

Application of Recreational Spaces in Fulfilling Collaborative Planning Goals A case study of Bandar Abbas city in southern Iran

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Abstract

Unsuccessful urban development plans in Iran, as a result of imperative positivistic planning and one-way up-down attitude, have averted cities from sustainability. An approach through which moving toward sustainability can be ascertained could be planning based on collaborative approach. But achieving collaboration and consensus between decision makers and stakeholders due to diverse interests of people is not an easy issue. In cases that society consists of different groups and ethnicities like Bandar Abbas, building consensus has much more difficulties. In order to reach social integrity and active interaction in the society, increasing general awareness of citizens and providing capacity to exchange knowledge are requisite. In fact, putting positive aspects of social capital in practice is urgent for consensus building. This situation, definitely, requires a particular space to have communication occurred. Outcomes of this research, which has conducted by a qualitative method shows that recreational spaces such as mosques, teahouses and daily bazaars in Bandar Abbas and cities/regions with similar characteristics, can play the role as a social lubricant tool to achieve sustainability. This case study research specifies that knowledge transferring and putting social capital in practice in Bandar Abbas can be feasible in such spaces and this is how recreational spaces take part in implementation of collaborative planning principles and consequently in moving toward more sustainable cities.

Keywords: *collaborative planning, sustainability, social capital, recreational spaces, mutual learning, Bandar Abbas.*

1 Introduction

One of the main reasons of unsustainability in third world cities, such as the cities of Iran is the fact that up-down positivistic attitude has encircled the planning process-the process in which opinion of authorities and decision makers has always been preferred to of stakeholders. Contrary, a key principle of a successful planning is that residents know what is best for their communities. This fruitless planning brings about unsustainability to residents of the city and urban life as well.

As an approach to achieving sustainability, collaborative planning focuses on the concept of consensus, and attempts to obtain that goal by moving away from the reference point of conflicting opinions (Bender, 1996).

Collaborative Planning draws on Habermas' concept of communicative rationality and Giddens' structuration theory in order to provide intellectual resources within policy arenas (Healey, 2003).

An issue mostly discussed in the domain of successful planning is the proper use of social capital and steer it to make societal benefits. In fact, on the way towards a more sustainable living sphere, social capital can be construed as a base for participation, which is in turn a principle of sustainability.

Furthermore, it is clear that social capital has negative aspects as well. To achieve its positive points (as a facilitator) communication and social awareness is essential. This fact sheds light on the key role of these two issues in moving toward sustainability. But the questions are:

- WHERE this communication may be implemented?
- HOW it can help achieve the collaborative planning?
- WHAT is the relationship between sustainability and recreational spaces?

This paper seeks to find a reasonable answer to the question mentioned. The method chosen to reach to this aim is qualitative method. Among different approaches of this method, within-case analysis has been selected. This method concerns with comparing data against the theory which are being used.

Researcher Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. This inductive method undertakes not only understanding the features of the case but also drawing out an analysis which may be applicable on a wider area.

Accordingly, as first step, literature review concentrates on three major concepts of the paper which are collaborative planning, social capital and recreational spaces. Afterwards, extracted points apply into case study, Bandar

Abbas, to scrutinize the role of recreation spaces in achieving collaborative planning principles.

2 Collaborative Planning

Planning in the public domain entails responding to and shaping anticipated social needs and resource necessities in the uncertain future. Thus, planning is essentially merged to decision making, which is in turn inherently transactional (negotiated). The word “collaborative” refers to all planning endeavors that involve multiple actors intentionally working together toward a collectively determined future (Shmueli et al., 2008). Collaborative planning is often mentioned as one of the most appropriate planning theories in relation to the network society owing to its focus on creating fair and inclusive institutional settings for deliberations among public and private stakeholders (Agger and Lofgren, 2008).

Collaborative Planning processes are popular approaches to local and regional planning because they contain many recognized social and organizational benefits (Mandarano, 2008). Such processes encourage broader stakeholder involvement than traditional planning approaches (Innes, 1998). Stakeholders’ face to face communication form new relationships, trust, and mutual understanding, and facilitate collective problem solving (Innes and Booher, 2003). Moreover, by working collaboratively, formerly disparate entities can product not only high-quality agreement but also social and organization changes that enable the community to achieve higher levels of performance in complex, uncertain, and fragmented policy contexts (Innes and Booher, 1999; Healey, 1997).

Collaborative planners emphasize the importance of candid and explicit discussions about values in planning processes because of different points of view of decision makers and people in real-life context. This, of course, marks a sharp turn away from the traditional, rationalist notion of the value-free planning process (Brand and Gaffikin, 2007). Collaborative planning seeks to enhance the quality of life in a specific area by joining attention to the environment and economic, social and physical infrastructure of the city to realize the goals defined by a resident-drive vision. This explains its connection to sustainability.

All too often, however, community residents are put in the position of reacting to the visions of ‘outsiders,’ planners and designers whose understanding of the city is less immediate and comprehensive. A clearly articulated vision for the future is a key component in public participation (Al-Kodmani, 1999). In fact this job encompasses translation of exact needs of people and their opinion into a formal language – the language which is used through planning process.

A communicative process can build a bridge between planners and decision makers on one hand, and stakeholders on the other. In another word, this mutual concerning implies a win-win process.

3 Social Capital

Social capital can be considered as both a social ‘glue’ that sticks people together (bonding capital) as well as a social lubricant (bridging capital). For allowing different groups of people to mix together freely, logically there needs to be a deep epistemological connection to the ‘like’ and ‘different’ identities (Brough et al., 2006).

Calthorpe and Fulton (2001) state that “usable public space and civic facilities have decayed, resulting in loss of community and loss of a sense of place”. The lack of public gathering places can stifle spontaneous socializing and thus adversely affects density of interpersonal networks. Loss of opportunities for people to interact with each other can deteriorate mutual understanding, trust, and reciprocity, which has been described as a decline in social capital (Putnam, 1995). Stakeholders lacked trust in planning authorities and were not used to reflect about the future of their home areas (Tress & Tress, 2003).

In a research in term of informal communication in collaborative planning, through interviews with stakeholders, Lee and College (2007) have found that both elites and non-elites deployed informal communication to amplify interaction and to defuse pressure for consensus. Much of the power of informal communication derived from its relation to local knowledge and place-based networking that was irrelevant in principle to formal process activities.

In an article which has been used by many researchers, Arnstein, first in 1969, clearly divided the participation into eight levels. In this article citizen participation has been linked to citizens' power which is explained in a ladder pattern (figure 1).

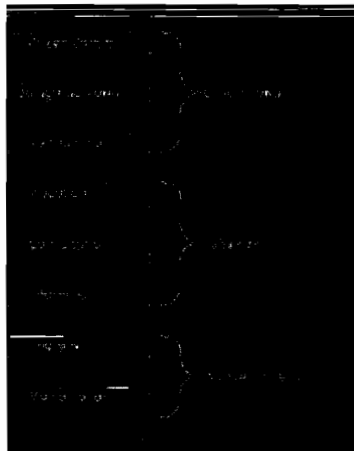


Figure 1: Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1996)

According to the figure above, one of the rungs of the ladder is informing, which is in turn a subset of tokenism. In this research, information transition is

considered as this level of participation. This stage carries the meaning of making people well aware of their rights, their roles and responsibilities and also their right to know about the projects of the city. Informing, consulting and asking for the attitude of the stakeholders would be surely beneficial only when they are emanated from the real society not through a one-way movement of information. Participation is the active intervention of people in affairs in which they are anyhow involved and this process is related strongly with informing and publicizing. Friedmann (1987) calls this process as social learning.

4 Recreational Spaces

Recreation refers to activities that promote “relaxation”, as opposed to “work”. Recreation also includes the actions and visions of people with permanent residence in the locality in question. All changes that would boost possibilities for recreational activities were appreciated most by nearby stakeholders (Tress & Tress, 2003). Recreational activities also address the activities which people chose willingly such as relaxation, entertainment, learning, promoting self-skills and most importantly voluntary participation in social activities (Daneshpour, 1997). Recreational spaces are public spaces in which such activities occur.

The recreational spaces have always been places for which stakeholders, especially ordinary people, struggled due to their livelihood and leisure time. They used their own strategies to protect their space in the unequal society.

Two characteristics of recreational spaces are public accessibility and social interaction. These peculiarities result in facilitating participation. In fact, recreational space as a bed for social interaction comprises public integrity, social coherence, self-motivated tendencies and free talk (Habibi & Rezvani, 2005).

In an ideal form, public spaces can be considered as an equal common context for social interaction and transferring the knowledge. Public spaces have been the ones where people interact with those outside their private circles. They have facilitated direct decision making, the articulation of public concerns, communication of information, commercial exchanges, and socializing (Ehrenfeucht & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007).

In addition, recreational spaces are like a window through which understanding the society and its changes is possible. These spaces can be considered as a sample of the whole society and the changes, thus, are observable. For instance, Chinese people still visit teahouses as a part of their daily routine. And also disorder in teahouses is a reflection of disorder in the larger society as a whole (Di Wang, 2000). People gather in similar spaces in different regions such as cafes, teahouses, etc. Another good example referable here as Dwyer and Childs (2004) believe is that experiences in these areas, often through outdoor recreation, can acquaint individuals with many aspects of resource management. This can be considered as a social benefit of recreational spaces which has been brought by indirect learning.

5 Case Study Close-Up

To build proper inferences leading to a reasonable suggestion, the steps applied into this research are the ones adopted from within-case analysis consisting of three concurrent flows of activity:

- Data reduction
- Data display
- Conclusion verification

First of all, many pieces of information related to objectives of paper have been gathered. Subsequently, data reduction has applied to help sharpen, sort, focus, discard, and organize the data in a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified. Data display has been the second major activity done. This includes taking the reduced data and displaying it in an organized, compressed way so that conclusions can be more easily drawn. With the aid of comparing data with theories emanated from literature review, conclusion verification has been made.

Hormozgan Province

Bandar Abbas is capital of Hormozgan Province, as one of the 30 Provinces in Iran. This Province is located in South of Iran. It has 67000 Kilometres square lands. Hormozgan has desert climate, with long, hot summers and short, mild winters. Totally, it is dry with low precipitation during winter.

5.1 Bandar Abbas City

Bandar Abbas is the most important port in Iran. This city is about 400 years old and has always been the centre of attention by central government and at international level. In 1964, Bandar Abbas was 500 hectare. In 1987, it increased to 2405 and in 2004; it is more than 4543 Hectare. In 40 years, it has expanded nine times. In other words, yearly growth rate between 1964 and 2004 has been 6.5 percent, which is close to annual population growth rate.

The city has a linear pattern along the sea. Lands away from the sea have less attraction. The macro structure and linear pattern of growth has four components (Sharestan Consulting Engineers 1982):

- Old core with commercial and residential function.
- Administrative, military, industrial and port related lands.
- Residential complexes (Private and Public).
- Ordinary residential units and informal houses (Spontaneous settlements).

The new growth era for Bandar Abbas is related to 1960s when military, industrial and port facilities were built. The result was physical expansion of the city in 1970s. The expansion happened into different ways:

- Building separate and scattered townships and residential complexes.

- Building neighbourhoods without plan where low-income migrants and those working in informal sector settled down.

Those migrated to Bandar Abbas can be divided into two groups; First group with capital and expertise who chose this city because of its employment opportunities and those without income and specialization who came to find a job (Sharestan Consulting Engineers, 2003).

The physical structure of city does not have integration. The northern part of the city does not have suitable topography and has been occupied by People who have built informal houses with cheap materials. The Northern and Southern part of beltline is covered with informal houses (World Bank, 2003). The physical segregation of different social groups can be observed. The upper middle income groups including non-local migrants live in Eastern and western part of city. The old central part of city is where local migrants and poor people live (Ibid).

The linear pattern of growth has impact on quality of municipality's servicing. Problems of lack of garbage collection, storm water collection, channels, open space, recreational facilities exist.

Dual and unbalanced professional composition can be divided into two groups: (A) specialized, professional non-local and urban migrants, (B) Non-Specialized, non-professional local and rural migrants. This condition has caused the lack of social dependency of the high-income group and escape of socio-economic resources from the city and spatial concentration of Poverty in the city. Physical segregation of urban migrants and specialists from low-income local people is remarkable (Ibid).

Therefore, living at periphery and informal housing is the result of socio-economic and physical structure of Bandar Abbas. Points mentioned above display unsustainable socio-economic and physical condition of the city.

Demography:

According to table I the population of this city has grown 15 times during the past 40 years with 6.3 Percent average growth rate.

Table 1: Population and growth rate changes (1956-2006)

Year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Population	17710	34627	87981	201642	249504	379513
Annual growth rate (%)	—	6.9	9.8	8.6	4.4	4.2

The population composition of city is presented in table 2. Population age 20-24 has the highest number. The ratio of male to female is normal up to age 20 (103-107 men per 100 women). After age 20 it gets even to 145 men per 100 women, because of the high number of male migrants

- Encouraging growth toward North.
- The construction of multifamily dwelling units in this plan.

The population for the year 1995 was estimated to be 380,000 and the city was estimated to be 4543 hectare. Density was estimated to be 84 per hectare. Second city center was suggested in East of city and expansion of city toward North was encouraged.

6 Analysis

Comparison between predictions and changes occurred in the city, shows that first comprehensive plan did not have any role in predicting the growth and conducting the changes.

City's today condition make it obvious that in comparison with what comprehensive plan has determined for the city, it has not made a success in preventing the city stepping toward unsustainability. For instance, the word encouraging mentioned above many policies of city's master plan is somehow vague because without explaining how this encouragement would happen, it is nonsense. Incompletion of these policies may have its root in lack of people's interest and their little involvement in the planning process as well; As Di Wang (2000) believes that the main reason why radical government controls always fail is probably because they are without enthusiastic support from local reformers. Collaboration of people in this condition can be inferred as a chain which links decision makers to the ones who get affected by the decision.

Penetration of non-urban land uses in the city and unpredicted socio-economic changes are the major reasons for the failure of the plan. These quick changes were out of urban management control. Second comprehensive plan has confronted barriers and problems too. Its policies are not compatible with the suggested physical plan. Lack of strong urban management and absence of collaboration have created serious problems for the city.

In terms of education, which is the key for human development, Human Development Index (HDI) for the city compared with of the whole country situated in medium level, and considering the education indicators, this city is at low level.

In spite of the fact that there is an increasing demand for active public involvement in decision making, people of different communities in Bandar Abbas which are from originally diverse groups of migrants, are pursuing their own way to enhance their so-called quality of living. In this career confronting different sorts of conflict in the society would be inevitable. Beside all disadvantages of such conflictions, the halts on the way of making the city a better place to live and achieving the continuous process of development would be the most considerable one for decision makers and decision takers. In such communities the leader of each ethnicity-most commonly the eldest man of them - plays a very determining role in directing the social network of his group/tribe

and, therefore, the social capital of each community. In fact forgetting about the nuances of ethnicities and also informal communities of migrants of different origins has led to incompleteness of projects which were supposed to implement in order to promote the quality of the city for these people. In order to appreciate these informal principles fully, one also needs to understand the context in which community planning is going to exercise.

It is referable here that these kinds of people are ready even to fight against officials due to their common needs. A common purpose to surmount a need or to strive to prevent losing something can link people together strongly, especially when it comes to basic needs such as housing and food. Having the same race or ethnicity can augment this internal force seriously. To make it clear we exemplify this fact with the conflict happened between municipal agencies and some people of Bandar Abbas in 2008. It was planned to link two districts of the city with constructing a new street. A spontaneous settlement which was formed by migrants was involved as well. The constitution of unpredictable force of this community that was hidden till then under the skin of the city came up protesting the negative effects of project. After estimating the communal wave force, to prevent a social critic, officials decided not to complete the project and it resulted in wasting much of investment which could be utilized in many other plans to ameliorate the quality of city life. Thus, their collaboration in city development plans is indeed.

In Bandar Abbas some plans are implementing in collaboration with World Bank. What is of great importance here is choosing a good career as second step. This means the step which is right after defeating poverty and finding solutions in accordance with people's basic needs as first one. Inasmuch as lack of this important step will lead to have all efforts incomplete and vain. In addition, all involved groups including stakeholders, planners, city governors, etc. will get stuck in a loop which will likely be construed as vicious circle. After having stakeholder concerned with city affairs and specially their neighbourhoods, and doing something against poverty (the actions which are in process now and are checked by the experts of world bank) it is sure that like many other societies, people would be glad to have somewhere suitable for spending their free time willingly (even if it is just a little!). This will bring about a context in which communicating with them and share the information and ideas between experts and indigenous people, who care much about their living conditions, would be more feasible and most importantly would be continuous. As it is so clear from the very beginning concept of sustainable development, continuity is the trunk of a tree called sustainability. This means sustainability is not a rigid end product but it is a continuous dynamic process.

Different perspectives of stakeholders and representatives and administrative authorities are so pronounced that no one would deny it. Besides, the attitudes that stakeholders express can be very helpful in designing a scenario that integrates these different interests and could thus find broad support. Successful planning depends on the acceptance of the public and therefore interests of stakeholders play a crucial role (Tress & Tress, 2003).

Initiating a communication process that could bridge the gap between planning and decision-making on one hand, and stakeholders and groups of interests on the other is one of the most important outcomes of collaborative planning. Providing actors in the planning process with tools and information to imagine future situation would be part of this initiative.

One of the problems in the course of educating and information transferring, which are major parts of communication, may be different perspectives of planners and stakeholders. Friedmann (1987) believes that something that prevents effective interaction of these two groups is the gap between their awareness. Even their means of gaining knowledge differ; planners use scientific methods and theories as while as learning of common people is based on experience and intuition.

Many successful experiences can be found as a result of collaborative planning in seeking interaction and mutual relationship. It is important to know that participation must be collaborative and it should incorporate not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations,

Planners and public administrators in a common framework where all are interacting and influencing one another and all are acting independently in the world as well. This is not one-way communication from citizens to government or from government to citizens. It is a multi-dimensional model where communication, learning and action are joined together and where the polity, interests and citizenry co-evolve (Innes and Booher, 2004). With this in mind if transferring the knowledge would be considerable as an interactive movement to train stakeholders and to learn from them, planners need the indigenous knowledge of people to steer the decisions and also need to tell people the ideas which are believed as enhancing for the society, such as letting them know about H1N1, environmental benefits of segregating dry and wet waste, adverse consequents of forcing their young children to work instead of going to school, using the stoves properly and so on. As a pre-condition for a good planning process, clearly it is so urgent to find a common language between stakeholders and decision makers to talk and to build collaboration. Furthermore, because of the fact that after decision making in the process of planning, decision taking is the next stage, promoting the quality of decisions based on reality will cause to take enhanced decisions in which the roles of both citizens and planners are remarkable. In this context it feels like getting closer to good governance through collaboration.

7 Conclusion

Authors of this article believe that one way community-led planning has its own shortcomings and it is critical not to forget that participation is a dichotomy.

Mutual learning which is a base for collaboration carries the meaning that planners should learn from indigenous knowledge of people and people should learn from technical expertise of planners. In this way their cognition would get

corrected and consequently their thoughts and behaviour would become enhanced as well; this change would be possible through communication and free talk. If we attempt to observe citizens, their social connections, and cultural appearance, we need to know where to look for them. The mosques, teahouses and daily bazaars of Bandar Abbas are in many ways similar to the coffeehouses, taverns, bars and saloons of the West. The importance of this kind of public sites is that they could encompass different classes of people. People go there to pray, meet friends, do business, sell goods, perform, have a chat, take a break, or just watch pedestrians for fun. Similarly, People go to crowded Bazaars and teahouses in south of Iran not only to sell their products but also to chat and have conversation with others and fulfil part of their social life. (Figure2)



Figure 2: Traditional Teahouse in Iran

Another issue which profoundly needs consideration is that we should not get confused facing the concept of participation. There are examples that show if we forget about the mutual relationship which is the main idea in the notion of collaboration, it cause disorder and disadvantages. Although following the principles of participatory management that local stakeholders are fully engaged in different phases of planning and decision-making is of much importance, these are planners and experts who translate qualitative expression of citizens. Besides, letting stakeholders of different communities know the challenges and diverse aspects in the course of planning and implementation will make sure the realization of peacefully conduction of the projects.

To put it in the nutshell, it can be said that public spaces, generally, are something beyond the physic. They can not be omitted even if their physical clothes would be cleared, because communities which grow in such spaces are the socio-cultural essence of urban life and thus are live elements.

One extendable result of the research which is applicable in many regions is that in societies identical to the case of this article, which are consist of different groups, multi-family communities, integrated migrants, ghettos, etc., there is a gap between the knowledge levels of two mentioned groups. Therefore an intermediate space in which one group can transfer the necessary knowledge like benefits of health care and danger of low quality housing and the other group can

express its opinion and assist planners to get informed of the real living condition of stakeholders, is requisite. Another peculiarity of this intermediate space (Figure3) is that looking for the feed-back of each action and each decision would be easier.

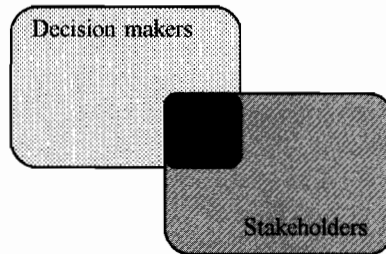


Figure 3: Intermediate Space in which common language (CL) would be found

According to the literature review of the paper, this intermediate space must contain these main characteristics:

- People have access to it freely.
- People can go willingly and optionally.
- People can talk freely.

In such spaces which are potentially prepared for communication, local government can steer the rival force of people reasonably. The outcome of such mutual conversation can result in collaboration. Since recreational spaces have these three traits, it would be possible to consider them as mentioned intermediate spaces in which so-called common language could be formed.

Planners must be well aware of communication to make useful conversation with people in order to promote the feasibility of the plans and decisions. This process leads to a win-win concept because in one hand people and stakeholders could tell the planners what their needs are and on the other hand planners can make them well acquainted with the limitations and the problems (including monetary and human resource, time schedule, etc.) in the course of decision making. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of the whole process can be discussable.

One of the bottlenecks on the way of implementation of rigid plans which are not in harmony with the precise needs of citizen is that up-down positivistic attitude has encircled the planning process and this, in turn, has caused unsustainability. This means that to take successful steps toward sustainability, building consensus between stakeholders and planners can be implemented through collaboration.

What is concluded from this article specifically in reply to the initial questions has 3 parts as:

- Recreational space with regard to its traits is one of those spaces that communication can take place.
- Knowledge-transferring and putting social capital in practice can happen in such places and this is why recreational space can help achieve collaborative planning.
- With respect to the collaboration which could happen in recreational spaces as well as considering the necessity of collaboration in sustainable development, it is logically deductible how such spaces can assist moving toward sustainability.

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