

WHO'S TALKING TO WHOM? VILLAGER PARTICIPATION IN THE RELOCATION OF EL GOURNA, EGYPT

NASSAR, HALA, Ph. D.

Clemson University, Hnassar@clemson.edu

DUGGAN, PAUL, Ph. D.

Clemson University, pduggan@g.clemson.edu

ABSTRACT

There is almost universal agreement among planners and designers that public participation in civic projects is critical. However, successful public participation can be problematic. There are important differences between the concepts and goals of planners and designers on one hand, and the daily lives of local residents on the other. Participatory procedures are often formal and stiff, representing a bureaucratic approach that is not suited to the customs and communicative structures of local populations. This paper presents the results of a 16 month qualitative study of villager participation in the relocation of El Gourna, Egypt. While the study corroborates certain findings from other studies of relocation, it introduces a unique communicative structure that we have called "village talk." The main purposes of the study were to examine how relocation and villager participation actually occurred, to describe relevant conditions of the relocation, to draw conclusions, and to propose recommendations for better participation. The study provides examples of various levels of interaction and communication between government officials, designers, and the local population. It shows that while important social and communicative structures, special occupational skills, and local knowledge were present in the community, they were not properly utilized in the participatory procedures or resettlement plan. This oversight led to conflicts between relocation officials and the local population, and to some unsatisfactory solutions. It suggests alternative methods for involving local residents in complex civic undertakings. It recommends that social, political and communicative structures of local communities be carefully studied, and that a strategy of participation and inclusion be designed to fit the unique aspects of these communities.