

Civic Engagement for Sustainable City Development in Afghanistan

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between civic participation and the pursuit of sustainability in Afghanistan. Many projects have been started to pursue sustainable cities and to improve their livability. A recurring theme for this aim is the role of public participation in shaping and implementing the projects. Civic engagement is manifest in the development of sustainable cities.

Sustainable city development is the process of long term prediction of demand for creating townscapes with significant features. The process is complicated because of involvement of differing variables such as population, employment, economic growth and government policies. The sustainability demand prediction becomes critical when cities grow fast and become metropolitan and mega cities.

The purpose of this study is to explore the current tradition of civic engagement in major cities and defines a research agenda by identifying the importance of public involvement toward sustainable city development.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Civic engagement, Sustainability, Squatter settlements, Organizational Characteristic.

1. Introduction

Since 1980, a growing awareness of sustainable development in the world has sought to adopt policies on sustainability in many topic areas, City development decision-making is an important arena within which a balance may be struck among economic development, environmental protection, and social justice; therefore, land use planning can play a vital role for sustainable urban development. In the past forty years, Japan has experienced great economic growth and has been called one of the “fast growing and developing countries in the world”. Like many democratic countries, Civic engagement is the most important scheme for Japan’s government to control land use, Afghanistan is a country having a different system for city development. Because of decades war recently from 2002 by the participation of international communities’ the idea of civic engagement have been adopted into small infrastructure projects and caused government attention.

Afghanistan is rapidly urbanizing as can be seen in the target cities with nearly 5% annual population growth. This urban growth is an irreversible process, and due to the extreme poverty many households are living in informal settlements without access to public services. Urban poverty and social exclusion are on the rise and half of the Afghan population is expected to be living in cities by 2050. To be able to make cities functioning and capable of managing such expected rapid urban growth strengthening institutional capacity of

municipal governance is essential. In response UN-Habitat helps the municipalities to improve their capacities to support local development through effective, efficient and accountable delivery of public services. In addition, UN-Habitat addresses the challenges of urban poverty with improving access to basic services and infrastructure through community empowerment¹⁾. Civic engagement is the involvement of people in the creation and management of their built and natural environments. Its strength is that it cuts across traditional professional boundaries and cultures. The activity of community participation is based on the principle that the built and natural environments work better if citizens are actively involved in its creation and management instead of being treated as passive consumer

The main purposes of participation are:

- To involve citizens in planning and design decision-making processes and, as a result, make it more likely they will work within established systems when seeking solutions to problems;
- To provide citizens with a voice in planning and decision making in order to improve plans, decisions, service delivery, and overall quality of the environment;
- To promote a sense of community by bringing together people who share common goals.

Participation should be active and directed to those who become involved should experience a sense of achievement. Traditional planning procedures should be reexamined to ensure that participation achieves more than simple affirmation of the designer’s or planner’s intentions²⁾.

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2. Afghanistan Geographical Terrain

Figure 1 identifies the geographical location of Afghanistan³⁾. Afghanistan is a landlocked mountainous country located within South Asia and Central Asia. The country is the 41st largest in the world in size. Kabul is the capital and largest city of Afghanistan. The country is bounded by six different countries. Its longest border is the poorly marked Durand Line, accounting for its entire southern and eastern boundary with Pakistan. The shortest one, bordering China's Xinjiang province, is a mere 76 km (47 mi) at the north end part of the country.



Fig.1. Afghanistan geographical map

Source: wikipedia, Kabul

2.1 Chronology of Urban Planning History

Modernization and urban development efforts continued through the two decades after 1960, including ministry buildings, public facilities such as the Kabul Poly-Technic, Kabul cinema and the Soviet cultural center, as well as a number of initiatives aimed at providing affordable housing⁴⁾. In addition, many of the roads envisaged by the 1978 Master Plan were implemented. After the mid-1980s, the deepening conflict between the Soviet-supported government and mujahidin factions also had an impact on urban development, as investments slowed. While the process of physical planning and structures of urban management remained in place, they became less and less effective. With the displacement of many rural communities to relative safety, Kabul (in which, along with other cities, services were available and many commodities subsidized) continued to grow apace as a protected enclave. This status ended abruptly in 1992 with the fall of the Najibullah regime, after which factional groups battled over control of Kabul, resulting in widespread destruction. Kabul's physical infrastructure,

social services, educational and medical systems and governmental institutions were all devastated. Although they attempted to clarify the roles of municipalities through issue of a new Municipal Law in 2000, the successor Taliban administration (1996 - 2001) undertook only very limited urban interventions, in the absence of sufficient funding for any form of development activity. It is only after the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001 and the arrival of coalition forces into Afghanistan that a new phase of "stitching up" Kabul and the rest of country has begun.

3. Characteristics of Participation

Although any given participation process does not automatically ensure success, it can be claimed that the process will minimize failure⁵⁾. Four essential characteristics of participation can be identified.

- Participation is inherently good.
- It is a secure of wisdom and information about local conditions, needs, and attitudes, and thus improves the effectiveness of decision making.
- It is an inclusive and pluralistic approach by which fundamental human needs are fulfilled and use values reflected.
- It is a mean of defending the interests of groups of people and of individuals, and a tool for satisfying their needs, which are often ignored and dominated by large organizations, institutions, and their bureaucracies.

Experience in the participation process show that the main source of use satisfaction is not the degree to which a person's needs have been met, but the feeling of having influenced the decisions.

4. The Idea of Sustainable Cities

Before embarking on an effort to examine the civic engagement side of sustainable cities, it is perhaps appropriate to provide a brief overview of what sustainable cities means in the context of relatively small geographical areas. A sustainable city is a city designed with consideration of environmental impact, inhabited by people dedicated to minimization of required inputs of energy, water and food, and waste output of heat, air pollution and water pollution⁶⁾.

Through an intensive survey during research the energy use and conservation aspect of sustainability in hot-arid region of east Afghanistan have been examined. The obtained results shows that conservation should be a strategy in all new buildings. Quality construction, good solar exposure, efficient lighting equipment and appliances are important factors for conserving energy. Efficient savings can be

delivered by vernacular design solution to make the sustainable building energy conscious. Moreover use of passive solar strategies by providing increased windows, sun space/greenhouses and gardens and shade them to increase summer comfort by overhangs, trellises and deciduous plants.

Although the idea of sustainable cities is grounded in the need to address environmental and livability issues as they affect people, it also has grown out of particular understanding of community. Effort should be made to preserve and restore the important site historical and cultural characteristics and qualities thought the neighborhood. A cohesive urban village quality with strong neighborhood identity is critical to a healthy, safe and sustainable community. It has been observed that the underlying forces and internal structural process that shaped the afghan pattern of community and city, are deeply rooted lining traditions, together with religious and social philosophies, that constitute the real agents of physical developments. Therefore it is necessary for planning and design team to make a thorough analysis of these cultural sensitivities and introduce design strategies that conform to these implicit qualities.

4.1 The Role of Participation in Sustainable City Development

Civic engagement plays two distinct roles in the context of sustainable city development⁷⁾. First as the city development authority decides which specific projects and policies need to be enacted or modified to promote sustainability, local residents are instrumental. Second, many advocates of sustainability seem to believe that greater civic engagement is itself an integral part of what it means for a city to be more sustainable and that cities need to adopt policies that will promote civic participation.

5. Current Views of Community Participation

After two decades of war, Afghanistan's governance system has been weakened. In response, the Government of Afghanistan and UN-HABITAT have designed the National Solidarity Program (NSP) which is initially aimed at strengthening the network of some 30,000 self-governing community institutions⁸⁾. The NSP has three objectives in empowering communities: (i) re-establishing relations between government and rural communities; (ii) providing grants for the reconstruction of physical and social infrastructure; and (iii) empowering communities and establishing community-level governance structures.

UN-HABITAT is one of the Facilitating Partners for the NSP funded by the Government of Afghanistan and World Bank. Community Development Councils (CDC) are

mobilized to prepare Community Action Plans and UN-HABITAT provides technical support for the development and implementation of these plans. Components include roads, drains, schools, health facilities and irrigation. The CDC forms an important part of local governance and the interaction between communities and District level administration. UN-HABITAT has been operating in 47 districts of 9 provinces with operations in 3,258 communities.

5.1 Activities

The National Solidarity program is implemented in five phases:

- * Undertaking community awareness-raising and problem identification;
- * Establishing Community Development Councils. Council members are voted in through secret ballot and must be aged above 20 years. Each elected member represents 28 eligible voters;
- * Preparing and endorsing a Community Development Plan and setting up a Community Savings Box;
- * Preparing designs for community projects and submitting proposals;
- * Implementing projects including monitoring, evaluation and reflective project learning. Fig.2. shows community development council's meeting.



Fig.2. Community Development Council Meeting

http://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/afghanistan/detail21_en.html - 25/05/2015

5.2 Confronting Challenges

5.2.1 The (IDP's) Internally Displaced People

Urban areas in Afghanistan, particularly major cities, have been and will continue to be the destination for a high proportion of returning refugees, IDPs. These groups settle in urban areas because many lived in urban conditions in exile and perceive urban areas as offering a higher level of security and a better quality of life. In fact, nearly a quarter of Afghanistan's population, about 7.25 million people, now live in urban areas. Much of this growth is recent, and has occurred in the larger towns such as Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat and Kandahar Cities. By 2015, with almost half of the population increase expected occur in urban areas, it is

projected the urban population will be over 12 million, or about 30 percent of the total population. Fig.3. shows the return IDPs in Kabul.



Fig.3. Return IDP's – Kabul. Photo by: Farzana Wahidy, 06/2013

5.2.2 Squatter Settlements

For at least three decades, rural migrants and slum dwellers searching for ways to survive and improve their lives have colonized lands in and outside the major cities in Afghanistan. Silently, away from the eyes of the authorities, they build shelters, organize communities, and acquire amenities such as piped water and electricity, more often than not by unlawful means. Kabul the capital of Afghanistan with the estimated population of 3,289,000 in 2012 and 275 km² area is on the major home for squatter settlements.

Fig.4. identifies the squatter settlements in capital city Kabul⁹⁾.

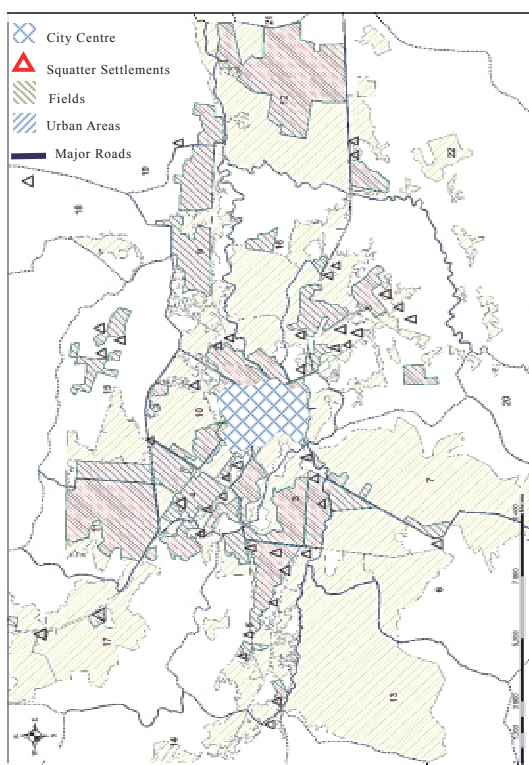


Fig. 4. Kabul City squatter settlement updated 06/2013, 63 Settlements mapped. Source: IMMAP/USAID, Kabul.

Few options at these circumstances are suggested:

First; to formalize and integrate illegal communities by recognizing their status and extending urban services. Second; prioritize the settlements and start demolition at the most important areas and put the settlements under daily surveillance by the municipality to make sure that no new shelters is being build. Fig.5 shows the current squatter settlement in urban area.



Fig.5. Deh Mazang, Kabul. Photo by: Fabien Dany 29/03/2013

6. Recommendations for Participation Planning

Indeed, the essential problem confronted by communitarian conceptions of sustainable cities is the idea that sustainability can be pursued as a matter of professional expertise. Thus in view of the existing concerns in major cities recommendations for better performance of participation planning in the future are suggested as bellow:

6.1 Role Clarity

For better achievements it is required to establish clear and distinct roles and responsibilities for council, staff and citizens around civic engagement.

6.1.1 City council

Although council is formally responsible for municipal decision-making, this responsibility is granted on the understanding that council will represent the interests and values of the community. Civic engagement offers the opportunity for council members to deepen their role as community representatives.

Each council members' role is to:

- Represent their constituents by staying in touch and working with citizens to determine top priorities for engagement.
- Work with staff to identify areas where public input can and will make a meaningful difference to decisions that council must make.
- Allow staff to take the lead role in identifying best practices and methods for engaging the public on various issues.
- Ensure that citizen demands for engagement opportunity

are balanced with engaging the public on various issues.

- Ensure that citizen demands for engagement opportunities are balanced with awareness of resource and capacity limits.
- Ensure time and resources are allocated to support successful engagement efforts

6.1.2 Neighborhood associations and community groups

The civic engagement can be better when neighborhood associations and other stakeholder groups support civic engagement efforts. In particular, neighborhood association have local knowledge, information and community networks that can be mobilized to make civic engagement meaningful and effective, and they have knowledge of community issues and assets. The neighborhood association's ideal role in civic engagement is to:

- Ensure that their advice and input is representative of a wide range of citizens in their community
- Provide advice about neighborhood priorities for engagement to city staff and council
- Assist city staff in establishing agendas and forming the issues in civic engagement initiatives.
- Participate in engagement initiatives and encourage others to participate.

6.2 Prioritization

It is particularly important to identify priority areas or policies that require more resource-intensive and in-depth engagement. Two priorities are modified in terms of the level of engagement:

- Improve communication about city issues and services
- Empower participation to learn about policy issues and make concrete recommendations.

6.3 Coordination and consistency

Coordination and consistency in civic engagement efforts is a top priority for citizens, stakeholders, and city staff. Therefore it is necessary to develop tools to ensure the application of guiding principles, a consistent engagement planning process, and metrics for engagement success.

6.4 Resourcing

With priorities established, roles clarified and systems standardized, resources dedicated to engagement will be used more efficiently than before. However, the city must still ensure adequate resourcing of engagement efforts and must still ensure adequate resourcing of engagement efforts and must build this into budgets.

- Proper resourcing includes budgeting time and staff support for planning, implementation and evaluation of civic engagement processes.
- Resourcing must also support training, organization wide learning, expanded communication efforts.
- City should centralize and office of civic engagement to

help implement these activities across the corporation and shift resource focus from one-way communications to formalized two-way dialogue¹⁰.

7. Research Agenda

This paper focuses on how to conceptualize, structure, and facilitate the participation of Community in the city development process. It shows how enlist public regularity by including them in decision making can create feelings of solidarity and respect for the environment.

Finally the paper develop an identical framework about the overall process design to ensure an effective program for sustainable city development through civic engagement, shown in fig.6¹¹:

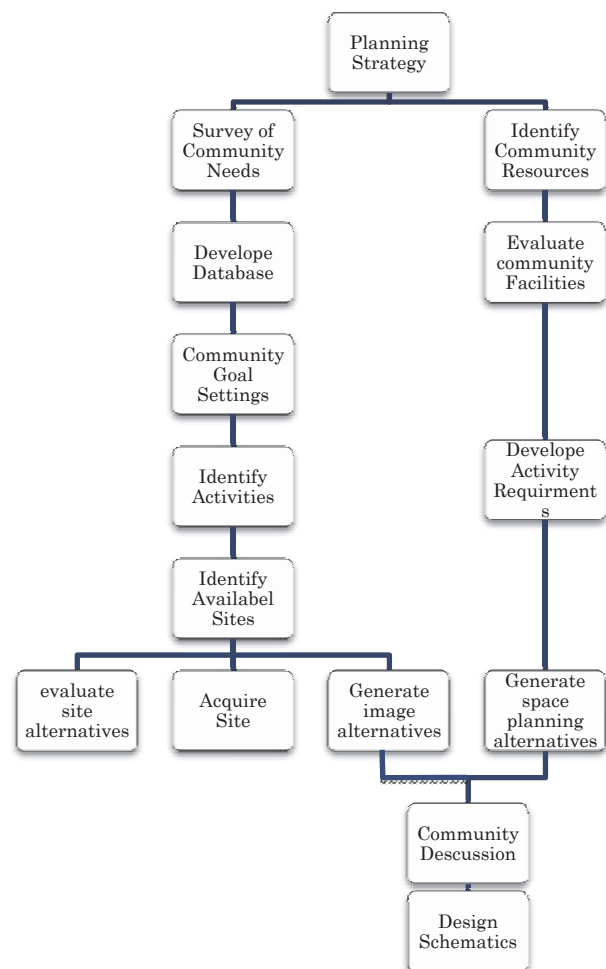


Fig.6. Design, Participation, and Development Process.

Source: Sanoff, H. (2000). Community participation methods in design and

A wide range of techniques are available to designers and planners¹². Some of these techniques have become standard for use in participatory process, such as interactive group decision-making techniques that take place in workshops. At the same time, designers and planners have

effectively used field technique, such as questionnaires, interviewing, focus group, and group mapping to acquire information. The techniques can be classified as awareness methods, group integration methods, and indirect methods.

8. Conclusion

Studies and surveys for promoting civic engagement has been performed. The major conclusions obtained through this study are as follow:

- 1) Architects and planners who wish to participate in community building will need to assume a new role by making their solutions less representative of themselves and more representative of user groups even though difficulties in applying participation may arise.
- 2) The sustainable design guidelines for Afghan cities can be effective tool for demonstrating the theory, quality and application of sustainable design to urban or rural communities. These integrated design strategies permit various defining levels of communities, integrating its natural amenities with its neighborhood context, residential, cluster and dwellings units.
- 3) Adopting these recommendations in a systematic manner will provide significant long term resource and monetary savings for the communities. These savings can be retained in the communities instead of exporting to pay for imported resources and energy. This way of planning and building fosters a sustainable economy. The implementation of sustainable program will require collaboration with government, civic organizations and private individuals.

Finally, this paper pave the way for future research on indication the confronting challenges in urban planning laws in Afghanistan, as efforts to address how extensive are the civic engagement to build a much clearer picture of the promise and pitfalls of sustainable cities' civic engagement process.

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