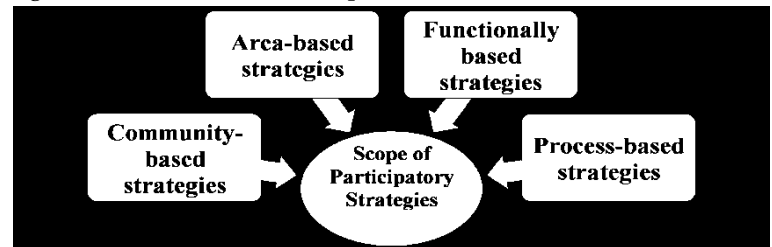


Figure 1- Different strategies of participation in urban development projects (ADB, 2000) [11].

Starting with the Community-based strategy, the main objectives of this strategy are to support the local urban development; enhance capacity of local community groups to manage urban service development; and enable these processes through appropriate changes in the legal, technical, and policy context.

The second strategy is an Area-based strategy. This form of participatory strategy deals with residents that reside in a residential area which constitutes the frame of reference of the development efforts. Programs involve beneficiaries at various stages of the development process, with the principle objective of improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of government activities [12].

The third strategy is a Functionally-based one. The main objectives of this strategy are first to designate areas of responsibility within which each stakeholder may pursue interests and exercise capacities, and secondly to establish effective collaboration between these various domains.

The fourth and last strategy is a Process-based one. The basic objective is to improve the efficiency, demand responsiveness, and accountability of urban developments and improvements through a general decentralization of delivery processes. Decentralization implies devolving decision-making processes and operational responsibilities to more local bodies and, on the other hand, opening management functions at each level to the exchange of information from below [12].

Characteristics of active participants

The literature suggests that, the reasons people become active, and the reasons they do not, are numerous, hugely diverse and vary according to personal, cultural, environmental and structural circumstances. One study concluded that, active participants tend to be male, older, more educated and more affluent [13]. Other researchers believed that participation is ingrained in a person's personality development [14]. Another study found that civic activism is associated with a family's history of public involvement and that a person's future par-

ticipation has a strong positive association with their past participation experiences. Moreover, the study highlighted that people who expressed the most interest in becoming involved, were those that possessed higher levels of optimism [15]. Another literature finding also addresses personal efficacy as a foundation for civic involvement and argued that self-interest plays a primary role in motivating individuals towards neighborhood civic involvement [16].

Potential obstacles to participation

As much as it is important to review why people become active participants it is of equal importance to discover the barriers which might prevent people from participating [17].

Starting with institutional barriers, the literature often suggests that the complex governmental structures and its officialdom, paired with the complexity of voluntary and community organizations are more likely to deter potential participants from participating. Moreover, bureaucracy is also cited as a dominant put-off factor for participants [17].

Another barrier aspect is lack of education. Studies argue that the more education people have the more their social networks are extensive and heterogenic, which in return increases their chance of being addressed and asked. It also has been noted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in New York, how a gap in education, results in the lack of awareness, poor understanding of global environmental issues, and developing processes which work towards preventing people from wanting to get involved [18].

The lack of financial resources can also cause barriers towards participation. The literature argued that the lack of disposable income, is seen as the most common reason why people do not participate. Also, the demanding financial costs involved in some participation roles, act as barriers to engagement. Moreover, the common lack of time and poor health are both seen as barriers to participation [17].

Finally, practical deterrents, such as, not being aware on how to get involved, childcare service, the bad timing of events and participatory opportunities, the access and location of the meetings held, and transportation difficulties are all often seen as main obstacles to participation [19].

Reasons behind unwillingness to participate

To further understand non-participation, a look at the psychological barriers, that might deter participants from engaging were considered. Starting with an individual's lack of confidence to participate and a person's perception that they lack the appropriate knowledge about the notion of redevelopment, and the role they might play through the processes work towards hindering participation. Lack of trust and suspicion also act as underlying deterrent to participation. Participants often get deterrent from committing financially to a cause, because they are in doubt about the whole development model [20]. The common lack of faith in the engagement process also often appears to limit participation. This occurs when people suspect their point of views will not be taken into consideration.

A deeper understanding can be achieved by considering the psychological factors that underpin active participation and

utilizing them to understand reasons behind non-participation. To identify motives that might lead a person to participate in redeveloping their neighborhood area, a consideration of the values that might be pursued by acting for the common good were considered.

Starting with egoism, which is the motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing a person's own welfare. It is the assumption of virtually every account of human action, in different sciences, that all human actions are always and inevitably directed towards the ultimate goal of self-benefit [21]. However, recent theory suggests that, as much as self-interest is a powerful and pervasive motive, the human caring capacity is not limited to one's own interest [22]. Three other broad classes of motives have been proposed, which involve interests beyond ourselves; altruism, which is the motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of one or more other individuals; collectivism, motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of a group; and Principalism, motivation with the ultimate goal of upholding some moral principle, such as justice [22]. An adequate answer to the question of why people might act for the common good, needs to consider all four of these underlying motives and their interplay. As a conclusion, from the literature provided previously, the studies suggest that, the individuals who tend not to participate, do not believe that their participation will help fulfill any of the above ultimate goals.

3 METHOD

To investigate the willingness of residents in Cairo to participate in neighborhood development and upkeep initiatives, the study relies on a case study research approach [23]. Through a survey questionnaire, the case study investigates attitudes and opinions of residents living in apartment buildings overlooking three neighborhood parks in District 1 of the 5th Settlement area in New Cairo (Figure 2).

Park A

Park B

Figure 2- District no.1, The 5th Set-

The settlement, NewCairo, Egypt district to ensure similarity of (www.googlemaps.com) parks are approximately the same area and are primarily surrounded by apartment buildings of two to three floors. Repeated visits to the parks revealed that they were poorly maintained and rarely used by residents.

The review of the relevant literature presented in the previous section guided the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to inquire first about the demographic characteristics of participants, including age, gender, marital status, level of education, occupation, and household annual income. The questionnaire also asked about the type of residential tenure and how long participants have been residing in the area. Moreover, several questions were included to assess participants attachment to the neighborhood, asking for example about if participants felt that their current neighborhood needs improvements, how many years participants were planning on residing in the area and about the number of social relationships established in the neighborhood.

In its second section, the questionnaire investigated participants' opinions about the current park state. Participants were then asked about their willingness to participate in eventual initiatives to upgrade the parks. Participants who expressed their willingness to participate were further asked to clarify their preferred method of participation and the potential obstacles or barriers that might hinder their participation. On the other hand, participants who expressed a lack of willingness to participate were asked about the reasons behind their position.

The questionnaire was administrated to 60 participants, 22 residing by park A, 17 residing by Park B, and 21 residing by Park C.

4 RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of participants

Participants were relatively young, ranging in age from 25 to 34 years. 83% indicated they were married. Responses indicated high education levels, as 88% of the participants completed university degrees (Figure 3). Close to 80% of the respondents noted being employed. In terms of residential tenure, 88% indicated being home owners. As a whole, participants could be considered to be of high-middle to high income levels. Only 13% of participants noted an annual household income of less than 120,000 L.E. (Figure 4). Questionnaire responses revealed that participants were somehow new to the area with 67% indicating only having lived there for 1 to 4 years.

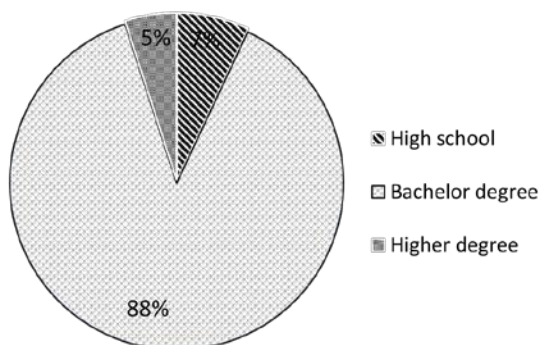


Figure 3-Level of education

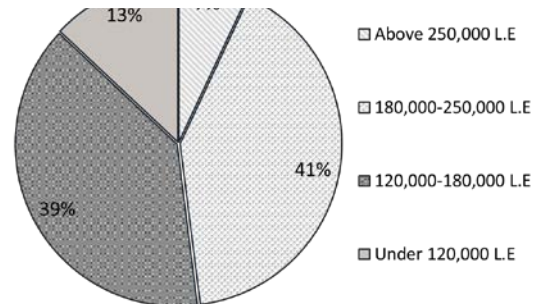


Figure 4-Household annual income

Attachment to the neighborhood

Questionnaire responses revealed that 90% of participants felt that their residential area needed improvements. Moreover, almost half of the participants indicated that they were not planning to reside in their current neighborhood for more than 1 to 5 years.

Furthermore, to investigate participants current established social relationships in the neighborhood, respondents were asked to indicate the number of families they know both in their residential building and their neighborhood area. Almost 40% indicated knowing just 1 family and another 40% know 2 to 3 families in their residential building (Figure 5). 47% indicated knowing from 1 to 4 residents in their neighborhood and 38% indicated not knowing anyone at all (Figure 6).

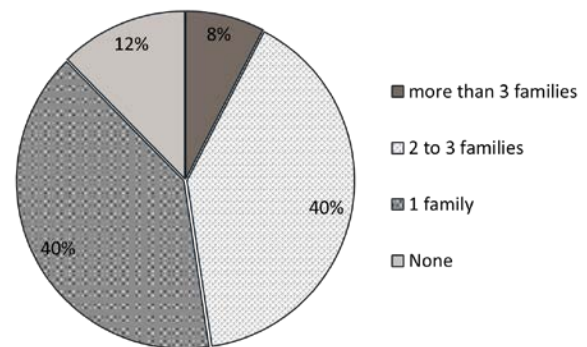


Figure 5- Number of families known by participants in their current residential building

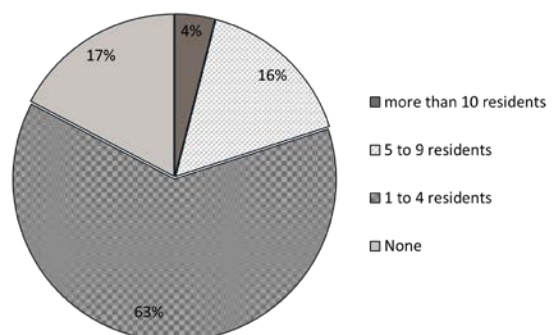


Figure 6- Number of individuals known by participants in the neighborhood area

Percieved importance of neighborhood parks

Participants' responses showed that 93% felt that a well-designed park could add value to the area, followed by 62% who felt that it would raise overall neighborhood safety and an almost equal percentage of 45% who felt that it will help encounter other residents and positively affect their childrens lives (Figure 7).

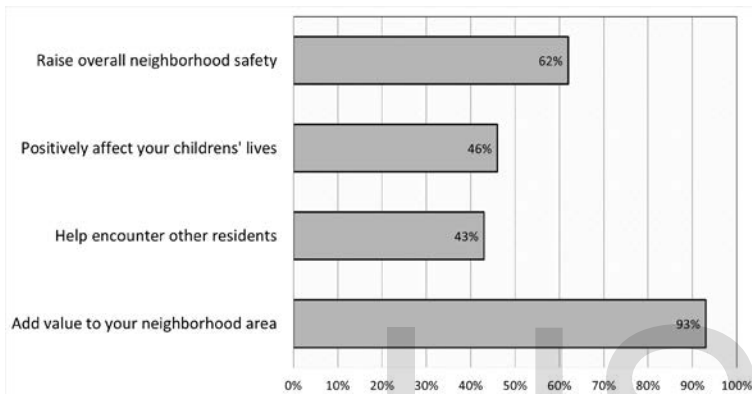


Figure 7-Residents' opinion on the potential role of a well-established park area

Percieved current state of the three investigated parks

Perceptions about the current state of the three parks were quite similar. As a whole, only 2% of the participants indicated that the parks were in a well-maintained state (Figure 8).

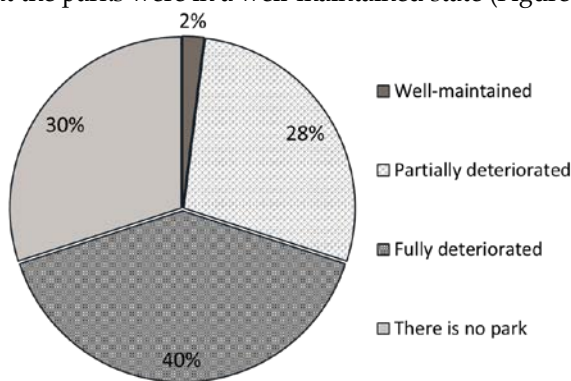


Figure 8-Participants' opinion on current park state

Participants' willingness to participate in initiatives towards upgrading current park areas

Responses revealed that 90% of participants noted being aware of what participation means in a redevelopment initia-

tive. Moreover, a high percentage of 93% of respondents indicated their willingness to participate in eventual development initiatives to upgrade park areas.

Preferred methods of participation

When investigating residents' preferred method of involvement, 67% wanted to participate but felt that they do not have time, and 65% wanted to give their opinion by just filling out surveys. It must be noted that, of those who expressed their willingness to participate in eventual initiatives for the upgrade of parks, 17% preferred minimal involvement, choosing the answer "Just be informed of final decisions" (Figure 9).

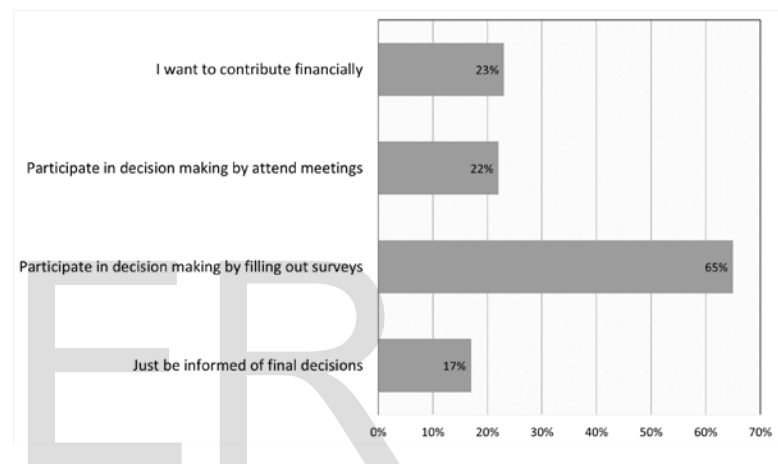


Figure 9-Preferred methods of involvement

Potential participation obstacles

Responses indicated that 72% of participants felt that the lack of time to be the main obstacle to their participation. This was followed by 47% who noted the complex governmental procedures as another participation obstacle and 25% indicated not knowing how to participate (Figure 10).

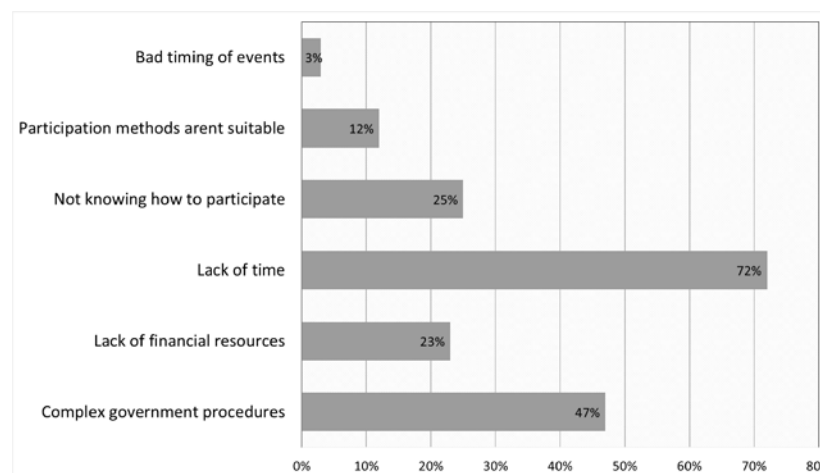


Figure 10- Reasons that might hinder participation

Reasons for lack of willingness to participate

Respondents who noted that they were unwilling to participate were asked to check all reasons that might explain why. Two respondents indicated lack of confidence to participate, followed by one respondent who felt not possessing any beneficial skills to contribute with, and one respondent noted not possessing enough trust towards other members.

5 CONCLUSIONS

According to the literature findings that highlighted how participants who were well-educated, employed, and young of age were more likely to be willing to participate, study findings were in sync with the literature claims as 93% of the respondents who were characterized with well-educated, employed and of young age expressed their interest in participating in a park development initiative.

It is of importance to further discuss the remaining 7% of the respondents who felt they lack the willingness to participate in eventual development initiatives. Aside from the psychological reasons indicated by the four respondents, finding correlations between participants responses and other questionnaire aspects might contribute in better understanding participants. It must be noted that the four individuals who noted their unwillingness to participate were somehow new to the area, all four indicated only having lived in the neighborhood for 1 to 4 years, moreover all four participants indicated having minimal established social relationships with other individuals whether in the apartment building or the neighborhood as a whole. Two of the respondents indicated not being home owners when asked about their residential tenure status, which might indicate why they might not be willing to participate in bettering their current neighborhood park area. Moreover, one participant indicated viewing the park as a well-maintained area, which would explain why participant might not be willing to participate.

When investigating participants input on the preferred methods of participation, 17% felt that they would prefer minimal participation involvement by choosing to just be informed of final decisions taken by officials. Looking back at the demographic characteristics of these individuals, it was highlighted that almost all of them chose lack of time as an obstacle to their potential willingness to participate which would explain why they indicated a minimal form of participation method. Moreover, all of the 17% who just wanted to be informed of final decisions and not contribute with their opinion by any means were new to the area, noting having lived there from 1 to 4 years only. In addition, 23% of participants indicated their willingness to participate by contributing financially. It is of importance to mention that six of these individuals noted having an annual household income of less than 120,000 L.E. which was considered the lowest annual income criteria in the questionnaire choices. This indicated that the financial status

of an individual might not necessarily affect their willingness to participate in development attempts, participants with low annual household incomes proved also willing to contribute financially. Moreover, a high percentage of the participants who chose to contribute financially were of an older aged group and indicated having lived in the area from 5 to 15 years. These findings suggest that individuals who have lived in the area relatively longer were willing to participate financially in order to better and upgrade their residential area.

The main limitations of the study need to be brought about in order to bring forth some additional suggestions for future research. To start with, the sample used cannot be claimed to be representative of the entire Egyptian population or even the population residing in Cairo as a whole, as it was mainly composed of individuals residing in one particular district in New Cairo, Egypt, characterized by a high-medium to high socio-economic status. Future research to further confirm the findings of the present study would need to use a larger sample in order to achieve a greater degree of population representativeness. Moreover, for a deeper understanding of residents' willingness to participate in developing and upkeeping their neighborhoods, future studies could incorporate more qualitative research approaches.

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