



EGYPT URBAN FUTURES

The third session “Urban Equity: Egyptian Cities from the Legal Perspective”

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Summary

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 Participatory Development
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EGYPT URBAN FUTURES (EUF) is a workshop series, jointly organised by CEDEJ, GIZ and UN-Habitat, which aims to promote dialogue between the public and private sector, civil society, development organisations and academia. EUF provides a platform to exchange experiences and opinions on issues concerning urban development for all stakeholders engaged in the field.

The third workshop was held on 29th of April 2014 and tackled the topic of urban equity, where the current condition of Egyptian cities from a legal perspective was discussed.. Furthermore, the event attempted at bridging the gap between the global discourses on urbanism and the local ones. It was divided into three sessions: a) Urban equity in the Egyptian context & Debriefing on the 7th World Urban Forum; b) The Rights AND the City; Government Perspective; and c) The Right TO the City; Civil Perspective. The speakers hosted by the workshop represented international organisations, academia, government officials and civil society activists and professionals. Around 110 participants from diverse academic, professional and other civil society groups attended the EUF.

In the opening session Roman Stadnicki, CEDEJ, illustrated a paradox. On one hand, the claim for more rights has triggered the 2011 Revolution; there are more and more civil society organizations involved in urban rights issues, such as the Habitation constitution process which was prepared by eight NGO's. On the other hand, the political transition had not totally eliminated repression and authoritarianism. This is somehow proven in the recent and huge demolition of many buildings in the informal areas of Dar el Salam and Manshiet Nasser. Nevertheless, Stadnicki invited the audience to try to go beyond this dichotomist and maybe simplistic vision. He added that it would be of interest to get back to the legal resources that are related to urban development in Egypt (How are city governance and urban authorities regulated by legislation?); and then to understand why civil society took hold of the question of the “right to the city” to legitimate its action in cities. At the end of his speech, he emphasized on the urgency to clarify the positions of the different stakeholders in regards to urban rights issues in order to promote the co-construction of a new legislative framework for the urban development. The latter would represent the interests of everybody.

In his speech Mohab Elrefaie, PDP, highlighted the importance of discussing the topic of Urban Equity especially in the light of the changes occurring on the Egyptian scene and encouraged the participants to actively engage in discussions over the course of the event.

Session 1: Urban Equity in the Egyptian context and 7th World Urban Forum debriefing session:

The first session started with a theoretical in-depth presentation on the Egyptian Government System by Dr. Lise Debout, University of Lyon, where she expanded on the administrative structure of the Egyptian government and offered a review for the current local administration law no. 53/1975 and law no.43/1979. She offered her own interpretation of these legal frameworks as the binding frameworks for the urban management in Egypt. She highlighted how the legal framework restricted the autonomy of the local units during the 1980's to lesser powers in the 1990's and 2000s; replacing *local government* with *local administration*. Local authorities were systematically limited in their powers in terms of local resources and decision making. Dr. Debout also spoke about the amendments to the building law of 2008 and the laws underway concerning local administration, social housing, and new law for associations and civil institutions which are supposed to be enacted soon. She pointed out the importance of thinking out of the box when it comes to ready-made governance models, citing the example of India.

A joint presentation by Katja Schaefer, UN-Habitat-Regional Office for Africa & Arab States (ROAAS), together with Philipp Schuck and Safa Ashoub from the Participatory Development Programme in Urban Areas (PDP) followed Dr. Debout's session. In their part they delivered the key messages from the 7th World Urban Forum which took place in Medellin, Colombia, between April 5th and 11th2014. Katja Schaefer spoke about the historical progress of the World Urban Forum and how the 7th session was significant to the function of the forum. Philipp Schuck presented the case of Medellin as an example for sound urban policies and a global showcase for urban equity and finally Safa Ashoub spoke of why 'urban equity' matters and what are the main principles that makes urban development a rights-based process. Participants engaged in a lively discussion and raised some questions regarding the New Urban Agenda as posed by the WUF-7 Declaration. Some criticised the case of Medellin as only the positive aspects were being portrayed while the negative aspects have been side-lined. The panel acknowledged that such events are also showcases, and there had been forced evictions before the WUF, and that despite huge improvements, Medellin is still facing many challenges. Philipp Schuck stressed that he placed question marks in his presentation to show some critical aspects of the case.



Other questions concerning the gap between local and national discourses were raised by the audience. Dr. Debout confirmed that attendees at such conferences generally belong to the national-level institutions, and they are used to such international discourses which is usually far

from the reality on the ground. She wondered why local administration reform was so rarely mentioned.

Finally the moderator, Khaled Abdelhalim, wrapped up the session promising that the issues not fully covered in the first session would be addressed in the following ones.

Session 2: “The Rights AND the City” – Government perspective

With focus on a Governmental perspective, Eng. Salwa Abdelwahab, from General Organisation for Physical Planning (GOPP), Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban development, presented the law no. 119 for 2008 and its different chapters and articles, which relate to the building regulations and urban planning in Egypt. She explained the urban planning article which consists of structure and general planning. She also talked about the institutional system according to the law and how it is based on two main levels, the national and regional level. Then she



explained how they deal with the areas that are in need for re-planning. While some areas cannot be upgraded will be demolished others will be upgraded as the percentage of the dilapidated buildings do not constitute the majority of the buildings. Abdelwahab added that there are some gaps in the articles, and that some of the articles and the provisions of the law need to be reconsidered in the amendments to law no. 119 for 2008. She also added that this cannot be done now because Egypt is still lacking a parliament.

Eng. Nahed Naguib from General Organisation for Physical Planning (GOPP), Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban development, explained how the strategic planning in the Greater Cairo Region (GCR) focuses on the social justice and the quality of life. She mentioned the future vision for developing the Greater Cairo Region. She also presented the projects that the Ministry of Housing is currently working on, and tried to shed light on the efforts of the Ministry in social participation. She mentioned that for Cairo 2052 the GOPP held two conferences, 28 workshops, four seminars, four questionnaires for about 3000 families in GCR. She pointed that the main problem is not in implementing the suggested solutions but in ensuring the sustainability. Then she mentioned that the Ministry has about 22 projects for GCR and one of the most important is the Matareya district, where they developed detailed plans in consultation with the different stakeholders. Finally, she said that for measuring the socio-economic impacts of these projects they have conducted a number of community consultation sessions.

Dr. Atwa Hussein from the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) - Ministry of State for Environment (MoSE), started his speech with explaining the difficulties and the hard circumstances that Egypt is passing through, which requires lots of support from everyone. He mentioned the Cairo 2052 plan several times and how ambitious reaching vision is. He mentioned the mutual interactions between the cities on the global level. He spoke about the top 50 cities that are indicators for sustainability and quoted this to explain his concept "think globally and act locally".



Session 3: “The Right TO the City” – Civil perspective

Manal El Tibe, Egyptian Centre for Housing Rights, spoke about housing rights in Egypt and the effects of the January 25th revolution on aggravating the demands for these rights. She highlighted the failure of the new cities to attract population, due to the weak infrastructure and the general lack of services. Then she spoke of the imbalances in the housing markets and how the neo-liberal policies led to the exclusion of a large segment of the poor population from accessing low-cost housing units. After the constitution of 2014, no real protection of rights is evident and she gave examples of the continued forced evictions in some areas in Cairo. In addition to the continuation of biased social housing policies which are being implemented by the Ministry of Housing together with the Armed Forces, she also criticized the repackaging of Cairo 2050 strategy into Cairo 2052 with some minor modifications.



El Tibe was followed by Rabie Wahba from the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) who spoke more on the origins of the conceptual frameworks of the Right to the City and the Social Function of Property and how these notions have helped in creating empowered citizens and in making the state accountable to citizens. This, he said, could be reflected in the constitution in terms of bringing the lower government tier closer to its citizens with emphasis on the regional and local levels' role.

Eventually Kareem Ibrahim showed some graphs related to urban inequity in service provision across the different governorates in Egypt. From his perspective, urban inequity is about a ‘system of injustice’ which is later translated into unjust policies of development which determine the distribution of services based on very imbalanced visions. Then he provided the audience with an idea of the ‘Urban Constitution’ campaign which included eight civil and human rights organisations which advanced a set of principles on the rights of housing and the rights to the city including the participation in planning and management. He also introduced the ‘Urban Reform Coalition’ that is concerned with monitoring & reforming urban planning policies and practices in Egypt. Finally, he posed a very challenging question about the current situation in Egypt where everything is unlikely to change unless a set of very political decisions is made to support urban equity.

From the audience, some other questions that arose during the day:

- Is there any governmental acknowledgment of the rights-based approach in urban equity?
- Are the current legislations sufficient for safeguarding these rights?
- Are there enough mechanisms to put these legislations in effect?
- Are there channels to deal with associations to deal with these rights?
- Does the government have any communication channels to meet the needs of NGOs?

In the closing remarks of the workshop, Safa Ashoub thanked the audience for their significant questions and asked them to keep their questions to the following sessions as the Egypt Urban Futures is held for that purpose. Ashoub informed about the coming workshop that the organising partners will aim at combining the panellists to include representation from government sector together with civil sector to achieve deep and fruitful debates between both parties.

