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Public Participation in Preparing Urban Plans, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: the Case of Dammam Metropolitan Area

المشاركة الشعبية في إعداد مخططات المناطق الحضرية بالمملكة العربية السعودية: دراسة حالة حاضرة الدمام

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ملخص

بادرت الحكومة السعودية وأصدرت قانون تشكيل المجالس البلدية، يسمح هذا القانون لأعضائه من السعوديين المنتخبين بالمشاركة في القضايا المتعلقة بتنمية المدينة الأمر الذي يساهم في تقليل آثار بعض المشاكل التي تواجه المجتمع المحلي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استطلاع الآراء بشأن الأخذ بممارسات المشاركة الشعبية في عملية التخطيط الحضري في المملكة العربية السعودية، مع التركيز على حاضرة الدمام كحالة دراسية. يستطلع البحث آراء المهنيين والمسؤولين والخبراء في الحاضرة فيما يتعلق بأسلوب ووسيلة المشاركة والذين ينبغي أن يشاركون؛ تبدأ الورقة بمقدمة، يتبعها استعراضاً للادبيات المتعلقة بعملية التنمية الحضرية والمشاركة المجتمعية، ثم تناقش أساليب جمع البيانات وتحليلها، وتختتم الدراسة بالمناقشة والتوصيات. وقد أظهرت النتائج أن المشاركة الشعبية هي من المبادئ الأساسية التي يجب أن تراعى عند إعداد الخطط الحضرية، كما تبين أن المهنيين والمسؤولين والخبراء بحاضرة الدمام لهم مواقف إيجابية مؤكدة تجاه المشاركة الشعبية في مراحل عملية التخطيط الحضري، وأنهم يدعمون تعزيز المشاركة العامة في التخطيط الحضري بصفة عامة وإعطاء فرص متساوية للرجال والنساء في المشاركة في صنع القرار على وجه الخصوص.

Abstract:

Saudi government took the initiative and declared formation of municipal councils. This act allows Saudi elected members to participate in issues concerning city development and thus lessening some of the problems facing the local society.

This research aims to explore opinions regarding the introduction of public participation practice in the urban planning process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA) is taken as a case study. The paper investigates the opinions of the *professionals, officials and experts* at DMA. Emphasis is on the method and means of participation, and who should participate.

The paper starts with an introduction, followed with a review of literature with emphasis on the processes of urban plan development and public participation. Then, data collection methods and analysis are discussed. Finally, the study ends with discussion and recommendations.

The results show that public participation is one of the core principles of preparing urban plans. It shows that the *professionals, officials and experts* of Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA) have positive attitudes toward public participation in urban planning. They support participation in urban planning and by particularly giving equal chance to "Men & Women" to participate in decision making.

Keywords: Participation in planning, methods of public participation, information society, planning process, urban planning

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has witnessed progressive development of democracy and legislation. In fact it has been experiencing new ways of openness with local society which is radically different from what the country is traditionally used to. The early progressive development of democracy and legislation in Saudi Arabia can be traced to King Abdul Aziz's establishment of the Shura system in Makkah in 1345 AH.

Eight years ago, the Saudi government took the initiative and declared formation of municipal councils. Half of the municipal representatives were elected. Another round of municipal members' election was conducted in 2005. This is considered the first participation of Saudi citizens to choose representatives in municipal councils. However, women were not given the chance for participating in both elections (2005 and 2011) either as voters or candidates. During the last election of 2011, King Abdullah announced giving women the right to vote, run in municipal elections, and have the right to join the appointed Shura (consultative) Council. By the end of 2012, women were appointed in Shura Council.

As the same time Saudi Arabia is progressing in democracy, it is also witnessing rapid urbanization, which requires unparalleled efforts by governmental organizations and especially planning authorities to prepare plans in order to effectively contain urban growth. For the plans to be successful, it is also necessary to engage the public in the planning and decision making process. The public have the ability to influence the decisions that affect their communities, environments and personal life.

The main goal of the this paper is to ascertain the opinions of the professionals and officials regarding the introduction of public participation in the process of preparing urban plans in the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia. Dammam Metropolitan Area is taken as a case study. The goal of the study will be fulfilled through the accomplishment of the following objectives:

- Reviewing the literature relating to planning process and public participation.
- Conducting a questionnaire to ascertain the opinions of the professionals and officials regarding the introduction of public participation in the process of preparing urban plans in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- Formulating recommendations towards more effective public participation in urban planning process in the Kingdom.

The paper starts with an introduction, followed by a review of literature with emphasis on the processes of urban plan development and public participation. Then data collection methods are introduced. After that the data analysis and the findings are discussed. Finally, the study concludes with a set of recommendations.

1. Literature Review:

1-1. Urban Planning and public participation:

Urban planning is a process that serves the public and answers their visions, needs and interests through providing a healthy environment in terms of location of their activities, appropriate space design, and appropriate social space, etc. These facets are emphasized in the urban planning definitions which is understood as the design and regulation of the uses of space, which focuses on the physical forms, economic functions, and social impacts of the urban environment, and on the location of different activities within it (Shrey, et. al., 2009).Chapin and Kaiser (1979) visualize it as a series of activities purposefully organized to bring about a built environment that corresponds as closely as possible to the wants and needs of citizens.

The broad meanings reflected in the above definitions are: planning means to project the future; to be aware of a range of issues and being prepared for any problems as they occur. Planning guides the growth of the city and deals with its problems in order to serve its population, and provides them with the requirements of urban life, health and safety. It has a broad combination of elements, namely physical, social, and economic. Urban planning also involves a combination of various specialists in different fields that are encountered in the process such as: planners, geographic, socialists, and engineers.

If urban planning is to involve public to express their needs and interests then why urban planning operates in segregating public in participating in the preparation of urban plans? This exclusion is true of Saudi people who have never played a role in shaping their community through participation with planners and authorities in municipalities. In contrast, the planning authorities in Saudi Arabia have been using their powers, rules, and policies in planning communities and cities.

Considering the municipalities in Saudi Arabia, one can see that there is no role for the public/residents to participate in the process and decision making in urban planning (Al-Shihri, 2009; Mubarak, 2004). The current top-down approach disconnects planners from citizens. This approach has not changed even with dramatic development in-urban planning like the introduction of modern planning models in this area over the last 40 years to deal with rapid economic, social and urban development. One of the pitfalls of this approach is evident when people are left out of the decision-making process and this result in the real needs of the people often not being met, or the methods used to solve problems can be culturally or socially unacceptable to the local society. The result will be failed projects. This often leads to a failure to meet development objectives and the real needs of the people.

Mubarak (2004) indicates that despite the transformation of city's function and increase of its area and population, urban planning has become more centralized. The absence of public participation and other obstacles (such as lack of trust, too little human and financial resources) in municipal government prevent the development of effective forms of urban planning, management and decentralization.

Introducing public to participate in urban planning can certainly be possible through urban planning processes. The planning process can be understood as setting the direction for the activities in the form of a sequence of steps. Miskowiak (2003) indicates that a planning process is much like a blueprint, and is a good place to begin when thinking about how to involve citizens. The planning process describes a set of stages to follow, a set of topics to cover, and a set of tasks to achieve, or products to create. This means that it is a path for accomplishing the task of making plans and the purposes of planning. The planning process comprises three elements which are important for achieving the planning purpose, namely the *Planning stages*, *Planning topics*, and *Planning tasks*. Myerson, (1956) labels planning process as a rational one, which begins by recognizing a problem and logically moves ahead in sequence to analyze it and solve it through appropriate decision making. Rukmana (2007) indicates that planning process is designed and managed by planners.

Development plans are a result of the planning process which comprises of a number of stages. By following this process, planners are able to determine a wide range of interconnecting issues that affect an urban area. Each step can be seen as interdependent and planners will frequently revise the order to best fit their needs.

Thus, a plan (such as a comprehensive plan) is the document that is the final product of the efforts of the planning

process. Amado et al (2009) indicate that stages or steps are mutually dependent, so that consecutive stages only begin after evaluating and validating the previous one. Grabow et al (2004) also indicate that the planning process is a step-by-step methodology to produce the comprehensive plan.

The following stages may assist in guiding the preparation of a plan of a desired future neighborhood within the city: The planning processes include problem identification (awareness of need), goal setting (statement of objectives and establishment of a work program to prepare appropriate plans), data collection and analysis, refinement of goals, development of alternative plans and/or policies (designed to achieve goals), evolution of alternatives (determine problem effects, both good and bad, and the ease or difficulty of implementation), adoption of preferred plans and/or policies, implementation of plans/or policies, monitoring and evaluating results (alerts to progress toward goals and/ or danger signals calling for course correction), and feedback (recycle the planning process as necessary to meet emerging circumstances).

1-2. Public Participation:

Today, there is an increasing interest for public participation in the planning process all over the world. It is seen as the practical way of answering public needs, enhancing the communication between the public and government (Wang, 2001), and enabling better decision making (Davies et al., 2012; Heberlein, 1976). It is the best way of securing that local communities become healthier, safer, and more sustainable.

Searching literature on public participation, four facets were found. First, participation appears in public service functions such as economic development, environmental protection, education, public health, public safety, and management functions. Second, participation occurs in policy making or decision making. It is involved in goal setting, strategy, policy, capacity determination, and implementation

evaluation (Wang, 2001). Third, participation uses several terms (public participation, public consultation, public involvement, and public engagement). The term 'public participation' is often used interchangeably with public consultation, public involvement, and community-based management (Ricketts and Fenton, 1994); other nearly synonymous terms include public or citizen engagement, empowerment, 'citizen participation', 'public involvement', 'citizen involvement' all of which imply or reflect varying degrees of involvement, power, or decision-making authority (Creighton, 1981). These terms 'citizen' and 'public,' and 'involvement' and 'participation' are often used interchangeably. These terms are also used to denote the involvement of people in local affairs. This research paper uses the terms 'public', 'community' and 'citizen' interchangeably, as sounds the most widely used in literature in respect participation and as is commonly used around the world.

Fourth, there is no consensus on a definition of participation. Numerous definitions can be found which carry a different meaning for different circumstances and different localities. This might be due to the several disciplines that deal with this term. Participation was conceived as a power in the participation ladder, which was developed by Armstein more than four decades ago (Armstein, 1969). This ladder of participation "...remains a prescient explanatory work and a reference point for planners and other local government officials about what is and is not meaningful public participation" (APA, 2006). The range of public engagement in planning processes is often illustrated as a ladder according to the degree of influence or power held by the public. United Nations (1981) conceive participation in the development context as "the creation of opportunities that enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to influence the development process, and share

equitably in the fruits of development". Henkel and Stirrat (2001) describe participation simply as people taking part in decision-making processes or grassroots community engagement.

Each definition emphasizes one aspect of participation. One definition highlights the redistribution the power which means that the public has an influential voice. Another sees it as a creation of opportunities for the public in the context of development process. Another sees it as a sharing decision with authorities and organizations, and emphasize on the concepts of democracy in a society where people influence the decision-making process.

Public participation in this sense is not just a tool, but it is a process involving a wide range of players in planning. Participation is a collaboration constructed by planners, officials, and citizens, and all expect to see the positive impact of their inputs. They should be allowed to participate at the local, regional and national levels.

With respect to participation methods, they include the followings:

- Questionnaire.
- Open discussion
- Public meetings.
- Workshops.
- Focus group
- Interview
- Education and information (Sanoff, 2000).

There is a comprehensive consensus by scholars regarding the advantages of public participation in planning. It is recognized that public participation in preparing urban plans is essential for ensuring that plans reflect the needs and wishes of residents in a community. Thus perfect plans grow "...from planning processes that involve a broad array of stakeholders, and strong plans accompanied by broad stakeholder involvement are needed if plans are to have a significant effect on the actions of local governments" (Burby, 2003, 33).

Public participation can enhance and improve the quality of both the process and

the end decision. The participation process is also a learning mechanism for the citizens involved. It provides the public with a voice in design and decision making which more likely improves plans, decisions, and service delivery (Sanoff, 2000). It could assist in: improving the quality of life, creating more active citizens, and managing complex problems in planning (Involve, 2005). It provides the public access to discuss their needs and wishes, which can contribute to sustainable decision-making (IAP2, 2006).

In contrary, there are also disadvantages associated with public participation. It has been labeled as time consuming, costly and demanding more staff. Topics are too technical, which pose difficulties to those ordinary participants. This matter needs to be translated and explained into plain language. Public participation requires building capacity and training staff in order to carry participation properly.

Several approaches in participation can be found in the literature for involving public in planning issues. But it is sensible to use: 1) an approach emphasizing on dialogue among various groups and individuals, and 2) means of communication- enhance the contact between various groups, individuals, and players. Considering collaboration approach, it may assist in creating meaningful participation. This approach was developed by Innes and Booher, which emphasizes on decision making based on dialogue. This process leads to satisfy a greater range of the needs of the various stakeholders. This approach deals with both diversity and interdependence (Innes and Booher, 2000).

Innes and Booher (2000) argued that collaborative planning is observed by citizens, and citizens have opportunities to speak on varying issues. They indicate, in collaborative planning, that many interests are on the table and their representatives get a chance to become informed, to express their views and concerns and to participate in developing new alternatives.

Collaborative planning relies on the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders to collect a variety of information. This diversity offers "... a wide range of resources, information, personalities, experiences, and point of view..." (Booher and Innes, 2002,18). The information is used as an input to the process of preparing plans to meet goals.

In addition, collaborative planning offers a number of benefits that include: incorporates the interests of all affected parties; supports the plan implementation; and improves stakeholder relations and knowledge that provide long-term benefits to society (Gunton, et. al, 2007).

As regards information technology and public participation, a major number of writers and organizations (Komito, 2009; Kingston, 2002; Huxol, 2001; United Nations, 2008) support the use of electronic means for public participation. A number of positive aspects are connected to electronic technology, namely: increasing the level of participation, enhancing traditional participation, increasing the number of participants, and providing a means of collecting data from participants in an economical way.

Komito (2009) studied how new Information Technology increase communication amongst individuals which, in turn, enhance community participation. Study suggested that increased public participation in governances is achieved by encouraging greater voluntary activity. The study went over the Government, Governance and Participation, followed by discussing new technology and community development. The study concluded that new technologies do increase levels of informal communication and information distribution. Such information exchange can become the basis for community participation.

A study conducted by (Kingston, 2002) investigated public participation in the planning. The study focused on the use of

Information Communication Technologies ICTs to provide way of participation in planning problems. The study also showed how web-based public participation can help to overcome some of the problems in participatory planning. The study revealed that on-line participation offered a good alternative to turning up at a meeting at a set time and/or location. It is possible to offer the tools to allow the public to make better informed decisions.

From the aforementioned discussions, it can be concluded that the public participation in the new paradigm (collaborative planning) is not the one-way communication between government and public or public and government, but the multi-way communication among many actors and public. It does not ignore interests of individuals and groups, but look for solutions that suit many interests. Further, collaborative planning is an approach empowering stakeholders and offering them with direct engagement through a number of activities: solicit ideas, information, and participation in the community planning process.

Electronic technology may induce major enhancement to public participation, which allow for generating instant information and reduce the geographical barriers. In addition it provides access for more people to be involved.

2. Data Collection

Methods:

Based on the research goal and objectives, stated earlier, the target population of the study includes the planning professionals, officials, and experts working in Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA), Saudi Arabia. The DMA consists of the three cities of Dammam, Khobar, and Dhahran.

A stratified sampling technique was adopted to ensure that the sample is representative of the target population. The sample was drawn from municipality, private consultant, academic, city council, municipality council, and other institutions

concerned with planning (such as the Chamber of Commerce, Saudi Electricity Company, and Saudi Telecommunication companies). Figure 1 shows the target population (the size and percentage of each).

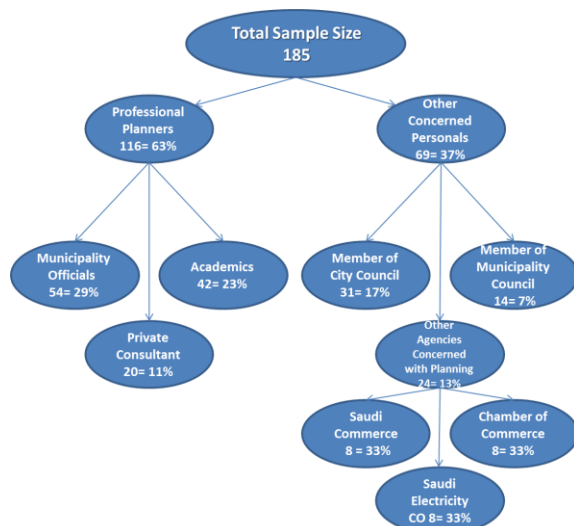


Figure1: Various potential participants (experts)

A self-administered questionnaire was specially designed for the data collection. It consists of a number of sections. The first section deals with identifying the planning levels in which the public can participate during the process of preparation of special plans. The second concerns with the opinions regarding the stages of planning process. The third is devoted to the identification of the appropriate methods for participation; such as questionnaires, interviews, displays and exhibits, open discussion, public meetings, public hearing, workshops, and focus groups. Part four determines who should participate in the process of preparing urban plans. The fifth section addresses mechanisms and means of public participation. Particularly respondents were asked how much do they agree on using: "traditional participation method", "electronic participation method", and "both electronic & traditional participation".

A Pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted to ascertain its validity. Pre-Coding method has been used for the questionnaire in order to be ready for entering data to SPSS program and performing the analysis.

3. Data Analysis:

185 questionnaires were distributed and 115 were returned which represents around 62% of the total questionnaire sample. SPSS statistical program was used in analyzing the data.

3-1. Respondents' Background:

The analysis shows that different backgrounds are represented in the sample. Regarding years of experiences, data shows that the more than half (53.9%) of the respondents had 15 years and more of experience, while around one third (36.5%) had 14-9 years of experience, and the rest (9.6%) had 6-9 years of experience.

Concerning level of education a small percentage (12.5%) completed high school or diploma. While a large percentage (60.0%) indicated that they hold a bachelor degree, 7.5% had a master degree, and a round one fifth 20.0% had a doctorate degree.

Regarding the field of work, it was found that professional planners represent the largest proportion of the respondents, 44.3%. One-third of the respondents (27.8%) were in the field of education. Businessmen ranked third (10.4%), while the rest work in other fields.

3-2. Planning Levels:

For each planning level, respondents were asked to record their level of agreement or disagreement on the five-point rating scale. Respondents were asked to select a level of agreement from: Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Response averages column was added to the table to assist in sorting them. Response averages were calculated through employing the formula: $[(\text{Strongly Agree} \times 5) + (\text{agree} \times 4) + (\text{neutral} \times 3) + (\text{disagree} \times 2) + (\text{strongly disagree} \times 1)] / 5$. The analysis shows that the

respondents are more likely to be in favor of the introduction of public participation in the preparation of the lower levels of plans.

Table 1 shows that the response average is the highest for the action area (89.20), followed by the city level (88.92%), while the least is at the national level (66.08%). The high percentage of responses came as a result of both levels (action area level and cities level) have things that can be discussed and questioned unlike the national level where only strategies and policies are stated in general. Thus, the analysis shows that the respondents are more likely to be in favor of the introduction of public participation on the preparation of the lower levels of plans.

3-3. Stages of Planning Process:

It is evident from table 2 that the respondents think that public participation is more important in certain planning stages than others. The planning stages that involve decision making attain higher response average than the technical stages. While the participation in initial definition of problem scored the highest percentage 92.46%, it slightly declined to 85.42% in goals formulation stage, and to 82.2% in selecting alternatives stage, and dropped to 57.16% in the stage of developing the planning process and methodology. The results suggest that it is more important in the stages that involve decision making than in those technical stages.

3-4 Participation Methods:

It seems that all types of participation methods attain relatively high response average. However, questionnaire method scored the highest (89.72%), followed with open discussion (87.04%), while focus groups is the least favorable method scoring (70.6%), see Table 3. The small differences of the responses' values imply that those participation methods are favored by respondents for preparation urban plans. However, it is important to indicate that:

- some of these methods are more superior than others.

- no single method can achieve a planning task alone, instead a number of methods should be combined together (Sanoff, 2000).

3-5 Who Should Participate?

In response to a question regarding who should participate in the process of preparing urban plans, the analysis shows that ordinary people, specialist and planning experts, governmental institutions, NGOs, and the private sector should all be involved. Ranking of the responses according to the response average shows that the ordinary people who are affected by the plan attained the highest score (93.06%), followed by specialists and experts in planning (92.98%), and the general public (91.18%), while private enterprises scored the lowest (81.72%), see Table 4. From the data above, it is appeared that there is a very close values registered between the ordinary people who are affected by the plan and specialists in planning, which imply that both are equally important. Respondents think that consulting the specialists is important due to their roles and experiences in the development plans. Technical terms associated with development plan are another thing that specialists are familiar with. Those specialists in planning authority provide support to help people develop their neighborhood plan.

Considering those affected by the plan is needed due to their right in influencing the decision in preparation plan. More importantly, the decision that will be taken might affects those people.

Table 1: Introduction of public participation on various planning levels

#	Planning Levels	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Action Area Level	61.7	26.1	8.7	3.5	0.0	89.20
2	Cities Level	60.9	25.2	12.2	0.9	0.9	88.92
3	Sub-regional Level	39.1	50.4	6.1	3.5	0.9	84.66
4	Provincial Level	30.4	40.0	11.3	15.7	2.6	75.98
5	National Level	17.4	33.9	17.4	24.3	7.0	66.08

Table 2: Introduction of public participation on the various planning stages

#	Planning Stages	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Initial Definition Problem	71.3	22.6	4.3	1.7	0.0	92.64
2	goals formulation	47.0	40.9	4.3	7.8	0.0	85.42
3	Selecting Alternatives	40.0	44.3	4.3	9.6	1.7	82.2
4	Plan Monitoring	28.7	44.3	9.6	15.7	1.7	76.52
5	Developing Alternative Plans and Proposals	30.4	37.4	4.3	27.0	0.9	73.88
6	Data Collection	24.3	33.9	12.2	28.7	0.9	70.4
7	Implementation Policy	16.5	25.2	16.5	38.3	3.5	62.58
8	Data Analysis (Opportunities and Constraints Identification)	11.3	31.3	10.4	45.2	1.7	61.0
9	Developing the Planning Process & Methodology	7.8	27.8	8.7	53.9	1.7	57.16

Table 3: Identification of Appropriate Methods of Public Participation

#	Participation Methods	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Questionnaires	56.5	39.1	0.9	3.5	0.0	89.72
2	Open Discussion	47.0	47.0	0.9	4.3	0.9	87.04
3	Display and Exhibit	34.8	56.5	7.8	0.9	0.0	85.04
4	Public Hearing	38.3	49.6	5.2	7.0	0.0	83.9
5	Interviews	27.0	58.3	3.5	11.3	0.0	80.26
6	Workshops	24.3	58.3	3.5	13.9	0.0	78.6
7	Public Meetings	20.0	43.5	27.8	8.7	0.0	74.96
8	Focus Groups	27.8	32.2	6.1	33.0	0.9	70.6

Table 4. Identification of the Population Eligible to Participate in Plan Making

#	Population Eligible to Participate	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Those Affected by the Plan	68.7	29.6	0.0	1.7	0.0	93.06
2	Specialists and Experts in Planning	70.4	26.1	1.7	1.7	0.0	92.98
3	Public	37.4	32.2	32.2	20.9	1.7	91.18
4	Local Governments and Institutions Affected by the Projects	53.9	44.3	0.0	1.7	0.0	90.02
5	NGOs	34.8	53.9	1.7	9.6	0.0	82.78
6	Private Enterprise	36.5	48.7	2.6	11.3	0.9	81.72

3-6. Participation Mechanism:

Respondents were asked about their opinions regarding the use of different participation mechanisms, i.e. "traditional methods", "electronic method" and "both electronic & traditional methods". Table 5 shows that "Electronic participation" scored the highest response average (88.86%), followed by "both Electronic & traditional methods" (87.82%), while "traditional" attained the lowest score (80.54%).

3-7. Women's Participation:

Respondents were specifically asked about who should participate in the process of preparing urban plans: "both men & women", or "men only". The analysis shown in Table 6, indicates that the vast majority of the respondents think that both men & women should participate (response average 94.8%), while a small minority think that participation should be limited to men only (response average 32.54%).

3-8. Various Backgrounds of Groups' Opinions:

This section explores the convergence and divergence in the responses of various groups surveyed (municipality officials, academics, professionals planners and other concerned groups) in relation to the planning levels, planning stages, participation methods, and participation mechanism (Table 7).

Regarding to the planning level, Table 7 shows significant divergence exist between opinions of respondents to national level (53.72%, 78.68%, 68.36%, and 79.72%) and provincial level (69.72%, 79.36%, 83.26%, and 76.68%) for municipality officials, academics, professionals planners and other concerned groups respectively. In contrast there is significant convergence that exists between opinions of respondents to sub-regional level (81.16%, 83.88% and 85.32%) and the action area level (88.08%, 91.01%) and 90.37%) for municipality officials, academics, and other concerned groups respectively.

As can be seen from Table 7, a consensus exists between municipality officials and academics in support of using public participation at action area level. A high percentage (98.34%) of professional planners supports public participation at action area level.

Regarding the participation methods, participation through questionnaire attained significant convergence between opinions of respondents who are officials in municipalities, academics, professional planners and other concerned groups. In contrast there is significant difference between opinions of respondents to display and exhibition method (92.2%, 80.66% and 85.0% respectively for municipality officials, Academics, and professionals planners) and open discussion method (84.06% and 98.34% respectively for municipality officials and professionals planners).

From the data mentioned earlier, it is clear that the convergence and divergence in the responses of various groups surveyed – municipality officials, academics, professionals planners and supervision other concerned groups – in relation to planning levels, planning stages, participation methods, and participation mechanism) show that there is convergence for most of them. While some show that there are significant divergence, generally, the respondents' various groups backgrounds have no significant impact on the opinions of the respondents.

Table 5: Opinions Regarding the Use of Different Participation Mechanisms

#	Participation Mechanism	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Electronic Participation Method	50.4	43.5	6.1	0.0	0.0	88.86
2	Electronic & Traditional Participation	48.7	42.6	7.8	0.9	0.0	87.82
3	Traditional Participation Method	23.5	63.5	5.2	7.8	0.0	80.54

Table 6: Participation of Men and Women in the Process of Preparing Urban Plans

#	The Targeted Population in Public Participation	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Average %
1	Public (Men & Women)	83.5	9.6	4.3	2.6	0.0	94.8
2	(Men only)	6.1	7.0	4.3	8.7	73.9	32.54

Table 7: Convergence/divergence in the responses of various groups surveyed (municipality officials, academics, professional planners and other concerned groups)

	Agreement level	Response average %			
		Municipalities officials	Academics	Professionals planners	Other concerned groups
Planning Levels	National level	53.72	78.68	68.36	79.72
	Provincial	69.72	79.36	83.26	76.68
	Sub-regional level	81.16	83.88	95.0	85.32
	Cities Level	84.08	89.7	98.34	92.44
	Action area level	88.08	91.01	98.34	90.37
Planning stages	Initial Definition Problem	96.58	91.7	85.02	94.6
	Goals formulation	86.28	87.72	78.32	84.86
	Selecting Alternatives	80.02	85.86	96.66	76.68
Participation Methods	Questionnaires	88.0	90.9	90.02	90.28
	Open Discussion	84.06	82.5	98.34	89.74
	Display and Exhibit	92.2	80.66	85.0	83.78
	Workshops	80.0	83.86	90.0	69.12
Participation Mechanism	Electronic Participation Method	81.22	81.3	92.06	78.92
	Electronic & Traditional Participation	86.2	93.72	88.34	89.2
	Traditional Participation Method	88.58	86.46	93.34	86.4

4-Discussion and Conclusion

Although public participation has become an essential ingredient in urban plan preparation, the approach in preparing urban plans in Saudi Arabia has limitations or lack of public participation. There is no public involvement in planning process: it is a centralized approach. This may be due to misunderstanding the potentials of citizen's participation in planning practice. This study shows that public participation is an essential approach not only for public and planning authorities but also for urban plans preparation. In fact it helps to develop proper solutions for urban planning. Introducing public participation in the planning process requires taking into consideration a number of aspects including: involving the appropriate participants, selecting the right methods of participation, and using appropriate means. Because the nature of urban planning affects human everyday activities, strong, participation becomes essential for the public to take part in planning their neighborhood and cities. City planning and area action plans are not only the job of authorities to develop an appropriate plan for their cities; it is everyone's role to do this together. This is because our cities deserve to have everyone's concerns: physical, health, social, economic and environmental.

This study identifies the proper methods of participation, means of participation, who should participate and the stages of planning more suitable for introducing public participation in the context of preparation of urban plans. These altogether help to introduce the participants at the right stages of the planning process.

The data show that the professionals, officials, and experts who participated in the questionnaire come from diverse backgrounds. The various age groups, level of education, field of work, as well as length of experience are represented in the sample.

Regarding the planning level in which public participation should be introduced; the analysis demonstrates that the respondents are more likely to be in favor of its introduction in the lower levels of plans. Namely, in action area level, city level, and to some extent in the Muhafdah level.

The high percentage of responses to both levels (action area and cities level) came as a result of both levels have things that can be discussed and questioned unlike the national level where only strategies and policies are stated in general. Therefore, respondents strongly agreed about supporting public to participate into both the action area level and cities level. The selection implies that local people are able to participate positively in those two levels. This is because residents may know about their neighborhood and cities, but less so about sub-regional and provincial levels. With reference to national levels, residents may have no knowledge. National levels have only strategies and policies which they are stated in general. Therefore, less public participation can be expected.

With reference to the planning processes stages in which the participation should take place, the results suggest that it is more important in the stages that involve decision making than those technical stages. Public participation is more effective at the initial stage of definition of problems, goals formulation stage, and selecting alternatives stage, than developing alternatives and methodologies and planning processes.

The analysis shows that there is a small difference of the responses values for participation methods. This implies that those participation methods are favored by respondents for preparation urban plans. Meaning that, all types of public participation methods are welcomed by the respondents, however some are considered more superior than others.

Regarding who should participate, it appeared that there is a very close values registered between '*specialists in*

planning' and *'ordinary people'* who are affected by the plan, which imply that both are equally important. Respondents think that consulting the specialists is important due to their roles and experiences in the development plans. Technical terms associated with development plan are another thing that specialists are familiar with. Those specialists in planning authority may provide support to help people develop their neighborhood plan. However, consulting those affected by the plan is needed because the decision that will be taken might affect those people. It is sensible to consider them to influence the decision in preparation plan.

The analysis shows that all those who are concerned should participate in the process of preparing urban plans: ordinary people, specialists and planning experts, governmental institutions, NGOs, as well as the private sector should all be involved. To enable all those to participate "electronic participation" is given the first priority by the respondents, followed by "both Electronic & traditional methods", whereas "only traditional methods" are the last choice. Finally, the data indicate that there is almost a consensus of agreement among professionals, officials, and experts that both men and women should equally participate in the processes of preparing urban plans.

In conclusion, this paper has searched to ascertain respondents (*professionals, officials and experts*) opinions of Dammam Metropolitan Area (DMA) regarding introduction of public participation practice in the urban planning process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The results show that the public participation is one of the core principles of preparing urban plans. It shows that the respondents have positive attitudes toward the participation in urban planning. They support participation in urban planning and particularly in giving equal chance to "Men & Women" to participate in decision making.

Recommendations

Based on the above, the study recommends the following:

- Identification of the future studies needed to make sure that the process is acceptable by all parties, especially the public itself and municipality managers and leaders.
- Identification of the necessary plans needed to implement public participation.
- Public participation should consider capacity building for both the community through public awareness and for the officials in municipalities through suitable training.
- Public participation should recognize and focus on the needs and interest of all participants.
- Public participation should be introduced as a mandatory procedure on the preparation of the action area, and urban plans. It can be optional in the preparation of urban plans at the Muhafdah, regional and national levels.
- In particular, public participation should be introduced in initial definition of problems stage, goals formulation stage, and selecting alternatives stage.
- Planner should employ the appropriate public participation methods at the different stages of the planning process. They may apply questionnaires, interviews, displays and exhibition, public hearing, open discussion, focus groups, and workshops.
- All those concerned about plans, i.e. ordinary people, specialist and planning experts, governmental institutions, NGOs, and the private sector should be invited and encouraged to participate in the planning processes.
- All means should be used to encourage the concerned groups to effectively participate in the preparation of plans, particularly the electronic means which is more convenient to females in the Saudi society.

- Finally, both men and women should be given equally chance to participate in the processes of preparing urban plans.

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