BUILDING AN INTERACTIVE COMMUNITY

By
MOHAMMED ALAA ADEL MANDOUR
M.Sc. Degree in Architecture
(Cairo University/Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1992)

Thesis submitted to the
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in Partial Fulfillment of the degree of
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in
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Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University
Department of Architecture

September, 1999

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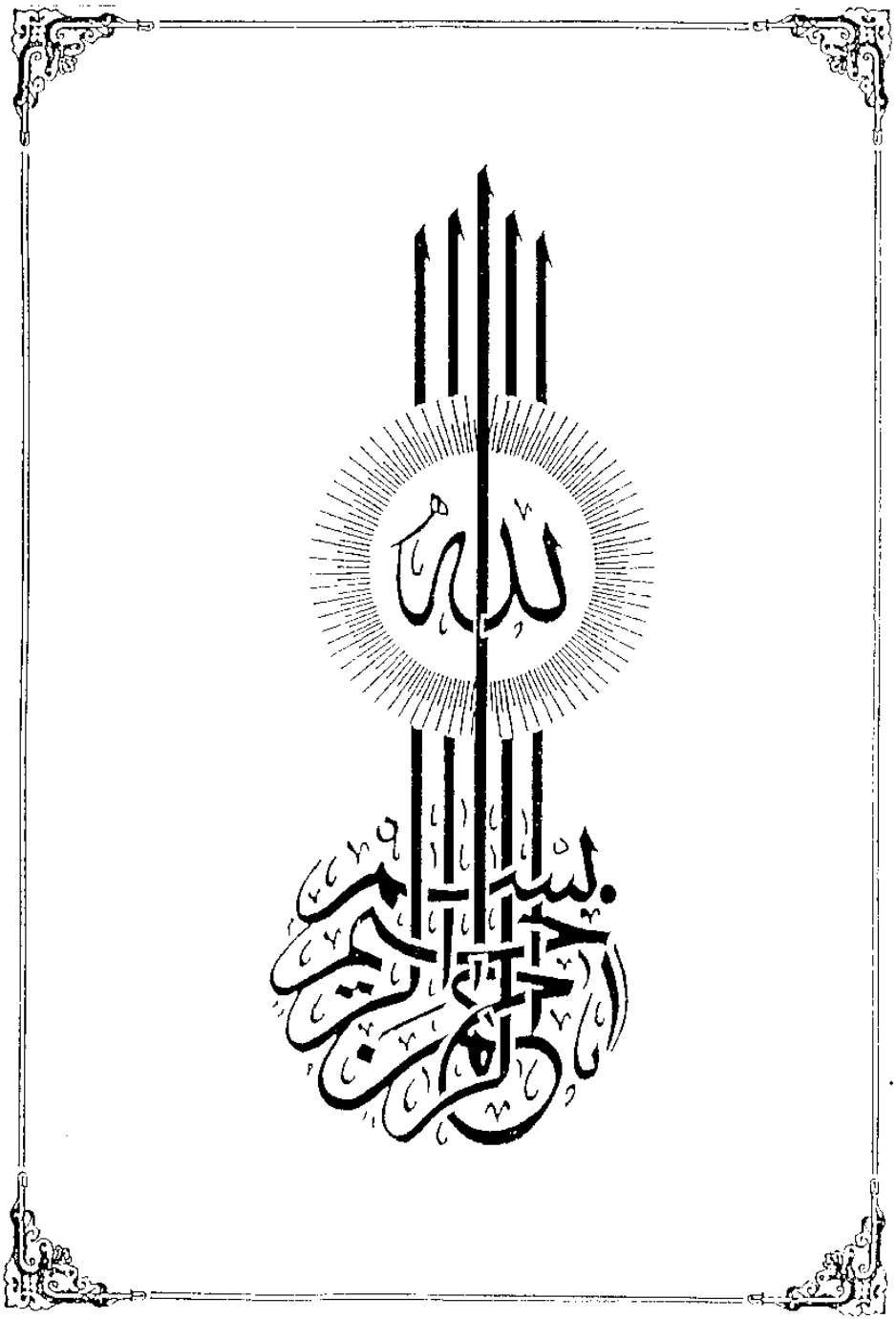

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BUILDING AN INTERACTIVE COMMUNITY

Abstract

Building an Interactive Community is a community-based process in design, and development, which enables programs for neighborhood upgrading to be prepared and implemented locally collaboratively and quickly. It is a process for 'going to scale ' based on building the capability locally to manage and act upon decision. as well as implement project work.

Its methods are neither proscriptive nor prescriptive of either contact or procedure, and leave much room for improvisation. Instead, they provide structure for making decision-marks; a process which can be accessed at any one of its stages, setting priorities, working out general strategies or preparing for implementation. The starting point, in other words, is largely dependent on local circumstances and objective.

Implicit, however, is an approach which is largely problem-driven and where each action in turn identifies subsequent actions, building the programmed as one proceeds, rather than as pre-emptive or pre-packaged.

In this way, local participants can contribute not only to the content, but also to the structure of the program. Only the broadest of intentions (or policies) are brought to the site from the top, and subsequently crafted into workable programs from the bottom. The Method is a process, which seeks to build linkages between local and central needs (or between local programs and national policies) and so to reach consensus among participants on priorities, as well as appropriate courses of action and government intervention.

We now know that urban low-income settlements are usually both resourceful and problematic. However, while we do have substantial knowledge about the dynamics of these settlements, we do not as yet have a sound theory about practice. Therefore, in the proposed Method, four assumptions are made on which the methods are built: Problems of implementation arise not so much because people locally lack information or skills, but because they lack an adequate framework for articulating and prioritizing problem, defining solutions, and building consensus and partnership; Not enough mediation takes place between public and privet organizations and between funders and implementers and policies and projects; There are not enough incentives for local production, with preference still for centralized and standard solution as basis for mass production and not enough learning takes place, and even when it does, usually takes too long to find its way back into mainstream of practice and usually winds up in thick reports that no one knows quite how to use.

A further assumption is the underling issue in project upgrading of 'going to scale' and three key principles are suggested for achieving this: more variety; more participation; and more learning.

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This study is directed to those who are responsible for the management and implementation of small-scale community-based upgrading programs. It is a tool with which to craft these programming and design of such programs.

Interactive community processes have been used in many fields before, and have no pretensions that what is presented is fundamentally new or unique. Community participation has long been theorized, but few examples of strong successes exist.

This work has focused on bringing theory to practice, and the associated methods, which make it, work at the community scale. Little documentation, which makes explicit these techniques, and in mind: to bring examples and suggestions for community-based programs.

This material is prepared specifically to elicit response and discussion. Rather than to instruct. The question is not whether these methods are than are good or bad, or different, or any better than anyone else's. More useful, do they contain ideas which can be carried forward and built upon.

This study describes the theory and practice of the proposed method of planning. The first part the theoretical basis to the approach is mapped, and its assumptions and objectives in the context of current trends are clarified. The second part, the methods are illustrated in practice, through a community based workshop undertaken in Nasyria, a low income community in Aswan, to track the implementation of one sample program. The final part is included in full as the research base for who wants to carry out their own workshops.

In this respect, a number of questions remain unanswered. Are the results any more effective from any other project? Or, if not, do the means employed offer greater equity or efficiency, or are they any more cost-effective? Has the money and effort been better directed with this method than without it? Does the consensus building process, which we do by first inducing a convergence of interests and later a convergence of interpretation about where the real problems or opportunities lie, better direct our interventions? Do they unlock ideas and solutions, which may otherwise remain hidden? Does the spirit of co-operation establish between professionals, government, community, and health workers, add up to doing anything?.

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