

Participatory Urban Planning and Design - Lessons Learnt from Germany for Post-War Urbanism in Syria

Dr. Gsan Albadoan*

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□ ABSTRACT □

This paper deals with participatory decision making and planning processes. It critically looks at methods and tools that are practiced currently in Germany and in particular in the city of Berlin, where the author has close relationship to and has studied in depth the Berlin experience made during the past decades.

The process of public involvement that started in the 1970ies in Berlin and in the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) is going to be monitored continuously. Focus is laid on the discourse on whom and how when to involve. Meanwhile the city of Berlin has developed a handbook on public participation that is briefly presented and assessed in this paper. Selected best practice cases where certain tools have been successfully applied in Berlin will be presented and analysed.

This paper is meant to enlarge the knowledge about state of the art dicourse on participatory urban planning, design and implementation and gives a brief outlook on replicability of instruments for participatory urban planning and design in the Syrian context.

Key words: urban development, public involvement, methods and tools of participatory urban planning,

*Associate Professor, Unvercity Damascus, Syria.

التشاركية في التخطيط ألمديني والتصميم الدروس المستقاة من التجربة الألمانية في التخطيط لمرحلة ما بعد الحرب في سورية

الدكتور غسان البدوان*

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□ ملخص □

تتعلق هذه الورقة البحثية بصنع اعتماد قرار المشاركة وعملية التنظيم من وجهة النظر الناقد للمناهج والأدوات المطبقة والتجارب الحديثة في هذا المجال في ألمانيا، وبشكل خاص في مدينة برلين، المدينة التي يرتبط بها الباحث خاصة بمجال البحث العلمي والعمل الجامعي بعلاقة عميقة، وقد رافق التطورات في هذا الاتجاه من وجهة النظر العلمية في السنوات العشر الماضية.

لقد بدأ منهج المشاركة الأهلية في مدينة برلين/جمهورية ألمانيا الاتحادية منذ سبعينيات القرن الماضي وقد استمرت وتطورت هذه التجربة إلى يومنا هذا، حيث يتيح للقاطنين من خلال المشاركة في عملية التطوير والبناء المراقبة المتواصلة لسير عملية التطوير والبناء.

في سياق هذه التجربة يطرح السؤال المهم: من يشارك في اتخاذ القرار وكيف يكون شكل هذه المشاركة؟ لقد طورت الجهات المختصة في مدينة برلين كتيباً وأدوات بخصوص طرائق وأساليب ومناهج المشاركة الأهلية، والتي تعرض وتناقش وتقيم في هذه الورقة ويختار هنا أحد التجارب الناجحة في هذا المجال والتي استخدمت فيها بعض الأدوات، التي ساهمت في نجاح التجربة في مدينة برلين ولقد تعرضت الورقة لعرض وتحليل هذه التجربة. ويعطي البحث نظرة في إمكانية استخدام أدوات التنظيم ألمديني والتصميم في سياق الحالة السورية في مجال إعادة الإعمار.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التطوير ألمديني، المشاركة الأهلية، أو التشاركية، المناهج وأدوات التشاركية في التنظيم ألمديني.

* أستاذ مساعد - كلية العمارة - جامعة دمشق - سورية.

Introduction

Syria is facing unimaginable damages caused by the war since 2011 and the country will face tremendous need for comprehensive post-war redevelopment. Besides world cultural heritage sites, single monuments and other historic buildings vast housing estates and complete neighborhoods including schools, hospitals and other facilities have been destroyed.

When starting to redevelop Syrian cities –be it Aleppo, Homs, Damascus or other places- the question of how involving local population, the former and future residents of areas, must be answered. The huge tasks the country will face may at least allow for a future sustainable redevelopment of Syrian cities where participation becomes a crucial factor.

The involvement of the public -residents, special interest groups but as well the business community- into decision making and urban planning processes is practiced in many parts of the world with different intensity and in locally adapted forms. This paper deals with participatory decision making and planning processes and critically looks at methods and tools that are practiced currently in Germany. It focuses in particular on the city of Berlin, where the author has close relationship to, and has studied in depth the Berlin experience made during the past decades.

In the city of Berlin and in the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) the discourse on public participation started in the 1970ies in is going to be monitored continuously. Meanwhile the city of Berlin and other german cities have evaluated various experience with participatory planning processes and have developed a handbook on public participation. This manual presents methods and instruments and illustrates complex processes through case studies.

This paper presents and analyses selected best practice cases where certain tools have been successfully applied in Berlin and gives a brief outlook on replicability of instruments for participatory urban planning and design in the Syrian context.

Research Methods applied

This paper is meant to enlarge the knowledge about state of the art dicourse on participatory urban planning, design and implementation. Key background literature has been evaluated. A manual for participation as developed and applied since a couple of years in the city of Berlin/ Germany is going to be critically reviewed. Focus is put on learning about instruments and tools, their strenghts and weaknesses within a participatory planning and design process. Case studies are presented and process documentations are analysed and reviewed.

This theoretical approach is accompanied by talks to local experts to better understand the difficulties in guiding participatory initiatives and processes and applying the appropriate tools at the right time. Various site visits allowed additional insights into planning and design outcomes.

What is meant by public participation?

When using the term ‘public participation’ I would briefly clarify the notion it has. Since S.Arnstein introduced in 1969 her ‘ladder of participation’¹ this model has been adapted and developed by many other scholars and professionals. The eight levels of participation presented by Arnstein, have been widely introduced into the daily practice.

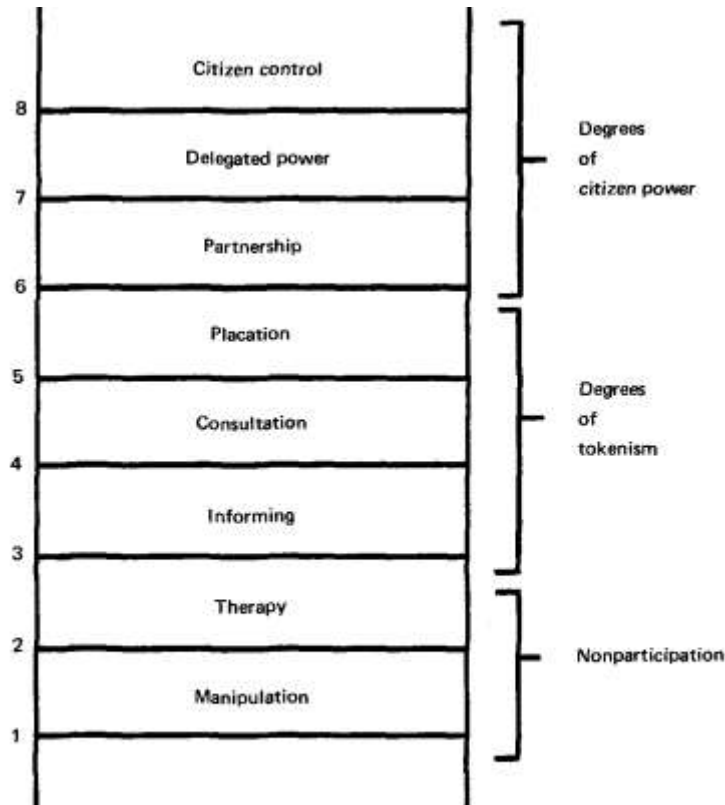


FIGURE 2 *Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation*

Fig. 1: Ladder of participation by Arnstein,1969

The ladder starts at the bottom with *manipulation* and *therapy*, which actually means ‘non-participation’. Three degrees of tokenism are following– ‘*information*’, ‘*consultation*’ and ‘*placation*’ where the public is going to be informed, may even have a say about a project but decisions are still taken by a few power holders. When facing the next degrees of *citizen power*, Arnstein talks of “*partnership*”, “*delegated power*” and “*citizen control*”. Here citizens are enabled to negotiate and even may take over managerial power. (see Arnstein in: AIP journal 1969:217)

Hamdy/Goethert have developed in 1997 another model, which relates different levels and intensities of participation to typical phases of a development project such as to initiate, to plan, to design, to implement and to maintain a project.

An example is given in the graph below illustrating different intensities of participation and showing how each stage involves the public (community) and the city (authorities)

¹Arnstein, S.: The ladder of participation, 1969

“in a relationship, which best serves their mutual interest”.²The key to effective planning is seen here in shared control during the phase of planning.

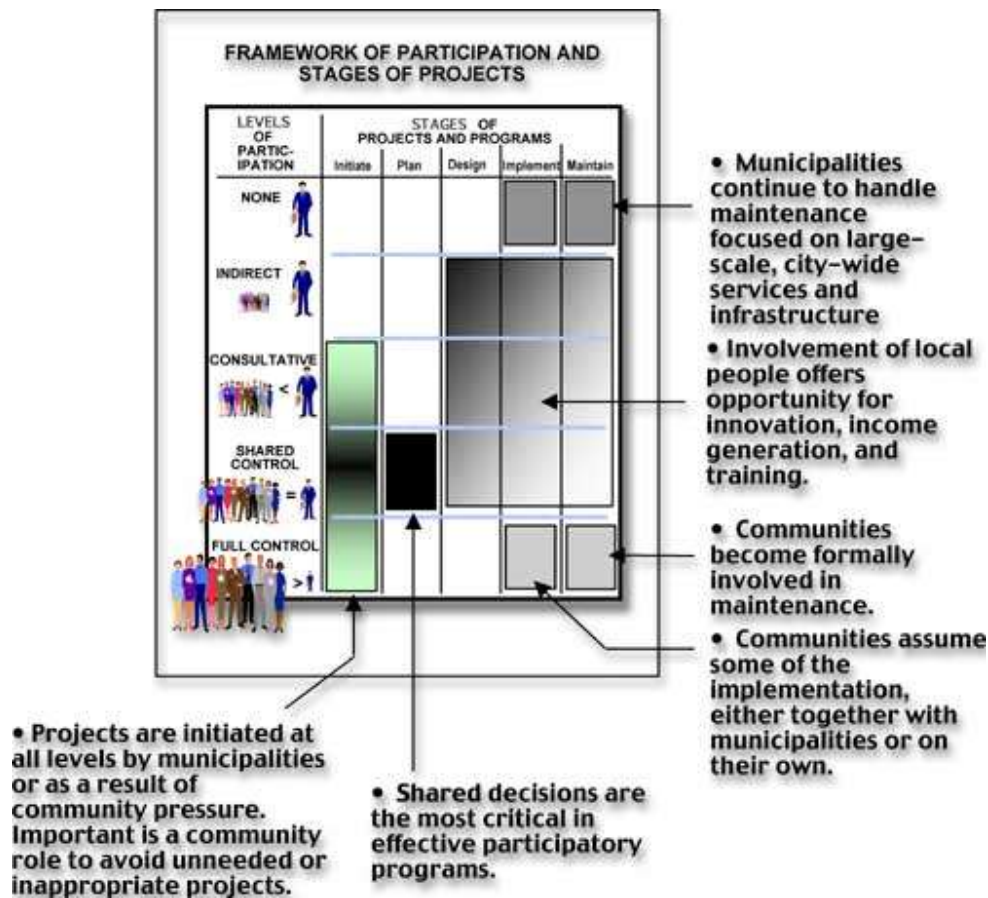


Fig.2 Framework of participation and stages of projects

source: Action Planning for Cities. NabeelHamdi and ReinhardGoethert, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 1997. Pg. 77.

Summarized into 3 levels – information, consultation, and cooperation-the process of participation has been shaped throughout many planning projects in practice.

²Hamdi.N and Goethert.R : Action Planning for Cities., John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 1997.

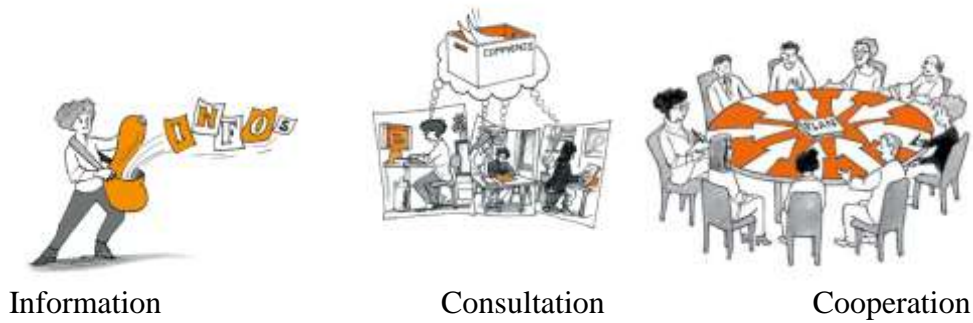


Fig. 3: Illustration on Information-consultation-cooperation,
source: <http://www.partizipation.at>

The tools presented later also reflect these three steps: how to get the public informed and make plans and decisions comprehensible, how to get the public involved to comment on plans and to know about ideas and opinions of stakeholders concerned, and finally how to integrate the public and jointly exercise power of decision making.

This paper finally follows the definition of public participation as given by the Austrian Society for Environment and Technology:

“The notion of “**public participation**” refers to involving various groups of stakeholders in a process of participation – individuals or citizens’ initiatives just as much as representatives of lobbies such as environment organizations, youth clubs or professional associations that make the concerns of the group they represent known. Lobbyists and common-interest groups are known as “the organized public”. As far as possible any process of participation should be open to all stakeholders and everyone interested, i.e. to a wide public.” (The public participation manual, ÖGUT news, Vienna 1-2007:6)

Public participation in urban issues –germany and the global context

Germany looks back on quite a long lasting tradition in public involvement into urban planning, urban conservation and urban design. In the 1970ies citizen initiatives came up out of local communities expressing their vital interest in urban issues and were taken over into legal amendments to the existing planning law. The Städtebauförderungsgesetz (urban development promotion law) issued in 1974 reflects the, at that time, new approach. Planning law so far asked only for information of the public. By experts elaborated planning proposals are exhibited for a certain period of time and citizens may comment on the proposals. These comments and as well the comments were evaluated and after approval the implementation could start.

Urban development issues in Germany are to be understood against the background of the international discourse on sustainable development. Participation is always seen as an integrated factor of sustainability and has been proliferated during decades of international experience. The need for participation in relationship with sustainability has been expressed first in the Brundtland report 1987. It says that a sustainable development is a „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.“ Besides environmental, economic and social aspects which contribute to sustainability as well participation takes over a crucial role. The Rio

Declaration dating from 1992 was translated into local *Agendas 21*, to implement sustainable development on the local community level, and asked for comprehensive involvement of the local population in all action programmes.

„Local Agenda 21“ involves many community participation and multi-sector strategic planning elements that are recognised internationally. These include:

- **A community vision** to bring together the aspirations of all stakeholders in the municipality and to establish a common direction. Key areas of concern are also identified.
- **Partnership** between local authorities, communities, and businesses as a mechanism for dialogue, cooperation, joint analysis, planning and action
- **Community-based issue analysis** to ensure that issues are well understood by all stakeholders and all views are considered to ensure a comprehensive and holistic understanding of issues, their causes, effects, threats and opportunities.
- **Action plans** to comprehensively set out and formalize agreed objectives, strategies, actions, targets, and commitments by stakeholders from different sectors.
- **Implementation and monitoring** to realize the action plans and to ensure continual joint progress and improvement towards agreed goals.
- **Evaluation and feedback** to celebrate successes and to seek opportunities for improvement. To review objectives, strategies and actions as necessary.

Fig. 4 Strategic Planning Elements

Source: Global Development Research Center, www.gdrc.org (Access 2015-05-09)

Germany is as well integrated into Europe-wide programmes and initiatives as laid down i.e. in the *Aalborg Charter in 1994*³. The „Charter of European cities and towns towards sustainability“ includes a Consensus Declaration, the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign and Local Action Plans Towards Sustainability. Participatory approaches towards sustainability are herein as well highlighted.

“We, cities & towns pledge to meet the mandate given by Agenda 21, the key document approved at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, to work with all sectors of our communities -citizens, businesses, interest groups - when developing our Local Agenda 21 plans. We recognise the call in the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme "Towards Sustainability" for the responsibility for the implementation of the programme to be shared among all sectors of the community. Therefore, we will base our work on co-operation between all actors involved. We shall ensure that all citizens and interested groups have access to information and are able to participate in local decision-making processes. We will seek opportunities for education and training for sustainability, not only for the general population, but for both elected representatives and officials in local government.”

Aalborg Charter: I.13

Another important document is the charter of Leipzig, in which the European Member States agree on common principles and strategies for sustainable urban development

³Charter of European Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability „Aalborg Charter“, Aalborg Denmark 1994

policies. The charter is meant to initiate a political debate on the local and regional level and to foster urban governance structures and instruments for sustainability and for a balanced development within Europe.

“We increasingly need holistic strategies and coordinated action by all persons and institutions involved in the urban development process which reach beyond the boundaries of individual cities. Every level of government - local, regional, national and European – has a responsibility for the future of our cities. To make this multi-level government really effective, we must improve the coordination of the sectoral policy areas and develop a new sense of responsibility for integrated urban development policy. We must also ensure that those working to deliver these policies at all levels acquire the generic and cross-occupational skills and knowledge needed to develop cities as sustainable communities”. (Charter of Leipzig 2007)

Participatory urban development in Berlin – focussing on socio-spatial units (neighborhoods)

Successful urban development has to start on site where the people live. It is the people’s knowledge, their ideas and their engagement that the city government of Berlin wants to build on for a socially balanced, open minded society that includes a variety of different cultures. This would need a cooperative approach among different parties involved.⁴The Berlin Senate has adopted in 2008 a strategy where a key element is to start at local needs, potentials and resources of a city quarter. This is the social and spatial unit where decisions are made through dialogue between all parties concerned. The quarter, the neighborhoods are the spatial units to focus on when development projects and interventions are taking place. This approach is in line with the German national urban development policies, the „Social City Programme“.

„The urban development assistance programme Social City is an important element of the federal urban development policy. It focuses on stabilising and upgrading economically and socially deprived, run down parts of cities and communities. Investments in the neighbourhood environment, infrastructure and the quality of homes ensure greater intergenerational equity and family-friendliness. They also improve the opportunities of residents for participation and integration. The aim is to promote vibrant neighbourhoods and strengthen social cohesion. The integrated development concept is a key element of the programme bringing together all actors and resources of the neighbourhood. Public participation ensures new ideas, improves results and raises acceptance for construction measures.“(<http://www.bmub.bund.de>, accessed 2015-09-05)

Neighborhood management in Berlin

The Berlin Senate began in 1999 to implement the *Programme of the Socially Integrative City*“ through introducing the Neighborhood Management Programme.

“The underlying idea of the Social City program is that the neighbourhoods themselves become the main actors in their own development, to improve the living conditions for residents. As such, supporting resident and stakeholder initiatives is essential to create ownership of this kind of positive self-development.”(www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de, accessed 2015-09-05))

⁴Handbuch Sozialraumorientierung Berlin 2009

To implement the programme a comprehensive neighborhood management scheme has been introduced, formed by a „neighborhood council“, and a „neighborhood fund“ as the main elements. Responsibility is given to a „Neighborhood Manager“ who acts on behalf of the Berlin Municipal Administration (Berlin Senate of Urban Development) in consultation with the District Authorities.

Members of the Neighborhood Council are elected by public elections in the respective neighborhood and consist of 25 members on average. Any council should have at least one member per 1,000 inhabitants. The most important aspect in forming a neighborhood council is to guarantee that the ideas, needs, and interests of all inhabitants, diverse e.g. in age, gender or professions, are represented. In addition to the residents, the Neighborhood Councils include as well representatives of local institutions and organized interest groups.

„The knowledge of the people living in the neighborhoods is pivotal for the development of a sustainable stabilization and improvement strategy. Close cooperation between the residents, the administration and the facilities in the neighborhoods lays the groundwork for a new community life in a spirit of solidarity“.

(Neighborhood Management Programme 2010:7)

The main task of a neighborhood council is to mediate between the residents and the administrative bodies, to improve communication and consultation in general and to foster the participatory decision making process within the communities. In particular when it comes to decide about the priority given to proposed projects and about their funding, the *neighborhood council* plays an important role in helping to balance different interests. The involvement of local people as well into the decisions on how to use allocated financial resources of a *neighborhood fund* became more and more crucial to the success of projects and activities in the neighborhoods.

“**Neighborhood Funds** are a fixed budget available for funding activities and projects within an integrated urban development framework. Funding decisions are primarily made by residents and local actors. The idea is to empower them to develop their own strategies (Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung 2010:7)

Instruments for participatory planning successfully applied: Case study: Gleisdreieck (2005-2015)

Experience made with the social city program on the active involvement of the public, Berlin started to emphasize on early participation, i.e. already in the preparatory phase of projects and during the decision making process.

A case to exemplify a participatory process from its very beginning allows as well reviewing the instruments applied, which fostered and guaranteed a broad involvement of all stakeholders. In the case of *Gleisdreieck* all stages of public participation have been practiced from information to consultation and cooperation.



Fig. 5: „Gleisdreieck“ ,/ „rail-triangle“ 1905 Fig.6 aerial view 2005

Source: www.berliner-verkehrsbauten.de, accessed 2015-09-05

A few preconditions were given by the Berlin Planning Authority. The area is officially dedicated in the land use plan to an open public park, as a compensation area to the close by and densely built-up Potsdamer Platz. The property owners of Potsdamer Platz paid 24 Mio Euro exclusively for the development of this green area.

The following chapter will present and evaluate the tools applied taking one case study as an example to portray a process, which started already in 2005. This case allows a long term review of a participatory planning process, which is still in an active stage.

Information and animation: The very first step is to inform the public and animate the citizens to participate in the entire process of decision making, planning and design and finally implementation and maintenance.

A **public opinion poll** has been carried out in 2005 and as follow-up 1.650 letters of invitation including an info-flyer have been send out to reach the individual citizens living in the area. This was accompanied by the distribution of another 10.000 Flyers in the area concerned, and 250 posters have been distributed in public buildings and facilities where people use to go frequently. The media (TV , radio and print) had been informed separately and guided through the areato enable them for informing and reporting about the project.

Next step was to organize **guided site walks**. The area was explored by walking around in order to understand local potential and constraints. 350 citizens participated in this sitewalk, which was also attended by the Berlin Minister of Urban Development.

Several **workshops** followed, where the participants have been working in different groups to bring together assessments and first ideas for future possible use. A team of moderators guided the discussion and summarized the results. Several groups of about 30 participants each discussed key interests, such as how to identify and keep the site's identity and its historic context, how to organize accessibility from neighboring areas for pedestrians, cars, public transport. How to harmonize different interest in the future park, (sport, recreation, children's playground, urban gardening etc) Safety and maintenance issues have been raised as well.

The workshops were professionally moderated and interim results summarized and documented. Participants of these **focus groups** have been selected to represent different social groups of the citizenship, woman, youth, elder people, people with different nationalities and cultural background.



Fig.7 focus group workshop example ,Gleisdreieck'

source: <http://www.nationale-stadtentwicklungspolitik.de> (accessed 2015-09-05)

The proposals made by the citizens from the neighboring city quarters have been integrated into the specifications for a *park design competition* announced to landscape architects.

All contributions were exhibited to the public and discussed again.

The winning contribution of the competition has been implemented.



Fig.8: Park layout of the winning contribution and photos in 2015

source: Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung: Park auf dem Gleisdreieck, Wettbewerbsdokumentation Berlin 2007, <http://schoenes.berlin/park-am-gleisdreieck-in-kreuzberg-schoeneberg> (accessed 2015-09-05)

Outlook

The dialogue process is still ongoing and focusses meanwhile on an area of 40.000 sqm within the public park.



Fig. 9: announcement for citizens' dialogue : „What kind of city can emerge here“?
source: www.facebook.com/Berlin.Gleisdreieck (accessed 2015-09-05)

There is so far no definitely set up program but only a contract dating 10 years back, that this area should be built up. But how to do this is now under public discourse. Three open workshops take place where citizens are expected to bring in their opinions and ideas about the future use of this area.

This means that it is not the architects to come up with proposals, but different experts together with non professional citizens develop the program. Different stakeholders are involved and alternative programmes are discussed.

The process is still ongoing, workshops are repeated, proposals are discussed and further developed and the local population plus a variety of other stakeholders stay involved into the longterm planning and implementation process.

Final remarks, tranferability, outlook for Syria

Today participatory decision making and urban planning in German municipalities has become without any doubt a clear element of what is called direct democracy, where it is widely believed that people affected by taken decisions should also have the right to be involved into the decision making process.

It has as well been experienced that participation is not always an easy going endeavour. The more different stakeholders may be involved the longer it may take to find a consensus. Systematic evaluation of the neighborhood management programme run in 17 selected areas of Berlin however show quite successful results.

In the case of the former railway site in Berlin the whole process started in 2005 and took more than 8 years until final implementation of the park. The second phase is still ongoing and diverse discussions go ahead.

Following the Berlin examples presented above it seems helpful to also adopt the socio-spatial unit of a neighborhood as an entity to redevelop. Being able to develop locally adapted solutions for the redevelopment process would also foster the active involvement of the inhabitants.

The need for redevelopment offers the chance to thoroughly rethink urban planning and urban development practice in Syria. Adopting the overall goal of sustainable city, public participation will become crucial. Only development, actively supported by all parties involved – including the community of residents- will offer the potential for sustainability. Syria could at least in this sence benefit from the need for redevelopment and refurbishment .

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