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People's Will

The Case of Rural Human Settlements Development in Farafra

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ABSTRACT: For more than 40 years, there had been several attempts of regional human settlements development in Egypt to disperse the population away from the Nile Valley. The New Valley governorate was subject to some of these attempts, in which Farafra was subject to some planning interventions. Until mid 1990s these attempts proved to be pointless with the population in Farafra being fixed at 3000 inhabitants. However, because of the remarkable intervention and collaboration of normal migrant farmers from the Nile Valley, the population of Farafra increased to 21000 inhabitants in less than 10 years with a tangible increase in the number of human settlements in this area. This paper documents their challenge and success and keeping the promise of telling their story.

Conference Topic: Cities, societies, communities and time

Keywords: Human settlements, regional planning, citizen participation, informal development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to review and document a successful informal development intervention in the Western Desert of Egypt.

Since the early 1960s this region was subject to successive regional development planning that aimed to establish rural communities in the desert and increase the population that had been already living there. Despite that some objectives of these plans had been fulfilled, the main objective of attracting people to migrate from the Nile Valley had never been reached.

However, in the 1990s Farafra, which is a group of oasis in this region, witnessed an inflow of migration from the Nile Valley causing a stark increase of population that grew from only 3000 inhabitants to 21000 between 1996 and 2006.

These events overlapped with the planning of Farafra city, which took place in 1998 at a time when rational comprehensive planning was still dominating.

Unfortunately the migration and expansion events of rural settlements had not been taken into consideration, leading to the production of a traditional master plan that was not successful.

This study focuses mainly on the informal attempt, yet it tries to compare the attitude in regards to the degrees of citizen participation in each case. This is because the informal case was later encouraged by the local government and people's demands were largely met.

The sequence of this paper starts by giving a brief overview on the regional development plan that was adopted at that time in which the city planning was situated. It then gives a bit of theory on the degrees of citizen participation mainly through the concept of Arnestein ladder. The informal rural and human settlements development case is then discussed and situated within the ladder. This is followed by reviewing the city planning for Farafra and the alienation from the migration events that were taking place, consequently situating the case within the ladder of citizen participation. Finally some concluding remarks will be given.

2. DEVELOPMENT & URBANIZATION MAP OF EGYPT 1998

This map reflects the national development policy in the late 1990s and the 2000s it is supposed to be the main reference for the different regional development projects and interventions in the Egyptian regions.

This policy which is known as the “*Development and Urbanization Map of Egypt 2017*” focuses mainly on developing desert and remote areas, reflecting the main Egyptian line of development aiming to increase the inhabited area of Egypt to reach 25% instead of the current 5% [1].

This plan like most of its predecessors aimed to achieve de-concentration of the Nile Valley through establishing secondary and intermediate cities in the desert, while also trying to introduce small service centers that are associated with rural development.

The study eventually introduced a reference map with the possible locations of 44 new cities, also identifying possible locations for land reclamation, others for industrial and mining and touristic activities, while identifying historical sites and natural protectorates. It is important to mention that the construction of these new settlements was not necessarily to be commenced from scratch; in many cases the approach was to develop already existing communities and upgrade them to cities, which was the case in Farafra.



Fig.1: Development and Urbanization Map of Egypt

2.1 Administrative Settings of Farafra

Farafra belongs to the New Valley *governorate* known in Egyptian Arabic as *El Wadi El Gedid* " with its capital city of Kharga. The governorate is divided into four districts, which in Egypt are called Marakaz, literally meaning centers; each is composed of a capital city and a group villages and sub villages. These districts are: Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra and Baris [2].

Farafra is considered the district with the least population with only 21400 inhabitants (est. 2006).

3. LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The Ladder of citizen participation was first introduced by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, about citizen involvement in the planning processes in the United States. She described a ladder of participation with three categories of participation: non participation, tokenism and citizens' power. [3]

The degrees of participation are illustrated as follows:

1 Manipulation and 2 Therapy: Both are non participative. The aim is to educate the participants, while convincing them that the proposed plan is the best, therefore the job of participation is to achieve public support by public relations.

3 Informing: A most important first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one way flow of information. No channel for feedback.

4 Consultation: Is considered another legitimate step, in which attitude surveys, neighborhood meetings and public enquiries take place, however, this step is perceived to be done "pour la forme".

5 Placation: Here citizens are allowed to advice or plan but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

6 Partnership: Power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees.

7 Delegated power: In this level citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions.

8 Citizen Control: This is the ultimate level of citizen participation in which the have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a program with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds [4].

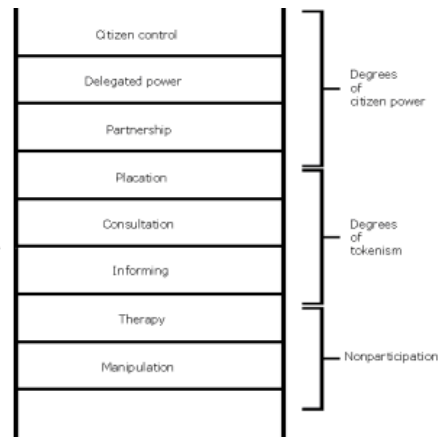


Fig.2: Ladder of Citizen Participation

Of course there are other theories that explain the levels of citizen participation, however, this paper relies mainly on Arnstein ladder just to situate the degree of citizens' intervention in the planning and development of Farafra.

4. INFORMAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN FARAFRA

In 1994/1995, thousands of farmers from different parts of the Nile Valley started to migrate to Farafra to work in agriculture and land reclamation. In May 2006 it was possible to visit the area and hold several interviews with some of these farmers and with the mayor of Farafra, who gave an account on this case in which he was personally involved.

4.1. Background settings

In the 1980s the government initiated several projects for young graduates & investors to encourage cultivation and land reclamation in the oases; these were based on selling land for low prices and supplying it with sufficient irrigation water by drilling wells for underground water. However, at that time not all landowners showed immediate intervention in their lands, consequently that led to an excess overflow of underground water that was not used.

According to the official documentation, the water flowing in the irrigation sewers at that time was a mixture of irrigation water that was already used by existing farmers and large quantities of fresh water coming from the overflow of water wells that are not used, which caused pools of excess water to appear in several places.

4.2. Migration and settling

The case started when bus drivers working on routes between the Nile Valley and this area took pictures of the pools of excess water and showed them to their friends back in their villages. Eventually the people believed that there might be opportunities in this area that can help them in enhancing their living standards and seeking land ownership, therefore they decided to move to Farafra.

When they arrived, the migrant farmers lived in temporary shelters before finally settling down. They later sent for their families and built permanent houses. They started cultivating and reclaiming lands outside the official cordon of Farafra, using excess water flowing in the irrigation sewers for irrigation.

However, because of legal complications at that time, the migrant farmers could not obtain ownership rights for the land they cultivated. Nevertheless, they had reached an informal agreement with local officials responsible for monitoring development attempts in Farafra, which entitled them to keep the land as long as they pay a minimum rent for it [5].

Many of the migrant farmers started informing their networks of friends and family in their home villages about the opportunities in the area, eventually, starting a migration process.



Fig.3: Temporary houses were built first and latter transformed to permanent ones



Fig.4: An irrigation sewer that migrant farmers used its water for cultivation

At a certain moment the media also played a role in motivating many farmers to migrate; during the interviews some of them declared that they were motivated by a speech given by the president in 1995 asking the people to seek prosperity in the New Valley. The migrant population in the second half of the 1990s reached 8000 inhabitants who transformed 12,500 Feddans of desert into cultivated land in comparison to only 2000 Feddans before their arrival.

4.3. The implications

Having seen the results of the migrants, the graduates and the investors came back to their properties and started cultivating as well.

However, with the water wells being used now by their owners, the migrant farmers were faced by lack of sufficient water to continue cultivating their lands.

The migrant farmers had to irrigate with what was left of the water after being used by the legal land owners within the administrative cordon of Farafra. Many of them felt it was unjust that having reclaimed vast areas of land outside the cordon, their needs for water were not taken into consideration. Consequently, the cultivated areas outside the cordon started decreasing to reach 6500 Feddans after being 12500 Feddans at the peak of the reclamation process [6]. At the same time many farmers could not carry on to cultivate their lands, which caused them to suffer from severe financial problems.

4.4. Government reaction

The migrant farmers started to make complaints and ask the local government for assistance. The Local and provincial governments could not ignore the situation (even if these migrants did not have property rights), especially that they actually carried out, informally, the government national objectives of reclaiming desert lands and moving away from the Nile Valley.

Consequently the case was taken to the parliament by the provincial government and a parliamentary committee was sent to the region for investigation. As a result, the ministry of irrigation and water resources was asked to drill 58 new wells to support the farmers, and steps towards giving them full ownership of their lands were done.



Fig.6: One of the wells drilled by the government to the migrant farmers

4.5. Impacts

The impacts of this case on Farafra were very tangible, not only in terms of physical and spatial impacts but also in terms of socio-economic aspects. These are discussed briefly as follows.



Fig.5: Migration flows came mainly from the Nile Delta at that time

Physical and Spatial impacts

In settling down, the migrant farmers managed to build new villages, exclusively on their own; these villages are home to 19000 inhabitants. It is important to stress that the migrant farmers make up for the majority of the population in Farafra, which is distributed over 5 villages. After the intervention of the parliament, these villages were legally recognized and treated as permanent settlements. The local government gave the people ownership rights of the lands that host their homes, and is currently working on supplying basic infrastructure and services to many of these settlements that were initially informal.

Of course the most remarkable physical difference is the increase in the cultivated land to reach 28000 Feddans in 2006 whereas it was only 2000 Feddans in 1995, which also had its effect on the economic situation in the area.



Fig.7: An informal rural settlement in Farafra, view from the field.

Socio-economic impacts

The new comers were coming from different places and contexts in Egypt however, Farafra acted as a melting pot for all these people who reinforced this through marriage from the different migrant groups, thus, the difference gap faded away.

The new comers brought with them activities and skills that were not known in Farafra like car repair shops, furniture shops and even new modes of transportation like the Tok-Tok, which is widely used in the Nile Delta.

Finally, with a lot of people coming from the Nile Valley and its Delta many private transportation companies started to operate between Farafra and other regions in Egypt, which are basically the origins of the migrant farmers.

This case represents an interesting example on development by co-production, between the people and the local and provincial governments. Co-production of policy and implementation is explained as the involvement of groups of civil society in general in debate, discussions and active decision making process for development policy and its implementation [7]. This is noticed in Farafra, both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, at the beginning, when the migrant farmers started using the existing infrastructure done by the government manifested in the water from the drilled wells, though these wells were drilled for other users. And directly when the government intervened and supported the efforts of the migrant farmers by drilling the necessary wells and supported their activities in land reclamation and cultivation.

In succeeding to get this support, those farmers proved that with sufficient organization, they can exert pressure on the government to respond to their needs and overcoming the typical Egyptian bureaucracy that cripples similar attempts.

The case also represents an example of social networking where the inflow of migrants who came to this area, managed to settle down with the help of their friends and family who arrived earlier to the area, in which, a state of cooperation and support took place between the earlier migrants and others who followed.

The involvement of the migrant farmers in this informal development process is somehow difficult to situate within the ladder of citizen participation. On one hand it is an informal case that started away from the official channels. It was even subject to major set backs at a certain moment when the access to water and ownership of cultivated lands were prohibited. In that case it can be placed at the bottom of the Arnstein ladder, with nil participation. However, since the migrant groups were organized in their demands to the local government, while seeking their assistance at a time when they achieved concrete status quo on the ground by reclaiming desert lands and constructing whole villages, in a sense that they can not be ignored.

This could be considered as an arm twisting situation that faced the local and central governments, eventually "People's will" was finally acknowledged and supported. In that sense the case could be situated as within the level of a full citizen control, however, in an informal way reached by arm twisting techniques against the government. Thus, this level differs from the one in Arnstein ladder, since the later is supposed to take place in an organized and official way.

Despite that this case was informal, the migrant population managed to achieve many of their demands and objectives, which contrasts another case of human settlements development and planning that focused on Farafra city at the same time, yet in an official and organized way, in which the above events were ignored and a master plan of the city was formulated eventually failing to fulfill most of its objectives.

5. THE MASTER PLAN FOR FARAFRA CITY

The master plan for Farafra city was finalized in 1998 by the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP). This plan was formulated in accordance with: first the development and urbanization map of 1998, which introduced the idea of constructing or upgrading 44 new cities, with Farafra being one of the communities to be further upgraded and second, an earlier regional development plan for Assuit region in 1996, to which Assuit and the New Valley Governorate belong.

It assumed that the economic and social development actions that were proposed in the regional plan would be implemented, thus creating many job opportunities in the cities of the New Valley, including Farafra, leading to inner migration from Assuit governorate. The forecasted population in 2020 was set on 30000 inhabitants to increase from 4100 inhabitants in 1998 over four growth periods [8].

5.1. Economic activities

The plan considered agriculture as one of the main economic activities possible to create job opportunities. This was based on the dramatic increase in reclaimed lands in Farafra between 1995 and 1998, together with the estimates showing that some 50000 billion m³ of underground water exist in Farafra.

Tourism and small industries were also considered as prominent activities, with possible industrial activities that could be based on mineral resources available in the oases in addition to supporting services activities.

5.2. The plan

Based on the earlier expected population, the construction of 6500 residential units was recommended by the plan to host the population increase in the city that would be 26000 inhabitants over 20 years; this was to be accompanied with the supply of necessary services for this increase.

The plan proposed that the city would take an oval shape as implied by the geographic & topographic settings. A ring road would surround it, with a main road passing through the center of the city which would lead to Bahareya oasis in the North and Dakhla oasis in the South.

The city was planned in a hierarchical way to include two districts that would include together five neighborhoods. Each of which would include four residential groups. Proper service centers in terms were also proposed in a hierarchical way starting from the city center, district centers and neighborhood centers. The final master plan included the proper road networks and the distribution of services and different activities [8].

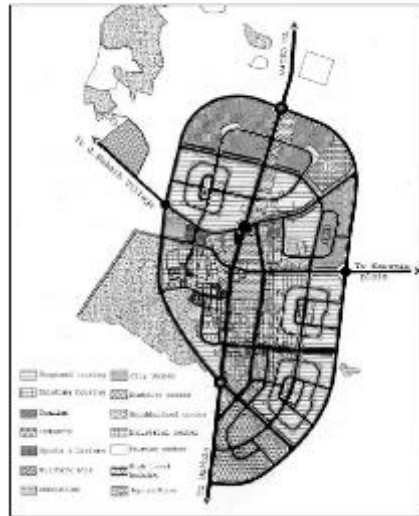


Fig.8: Master Plan of Farafra city – 1998.

5.3. The outcome

The outcomes of the plan could be discussed in terms of both its physical, economic and demographic dimensions.

- For the *Physical dimension*, the only visible element of the master plan that was realized is a large part of the road network especially the ring road surrounding the city, yet for the division and rearrangement of the city into five neighborhoods with their service centers was not realized or even detected visibly.

- As for the *economical dimension*, agricultural indeed prospered and the expansion in reclaimed lands increased, not as an outcome of the 1996 regional plan, but as a result of the efforts of the migrant farmers, which were later supported by the local and provincial governments, as discussed earlier.

Like agriculture, tourism has been growing as estimated by this plan, but not as an outcome for the regional plan of 1996. It was noticed during the field work that several hotels and smaller camp sites were operational in the area, yet again, the increase in this activity primarily happened because of private sector initiatives and not because of direct government attempts.



Fig.9: Satellite image of Farafra city in 2006

- Finally, in terms of *demographics*, the population of Farafra city had not reached the 8500 inhabitants in 2005 as estimated by the plan, as it hosted 3700 inhabitants in 2006 [2]. Nevertheless, the population of the Farafra group of settlements in total had increased seven times by 2006 to reach 21000 inhabitants, mostly in the villages of the migrant farmers surrounding the city.

From the above overview, it can be argued that the plan did not take into consideration the surrounding events, i.e. the migration of large number of farmers to the surroundings of the city, when it was being made.

As seen, the plan acknowledged the increase of agricultural lands because of the migrant farmers; however, the planners did not pay attention in their proposal to support them. They built their estimates that there will be an increase in the population of the city for people coming to work in support-services to agriculture, tourism and industry, however, the expected increase did not happen in the city but it took place in its surrounding villages. Perhaps the main problem here was that the planning was based on direct and specific demands from the GOPP, which made the planners fulfill these demands (in a pragmatic way) and not taking into consideration the actual regional changes that could affect the making of the plan. In addition, the planners did not really consider the contextual needs of the people.

This planning case in contrast to the informal one could be straight forward placed within the lower levels of citizen participation. It can be placed in the first degree of tokenism, which is informing. From experience, most city plans in the 1990s were approved after a couple of presentations in front of the governor and the city mayor together with representatives of the local councils and executive committees, in most cases the governor's will overruled the rest of the participants, making such participations theatrical to fulfill the requirements of approving the plan[9].

CONCLUSION: Lessons from the Farafra experience

Having reviewed the case of Farafra and its development attempts, one could come out with the following remarks:

- A total top-down approach in planning cannot achieve adequate results, which was the case in the physical planning for Farafra city, in which the local population was excluded from the planning process, and the informal development attempts which was causing an increase in the population outside the city were not taken into consideration, eventually the plan could not achieve most of its objectives. This calls for public participation in the planning process to at least know the needs of the people. Luckily, the planning process has been changing lately in Egypt by adopting the norms of planning through participation, decentralization and subsidiary, despite that this change perhaps took place because of the pressure exerted by international donor agencies on the Egyptian government [10].

- The Informal development, done by the migrant farmers, has been successful in Farafra, which eventually was transformed into co-production with the local and provincial governments. This was done after the interventions of the migrant farmers managed to actually realize the national objectives, mainly reclaiming desert lands and relocating people away from the Nile Valley, because of their initial success the government was faced by an existing fact (the reclaimed lands) and had no choice

but to bypass bureaucracy, and assist these groups of settlers in their attempts. It is argued that this could be an interesting approach in achieving specific objectives in the presence of a central government, simply by putting the government face to face with reality (arm twisting approach), which is backed up by a strong popular demand; eventually the government is most likely to support the ongoing attempts and responding to any relevant demands driven by the People's will.

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