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ABSTRACT

Apartments in walkups or housing blocks are invariably used in most large scale public housing developments in Egypt. Users living in stacked "layers" of developments are denied contact with landscapes, and open spaces. There are many, worldwide examples, where large scale housing developments (private & public) were not restricted to walk ups and elevated apartments and effectively used single family houses on plots (eg. row houses, town houses, etc). These projects allowed the users the identified house unit and private plots and hence direct contact with the ground and maximum accessibility to roads and open spaces.

This paper points out the apparent merits and key factors that justify the selection of apartment blocks by most officials and professionals in Egypt and developing nations. It then critically questions the wisdom of those merits and calls for further investigation and comparative evaluation of houses on plots versus stereotype apartment blocks in large scale low cost housing developments in Egypt and similar contexts.
ABSTRACT

This paper looks into the physical aspects of the process of Shelter Enablement, i.e. enabling those in need to self-shelter. Hence it does not accept, from the outset, the prevailing policies, actions and products, related to shelter provision in most developing nations. It also accepts not the inherent, notion that, the shelterless or the "bottom" demand groups are mere receivers of completed shelters, produced by governments, central agencies or "external" philanthropists. This is by no means a (categorical) rejection of the roles of formal institutions in shelter provision, as there exists an urgent need for their contributions in low cost housing & shelter programmes.

Their role however should be confined to the development frameworks and settings for communities to self-help. Such frameworks and positive contexts comprise: development policies objectives and goals, selection of the appropriate development plans to achieve them and related development sites .. etc.

Central agencies and formal institutions in effective enablement scenarios are not mere producers of shelters (whose success is synonymous to the quantities produced). But more appropriately they are to act as enablers, organizers, guides and catalysts in the shelter drive. This shift in roles and responsibilities is related to the current phase of theory & practice of housing the poor in developing nations (i.e. third wave), where the fulcrum is effective community participation.

This work reviews the roles and interrelations between the architect-planner and the shelterless community (or low-cost housing demand groups) and stresses the need for its modification to secure better and effective shelter processes.

It also emphasizes a number of notions to minimize the cost of shelter (or minimal house units), and equally to close the gap between users' affordability and the cost of shelter and its setting. Topmost among key elements to achieve such objectives are: the macro-context of shelter projects (features and potentials), location of shelter projects together with appropriate forms of shelter and sites.
Territorial and communal identity realization and enhancement is among key planning objectives in the development of human settlements and housing areas.

Many works attempted to address the features & determinants of the interrelation of: individuals, community & locale. Theories on and proposals for optimum size of settlements and urban enclaves were envisaged as means & solutions to the delicate relations and needs of individuals & communities in post-industrial urban settings.

The physical expression of the above notions attempted to revitalize traditional rural settlements and to use its features as bases for the form of basic planning units in contemporary cities and large urban areas. Typical rural settlements combined the merits of clear identity & borders, limited scale and autonomy, hence they were thought appropriate to accommodate homogeneous groups and integrated communities.

The famous-most among these physical expressions, attempting to create a man's domain in the motorized cities of the 20th century is undoubtedly the neighbourhood. The applications of the neighbourhood concept in the West and in developing nations highlighted many shortcomings and relative drawbacks. The most important of which is: the confusion in determining the optimum size of the neighbourhood between the criteria for optimum community facilities provision on one hand and territorial identification and homogeneity of communities on the other.

This paper points out the conflicting two sets of determinants and suggests means of easing the crash, through the adoption of alternative basic planning units and hierarchy.

The work also reviews the authors' approach and proposals used in developing the concept & development plans for an Egyptian New Settlement, New Farafra, Western Desert – to highlight guidelines for securing territorial and communal identity. The paper comprises four sections: an introduction, on factors affecting spatial organization of general urban areas, on form of residential areas and basic planning units and form generation of the New Farafra settlement. The paper also includes a limited list of selected works by the author’s and others that may help in elaborating the highlighted notions and proposed guidelines.
ABSTRACT

The conception and notions of Urban Design overlaps and mixes (even among the specialists) with those of architecture and urban or physical planning. This may be attributed to the novelty of the subject, to the inadequacy of its applications and equally to the attitudes towards urban aesthetics and visual qualities in the processes of comprehensive & physical development in 3rd world countries.

This paper looks into the conception and relative importance of urban design and stresses its weight in architectural and urban development in limited resources settings. It points out the inherent relations between urban design and local identity of communities and the society at large. The paper also re-examines the widely accepted fallacy that Urban Design is a costly element in development drives and stresses that the real cost developing nations can not afford is its absence.

The discourse comprises three related sections on: urban Design, its relative importance and urban design in development. It is also supported by a brief list of selected readings and representative graphics.
The cultural crisis - similar to that of some of its closest realms, components & products (i.e. architecture and built forms & environs) - is clearly manifested in the absence of rational dialogue and communications between concerned parties, i.e. between the intellectuals and the public (and even within each faction).

Lack of communications is in turn clearly reflected in the disagreement that extends from definitions & terminology to conceptions and principles, and hence in the absence of common grounds and the vocabulary needed to span the differences, in cultural settings.

This results in two key features characterizing development contexts in developing countries, namely:

- The disappearance of comprehensive cultural and societal frameworks that encompasses, goals & objectives, aspirations and potentials of the community and reflects its character and identity.
- The withdrawal of key issues into the confinement of intellectuals’ spheres and away from the grass roots and their concerns.

The notion and streams of "Post Modernism" in architecture and urbanism effectively readdressed the critical issues of local identity, contextual design and community participation.

This resulted in the emergence of local cultures as a key factor in delineating contextual architecture and environs.

This work looks in a purposeful sequence, into: the conceptions of local culture and civilization, then to architectural heritage and finally to urban character - to confirm the proposition that, the way out of the present crisis in architectural expression in limited resources setting (the South or developing nations) is closely linked to the committed understanding of local cultures and to respecting their determinants (including architectural heritage & local character) in development drives.