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THE "HARAH" REVIVED, AN EGYPTIAN PLANNING UNIT.

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THE "HARAH" REVIVED - AN EGYPTIAN PLANNING UNIT ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF BASIC PLANNING UNITS IN EGYPTIAN NEW TOWNS.

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ABSTRACT

Egypt's new towns experience is among the most ambitious in the development programmes of 3rd world countries. Adopted since the early 1970's as one of the strategies to combat the complexities of under development problems engulfing its urban settlements and structure.

New communities were envisaged as means of directing development towards the desert (96% of the country's area), to provide self contained settlements and to absorb the excess urban population estimated to total 16 millions by the year 2000.

Twelve major new towns were planned and carefully located outside the Nile valley. They are currently at various stages of development. The new towns are characterized by relatively high target population figures (of the order of 120 000 - 1000 000 persons). They enjoy mixed economic bases and should provide work, shelter, community facilities and better living environments to their inhabitants.

A central issue in the physical planning and spatial organization of those large settlements was the basic planning unit: the Neighbourhood or the human sector, i.e. the clearly defined physical entity dominated by man.

The Egyptian New Towns, invariably accepted the concept of hierarchy of social units in their physical structure, with many adopting the "Western" morphology and conception of the neighbourhood as a basic planning unit. A number of the new town studies questioned the validity and appropriateness of the neighbourhood as a planning unit and critically evaluated its components and basic assumptions, and advocated modifications and transformations, to suit the Egyptian development context.

This paper looks into the application of the neighbourhood concept in Egyptian New Towns experience, and critically addresses its appropriateness as a basic planning unit in the light of two closely related issues, namely; local identity and community realization & community facilities provision and locations.
The discourse comprises three consecutive sections:
1- On basic planning units, an introduction and contextual reservations.
2- Basic planning units in Egyptian new communities – Selected conceptions and related forms.
3- On basic planning units; Development guidelines.

1.1 Basic Planning Units

The urbanization explosion in the wake of industrial and technical revolutions and the related changes in the features and structure of urban areas (existing and newly developed) in terms of: scale, components, circulation & population (size, profiles and needs) – made basic planning units a must for managing the complexities of the expanding man made environments on one hand and the well being of the residents on the other.

Basic planning units is a loosely defined term that encompasses social and physical social and physical connotations, It is deeply rooted in the theory and practice of physical planning in this century, though its origins and conceptions date back to earlier attempts to humanize man’s habitat in the aftermath of industrial revolution.

The neighbourhood is the traditional and widely accepted realization of basic planning units in twentieth century urbanism. The features of the neighbourhood were clearly delineated in the early decades of this century and were invariably sustained since.

The neighbourhood was conceived as a well defined geographical area, with the elementary school as its nucleus, a population that requires and enough to support that school, an area governed by walking distance (optimum or maximum) to the school and other facilities and a chain of community facilities (commercial, religious, recreational, social, public etc). Another key factor in the structure and form of neighbourhood units was the circulation network and movement patterns, characterized by the exclusion of through traffic, segregation of man and cars together with maximum provision for walking and cycling, Gallion (13).

The neighbourhood unit emerged in the west and was developed as a relatively low density (25 families/hectare), large area (some 60 - 70 hectares), with homogeneous population of the order of 3000 - 12000 residents. A unit from which the city may be constructed and contains an urban population with basic common needs for education, recreation and other community facilities. Its size and design are determined by the features and standards of these facilities, Gallion (13), Blowers (1). The New Towns Commission, Britain, adopted the neighbourhood units enthusiastically as an essential element in the creation of new communities, Blowers (1). The American Institute of Architects in 1972 adopted the neighbourhood unit as the recommended "growth unit" for future urban growth - a unit that comprises some 500 - 3000 dwellings (170010000 residents), (13).

The social aspects of the neighbourhood were simultaneously recognized and simply expressed as: the neighbourhood is people" (they are who really make it up), as it is" the smallest denomination within the city for effective expression of civic conciousness". (13).

Furthermore the idea of a basic planning unit has been related to other social frameworks, topmost among which is the conceptualization of community (as the
neighbourhood is - in essence - modeled after rural settlements which in turn is based on the tribe or extended family).

Walker (22) pointed out that till recently most people made most of their contacts within an area governed by walking distance - a village was a genuine social unit.

To many the neighbourhood unit offered a panacea for social problems related to urbanization. Blowes (1). The neighbourhood as a basic planning unit may be regarded as an integral part of the urban ecological system that encompasses a much larger urban area. It may also be seen as a social organization concept i.e. the geographic clusters of persons with similar socio-economic, cultural and ethnic characteristics, Wilson (23).

The conception of clustering and urban enclaves was further unfolded by Rapoport (19) who pointed out that "the process of clustering of like people in cities ... a process of inclusion and exclusion, of establishing boundaries and stressing social identity."

The neighbourhood may thus be looked at as a particular type of homogeneous areas, small and well defined, an enclave of people, that provides an intermediate physical environment between the individual and the larger heterogeneous group.

Clustering and local homogeneity is particularly important when the overall homogeneity of the macro setting is low.

Chermayeff & Alexander (3) in an earlier attempt at the anatomy of urbanism suggested two means for the organization of man-made environments, namely:
- Distinct articulation of activities into appropriately structured zones, and
- The organization of these separated zones into hierarchial structure, which is an important feature of any complex form.

The neighbourhood or the widely acclaimed basic planning unit served both levels, it provided a distinct expression of clustering of homogeneous socio-economic & cultural groups, accommodated the basic community facilities they need, tamed the car and restricted its movement and allowed a rational hierarchial structure for large settlements.

It was invariably adopted, under various names (e.g. the sector, human sector & local unit .. etc ) by leading architects and planners as the most suitable planning module in construction and upgrading 20th century settlements and existing urban areas. (1), (13). ( See also Doxiadis, human sector (5)).

1.2 Contextual Reservations - with reference to developing countries.

The neighbourhood concept was also adopted in manipulating urban settlements existing and new - in developing countries, it was carried out by local and western planners and architects, with its basic assumptions, morphology and formal expressions unchanged.

The need for clustering and residents identity, access to services and restricting cars invasion into man's domain remain generally accepted objectives in developing mans habitat in 3rd world countries but there are other socio-cultural, economic and physical determinants that remain ignored or underrated in the morphology and implementation of the neighbourhood unit, hence reflect on its appropriateness as a suitable basic planning unit in those contexts.

In Egypt traditional physical expressions of clustering and urban enclaves remained a distinct feature of urban settlements since the Arab conquest (seventh century A.D.) and till the French expedition at the end of the 18th century.

The basic planning unit or urban enclave was "Al Darb", a quarter that comprised a hierarchy of alley ways and provided a well defined physical
FIG. 1.1
Fatimide Cairo (Medieval), The Urban Fabric With A Typical Harah Setting Highlighted.

FIG. 1.2
A Typical Harah Compound: Aldarb Alasfar, Fatimide Cairo, Egypt.

FIG. 1
Traditional Urban Enclaves, Cairo, Egypt.

1- TENTH RAMADAN
2- SADAT M.C.
3- M. AMERYAH C.
4- SIX OCTOBER M.C.
5- AMAL M.C.
6- OBOUR M.C.
7- SHATTAH M.S.
8- M. MEMYAH C.

FIG. 2
Egyptian New Communities Locations - The Selected Sample
environment for a homogeneous community, Fig. 1. 

The "Hara" or the alleyway presented a lower level and a more vivid expression of urban enclaves, closed or open ended, narrow and relatively short. (2 - 6 metres wide and some 50 - 150 m. long) and comprises a limited number of plots and dwelling units (15 - 60 units) together with essential services. It also provided a clearly defined physical entity and an urban module, (See also El Sioufi (7)), Fig. 1.

Rapoport (19) recognized the socio-physical fabric of Arab cities and indicated that they "had quarters within which people bound together by ties of language, religion, occupation, family and common origin ... a traditional Moslem city may thus be looked at as a collection of homogeneous areas".

There are many reservations on the adoption of the western neighbourhood as a basic planning unit in developing nations regardless of societal differences, local behavioural patterns & cultural variability and physical setting. This view is supported by Brolin (2) who reffering to Corbusier's functional and spatial organization of Chandigarh, India - pointed out that "the assumptions that made the success of neighbourhood in the west have not proven appropriate for India". The western concept of the elementary school as the focus for the community and concepts and organization of other service facilities (especially shopping & open spaces) did not fit the Indian context. Brolin (2) indicated that 98% of school children in a given sector went to schools outside it, and that income is (unlike the West) not the catalyst for neighbourliness (See also Blowers (1)).

The main reservations that may be raised against the appropriateness of the neighbourhood unit as a basic planning unit in Egypt and other developing countries may be summarized as follows:

- The primary (elementary) school is the catalyst for social interactions and integration in Egypt. There are many types of schools and education streams within the general education system. School selection is by no means confined to proximity to home or distance.

- Similar reservations apply to other basic community facilities, e.g. shopping is preferred where comparison & choice are possible and competition between shop keepers is evident.

- Once proximity is not the criterion governing the relation between users and community facilities, walking distance is a meaningless factor in defining an urban enclave.

- The size of an urban enclave for maximum human contacts, social interactions and feelings of belonging to territorial or a social group - synonymous to small primary groups in rural areas and pre-industrial urban quarters - is much smaller than the neighbourhood both in terms of area and population.  

(See also Blowers (1)).

2 - Basic Planning Units in Egyptian New Communities - Selected Conceptions and Related Forms.

Egypt's experience in developing new communities is among the most ambitious in third world nations. Since the mid seventies and till now, a large number of new settlements were envisaged, planned and initiated. These represented a major part of the many fold development strategy to face the country's rapid urbanization and population explosion.

The new settlements are predominantly self contained and provide shelter, work and service facilities to their residents - and located outside the densely populated fertile strip (the Nile Valley and its Delta) bisecting the large
stretches of Egyptian arid land. They considerably vary in population targets, area, conception, economic base and implementation strategies.

In this section, the physical structure and hierarchy of basic planning units in a carefully selected sample of Egyptian new settlements is reviewed and comparative analysis of the conceptions and morphology of the adopted basic units is presented. Furthermore the merits and drawbacks of the various forms of planning units are highlighted together with attempts to modify the neighbourhood conception and improve its fitness to local setting are highlighted.

From the dozen or so Egyptian major new settlements studies completed during the past decade, eight were selected for review. They cover the various categories and features of new settlements and represent the consecutive phases of new town developments studies (i.e. early phase 1976-79, the middle phase 1979-1981 & the 3rd phase 1982 - 86). The selected eight new settlements may be classified as follows, Fig. 2.

- Independent New Cities, 10th Ramadan (500 000 population), Sadat New City (500 000) & New Ameriyah City (500 000) belong to the early phase.

- Greater Cairo Region New Towns, 6th October (350 000), Amal (250 000) & El Obour (240 000), belong to the middle and 3rd phases.

- Twin settlements or desert extensions of existing cities (physically separated and self contained), New Menyah City (120 000), 3rd phase.

- Small settlements (satellitess), New Shattah (350 000), 3rd phase.

The review is supported by a set of maps illustrating the hierarchial structure of each of the eight settlements together with details of the basic planning units, components & enclaves, Figures 2 - 10.

Table 1 summarizes the features of the eight settlement and comparatively points out:

- population target, classification of settlement and phase.

- hierarchical structure, i.e. the break down into sectors, districts or communities, neighbourhoods or local areas etc.

- the basic planning unit features, including:
  - population target ranges
  - area in hectares
  - gross density residents/hectare
  - nucleus (e.g. elementary school, mosque etc).

The conventional hierarchy of planning units (i.e., sectors, districts or communities, neighbourhoods, residential groups & housing groups or clusters) was invariably followed in the structure of Egyptian new settlements with some of the upper levels units excluded according to the size of settlements. In this hierarchy of urban enclaves the neighbourhood was the focal point and treated as the basic unit, in terms of service facilities provision and morphology of urban fabric. The consecutive planning studies elaborated the structure and features of the neighbourhood and maintained a progressive awareness of the context determinants.

The three studies of the 1st generation of Egyptian new settlements, Ramadan, Sadat and Ameriyah used a conventionally structured neighbourhood as a modular brick in the hierarchical city fabric. (4), (21), (20), (17), (18). In Tenth Ramadan (4), (21), the 1st Egyptian New Town, the neighbourhood was conventional - most, western in its morphology, conception and details. A basic planning unit shaped and determined by social aspects, service structure, walking distance and the population needing an elementary school, the nucleus of the neighbourhood. It was marked by low density, large area and limited population, i.e. (4000 - 5000 residents, 25 hectare & 160 - 200 residents/ha).
FIG. 3.1
The Master Plan, Basic Planning Unit, Community & Neighbourhoods

FIG. 3.2
A Typical Neighbourhood, Residential Group Spatial Organization.

FIG. 3.3
A Typical Housing Group

FIG. 3
Tenth Ramadan New City
FIG. 4.1
The Master Plan, Basic Planning Unit: The 3 Neighbourhoods Group

FIG. 4.2
The 3 Neighbourhoods Group And The Sub-Unit, The Housing Block.

FIG. 4.3
The Housing Block, Site Plan.

FIG. 4
Sadat New City
FIG. 5.1
The Hierarchy Of Planning Units, Sectors, Districts, Neighbourhoods

FIG. 5.2
Neighbourhood 9, Site Plan: Typical Sub-Unit The Housing Block & Clusters.

FIG. 5.3
A Typical Block And Overlapping Residential Clusters (108 by 216 metres)

FIG. 5
New Ameryah City
The adopted standards were relatively high with respect to current practices and the development context.

The study recognized the importance of smaller urban enclaves and pointed out proximity as a major criterion in enhancing social interactions and associations. Two sub levels were advocated, the residential group of 150 families with a .15 hectare open space as the centre and the housing group 10 -40 families with a square metre meeting place and a play lot as the focus. (i.e. the neighbourhood comprises 6 - 8 residential groups and 30 - 40 housing groups). Fig 3 shows the hierarchy of planning units in the city master plan (i.e. communities and neighbourhoods), the structure of a typical neighbourhood Fig 3.2 & an inset illustrating spatial organization of housing groups Fig 3.3, (4), (21).

Sadat city plan (20) also adopted the neighbourhood as a basic planning unit with similar population ranges and service facilities as in Ramadan N.C. and a categorically different spatial structure. Two key features characterized the Sadat city neighbourhoods, the linear service spines combining the neighbourhood centres (and joining into community central spines) and the sub-basic planning unit: the housing block. Fig 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3.

The spinal concept marked the spatial structure with linearity, i.e. linear neighbourhood spines serving linear strips of housing blocks, each strip comprising 8 - 12 housing blocks and runs perpendicular to the neighbourhood centre. No clear definition of the neighbourhood boundaries is followed and each 3-4 neighbourhoods formed a well defined entity.

The housing block may be regarded as the planning cell of the neighbourhood, about 0.5 hectare and comprising 24 attached plots and with a central alley way as its focal or fulcrum, Fig. 4.3. The spatial structure is interesting as it practically disregarded the neighbourhood as a planning unit and replaced it by two distinct physical expressions namely: the residential planning unit comprising 3 - 4 neighbourhood" of sufficient scale to accommodate a great many housing mix and plan variations" and the intimate compact and contextually aware "housing block",(20). This early conception of the appropriate hierarchy of planning units was further developed in latter studies.

New Ameriyah City (N.A.C.), (17), (18), physical structure echoed Sadat City spinal hierarchy of service facilities and planning units, (3 sectors, 3 districts each and 8 neighbourhoods in each district), Fig 5.1. The neighbourhood was again the basis for community facilities provision programme and the theoretical planning unit (4 - 7 thousand population, and low density) Two distinct features marked the neighbourhood morphology in N.A.C., both did emerge at the detailed study stages,(18),(8),namely:
- the shift from neighbourhood spine conception to separate local centres, each serving two neighbourhoods, i.e. the community was divided into four local areas (8000 - 14000 residents each). The articulated centres were physically separated from the served areas and their influence zones overlapped. This reduced the neighbourhood into a collection of clusters and residential groups, with major roads as the only defining element of its physical identity. Fig 5.2 shows the site plan of neighbourhood 9, (8).
- the residential cluster and loosely overlapped groups of clusters (forming a residential block) with play lots and undesignated open spaces providing the internal foci, population of the order of 1500 residents and relatively high density 600 pp ha. provided the smallest cell in the city fabric. Fig 5.3 shows a typical residential block from N.A.C. neighbourhood 9, measuring 108 x 216 metres.

6th October new city continued the spinal organization of services and the
FIG. 6.1
Master Plan, Hierarchy of Planning Units, Sectors, Communities and Neighbourhoods.

FIG. 6.2
The Third and Fourth Communities and SubUnits (8 Neighbourhoods).

FIG. 6.3
A Schematic Plan of A Typical Neighbourhood Unit.

FIG. 6
Six October City
Structure Plan, Hierarchy of Planning Units: 6 Communities, Eight Neighbourhoods Each.

FIG. 7
Amal New City

FIG. 8.2
The General Plan, 4 Neighbourhoods, Two Residential and Two Mixed.

FIG. 8.3
A Typical Residential Harah, Comprising 2 Residential Groups & A Number Of Clusters

FIG. 8
Shattah New Settlement
FIG. 9.1
Master Plan Hierarchical Structure With 1st District Highlighted

FIG. 9.2
First District General Plan, Four local Units 3-4 Harahs Each.

FIG. 9.3
Basic Residential Cell (216 x 108 Metres.)

FIG. 9
Obour New City
thoritical hierarchy of urban enclaves, Fig 6.1 (15). The 4 - 6 thousand re-
disidents agglomerations were merely convenient for community facilities pro-
vision. Neighbourhoods with hardly discernable boundaries and shared local
centres were envisaged and elaborated at the detailed study stage. Fig. 6.2
delineates the structure of the 3rd & 4th districts in 6th October new city,
comprising eight neighbourhood in each district, flanking a linear district
spine with each two . neighbourhoods sharing a local centre and each four
forming a local unit. Fig 6.3 shows the layout of a typical neighbourhood,
(15).
The major contribution of this study was the introduction of the notion of
"Harah" or the alley social group as the basic planning unit in the city's
physical structure. It comprises about 200 families with similar socio-cultural
features and present a visual & functional entity with a central place -
an external courtyard as its focal point, it provides local identity and
privacy to its inhabitants, (15).

Amal new city (16), confirmed the established trend towards larger local
areas (replacing the neighbourhood) coupled with small residential units to
provide local identity and allow social integration. The master plan, Fig. 7,
and the community facilities programme adopted a large unit, i.e. the extend-
ed neighbourhood (8 - 12 thousands population) as a theoretical planning unit
with each two forming a local unit enjoying higher level services and recrea-
tional facilities.

Obour master plan study (6), combined many of preceding conceptions into
its contextually aware physical structure, Fig. 9.1. The main features of the
Obour urban fabric were further elaborated at the detailed study of the first
district, Ettouney & Abdel Kader (10).

Local planning units with population 12000 - 20000, Fig. 9.2 formed an inter-
mediate urban enclave (with a local centre and two basic education schools)
between the city's six districts (population 40 - 70 thousands each), Fig. 9.1
and the basic planning cell, see also table 1.

The positive aspects of Obour new city spatial organization includes:
- clear demarcation of optimum planning units,
- decentralization and dispersion of service facilities to restore integra-
tion between services and served population and
- encouraging mixed uses along main routes and deep into residential quarters.

The proposals for the first district detailed plan, Fig. 9.2, developed the
intentions into a physical structure, (10). Local units were divided into 3-
4 smaller units "Hara", 3000 - 5000 residents, land marked by its central
nucleus representing the traditional plaza ("saha" or "meidan", congregation
area) and accommodating a mosque, a kindergarten, local market etc.

Each "Hara" comprises three cells, 1000-1500 residents each and structured
in turn from a number of small clusters (25 - 50 plots & 40 - 60 families).
The cell is a well defined entity, 216 x 108, 5.5 ha. area and looks into an
internal urban space marked by the local cafe, children play lot, a corner
shop and meeting area.

The "Hara" in this structure is larger and morphologically different from the
traditional, which is closer in terms of population and conception to the cell
and even the cluster. The similarity is also enhanced by the features of the
physical character of the residential cell and its clusters namely; single
family housing, attached plots, low rise (2-3 storeys), compact planning and
high density.

The last two studies in the selected sample New Menyah city and Shattah new
settlement (9), (11), (12) were carried out by the same team of "Obour" new
city 1st district detailed study (10). They attempted further modifications
and elaborations of the hierarchical structure reached at "Obour" new city, with
FIG. 10.1
Master Plan And The First Phase: 4 Neighbourhood.

FIG. 10.2
The First Phase Hierarchical Structure; 4 Neighbourhoods; Three Harahs Each, With 2nd Neighbourhood Highlighted.

FIG. 10.3
Neighbourhood 2, Harahs And Clusters.

FIG. 10
New Menyah City
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETTLEMENT FEATURES</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASSIFICATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>POPULATION x1000</td>
<td>500 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTOR</td>
<td>2 3</td>
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<td>16 16</td>
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<tr>
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<td>N.H. 4-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>POPULATION x1000</td>
<td>4-6 25</td>
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<tr>
<td>AREA Ha.</td>
<td>200 250</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUCLEUS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>6-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
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<tr>
<td>POPULATION</td>
<td>120 150 2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>AREA Ha.</td>
<td>2.5 3-4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUCLEUS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No. OF SMALLER UNITS</td>
<td>4-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LEGEND**

- **△** Kindergarten
- **□** Primary/Elementary School
- **□** Basic Education School
- **○** Mosque
- **○** Local Mosque
- **△** Local Center
- **□** Open Space (Major)
- **□** Open Space (Minor)
- **□** Harah: Residential Socio-Physical Unit
the "Harah" presenting the appropriate planning unit for Egyptian setting.

Shattah new settlement presents a different scale of development, its target population (35000 residents), hardly matches the population of a single community in the reviewed sample, (11). It is presented because of its clarity of structure, integration of its components and for completing the cycle of the closely related studies of basic planning units in Obour and new Menyah city. Shattah new settlement plan Fig. 8.1, comprises 4 neighbourhoods (2 residential & 2 mixed, crafts/residential) an integrated industrial estate and a central spine. The residential neighbourhood 9000 population, comprises three "Hara" units, 8000 residents each. The "Hara", Fig 8.2, is divided in turn into 2 residential groups, 1200 - 1500 population. Each includes a number of linear clusters articulated by small open spaces.

The whole settlement is treated as a local area with the central spine emphasizing the overlapping of catchment areas and interactions; this is further enhanced through the dispersion of commercial facilities along major routes joining local and main centres. This again suggests the "Hara" as the basic socio-physical planning unit even at this limited scale.

The New "Menyah" city structure is linear Fig. 10.1 and the hierarchial structure ignores communities or districts as physical entities (9). The city structure comprises a set of extended neighbourhoods (separate, pairs or four some) perpendicularly linked to a central spine, (9). The neighbourhood services are divided between local centres and along major routes joining the neighbourhood centres and the central spine. The boundaries of the neighbourhoods are channels for social mix and interactions of activities, which also permeates into the neighbourhood along the internal circular routes joining local centres, (9), (12). This further dilutes the neighbourhood as a physical entity and shifts the socio-physical identity to the lower level "Hara" Fig. 10.2 shows the 1st phase plan of Menya new city comprising part of the central spine and four neighbourhoods, (total population 40000), (12). Fig. 10.3 show the parcellization plan for neighbourhood 2, population 12000. The clearly delineated unit is the internal cell "Hara", three of which make up the neighbourhood, similar in its morphology and structure to those developed in "Obour" 1st district and "Shattah" new settlement. The development is also marked by inward looking compact planning and high density reflecting the aridity of the local setting. See also Table 1.

3 - On Basic Planning Units:
Conclusions and Development Guidelines

The neighbourhood concept provided a convenient planning module - a useful tool for scaling down large-scale urban developments and practical means for programming and allocating service facilities.

The reviewed sample of new Egyptian communities' handling of and proposals for basic planning units together with the reservations (highlighted in Section 1.2) regarding the appropriateness of the neighbourhood as a planning module in developing countries, justify the following proposition:

The conventional neighbourhood unit hardly satisfies the purposes behind its creation, in terms of: size & provision for maximum social interactions, the primary school as a catalyst for the community & controlled walking distance to service facilities.

In terms of optimum size (population and landcover) the conventional neighbourhood unit falls on two levels. Being far larger than the areas required for intimate contacts, social interactions and feelings of belonging on
territorial identity and social bases, but not large enough to allow choice and selection between service facilities. Primary group contacts are not the simple result that can be solely attributed to a given geographical area. Proximity helps however, in enhancing social interactions and contacts and traditional clusters and urban enclaves with limited number of families provide the nearest physical unit to satisfy that purpose.
The size of the neighbourhood was conventionally related to the population needing and enough to support a primary school, i.e. a population of the order of four to five thousands (if the percentage of school age children is of the order of 10 - 14% of the total).

Basic education system in Egypt increased the percentage of school age population to 18 - 24% (by increasing the duration of the compulsory education from six to nine years). This means a smaller catchment area and supporting population, if choice is ignored. Allowing for choice between basic education streams (i.e. language schools, mixed or separated sexes, religious, technical etc) means larger population and longer distances to school and also the physical absence of the school as a potential community development nucleus.

In contemporary urban areas, work opportunities are invariably located outside the neighbourhood unit, a fact that further complicates the relation between community facilities and catchment areas. Convenience and accessibility during the routine home - work trips are likely to encourage the use of service facilities outside the neighbourhood.

This justifies the view that: walking distance as a criterion for determining the size of the neighbourhood unit is of limited value once the use and selection of service facilities is carried out on basis other than proximity.

Furthermore, walking distance optimum or maximum can be a misleading parameter in high density compact planning agglomerations, where the conventional figures for max walking distances (e.g. 600 - 800 metres) originally based on low density development means population figures much higher than envisaged.

To reiterate, the neighbourhood unit or the limited and well defined area, with basic service facilities to enhance human contacts and social interactions, located within walking distance from residents dwellings - is a valid notion, that hardly satisfy its purpose in practice, especially in developing nations where behavioural patterns and physical settings greatly differ from its original Western context (though many of the raised reservations may also apply to it).

Basic planning units need to be larger than the neighbourhood unit for optimum and efficient community facilities provision and considerably smaller to allow maximum social contacts, belonging and interactions.

The solutions adopted in some of the Egyptian new communities (reviewed in Section 2) support this view and provide sound bases for further investigation.

These are elaborated in the following set of urban design guidelines.

Basic Planning Units: Urban Design Development Guidelines:

- Basic planning units for maximum social interactions are different in size and population from those providing economic and efficient catchment area for service facilities.

- The traditional Egyptian "Harah" or street (alley) social group is a useful indicator for the optimum size and population of the basic urban enclave. It comprises a limited number of families (20 - 40), compact and inward oriented into a linear or a small formal space (i.e. a housing cluster).
The notion may be extended to encompass a larger area or higher population figures, due to the type of development and the nature of the context (e.g. the use of walk ups instead of single family housing and intensive landuse).

Three levels of basic planning units for social identity, maximum contacts & interactions may be used in physical developments, namely:

1- The alley social unit (cluster): 20 - 40 families, 100 - 200 residents with the alley (or the central court) as the focal point.

2- The "Harah" (residential cell): 160 - 240 families, 800 - 1200 residents, with a central formal open space for meeting, playing and social gathering.

3- The "Quarter" (extended "Hara" or the basic planning unit), 400 - 600 families 2000 - 3000 population, with a number of community facilities (grouped or dispersed) providing the nucleus, including: the Kindergarten, local mosque, the cafe, corner shops and local greens.

A fourth level of basic planning units should be incorporated to the suggested hierarchy of social units which is to provide the basic planning unit for community facilities provision, namely:

4- The "local unit" (local community): population 12 - 20 thousands, with 3 - 5 basic education schools and other service facilities (allowing choice, variety and optimum catchment area).

Compact planning, single family housing on attached plots or low rise walk-ups (2,3 & 4) storeys, high density mixed developments, tolerant attitudes towards man and residents' cars mix, and maximum provision for pedestrians and cyclists are some of the development features that are likely to complement and enhance the suggested hierarchy of urban enclaves.

Socio economic aspects of the proposed hierarchy of urban enclaves and spatial system need to be monitored and evaluated. The new communities developments in Egypt provide a good opportunity. The results are likely to provide some new perspectives and allow better understanding of the critical issue of urban enclaves and means of humanizing urban environments in limited resources contexts.

References


4- COPA (Egypt) - SWECO (Sweden) Tenth of Ramadan, First Stage - Final Report, Ministry of Development, Egypt, 1978, pp 11.1 - 11.6


