

Revolutionizing the planning process in Egypt

Decentralizing Powers and Actions

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Abstract: *While the global market and neo-liberal economy brought about Entrepreneurial planning approaches, the late 20th Century post industrial cities called for collaborative planning which in turn lead to strategic planning.*

With the new building Law 118/08, Egyptian government adopted the strategic planning approach starting with villages, cities then governorates. However more than 10 years had passed and none of the defined visions and strategies have been applied and results were limited to border changes in villages, few development projects and large number of aging development reports.

This Paper is an attempt to revolutionize the strategic planning process in Egypt through a theoretical approach that defines key elements to be adapted for better implementable development. Revisiting of stakeholders - specifically local authorities'- role in the plan is thus defined as a major focus that enables decentralization of powers and decisions with minimum policy changes required through a diagnostic analysis of the main reasons for inefficiency in addition to revolutionizing the planning process itself. The paper is designed as a survey research that studies the efficiency and sustainability of the strategic planning process in Egypt within the natural development policy setting. A descriptive conclusion of the new process design concludes the possible benefits for the urban future of new cities in Egypt.

Further research shall provide deeper focus on the new proposed process and its legal and policy impact sketching a clear roadmap for the transformation aspired.

Keywords: Decentralization - Implementable planning - strategic urban planning- Temporary Urbanism

1. INTRODUCTION

In a world that has sought to expect the unexpected, to predict the possible scenarios and to accordingly be prepared; time has proven its own different way. It's likely that planning on itself brings the future into present, However it has become doubtful that a line drawn today shall judge our acts tomorrow. In 2008 the economic crisis shifted the world to its will; just as in 2011 the Egyptian and Arab people shifted the political globe to their choice. These and many multi-scale paradigm shifts cause from dramatic to detailed plans change, and they are now more often happening. The world as a whole has become so linked that a stroke in the Far East could affect plans in a distant continent.

Accordingly, (O'Donovan and Flower, 2013) claims that strategic planning is dead, however (Mintzberg, 1994b) argues that it is certainly not dead but has fallen from its pedestal; he explains that *the most successful strategies are visions not plans*. (Zuckerman, 2012) Claims that *today's profoundly uncertain times have forced business strategists to acknowledge that strategic planning as usual will not provide the foundation needed to survive tumultuous economic conditions*. Correspondingly, after more than ten years of applying strategic planning in Egypt, it has become questionable whether the process –as it is- is expected to achieve the anticipated goals; or a process revolution for sound, real and implementable development should take place.

This paper discuss the relevance of maintaining strategic planning process currently adopted by the Egyptian government for urban development, concluding suggested reform to the process that could adopt it with the local and global changes. This will be achieved by defining the key aspects within the process that should be modified to fulfil the aspired development goals and maintain efficiency, and sustainability. By the end of the research, insights for the new process guidelines and its expected outcome will be described.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH APPROACH

This paper holds a *theoretical* approach in the sense that it tests the hypothesis that strategic urban planning is the current successful tool for the Egyptian development; it provides general insights on Egyptian urban development road map focusing on the conceptual framework of the problem and not the target groups or case study. It also combines *diagnostic* approach exploring the reasons of the concluded inefficiency, and a final *descriptive* approach for the new suggested process.

2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is designed as *survey* that studies the efficiency and sustainability of the strategic planning process in Egypt. Quantitative diagnosis is used to analyze results from the designed *standard structured questionnaire* that is then compared to theoretical data and thus conclude variations and suggested changes applied to the process. The Sample selected for the questionnaire is a *Matching sample*; randomly chosen from the strategic planning main stakeholders: Governmental, Non-governmental, Private sector and Academic agencies.

2.3. RESEARCH SETTING

This research takes place in the *natural setting* of the existing planning polices and laws.

3. STRATEGIC URBAN PLANNING

This part of the research shall provide a concrete base for the later discussion; explaining the theoretical background and conceptual framework of strategic plans and strategic urban planning focusing on the Egyptian application of the process.

3.1. STRATEGIC PLANNING BACKGROUND

As a basic management tool; strategic planning concepts began in the late 1950's within the U.S. Department of Defense represented in the Planning-Programming-Budgeting-System (PPBS) that was later adapted to series of varying strategic planning and budgeting systems (Young, 2003). Large companies later in the 1960s and 1970s practiced strategic planning; providing a framework beyond the 12-month cycle and a systematic approach of management (Webster et al., 1989)

Strategic approaches were then applied in the urban context in the 1980's to promote public policies for socio-economic development, public participation and public-private cooperation between actors of the city. Later in the century, cooperation networks between cities have arisen with the aim of enhancing collaboration and knowledge production (CIDEU, RADEUT, URBAL), and the development of incentives for various levels of government to foster the implementation of Strategic Urban Plans in cities (Rodríguez, 2009)

(Mintzberg, 1994b) summarized the strategy formation approaches in ten different schools illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Schools of Thought on Strategic Planning (Based on (Mintzberg, 1994b))

School	View of Process		Approach
Design	Conceptual (informal)	Both are essentially SWOT analyses : their strength lies in the <i>assessment stages</i> of strategic planning	Strive to elucidate—or to put into plain words—the appropriate methods or procedures of making strategy.
Planning	Formal		
Positioning	Analytical	places greater emphasis on “content” rather than process	
Cognitive	Mental	Focuses on mental or deliberative processes	Descriptive : Take on thematic interpretations
Entrepreneurial	Visionary	“strong person” with a compelling vision of the future	
Learning	Emergent	Emphasis on collective or “group-think.”	
Political	Power		
Cultural	Ideological	collective cooperative dimension	
Environmental	Passive	Passive response to external forces	
Configurational	Episodic	Put all other schools into the context of specific episodes	

Understanding the different approaches and philosophical basis of strategic plan elucidate the fact of the wideness and comprehensiveness of the process. Thus the focus of this paper will not be carried to explain and categorize those approaches, but rather focus on the Egyptian application in urban planning to criticise and discuss the concept of creating a strategic plan without going into details of the process itself.

3.2. EGYPTIAN APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC URBAN PLANNING

For as old as its civilization, Egypt has one of the longest histories of a centralized, top-down, decision-making process and traditions in the world. Even after the 1952 revolution decentralization consequences had remained illusionary through dividing the country into provinces, cities and villages each with its own legal personality. (Arab Republic of Egypt 1960) while Nasser tended to increase centralization through the prevailing socialism spirit generated by the Soviet Union (Tobbala, 2012).

Within the same approach for decentralization efforts, the Egyptian government adopted the strategic planning approach. The new system carried within many levels and concepts of participation and cooperation involving all relevant stakeholders in the development process.

The Egyptian (Presidential decree, 2008) defines the strategic plan as the plan that defines the future vision for urban development, which can be applied on national, regional, governorate, city or village scale. It illustrates the goals, policies and required economic, social, and environmental development plans to achieve sustainable development. It also defines the future needs for urban expansion, different land uses and implementation programs, priorities and mechanisms in addition to sources of funds on the planning level.

This law created a new development hierarchy and decentralization pyramid, one that receives support from all relevant stakeholders. However, even it looks like a widely spread decision making process, the power and financial capacities remained top-down as illustrated in the figure below.

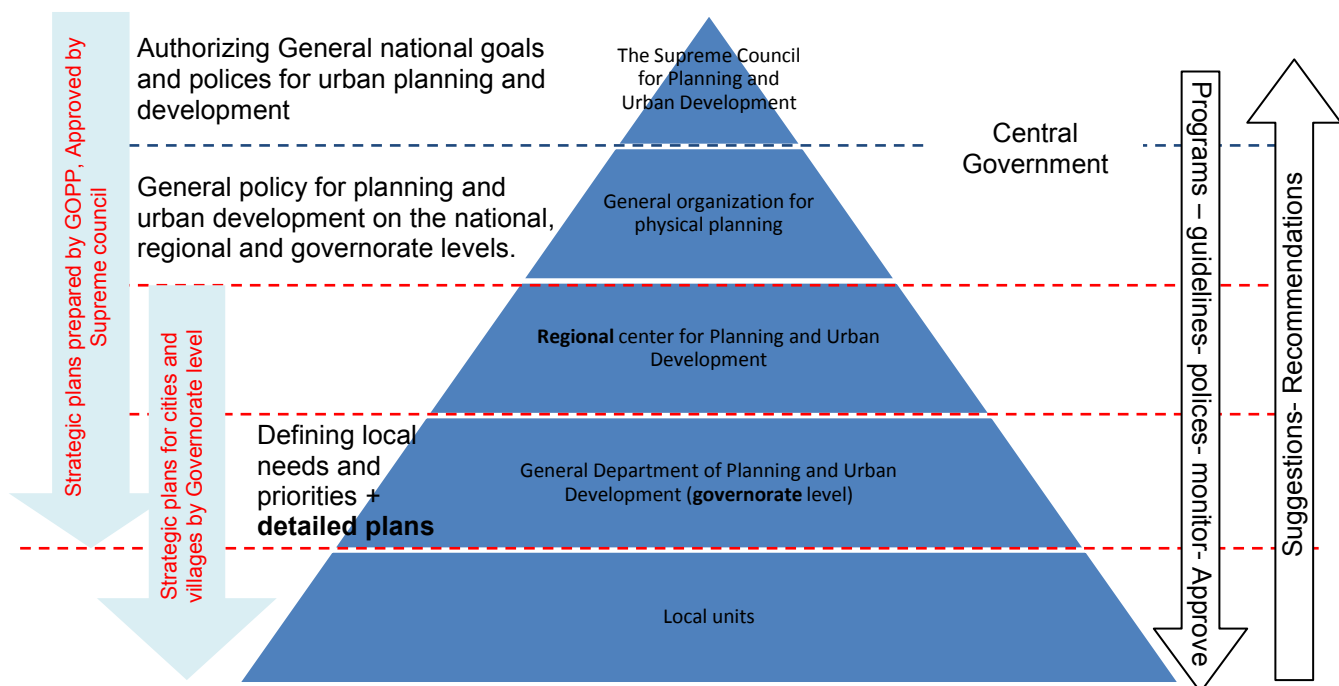


Figure 1: Development process plan in Egypt (Author adapted from (Presidential decree, 2008))

The strategic planning process includes three main stages illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 2 : Strategic urban planning process (Author adapted from (Khaleefa, 2012))

The process as illustrated above holds great participation principles; however it remains clear that actual application of the process seldom carry equal values. It could also be concluded from the figure the complexity and time consuming involved in such a process; especially with the lack of appropriate database and capacity of application authorities.

The main challenges facing the strategic urban planning process in Egypt will be summarized in the following part of the research aiming at defining the key issues to be addressed within the updating of the process.

4. EGYPTIAN URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING CHALLENGES

The questionnaire used for this paper to survey urban development in Egypt and strategic planning specifically included variety of roles and involvement in strategic planning as governmental (23.5 %), non-governmental (11.8%), Private sector (29.4%) and academic sector (35.3%) with a total of 16 contributors. The rating of the Egyptian national development plan resulted as follows.

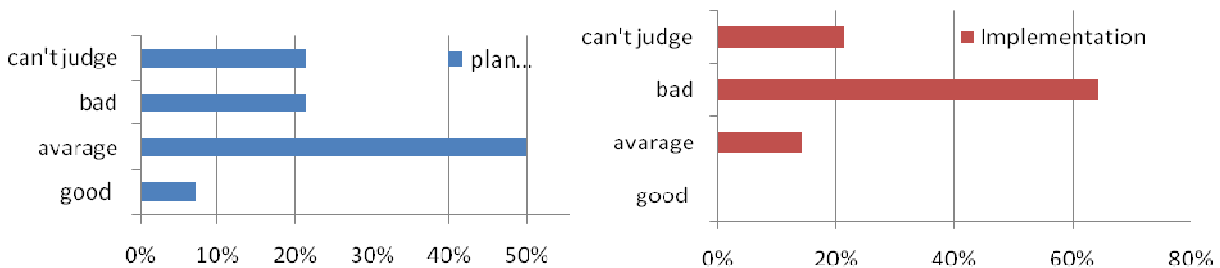


Figure 3: Rating of the Egyptian national urban development plan (questionnaire performed by author)

It is clear from these results that main problem with the planning is the poor implementation in addition to the average -and below- quality of the plan. It is important to also note that an average plan that could not be implemented shifts it to a bad one; since plans without action and achievements lose their basic goal for development. Additionally result for the strategic plans' projects implementation shows that the majority of respondents believe that from only 11 to 25% of the plan's outcome is implemented. This is shown in the figure below.

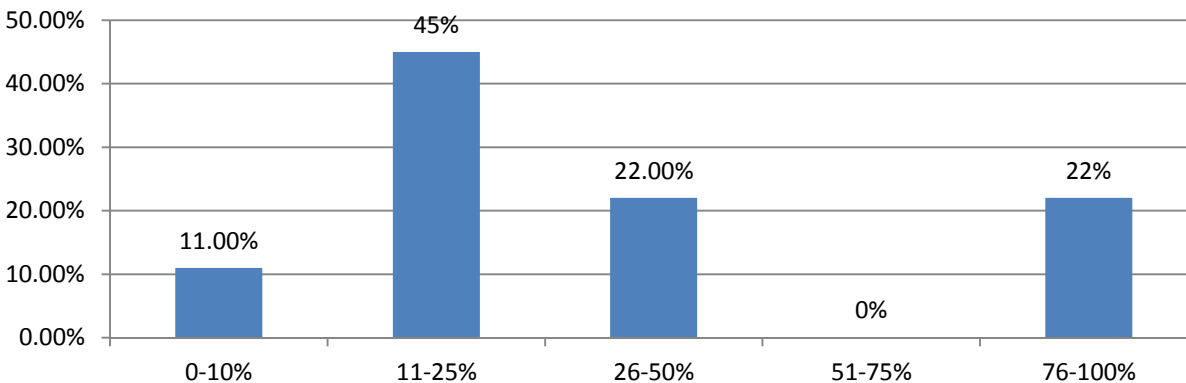


Figure 4: Average percentage of outcome projects' implementation after strategic plans are completed

The basic question that the following part of the research will address is the *reason behind this poor implementation of plans and strategic projects* and concluded recommendations for enhancing the process. This is based on the qualitative analysis of the questionnaire results and experiences from the strategic plan of 6th of October new city and Alexandria strategic urban plan which reflected main technical, institutional and financial challenges summarized below.

4.1. THE FALLACY OF PREDICTION WITHIN A REVOLUTIONARY CONTEXT

In the survey questionnaire, more than 50% of respondents believe that the strategic plans take from 3 to 5 years to be finished. Thus when it's time for implementation, the data on which decision have been made are already years old. Our current external environment is one of market uncertainty, international political unrest, and shifting social values; and economic imbalances (Zuckerman, 2012). Therefore, in our fast, connected and revolutionary world; political, socio-economic and global trending could be completely different after such duration. (Mintzberg, 1994a) claims that according to *premises of strategic planning, the world is supposed to hold still while a plan is being developed and then stay on the predicted course while that plan is being implemented*; which is certainly not the case.

The questionnaire results show that despite living the change; the majority of respondents could not expect whether the effect of the Egyptian revolution on urban planning would be positive or negative. This reflects the complex interrelated situation that makes it hard for expectations to be true or valid.

Similarly, in their recent book *The Temporary city*; (Bishop and Williams, 2012) challenges our preoccupation with long-term strategies and master plans and questions our ability to achieve these in the face of increasing resource constraints and political and economic uncertainty.

■ Positively ■ Negatively ■ No impact ■ Can't Expect

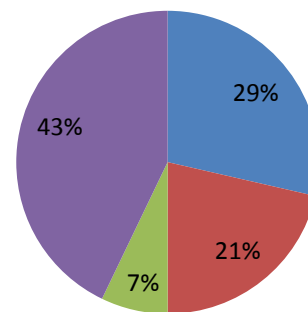


Figure 5: Results of questionnaire question :How do you think the Egyptian Revolution changes shall impact urban development? (Author)

4.2. CENTRALIZATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICTS

(Tobbala, 2012) explains that the power of local governments has always been controlled by the central authority in addition to moving some of the few local powers to public organizations leaving local authorities with incomplete dysfunctional powers and leading to disputes between central and local authorities causing inefficient decision making and services provided to local communities. Although elected local popular councils are present at the different local levels, the hierarchy system within the elected and appointed local councils in addition to the non-defined roles and responsibilities represent the root cause of its ineffectiveness. (The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), 2004) adds that despite the importance of the democratic character of local government, the regime's policies are proceeding in the opposite direction. Thus we are dealing with a quasi-governmental body whose membership is monopolized by ruling party members.

The main problems in this regard can thus be summarized as following:

- Inconsistency of decisions taken by central authorities involved in the implementation of local plans including Ministry of housing, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Local development.
- Vague rules and regulations connecting plans to budgets and implementation mechanisms on different planning scales.

- Overlapped and poorly defined roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in development.
- Lack of incentives for decentralization at the central level and thus holding back attempts for local units empowerment.
- Lack of local authorities power creating a gap between the end-user / citizens and decision making
- Corruption and manipulation of the system
- Lack of local capacity within governmental agencies
- Stakeholders involvement is not efficiently adopted; in many cases applied only in first phases of data collection and analysis then decisions are taken centrally afterwards.

4.3. CENTRALIZED FINANCING

The second key challenge to the application of the strategic plans is the financing problem. Although fiscal decentralization efforts began in the early 1990's with the economic system reform, state control over the public sector's finances remained highly centralized and concentrated; all financial requests from lower government are to be approved by the central ministries and other central administration units—by the Ministry of Finance and approved by the Cabinet and Parliament as part of the annual budget process.(Boex, 2011).Figure 6 illustrates the main financial constraints to successful decentralization in Egypt. This results in the lack of local authorities to adopt the projects decided in the plans since they have no financial control over their budgets or investment opportunities.

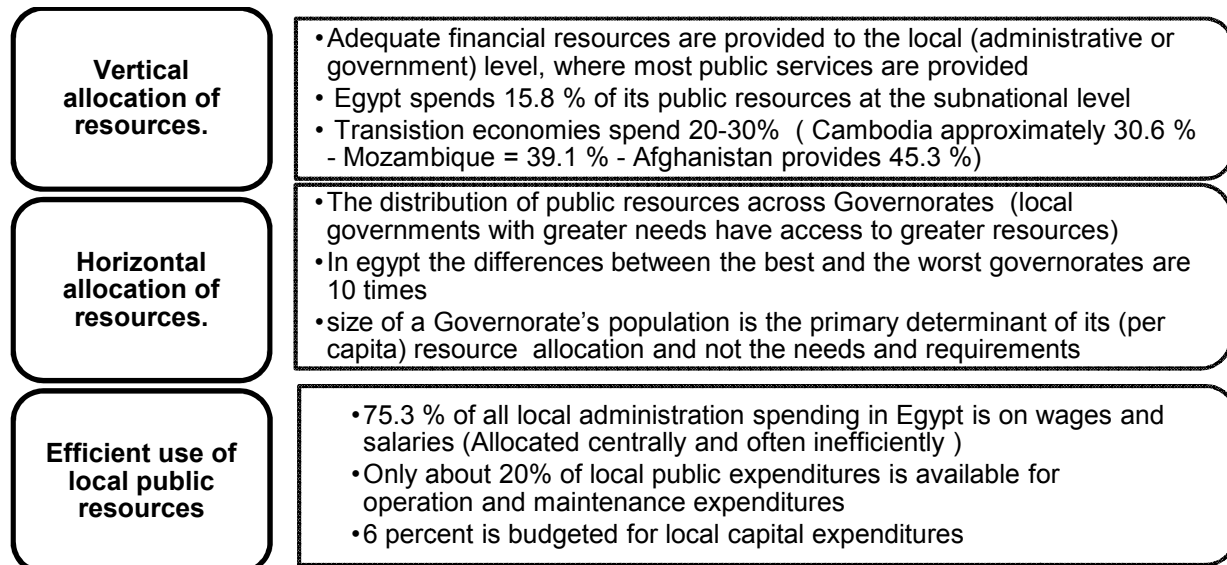


Figure 6 : Main financial constraints to successful decentralization in Egypt (Researcher analysis based on (Boex, 2011))

4.4. POOR DATABASING

The absence of accurate, updated and systemized database for raw data needed in strategic planning represents also a core challenge to the process. Data collection phase often acquires longer durations than assigned in order to create the basic database. This also links to the governance problems reflected in the central government need for data basing, and their use of strategic plans to achieve this need. Secondly is the lack of local capacity that could maintain and update the data collected by the strategic plan through electronic systems and GIS formats. Accordingly, so much time is spent in collecting very detailed data to create a database that will already be inaccurate by the end of the project leading to the next important challenge of time lag between planning and implementation.

5. REVOLUTIONARY URBAN PLANNING IN EGYPT

It is concluded from the previous sector that the urban planning process in Egypt –represented in the strategic planning approach- is in need for revolutionizing itself. The system -as it is- has proven inefficiency and thus changes should be introduced internally and externally.

5.1. CONCEPTUAL SHIFT

When thinking about the changes required to improve the planning process, it is important to start with the basic idea and concept of planning. Importing global trends that are already aging shall first pass through a filtering conceptual stage to decide whether this system is the most efficient and sustainable approach. In their latest vision to the changing world, (O'Donovan and Flower, 2013) believes that what is necessary today is a *strategy* that breaks free of static plans to be adaptive and directive, that emphasizes learning and control, and that reclaims the value of strategic thinking. Accordingly conceptual shift of the existing paradigm should take place to transfer predictions to experiments, data collection to pattern recognition, and top down execution to execution by the whole.

This leads to the conclusion that the strategic plan paradigm –as we know it- is degenerating; a new trend calling for 'adaptive planning' is thus evolving.

5.2. EXTERNAL SCHEME

These are the changes regarding the urban policy and management environment; where administrative, fiscal and political decentralization should be applied by Law. Providing incentives and means of implementation for the central government is a key issue.

5.2.1. GOOD GOVERNANCE

(The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), 2004) suggests that "People's councils need to be at the top of the system, a strong partner, rather than a weak partner. They need to hold power at the local level, extract resources, and be the main driver of local operations." Accordingly local budgeting and resources should be revised creating new opportunities for local financing and true contribution for development, in addition to creating sound market plans for outcome projects to involve various investment sectors and enable local authorities to manage the process.

Also transparency and sustainability of the governing system shall increase cohesiveness and the hierarchy of planning from national to local and village levels aiming at achieving basic principles of *good governance*.

5.2.2. GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY BUILDING AND DATA BASING

Two linked issues that should be addressed in parallel are the capacity building and data basing. Capacity building for central government shall aim at understanding their roles and responsibilities, to comprehend the factual goals of strategic planning and thus facilitate the process and to effectively play its role in national planning and management. Local authorities shall be empowered and enabled to also play its vital role, it should thus be able to create the link between the people and the different stakeholders and perform their public awareness role. Local authorities shall have required capacities to collect, maintain and update databases to facilitate decision making and feedback cycles.

5.3. INTERNAL SCHEME

These are suggestion for the strategic planning process itself; or the changes that are recommended internally to better achieve the aspired goals.

As the complexity of our physical and social systems make the world more unpredictable, we have to abandon our focus on predictions and shift into rapid prototyping and experimentation so that we learn quickly about what actually works (O'Donovan and Flower, 2013). Thus instead of creating plans and sticking to it; we should define a direction and test it. (Mintzberg, 1994a) claims that the whole process should loosen up and edging its formality to cope up with the external interacting factors.

Accordingly in this new form, the planner role shifts from deciding the strategy to serving and contributing around the strategy making process. Supplying with analysis, broaden considerations, and act as the catalyst that support strategy making, finally they can be programmers of a strategy; helping to specify the series of concrete steps to carry out the vision (Mintzberg, 1994a).

This strategy making is an immensely complex process which involves the most sophisticated, subtle, and at times subconscious elements of human thinking. (Mintzberg, 1994a)

THE CASCADE OF STRATEGIC CHOICES:



Figure 7: Basic proposed structure for the proposed strategic approach (O'Donovan and Flower, 2013)

This approach is alternatively suggested by (Bishop and Williams, 2012) as the new emerging approach that reconsiders the contemporary *in favor of a more dynamic, fluid approach* which “See Click Fix”. Temporary Urbanism Initiative has thus begun to emerge and even applied in the long-term master planning as in London's Royal Docks project in addition to Washington, D.C., which is ahead of the curve. (Lepeska, 2012)

(Schramm, 2013) concluded from his analysis of the mis functioning planning trends that we need “*proto-dynamic*” plans for cities that draws an economic path leading to self-sustenance; the urban plans of the future have to combine the capacity first to encourage a city's entire population.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the discussions that strategic planning as we know it is currently degenerating while a new –still unclear- paradigm is taking over. It is questionable if the Egyptian urban environment is currently capable of embracing such a major shift with its existing capacities. However, Egyptian people have succeeded to surprise the world throughout history, and are now expected to revolutionize its policies and approaches as well.

The New Revolutionized urban planning in Egypt shall conceptually be base upon adopting external schemes of good governance concepts; and internal shift in paradigms from long term plans to a more adaptive, inclusive and flexible planning process. Plans and reports shall be transformed to actions and testing which is expected to save resources and see changes.

Further research should draw a clear roadmap for the process change; identifying carefully what the new process should be like and the institutional and financial steps required for adopting it, additionally learning from experiences adopting new trends in urbanism shall also be studied for possible learning and application in the Egyptian context.

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