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## Tracing Participatory Planning in Amman

*Luna Khirfan and Bessma Momani*

### INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Amman, the capital of Jordan, has undergone rapid urban growth due to internal rural-to-urban migration and to external immigration triggered by regional political unrest, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. These population inflows led to Amman's domination as a "city-state" (Samha 1996; Al-Asad 2004). From accommodating 9 per cent of Jordan's population in 1952, Amman expanded to accommodate 40 per cent in 2007 (Greater Amman Municipality 2008; Potter et al. 2009). Naturally, urban expansions paralleled this population growth (Samha 1996; also see Tewfik 1989; Abu-Dayyeh 2004; Madbouly 2009; Potter et al. 2009) and warranted physical plans for Amman, four of which were developed in 1955, 1968, 1978, and in 1988 (Abu-Dayyeh 2004). Completely absent from these plans were any notions of inclusive or participatory planning.

While dramatic changes are not foreign to Amman's urban landscape, the years 2006–07 marked a turning point when the Greater Amman Municipality was assailed by sixteen requisitions for high-rise developments – an unprecedented, hence unregulated building typology in Amman's landscape. Triggered by the influx of investments in real estate development from the Arab Gulf States, and perceived as a form of "modernization," these development pressures prompted King Abdullah II to appoint Omar Maani as mayor in 2006. The king instructed the new mayor "to invite experts from all over the world," perceiving that their "sharing of successes and failures that they have witnessed in other cities can be of tremendous

value to us” (King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein, 3 May 2006, documented in Greater Amman Municipality 2008, 10–11). Eventually, more than fifteen Canadian planning experts from Toronto became involved with Jordanian planners in developing the 2007 Amman Master Plan (Khirfan 2011), which was followed by a series of planning documents, including the 2008 *Amman Plan: Metropolitan Growth Report* (Greater Amman Municipality 2007d, 2008). In contrast with previous plans, and probably under the influence of the Canadian planners, the Amman Master Plan specifically mentions “governance,” maintains that it “be citizen centered,” and claims it is adopting an “implementation framework that is participatory, [and] inclusive”; it also mentions “a public review” for all the proposed high-density mixed-use development projects (Greater Amman Municipality 2007a, 7). Similarly, the subsequent Metropolitan Growth Report claims in its *Amman 2025: Visions and Aspirations* section that by 2025 Amman will be “a city with a citizen-centered governance” that is “based on principles of transparency, accountability, inclusive citizen participation” (Greater Amman Municipality 2008, 36). The Jordanian urban planners who were at the helm of these new plans also reiterated this inclusive and participatory rhetoric and made claims of engaging the public and of fostering participatory planning processes. Apart from sporadic criticism of these claims (Parker 2009; Beaugregard and Marpillero-Colomina 2011), there is a dearth of systematic studies to assess these participatory claims and investigate how Amman’s citizens perceive them and the new plans for their city. We are therefore combining political science and urban planning perspectives in an attempt to understand the extent and the nature of public engagement and participation in Amman’s urban development. We build on Cooke and Kothari’s notion of participation as tyranny, or “how participatory development facilitates [...] the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power” (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 4). Accordingly, we reveal the tyrannies in the Greater Amman Municipality’s (GAM) approach to public participation and how, in a counter-reaction, some of those directly affected by GAM’s policies used tyranny to resist, and even reverse, these policies.

The next section situates public participation in the urban landscape of the Middle East in general and Amman in particular. It is followed by the research design and methodology that facilitated a comparison between the official narrative and the public’s perception

of Amman's new plans to assess the extent and nature of public engagement in the formation of these plans. The next two sections then present our analysis, which juxtaposes the official narratives against public perceptions. By investigating the limitations of current approaches to expanding public participation in the transformations taking place in Amman, this study in the final section provides insights drawn from our study participants on how to best integrate public participation in future urban planning projects.

#### URBAN PLANNING AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The rapid transformations that have occurred in the urban landscapes of the Middle East have been discussed by many scholars (for example, see the edited volumes by Elsheshtawy 2008 and Al-Harithy 2010; see also Abu-Dayyeh 2004; Abu-Ghazalah 2007, 2008, 2010; Alnsour and Meaton 2009; Parker 2009; Potter et al. 2009; Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina 2011). Simultaneously, poor public participation in the planning process of the region has come under greater academic scrutiny (see, for example, Mubarak 2004; Shechter and Yacobi 2005a; Abu-Ghazalah 2010; Al-Naim 2008; Madbouly 2009; Fenster and Yacobi 2005), including studies that have examined the absence of long-term plans for sustained and inclusive urban development projects (i.e., Al-Hathloul 2004; Shechter and Yacobi 2005b; Stanley 2005). These rapid urban expansions paralleled significant changes in city-state relationships throughout the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s – in which government services in many countries were curtailed to citizenries that had become accustomed to these services, and indeed viewed them as a difficult though necessary exchange for life under autocratic regimes. The social contract between citizens and government was one that exchanged political acquiescence for social services. As the provision of social services to urban communities decreased with the rise of neoliberal discourse surrounding the necessity for fiscal conservatism, state bureaucracies nonetheless retained significant powers in the development of urban spaces, including informal and formal control over city planning projects (Mubarak 2004; Fenster and Yacobi 2005; Shechter and Yacobi 2005a, 2005b; Stanley 2005; Madbouly 2009). The social contract was altered on one side, i.e., the provision of social services, but not on the other, i.e., decreasing

governmental control over policy planning. Furthermore, Shami (2003) argues for a transition in the rhetoric from urban services to urban resources that include “Space, information, environment, kinship networks, [and] good neighbours.” Such a transition prioritizes assets, including “patronage, threat of collective action, bargaining, negotiation, and formal processes such as elections and lobbying that are more commonly recognized as political. Governance research should be particularly cognizant of the importance of issues of identity to community formation and collective action.”

The challenges currently facing cities in the Middle East – including rapid population growth, inequality, weak economic reform, crumbling infrastructure, and high unemployment (e.g., Al-Hathloul 2004; Madbouly 2009; Shechter and Yacobi 2005a, 2005b) – are of particular concern given that the wealth, culture, and politics of the Arab world are urban-based (Stanley 2005), and that urban centres like Amman remain the areas with the largest population densities and the fastest population growth (see Shechter and Yacobi 2005b on cities in the Middle East). Yet state-induced planning policies at the national and municipal levels have been inconsistent (Shechter and Yacobi 2005b; Stanley 2005; Madbouly 2009) – ranging, in Amman’s case, from constructing mega-projects (Abu-Ghazalah 2007) to ad hoc interventions in times of crisis, such as during water shortages (Potter, Darmame, and Nortcliff 2010). Such inconsistency rendered GAM unable to keep pace with the needs of its constituency, thus lagging in developing necessary infrastructure such as public transportation (Sugar, Kennedy, and Hoornweg 2013).

Mubarak (2004) attributes the absence of institutionalized public participation in the urban landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) partly to this region’s colonial legacy and partly to the inability of MENA nation-states to establish clear avenues for public participation after they implemented decentralization policies. Stanley (2005) discussed the limits of such decentralization and the states’ continuous overshadowing of cities and of municipal authorities. He argues that the state has continually disempowered municipal authorities in planning decisions, so that “[r]eciprocity is low within, among and through cities for communities, or for cities with the state, and political space is tightly controlled” (2005, 197). Indeed, Jordan’s king holds absolute power in Jordan’s constitutional monarchy (Al Oudat and Alshboul 2010). Notwithstanding King Hussein’s (1952–99) political liberalization during the

1980s–90s, which revitalized parliamentary elections and expanded civic society, Mednicoff (2002) argues that the king actually “use[d] these developments to concentrate, rather than decentralise, [his] political control.” His son and successor, King Abdullah II, has deployed “soft mechanisms of manipulation,” Yom (2009) argues, to further solidify his rule, including “the adoption of selective economic reforms, the use of legal regulations to constrain civil society, and the cooptation from above of all democratic initiatives” (151). Monarchical rule in Jordan therefore centralizes real authority in its executive, i.e., the monarch, while rendering institutions, such as legislatures, governorates, and municipal bodies symbolic, even if they are democratically elected, since they possess few real instruments of authority. GAM’s governance system actually reflects how electoral power has been curbed. Although all the municipal councils and mayors throughout Jordan are elected, Amman is the exception: the king appoints not only its mayor, but also 50 per cent of its city council – leaving the other 50 per cent to be elected as representatives by the citizens of Amman’s various districts (Greater Amman Municipality 2015). Furthermore, while all the municipalities in Jordan fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, GAM falls under the direct responsibility of the Prime Ministry (Clark 2012). Indeed, Madbouly (2009) finds that weak administrations in Middle Eastern cities, combined with limited resources, have contributed to low public participation at the local level. This is further exacerbated in Jordanian municipalities in general, and in GAM in particular, through the uncritical application of western urban planning models that disregard the cities’ local, social, cultural, and environmental contexts (see Alnsour and Meaton 2009; Abu-Dayyeh 2004).

The inability or unwillingness of states to integrate public participation into the planning process in the Middle East has meant that citizens have largely been confined to rather passive roles in the urban planning of their cities, such as being respondents in general discussions run by experts (Madbouly 2009). Indeed, scholars from various interdisciplinary backgrounds have noted that there is an appetite for public participation in the planning process in Middle Eastern cities, but that it is hindered by several factors (see, for example, Mubarak 2004; Shechter and Yacobi 2005b; Al-Naim 2008; Abu-Ghazalah 2008; Alnsour and Meaton 2009; Madbouly 2009; Fenster and Yacobi 2005). For instance, Fenster and Yacobi

(2005) find a disconnect in Tel Aviv between the municipality's rhetoric of citizen involvement in the city's Central Bus Station (CBS) plans and its practice of providing poor services to residents who, in turn, have become suspicious of urban planning projects. Similarly, Al-Naim (2008) writes about the minimal role of public participation and the "largely consultative" role of municipal councils in government planning projects in Saudi Arabia, while in Lebanon, Madbouly (2009) notes that the lack of structured institutional mechanisms (e.g., laws, policies, administrative structures, participatory processes, etc.) has meant that interaction between municipalities and residents remains difficult. Finally, in the city of Zarqa, Jordan, Abu-Ghazalah (2008) discusses the failure of municipal officials to make public participation in city projects a reality.

Despite the ability of civil society actors to mobilize public participation (Al-Hathloul 2004; Madbouly 2009) and despite their expertise in matters related to city planning, such as in the areas of health, education, housing, and the environment (Madbouly 2009; Shechter and Yacobi 2005b), these actors, which include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, and, in some instances, charity associations (e.g., Abu-Ghazalah 2008; Wiktorowicz 2002) have been marginalized in the urban planning arena. Such actors too often find themselves brought into discussions for symbolic purposes to demonstrate a form of outreach and consultation, though they are not seen as valuable partners in the planning process or in the implementation and quickly become ignored. As a result, very little has been achieved in what can be considered true participation in urban planning initiatives (Mubarak 2004; Fenster and Yacobi 2005; Al-Naim 2008; Madbouly 2009). This is particularly disconcerting in Amman's case given the challenges that it currently faces as it attempts to move forward with development initiatives, including: traffic congestion, affordable housing needs, water shortage, and severe polarization as expressed by Amman's East-West divide (i.e., Potter et al. 2009; Madbouly 2009; Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina 2011).

According to Arnstein's "ladder" of citizen participation (see figure 3.1), citizen participation in urban development projects across the Middle East is tokenism at best. While tokenism is better than no participation, it falls short of empowerment and includes attempts to placate, consult, and inform (Arnstein 1969). For Cooke and Kothari (2001), tokenistic attempts at participation fall under one of

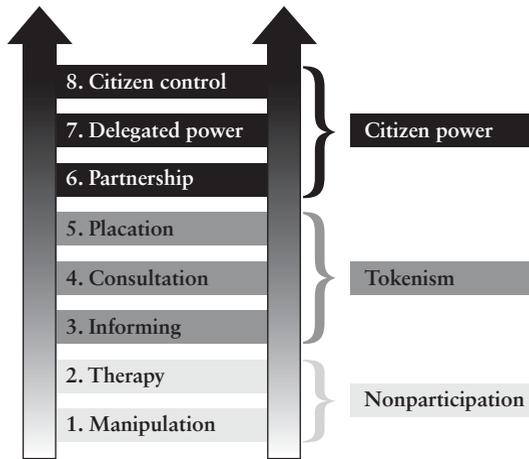


Figure 3.1 Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation

three participation tyrannies. The first is the tyranny of decision-making and control that ensues from those in charge of the participatory process; the second is the tyranny of the group which favours power dynamics; and the third is the tyranny of method which constrains including and/or excluding interest groups. By investigating the extent and nature of public engagement in Amman's recent planning initiatives, the following sections elucidate how a combination of these tyrannies permeated Amman's recent planning initiatives. Also, by investigating the public perceptions of, and response to, these tokenistic initiatives, the analysis reveals how the local communities deployed some of these same tyrannies to counter GAM's tokenism and successfully hinder and even completely reverse some of the ensuing policies. The analysis concludes with insights on Ammanis' preferences for their future engagement in the planning of their city.

To obtain a clear picture of the formation of Amman's Master Growth Plan (AMP), to assess the official claims of public engagement, to investigate the rationale behind these claims, and to examine the extent to which Ammanis were engaged in the urban planning processes that have occurred since 2007, we deployed an exploratory research design of interdisciplinary and multi-layered research methods. Our methods facilitated a comparison between the official narratives and public perceptions, particularly the extent and nature

of participation that the officials believed they were providing, the public's perceptions of the extent and nature of their engagement, and the extent and nature of participation that the citizens of Amman are demanding for future initiatives.

To begin with, the official narrative was acquired through interviews with planners and policymakers, and through analyzing the content of municipal planning documents. We conducted a series of eighteen in-depth interviews with public officials at the municipal level that elucidated their perceptions about public engagement during the planning process. Among those interviewed were senior and mid-level policymakers and planners at GAM and at the Amman Institute for Urban Development<sup>1</sup> (Ai), who were directly involved in the formation of the new plans; appointed advisors to the mayor who were members of the Mayor's Roundtable (the formation and role of which are discussed in the following section); appointed and elected city councillors; and members of Parliament (MPs), who represented various districts in Amman at the time of our fieldwork.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, we undertook content analysis of all official municipal planning documents associated with the recent plans for Amman, and complemented this approach with an investigation of an array of local media and archived web postings, which promulgated the official narrative. This allowed us to assess the official rhetoric on public participation during the urban planning process, and allowed us to determine the degree of transparency during the public consultation process.

The research also involved gauging the public's perception of their inclusion in the planning process and their attitudes toward the changes taking place in Amman's urban landscape. In addition, the research investigated the specific ways in which the public perceived that citizens' engagement could ideally occur in future planning and development initiatives in Amman. Therefore, we deployed an online survey whose findings were then verified through a series of focus groups with representative communities of Amman's various districts.<sup>3</sup> In total, 2,118 Ammanis responded to the online survey, of whom 533 completed all twenty questions in the survey. Among the respondents, more males (75 per cent) completed the survey than females (25 per cent), but there were no visible voting preferences among males or females on any issue. Moreover, while every age group was represented among the 533 respondents who completed the survey, the majority (71 per cent) were between 18 and 29 years

of age.<sup>4</sup> A majority of the respondents (56 per cent) had an undergraduate (a bachelor's) degree and 12 per cent had some form of postgraduate degree. A majority of the respondents were either employed (54 per cent) or students (37 per cent), while the remaining 9 per cent were unemployed, which suggests that the respondents represented a wide distribution of income levels. Respondents were distributed widely from the various districts within Amman, although respondents from Tla' al-'Ali area were slightly overrepresented (18 per cent).

To obtain further in-depth insights from the various interest groups representing the citizens of Amman, we followed the online survey by conducting thirteen focus group meetings, each consisting of ten to fifteen participants. These participants represented a diverse array of socio-economic, age, gender, and professional backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> In organizing these focus group meetings, we also took the geographic distribution of the various districts within Amman into account. Our research benefited tremendously from the effect that focus groups had on group synergy, stimulation, spontaneity, and reflection, as well as from the ability to document the participants' non-verbal responses in such contexts (Bloor et al. 2002; Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2007). The staff of the Ai provided valuable assistance in the recruitment for the focus groups and later in the transcriptions, but we managed the sessions independently from the Ai.

#### THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

During the eighteen interviews conducted with Amman's planning officials, it became apparent that officials' claims of an inclusive and engaging planning process were inconsistent. Further, there was a serious disconnect between government statements regarding engagement and the public's own understanding of that engagement. To begin with, most municipal officials claimed that they had made unprecedented efforts at GAM to ensure public engagement in various projects, whether toward the new policies to regulate high-rise towers, the amalgamation of several municipalities in Amman's urban hinterland under GAM's jurisdictions,<sup>6</sup> the proposed bus rapid transit (BRT), the development of King Faisal Street downtown, or the Citadel area development, to name but a few. In discussing public engagement, the mayor of Amman at that time, Omar Maani,

said that he was “very bullish on this” and that as a result of his persistence, “[participation] is beginning to happen,” asserting that institutionalizing public participation is a “commitment, you can’t waiver” (interview on 2 January 2011). Other GAM officials who were interviewed corroborated these claims by asserting that they sought to “build trust” with the public, as exemplified in initiatives such as forming a public consultative body dubbed “the Mayor’s Round Table,” holding consultations with interest groups, and also convening public meetings. Probing these initiatives however, reveals a different scenario – one that depicted the tyrannies of the decision-making process, the method, and even the group (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

In particular, the tyranny of the decision-making process can be seen through the fact that the AMP was produced in a very short time span, which would have precluded any genuine consultative or engagement processes. In describing the production of the AMP, a senior GAM planner proudly shared how “the scale of this work was rather substantial, having worked approximately 19,000 hours within five months between 12 or 14 of us. We worked consecutively as late as 11 at night daily, so it was quite the challenge.”

Moreover, the tyranny of the method can be seen through the many shortcomings and internal biases of what GAM officials claimed were participatory activities, and what Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina (2011, 66) uncritically describe as “maximizing input from stakeholders.” In fact, what had happened is that the mayor and GAM’s officials converted the existing Amman Commission, a voluntary advisory body on architectural affairs, into what came to be known as the Mayor’s Round Table. The latter’s forty-odd attendees included, in addition to representatives of relevant governmental agencies (such as the Ministry of Public Works and Housing) and GAM’s heads of departments, members of the public who were supposedly chosen based on their suitability and skills. Yet the latter were directly appointed by the mayor instead of through a transparent process, such as advertising their positions. We argue that the participation of these individuals represented the tyranny of the group (Cooke and Kothari 2001). At best, their selection reflected inequity given that they typified a privileged class that did not represent Amman’s various sub-communities, especially those residing in impoverished and marginalized East Amman. At worst, their selection represented a conspicuous conflict of interest

given that some of these individuals were architects and urban planners whose private firms, during their tenure at the Mayor's Round Table, were directly involved in projects tendered by GAM.

In a similar fashion, the tyranny of the method (Cooke and Kothari 2001) is shown in both the type of engagement methods deployed – i.e., public meetings dubbed “consultations” – and in their timing. These consultations were held with specific interest groups that were supposedly directly affected by the proposed policies, such as the developers of the high-rise towers and the merchants of Faisal Street downtown. Answering a question about the criteria behind the selection of the participants in these consultations, a planner justified that it “depend[ed] on the extent of [the participants] being affected” by the planning decisions, and went on to elaborate that “I won't tell you what all the other [planners] have, that we've reached all the parties of the community. No. I would tell you that if we are talking about the high-rise, or the Industrial Land Policy ... [these policies] affect a certain group of landowners, so we were focusing on them so that they fully understand what we are doing; we've met them.” Not only did the selection of the participants in this method exclude others who might have directly or indirectly been affected by the policies, but it also seems obvious from this narrative that this planner, like other GAM officials, used “informing” and “participating” interchangeably, misconceiving the distinctions between the two processes. This misconception continues in this same planner's explanation of how such “participation” continued after the policy was enacted: “Our role as a GAM team continues, whereas we keep receiving every landowner, regardless of his land's location in order to explain to him his exact situation, show him whether he will be affected or not, and illustrate more about this new coming policy.” This planner complained how “these individual meetings were a little tiring for us until people could comprehend what's going on” and lamented the lack of public appreciation of GAM's “participatory approach” by concluding, “I feel that this was the real role assumed by GAM [and it] was downplayed in newspapers and media” (interview on 11 January 2011).

Last, while what the mayor and GAM officials dubbed “public meetings” were indeed held at one point, our investigation reveals that these meetings only addressed tangential issues such as the new design for Amman's logo rather than the fundamental policy-related ones, such as the BRT or the amalgamation of several smaller

municipalities in Amman's urban hinterland under GAM's jurisdictions. The former was a particularly contentious decision that we discuss further in the next section.

Altogether, the interviews with the planners revealed how entrenched the tyranny of the decision-making and control was at GAM. The assumption that planners are experts who know better than citizens, who are ignorant about planning-related matters, and hence are mere recipients of services that these planners "deliver" to them, was omnipresent. These views were further compounded by the fact that GAM planners themselves perceive planning merely as the delivery of services in the form of physical mega-infrastructure projects such as roads, tunnels, and bypasses rather than, as Shami's (2003) study of Middle Eastern capital cities revealed, a wider concept of urban resources. One example of this attitude emerged during a meeting between one of the co-authors of this chapter and senior GAM planners in 2011 to discuss a public viewing of a movie on Curitiba's BRT experience. One of the senior GAM planners insisted at the time on an "invitation only" event, and justified the choice by stating that "we do not want people to ask stupid questions" in reference to the proposed BRT in Amman. During our interactions with GAM planners, we found that they continually imparted unsubstantiated assumptions about their constituencies' needs and preferences to make important planning decisions. This way of thinking and acting is so entrenched among them that they do not think it is necessary to use objective methods to assess these needs and preferences. One of these assumptions was citizens' apathy toward urban planning issues. GAM planners believed that the turnout in public consultations for Amman's logo was low because Jordanians are private and family-oriented people who are not keen on expressing their opinions on non-family matters – a claim that our findings contest, as we discuss in the following section.

#### THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTIONS

Our findings show that the citizens of Amman are passionate about their city and have a keen interest in being involved in its future. Unlike a once dominant argument that Arab citizens tend to be apathetic and apolitical, captured by Aarts's (1999) notion of "Arab exceptionalism," we found a great deal of interest in participating in

urban planning. This was evident in the high response rate to the online survey, in the strong response to our recruitment calls for the focus groups, and in the lively discussions of these focus groups, each of which lasted well over ninety minutes. Indeed, our findings coincided with the birth of the Arab Spring demonstrations and protests, which debunked the Arab exceptionalist argument of an apathetic Arab political culture. Again, our findings confirm that the political apathy among the respondents was very low. This was consistent among different age group, education, and income levels, suggesting that municipal government perceptions were very much unfounded. Of the 1,264 respondents who answered a question whether, if the opportunity arose, they would share their opinion about current developments in Amman's urban landscape, only 10 per cent (131 respondents) selected "no," 21 per cent (270 respondents) indicated that they were "not sure," while a 68 per cent majority (863 respondents) chose "yes." Of those who selected "no," only 9.5 per cent (11 respondents) indicated that they were not interested in getting involved in the urban planning process, but a 47 per cent majority (55 respondents) largely attributed their negative choice to scepticism that their opinions would not be heard. Indeed, the key groups affected by Amman's new AMP, such as the downtown merchants, where the downtown corridor was implemented, and the residents of the then newly amalgamated Muwaggar area, were the most critical of the so-called participatory planning process during the focus groups. They claimed it was "manipulative" since it imparted selective information about the new policies and plans, made false promises about future planning initiatives, and thus lacked transparency. As a result, these individuals felt alienated from the decision-making process – particularly in cases when political decisions directly influenced their livelihoods.

For example, in the case of Amman's downtown corridor, GAM's officials noted that the investors, members of the Chamber of Commerce, and members of the Chamber of Industry had been consulted. During focus group meetings with these same groups however, they consistently insisted that they had not been consulted. One participant, who was involved with the Downtown Committee that met regularly with the Ai and GAM planners shared that "I am a member of this committee and we went for a few meetings and honestly they showed us [the plans] but they did not call us or consult

[us] or hear what we [have to] say. [They] descended on us like a parachute [and said] this is the plan, and deal with it. And I asked them many times: ‘Are you here to consult us or to tell<sup>7</sup> us?’”

In fact, the downtown merchants claimed that they were the ones who had invited the mayor to a meeting to share with him their own vision for the downtown area. In a similar vein, the residents of the newly amalgamated Muwaggar claimed that while the so-called consultation did indeed take place, the approach was biased. For example, one of the focus group participants emphasized how GAM planners “did not seek people’s opinions. And even when they did, they went to people who had personal goals for supporting merging with Amman.” This confirms that GAM’s planners exercised the tyranny of the method and the group whereby the consultations excluded certain groups, while the ensuing decisions “reinforced the interests of the already powerful” (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

While the “informing” strategy is corroborated by the officials themselves, as discussed earlier, still it is important to delve into these declarations beyond their face value, for several reasons. First, the initial indifference of these interest groups toward the proposed AMP was in fact triggered by their expectations of positive outcomes, which, for various reasons, including the global economic downturn in 2008, did not materialize. This is betrayed through statements such as the one by a participant in the Muwaggar focus group who complained about GAM planners in reference to the amalgamation policy: “We saw nothing. They made nothing for us. Have they opened new roads? No, they haven’t. Have they brought electricity? No, they haven’t. Have they brought water? No, they haven’t. Schools? No. Nothing other than fees and collecting taxes.” The latter reference to increased taxes also played a crucial role in the outcry against the amalgamation. Once the policy sank in, the residents of these formerly rural areas realized that the prestige of affiliation with the capital came with a price tag in the form of taxes and additional fees for various municipal services as well as for private property. In a Foucauldian twist that demonstrates both the circulation of power – as opposed to its division (Kothari 2001) – and the technologies of citizenship (Cruikshank 1993), the inhabitants of the six amalgamated districts took to the streets in protest against these policies. The participants in our focus group insisted that their “main and basic demand” was to reverse the

amalgamation decision, which indeed they achieved in 2011, when the then Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs rescinded the decision (Al-Habashneh 2011).

Second, the majority of the participants in our focus groups lacked an awareness of the rationale behind the policies instigated by the AMP. Three examples stand out. The first is the amalgamation decision in which none of the participants in our focus groups were aware of the rationale for the decision provided in the AMP's documents, including the necessity to conserve agricultural land, to manage the scarce water resources, or to protect the environment (Greater Amman Municipality 2007d). Similarly, even though it was already underway, the BRT project was unfathomable to the overwhelming majority of the various societal representations we had interacted with in Amman, whether in the focus groups or in social circles. In fact, almost everyone we spoke to misunderstood the word "rapid" to refer to the speed of the vehicle itself rather than to the frequency of the bus service. Even renowned online newspapers continue to refer to the BRT as the "fast bus" (Khaberni 2015). Like the amalgamation decision, the BRT project has been halted since July 2011 (*The Jordan Times* 2011). In another Foucauldian twist, Abdul Rahim al-Boucai, the MP for Amman's Third District (2007–16), who spearheaded the campaign against the BRT and who influenced then Prime Minister Marouf Bakhit's decision to halt the project, had in fact served as the Deputy Mayor of Amman to Mayor Maani's predecessor. Armed with budgetary information, one of his parliamentary speeches highlighted the increase in GAM's fiscal deficit, from JoD 7 million in 2006 to nearly JoD 250 million at the time of his speech in December 2010. Al-Boucai presented these figures vis-à-vis GAM's new initiatives such as the BRT, its recruitment of the Canadian planners, and particularly, the foundation of the Ai under Canadian leadership (interview on 30 December 2010). The third example reflects how, despite Amman's rapid urban development, an overwhelming number of our study's respondents identified with, and expressed a strong preference for, characterizing Amman by its homogenous hills and its older neighbourhoods, such as Jabal el-Weibdeh, Jabal Amman, and Jabal el-Taj (figure 3.2). The participants in our focus groups consistently described the proposed high rise towers as "out of place," expressed their preference for the "older" relationship between medium-density or medium-rise built structures and Amman's natural hills, and voiced their wishes to

place newer high-rise developments on the eastern fringes of the city away from Amman's established neighbourhoods. Yet, when asked about their views on intensification, clearly the concept remained vague for these focus group participants. For them, the linkage between intensification and sustainability – be it environmental, social, or economic – was not obvious. Nor was it obvious to them that the preferred “older” urban form of Amman, with its medium-density and medium-rise structures represents intensification. Most important, the respondents could not establish connections between intensification and the management of scarce water resources by decreasing runoff and protecting underground water, regardless of the fact that water shortages represent a daily challenge for all the residents of Amman (Potter, Darmame, and Nortcliff 2010, and personal experience). Our respondents also rightfully expressed concerns about the ability of Amman's physical and social infrastructure to bear the additional demands of intensification in general, and high-rise towers in particular. It is important to mention that while most respondents did not particularly object to intensification in principle, their concerns stemmed from a lack of comprehension of the rationale behind the decisions for intensification. These three examples highlight the lost opportunities that would have stemmed from genuine public participation, which if it had occurred, would have raised awareness of urban planning issues as Fagence (1977) asserts.

Last, and most important, our findings reveal that, similar to GAM's officials and planners, Amman's residents continue to misconceive GAM's responsibilities as limited to the delivery of supply-side physical services, particularly those pertaining to road construction and infrastructure, rather than perceiving GAM as a public institution whose responsibilities encompass various aspects of civic life – or urban resources, as Shami (2003) puts it. Among the 560 respondents who ranked a list of the initiatives prioritized by GAM, providing road infrastructure was ranked the highest (by 231 respondents who ranked it first). When asked in a later question to rank their preferences for new initiatives that GAM should tackle, providing road infrastructure and public parks were equally ranked by 120 respondents each as their first choice. Other services trailed in their first choice ranking. Public transit was ranked as a first choice by 84 respondents and cultural services was ranked as a first choice by only 54 respondents.



Figure 3.2 The homogenous hills of Amman's older neighbourhoods

#### THE FUTURE OF PARTICIPATORY PLANNING IN AMMAN

When interpreting the results of our study, Arnstein's (1969) ladder serves solely as a benchmark – one that indicates that the attempts at some form of a participatory approach during the formation of the AMP did not exceed the level of informing. In fact, informing, as the lowest level of tokenism, lies only one level above non-participation. In other words, while GAM's planners perceived their efforts to be participatory, these efforts did not adequately represent citizen participation in its fullest sense, or even in its most minimal sense. More fundamentally, these claims of participation on behalf of GAM's officials and planners embody Cooke and Kothari's (2001) participation as tyranny. The findings reveal that the tyranny of decision-making and control occurred through informing rather than consulting or even placating, let alone empowering citizens through

actual partnership (Arnstein 1969). Furthermore, the tyranny of the method transpired by constraining the inclusion of – and even purposefully excluding – interest groups, and, combined with the tyranny of the group that favoured power dynamics, they hindered public input, especially when this public input threatened to undermine the interests of elite stakeholders, as was the case with the land owners in Muwaggar. Our findings reveal, however, that these power dynamics are far from constant. On the contrary, power circulated away from GAM's officials, whether toward the formerly marginalized groups, such as with the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, or toward Amman's former deputy mayor-turned MP for what Robinson (1997) considers Amman's most affluent, hence influential, electoral district.

Simultaneously, our study reveals that the onus is on GAM, as the principal local planning institution, to effectively identify, tailor, and institutionalize public engagement and participatory planning methods to suit the unique conditions of Amman's varying districts. Two issues that stand out in this regard warrant the attention of GAM planners, namely, first, the need to initiate public engagement at the outset of any planning initiative. Certainly, local engagement in Amman seemed to occur at random in the planning process – often toward the end of the planning process and the beginning of implementation and rarely, if ever, at the onset of any planning initiative. Simultaneously, while GAM planners declared their willingness to engage Amman's citizens in the planning process, GAM's planning culture needs a paradigm shift. According to Sanyal (2005, 3), planning culture refers to “the collective ethos and dominant attitude of professional planners,” which in GAM's case maintained that planners are providers of physical infrastructure services to passive and apathetic recipients. Our findings reveal otherwise – that Ammanis are extremely passionate about their city, and are keen to take part in the decision-making process. Therefore, a paradigm shift in the planning culture at GAM would entail a genuine appreciation of the benefits of engagement, inclusiveness, and transparency in the decision-making processes. Ironically, it is the BRT project that provides a profound argument in favour of this paradigm shift. The public's confusion about the nature of a BRT system, combined with numerous rumours, has resulted in a public outcry against this desperately needed project and has led to extensive delays, mushrooming expenses, and outright antagonism toward GAM (figure 3.3) (*The Jordan Times* 2011).



Figure 3.3 The lanes dedicated to the BRT along the University Street (Shari' al-Jami'a) have been standing unused since the halting of the project in July 2011

Finally, we sought to obtain insights from the participants in our study about their preferences for participating in future urban planning processes. Our findings from the online survey reveal that of the 553 respondents who answered a question about their preferred form of engagement, 44 per cent preferred to vote on key proposals in their city, 32 per cent preferred to take part in small focus groups, while the remaining 19 per cent wanted to attend public town hall meetings. It is imperative to emphasize that these responses were consistent regardless of the respondents' age group, education, employment, or income levels. Probing further, the participants of the focus groups recommended stakeholder-specific strategies tailored to each group's particular characteristics, such as capitalizing on the traditional role of the "mukhtar" (an elder chosen to manage a neighbourhood's affairs) which still functions effectively in some areas, especially in East Amman. Some participants

recommended a more effective role for elected city councillors, while others recommended capitalizing on existing positive relationships with locally respected bodies such as religious and non-governmental organizations active within the communities.

#### NOTES

- 1 The Amman Institute (Ai) was founded in 2008 with an NGO status to serve as a think tank on urban planning and development. Its staff combined Jordanian and international – mostly Canadian – experts. Until its closing in 2012, Gerry Post, a Canadian planning expert, presided over it. GAM commissioned the Ai to conduct several tasks, including studies and plans for several projects that spun off the Amman Master Plan (AMP).
- 2 Because GAM falls directly under the prime minister's jurisdiction, these MPs do not have a direct influence on GAM's policy formation, yet we chose to interview them since some are among the most influential in parliament and they affect policies through their direct and personal interactions with the prime minister.
- 3 Advertising of the survey via Google ads and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter targeted elite English-speaking Jordanians with high Internet connectivity, as well as middle/working-class, Arabic-speaking Jordanians. In addition, advertising the survey through Arabic media websites, such as Jordan-based Khaberni and Ammon, reached a mass public with lower educational levels and socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
- 4 According to official census data, this particular age range accounts for 20 per cent of the national Jordanian population. As a result, their relatively higher response rate to the survey questionnaire significantly (3.5 times) overrepresents this age range in the survey.
- 5 Between December 2010 and January 2011, we organized and facilitated thirteen focus groups where each group comprised women in poor districts; women in elite districts; children in impoverished areas; children in affluent areas; two separate professional groups of middle-class Ammanis; one group of university students in low-class districts; one group of university students in affluent districts; one group of downtown merchants; and one group of media representatives and journalists. These focus groups were organized with the assistance of civil society organizations or professional organizations who sent a call for participants to their members. Each focus group lasted anywhere between an hour or two, was

candid, and often took place in either Arabic or English depending on the comfort level of the participants in either language.

- 6 One of the AMP's major outcomes was to amalgamate 982 km<sup>2</sup> (98,200 hectares) of territory in Amman's hinterland into GAM's jurisdictions (Greater Amman Municipality 2008, 47).
- 7 This focus group participant used the word "ykhhabber" in Arabic, which means "to tell" or "to inform" or even "to notify." By leaving the sentence open-ended, the act of telling, informing, or notifying could refer to anything, such as the finished plans or the enactment of polices.

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