

Urban Management: an introductory note

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The world population living in cities is growing steadily. This is remarkable in developing countries where urbanisation processes create a landscape configured by networks of mid-sized cities and growing number of 'plus million cities' that pose unprecedented challenges to local governments. Additionally global and regional economic development processes are affecting the viability and competitiveness of local economies that ultimately challenges the future of urban agglomerations as a place to live, work and leisure. For years one camp of the international debate on urbanisation has pointed at the adverse effects of urbanisation, the environmental impacts, congestion, the diseconomies and the absorption of national investments by cities as their argument in favour of policies focusing on rural development. Despite all the attention given and years of practice of this paradigm cities continued to grow. Fortunately, from the 1990's onwards it has been acknowledged that cities are an engine of development and play a fundamental role in macro-economic development if properly governed, managed and planned. Furthermore, the United Nations conferences on Environment (Rio 1992) and Habitat (Istanbul 1996) reinforced the importance of cities in the solution of major global environmental problems underscoring the axiom "think globally and act locally". These conferences helped to promote the principles of decentralisation, civil society participation, partnerships, tenure regularisation and the right to housing among other equally important issues.

The growing awareness about the role of cities in national development reinforces the increasing international interest for urban management that actually started from late 1980's onwards. For a country like Egypt – where the population is concentrated in only nearly 5% of its territory resulting into very compact cities¹ surrounded by desert and/or essential arable land that provides food to its population – urban management becomes a function of the sustainability of the country as a whole. The management of urban growth and the actual planning of cities in such a condition require a pro-active local government, well-trained staff, policy instruments and the availability of funds among other things that in fact will determine the chances of a sound urban environment for future generations of Egyptians. The present study on Belbeis is just one of the many case study research which were carried out within the framework of the TRHUD project during the last 5 years in support to the development of post graduation training programmes addressed to Egyptian professionals and public officials. It is intended to document and disclose local urban management practices and unveil locally coined solutions for problems that affect the majority of Egypt's urban centres.

***What is urban management?*ⁱⁱ**

Urban management is defined as a set of instruments, activities, tasks and functions that assures that a city can function. That one gets water at home, that a road can transport goods and people, that land is provided for various activities essential for its residents, that public interest is safeguarded against individual and firms' interests and that repairs are carried out on infrastructure networks before it starts affecting people's life. Urban management assures that basic urban

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services are provided for the population and the various private, public and community stakeholders to perform and maximise their intrinsic roles in a harmonic manner. Urban management facilitates co-ordinated efforts although interests among these actors are not always convergent meaning that conflict resolution is an essential part of it. Efficiency, efficacy and equity in the distribution of resources and public investments generated from within the city and to be reverted into its further development is the basis of urban management.

To achieve the targets outlined above local governments must possess instruments that allows it to arbitrate these conflicts, mobilise efforts and take advantage from the capacities, potentials and creativity that exist among its constituents to forge sustainable and equitable local development processes. Only then local government will be able to assume its leading an enabling roles in the planning and management of urban growth establishing strategic public-private-community partnerships particularly for the tasks which it does not possess all the means and resources.

Daveyⁱⁱⁱ, affirms that urban management refers to policies, plans, programs and practices that try to assure that population growth is matched by access to infrastructure, housing and employment. The access to these services depends very much on the initiatives of the private sector which are affected by policies of the public sector and by functions that only local governments are eligible to carry out. In some countries sole responsibilities defined by national constitutions. But experiences in various countries show that public sector alone is not capable to fulfil its constituent role. Public-private partnerships - PPP in the supply, management and maintenance of public services are becoming popular urban management instrument especially because of the problems derived from budget restrictions, decreasing revenues and cuts in public sector expenditures and the search for the efficiency that private sector seems to offer. Different forms of privatisation and concessions are on the order of the day particularly in public transport, solid waste management, electricity and water supply where measurable individual consumption can be translated into tariffs and costs.

The structure, roles, tasks and functions of local governments and the way responsibilities are assigned to different agencies and departments directly affect the quality and efficiency of urban management. Equally the capacity, quantity and quality of human, material, financial and legal resources without which it will be unable to exercise governance over the city will ultimately result into poorly or well-established urban management processes. Last but not least, the way local governments relate to central and state/provincial governments and community organisations, and the way local interests are represented in the organisation and implementation of public policies altogether affect positively or negatively urban management practice. The participation of civil society organisations in public policy formulation and implementation is becoming increasingly important in contemporary urban management in countries emerging from centralised and authoritarian regimes like Brazil, South Africa, Philippines and many countries of Eastern Europe. Actually all these factors form the basic pre-requisites of urban governance.

Despite local diversities in terms of legislation and political structures there is a global trend towards the transfer of administrative, political and financial responsibilities to local governments in a number of areas of activity. This is associated with structural reforms in central governments and the gradual retreat of the State from productive sectors. An increasing number of countries are pursuing this policy. The rationale is to bring decision making and problem solving in the city as close as possible to citizens and their area of residence redirecting information, public-citizen interface and provision of certain services down to the district and neighbourhood levels.

In Egypt, there is a number of legislation enacted that provides avenues for local governments to act more 'autonomously'. Project experiences in Alexandria, Ismailia, Aswan and Giza show that

problems of informal urbanisation and poor environmental conditions can be tackled in a creative and relative successful manner. On the basis of reporting of participants attending the various courses conducted by UTI within the framework of the TRHUD project we depict a wealth of experiences in smaller cities that unfortunately remain undocumented and not shared by a wide public. One of the objectives of this publication on Belbeis is exactly to fill this gap and disseminate to wider public the challenges, the opportunities and the actual experience in managing a mid-sized city in Egypt with the characteristics of Belbeis.

This publication is the result of a comprehensive field research, data collection and institutional analysis carried out by Azza Sirry who was responsible for preparing and conducting the study and the reporting thereafter. Sirry's tireless and continuous endurance during the research project was the engine and the inspiring force that resulted into this publication now being shared by a wider public outside the TRHUD project.

The primary objective of the case study researches of TRHUD is to describe, analyse and document Egyptian experiences that will ultimately produce training support materials for the training programmes developed and implemented through the TRHUD project. The goal is to highlight processes, institutional arrangements, approaches and lessons learned so that the curriculum and the training program are locally bound and meaningful to the Egyptian participants who come from different governorates, private, public and non-governmental organisations. Practical exercises as well as field visits have been organised to and with the government of Belbeis. The support and facilitation of the local government and its staff must be acknowledged and appreciated. Without their support it would be difficult to access the information and to unveil local experiences and describe how solutions were coined.

The final publication and editing must be credited to Sameh Wahba who carefully analysed the final research report as well as all available materials, documentation, photographs and maps generated by the research and other relevant references. The result is a coherent text that depicts all dimensions and findings of the case study research. Without his work this study would remain restricted to the TRHUD project and the participants who attend the courses at UTI.

ⁱ Acioly, Claudio, 'Guided densification' in Brazil versus informal compactness in Egypt: can urban management provide a pathway to a sustainable city", in R. Burgess and M. Jenks (eds) *Compact Cities: Sustainable Urban Forms in Developing Countries*, UK, Spon Press. (pp. 127-140).

ⁱⁱ This is drawn from the article by C. Acioly, 'Note on Governance and Urban Management in Brazil', in 'Cities Made by People' Volume II, A. Hartkoorn (ed), Coplan, Tirana, Albania, 2000. (pp. 59-72)

ⁱⁱⁱ Kenneth J. Davey, "Elements of Urban Management", *Urban Management Programme Discussion Paper No.11*, UNCHS/World Bank, 1993.