Participatory Urban Planning Approaches in the Arab Region - Case Studies: City Development Strategy (CDS) in Aleppo and Alexandria (2003-2010)

Participatory urban planning approaches (PUPAs) are seen as key methodological tools to develop plans and strategies that can help in alleviating urban poverty and improving urban planning and governance. Given that, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the PUPAs adopted and implemented in the Arab cities to define the challenges that led to the weak impacts of these approaches in the examined cities and to identify their potentials for improvement in the future. Yet, adopting PUPAs in restrictive political and institutional settings like the ones in the Arab region proved to be ineffective, either in improving urban planning and governance or in including urban citizens in planning decision-making processes.

This research examines PUPAs in the City Development Strategies of two big cities in the Arab region between 2003 and 2010: Alexandria in Egypt and Aleppo in Syria. The research investigates whether PUPAs are adopted and supported by the institutional and legal framework in the cities under study and whether they are implemented successfully. For this purpose, the research identifies first the challenges and successes in implementing PUPAs in the two cities based on an in-depth analysis of the structures and actors of governance and planning. Second, it explores the effects of the PUPAs on the participatory process and vice versa.

The main findings of the research have shown that PUPAs can only be effective when the political, institutional, and social contexts are supporting participation, which is lacking in the two examined cities. Yet, the different PUPAs implemented in these cities indicate that local actors and planners have a great potential for developing innovative communication strategies and participatory mechanisms that could have positive impacts on urban planning, urban governance, and the society."