

Beirut, September 11, 2006

Draft-Proposal for a Network: “Together We Build”

In what follows we propose the establishment of a network concerned with the encouragement of public participation in reconstruction. Its objectives are the publication of information regarding the diverse reconstruction projects that are either starting or are about to start, the enhancement of an informed debate, the support of citizen involvement in this process, and ultimately the encouragement of participative planning processes within the reconstruction projects.

It is our profound belief that the reconstruction has to first and foremost be in the interest of the affected citizens, and that it is their democratic right to be included in the decisions that are taken on how, and by whom, their houses, neighborhoods and villages are to be reconstructed. We think that the involvement of citizens in decision making processes leads to plans and projects that are more sensitive to local needs and thus have to be encouraged.

The project

In the immediate post-war period the approaches to reconstruction of the destroyed houses, neighborhoods, villages and towns after the Israeli aggression of July 2006, are highly diverse, as are the actors involved. They reach from citizens who organized themselves to clear rubble, to NGOs, state institutions, engineering and consulting companies, local and international donors, and many other interested individuals and groups starting to engage in projects of reconstruction. While the Lebanese Government has announced very vague plans and projects in the beginning, it meanwhile started (announcing) compensation payments to the affected population. In the same venue, and to facilitate and speed up compensation payments, it pushes for the leveling to the ground of the heavily damaged (however, not completely destroyed) old cities. In some villages, like in Aita Chab and Bint Jbeil, the local municipalities were able to put on hold these further destructions in attendance of alternative and more thought through solutions.

We think that in this situation of emerging ideas and starting projects in which a significant number of actors are involved it is urgent to initiate and push for public debate. However, for a valuable and informed debate to be possible it is crucial that information about the projects is easily accessible and diffused to ALL the concerned actors, especially those who are most directly touched: the citizens and inhabitants who lost their houses and livelihood.

This proposal therefore calls for the creation of an network open to all who are interested that brings together a diversity of engaged actors and affected or simply interested citizens in order to inform and reflect about the ongoing projects and to think of alternative (more participative) reconstruction processes. We think that the creation of an information platform and network of engaged people is crucial in this situation, in order to monitor the reconstruction process, and push for participative processes that allow for affected and interested citizens to engage in it.

Proposed Mission

- **Collecting and diffusing information on planned and ongoing reconstruction projects**
Information is the first prerequisite for participation and citizen involvement. Information is a crucial resource and access to it empowers the different actors in negotiations. In a first step, our project therefore aims to create an information platform on which a multitude of actors – concerned citizens, planners, engineers, municipalities, journalists, NGOs, etc.- can have access to (and make accessible) information about ongoing and planned projects. This information will allow for comparisons between different planning strategies and highlight alternative ways of reconstruction.
- **Enhancing a transparent process**
The information about plans and implementation of projects needs to be published by different actors in a transparent manner.
- **Enhancing informed debate among all involved actors and the affected population and other concerned individuals and groups**
By contributing to an informed public debate among affected citizens, planners, donors, and other actors, the platform aims to facilitate the involvement of the public in the project proposal stage and to encourage the prioritization of participative planning strategies.
- **Encouraging participative planning processes within the diverse reconstruction projects. The “actor network” aims at being a link between information and practice/action.**
Ultimately, the aim of the proposed actor network is the encouragement of participative planning and decision-making practices in all of the reconstruction projects through interaction, communication and exchange of information and know-how among its members.
- **Highlight and open discussion about diverse urgent issues, possible themes:**
 - Efforts to enhance protection of citizens in case of future Israeli attacks
 - Respect of the history of the villages and the historic urban fabric
 - Comprehensive approaches to reconstruction, including, social, economic, environmental and cultural factors
 - The right of affected citizens to compensation from the state equal to their losses
 - ...

Tasks:

1. Phase: Information

Information is the first step towards participation and debate and in a first phase of its formation the network will create itself around this nucleus. Actors who join the network will provide information about their plans and projects and will be able to access information made available by other actors. The first task of the network is thus to collect as much information as possible about reconstruction projects. A website is going to be created to make this information accessible to the public, in both English and Arabic. Progress reports about projects in which members are involved or have information about can easily be pooled via email, similarly with other information regarding the reconstruction or related topics.

Information that needs to be collected includes:

- Who are the actors involved in the different villages?
- What are the plans, projects?
- Where does the funding come from and to whom does it go, and in which form (cash, materials, etc)?
- What are the levels of participation in these projects? Who is participating, who is not participating and in which form?
- What are the official discourses about the reconstruction processes
- What are the opinions of affected citizens about the different projects?
- What is happening in villages and areas where the network has no contacts?
- ...
- ...

Information about participatory experiences includes:

- Collection of material, articles on participatory experiences and the urgent issues related to reconstruction in general.
 - Preparation of practical suggestions (from experience) for participatory processes and the other issues.
 - Collect data on the official discourses from newspaper archives and put them together.
 - ...
 - ...
- **Enlarge the network to include more actors and citizens on the ground as well as other interested groups and individuals.**

2nd Phase: Prepare further participatory action:

This would include developing practical steps considered useful by the network. It could include:

- Encouraging debate/discussion forums in the towns or in cities.
- Organizing information events (discussion forums and activities), bringing together different actors for debate
- Exchange of experiences, open meetings between different actors
- Building a team experienced in participative processes to assist actors on the ground
- Organization of workshops.
- Assist or initiate petitions in which the rights of the citizens are violated.
- ...
- ...

Organizational Framework

As its name indicates, it is a NETWORK based on the participation of as many people as possible: those who are working in the villages and neighborhoods, the affected citizens and all others interested in the reconstruction process. It is suggested that the project will be managed in a decentralized way. The meetings for coordination will be open to members of the different networks and coordinators to participate equally.

This proposal is a draft, which will be further finalized through your feedback, proposals and discussions among its members.

If you are interested in this project, want to join and provide information, or you have comments, suggestions or critiques, please contact us. Also please circulate this proposal to other people that could be interested. A brief email to the below address will allow us to keep in contact. Thank you

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