Madinatuna – A Programme for Aleppo City Development Strategy 2025: The Role of Civil Society in Local Urban Development[1]

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The urban morphology of Aleppo is the product of a rich cultural and economic heritage of successive civilisations built on a social structure involving various religious and ethnic groups. It presents a social complex that encompasses all sections of society in a diverse architectural and urban landscape that makes Aleppo the unique place it is now. Combined with the long practice of local traditional governance, it granted Aleppo the economic, social and political influence it enjoys today. Yet as a result of the economic downturn during the 1980s Aleppo's city council suffered from devaluation of its assets and a reduction in its ability to generate funds. The largest of setbacks involve the reduction in revenues from construction and assets taxes, which formed a substantial part of its income. The decreasing financial capacities of the central government, associated with its decreased ability to generate income combined with dwindling rent values in cities suffering from a weakness of productivity and capabilities, led to an ever increasing gap between modest economic growth and rapid urban expansion. In this context, the position of local councils grew even weaker as the central authorities witnessed a decline in its abilities to influence urban growth whether through the provision of funding or through the appropriate management of policy implementation. Added to this are the current challenges faced by cities in developing or developed countries at large. All these factors call for a new approach in urban management, economically, socially, environmentally, culturally and institutionally.

This chapter highlights the complex efforts pertaining to local urban development that Aleppo is undertaking. These efforts entail a transition mechanism from emergency management to urban management informed by a new culture of participation, voluntary work, and strategic planning, in collaboration with the national technical team at a central governmental level. It also defines the space for participation and collaboration between the local authorities, the private sector, civil society and citizens on the one hand, and the increasing ability of their city to benefit from international corporation platforms on the other hand. These interactions and efforts take place within the context of the 'Aleppo City Development Strategy 2025 – Madinatuna in Arabic' which foresees to complete planning stages within four year periods – the mandate of the city council. It also identifies the general framework for operation for areas of policy interventions, the life cycle of the programme, its concepts and pillars. The chapter assesses the main characteristics of the urban platform supposedly underlying urban policies, as policymakers are expected to interact at the

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[1] This article was written for the first time at the end of 2010.

horizontal level of the city, or civil society more specifically, in a bid to strengthen participation, accountability and the sharing of responsibilities to achieve a shared vision of Aleppo's future. The level of success of this exercise remains conditioned on the commitment of all stakeholders to perform their tasks and implement their strategies for the purpose of improving society.

Historical background

Aleppo is characterised by a history that continues to be its main asset, based on a continuous experience of civilisation dating back 8,000 years. As a result, the city can be viewed as the oldest continuous urban setting in the world. Aleppo flourished thanks to its role as a cultural hub for a succession of civilisations, in addition to its role as a large economic depot strategically positioned on the Silk Road.

In the 19th Century, the city of Aleppo adopted a new municipal system. Accordingly, Aleppo city council is one of the oldest in the region, having been established in 1860, and prior to the issuance of the Ottoman Law of 1877 which initiated the concept of municipal governance in the empire at the time. Traditional local administration has a long history in the city, which helped Aleppo to become a relatively rich town with considerable economic, social and political influence. Its relation to modernity increased its dependency on administrative regulations, and hence local governance, particularly when it came to urban development in the 1930s, thereby granting Aleppo the first institutional administration in the region.

Aleppo is currently considered the second largest city in Syria with an area (Master Plan) covering 37,000 hectares and a population of 2.4 million inhabitants. Population growth slowed down to 2.4% after having reached 3% during the 1970s and 1980s. This large number of inhabitants made Aleppo an important source of attraction in northern Syria, particularly economically as it turned into a large commercial and industrial centre, and the focal point of agricultural crops in northern Syria.

Aleppo still witnesses significant demographic growth, which is expected to expand even further due to the migration of many who come to Aleppo seeking work opportunities and better living conditions – Aleppo population is expected to be 3.6 million inhabitants in the next ten years- . This of course comes at a price as the city faces many challenges in the form of increased poverty, inequality in available opportunities, and growing income disparities. There are almost half of inhabitants living in informal settlements, which pose considerable challenges. In addition, the recent international economic downturn had its effect on economic development in a city where half of the population is under the age of 20. The other challenge facing the city is to preserve its heritage. The historical centre of the city is

still a living urban space in addition to being the administrative and commercial centre. Other challenges also face the city's urban management pertaining to environmental concerns and climate change, witnessing widespread pollution, problems in waste management, and maintaining water and sewage networks.

The 1980s witnessed the dwindling of financial capabilities of the central authorities, and hence of local administrations as well. Despite its decreased income, Aleppo's city council had to increase its expenditures due to an increasing gap between the ever increasing needs and the shrinking of economic activities, in addition to rapid urban expansion. This in turn led to the weakness of the position of local councils, which affected their management of urban growth in terms of resources, and thwarted the implementation of necessary recovery policies. Moreover, the suffering of Aleppo's city council as a result of the economic downturn led to reductions in the value of its assets and a decrease in its ability to collect funds, the largest of which included building fees and taxes on the income generated from rent. This caused serious challenges to its ability to fund new projects.

The city council also faced an unprecedented stagnation with regards to its human resource management, and a move away from transparency combined with its inability to motivate employees and encourage commitment at all levels. The majority of its staff were focused on daily tasks such monitoring legal and illegal building activities, and responding to daily problems without taking into account qualitative and quantitative indicators essential to assess implemented policies whatever they might be. As result, those responsible for urban management at the time focused on crisis management in dealing with urgent problems while failing to adopt any systematic methodology for strategic planning, or indeed any feasible policies addressing the actual needs of the city's inhabitants.

The process of development planning in a city as diverse socially, economically and structurally as Aleppo requires a change of mind away from the mentality of crisis management and pure service operations to that of policies based on studies of social, economic and institutional aspects of urban governance. Equally important is the establishment of democratic communication channels with its citizen through various mechanisms set to ensure public participation taking into account a certain fact that development does not lead to economic prosperity everywhere and at the same time. Economic success entails a certain extent of concentration of production, and hence requires policies aimed at ensuring that living conditions – in terms of nourishment, education, health care and sanitation – are distributed fairly. This cannot be achieved without having an integrated and clearly defined development strategy at all levels. Consequently, it is of great importance to think of establishing a long-term strategic vision for the city and translating this vision to plans for development and progress of the city that would combine poverty

reduction plans with plans for local development as well as capitalizing on especially young human capital.

The context and nature of "Madinatuna" programme

Aleppo city council took the first steps towards its urban management plans in 2003 when it established the first collective planning matrix that encompassed all stakeholders in the city using a planning mechanism extending four years – the city council mandate -, the overall objective of this matrix was "development of urban planning process in an efficient and effective way based on principles of transparency and a phased executive programme". An assessment report produced in 2007 by an evaluation team headed by an international expert, the report echoed local wishes to establish a new methodology that guarantees continuity with policies of consecutive elective councils. The report highlighted that: The process of identifying problems and developing a planning matrix for the city council that consists of 15 axes is a very positive move. The project planning workshop, guided by the goals of 2003, led to a common view that made many aware of important issues and the need to work on these issues in an effective and powerful way. The workshop resulted in a detailed and comprehensive list of initiatives. It also led to a clear and complete understanding and realisation of the goal in addition to specific ways to improve urban management.2

Nonetheless, it was clear that a four-year plan was insufficient to determine development directions in the city of Aleppo.

In 2005, and on the margins of a forum jointly organised by the Ministry of Local Affairs and the World Bank, the Mayor of Aleppo discussed with representatives of the World Bank and representatives of the Cities Alliance a request for a grant to establish a future development methodology for Aleppo until 2025.[3] This coincided with increased collaboration between Aleppo's City Council and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for the purpose of urban development for the entire city. The efforts of Aleppo's City Council to seek collaboration with GTZ, and the Cities Alliance were laid down in one programme called "Aleppo's City Development Strategy", for which the banner of 'Our City' (*Madinatuna* in Arabic,) was adopted to signify the shared vision. The Madinatuna programme identified a number of working aspects aligned with the first 4-year plan (2003-2007), and the second 4-year plan of Aleppo's City Council (2007-2011), in addition to the assessment report and the follow up plan, set to coincide with the end of the council's term until 2007, and

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[2] Planning and implementation of Urban Management in Aleppo – Evaluation of Approach and Results over 2003-2007 by Martin de Graff – October 2007.

[3] Partnership World Bank – Mediterranean Cities; Europe – MENA Damascus (29th – 31st January 2005) Seminar organized with the support of the Syrian Ministry of the Local Administration and Environment.

corresponding with the central government's 10th 5-year plan. This suggested a timeframe compatible with the culture of planning and assessment in the city of Aleppo, and which emerged and matured through collaboration with GTZ by way of a project for the rehabilitation of Old Aleppo since 1994 where the knowledge and the culture of urban management was transferred and employed in a way suitable for the local context.

Therefore, the basis on which this project is built relates much better to society as its working plan is steered towards a positive collective vision to achieve more balanced urban growth. Generally, the programme focuses on improving governance and urban management, and on achieving local economic growth that generates job opportunities and increases the scope of service delivery, both within the context of systematic and continuous efforts to reduce urban poverty.

Naturally, criteria of good urban management[4] vary according to the history, culture and level of development within the environment in which it is applied. Therefore, understanding the particularities of these qualities is of great importance in order to move from theoretical understandings to innovative approaches, and considering feasible and practical mechanisms necessary for effective implementation. Key in this respect is to integrate the efforts of the state, its institutions, the private sector and civil society, bolstered by decentralisation and through enhancing the roles of local councils and local awareness raising. The aforementioned assessment report stated that

> *Taking into account the many profound constraints that existed in 2003 and that still exist, and taking into account the lack of any clear precedents and examples, the dynamic and very active efforts made in Aleppo to set a longer-term strategy, and to use this to focus people's minds and their work towards real and sustainable improvement across a wide specter can be judged to be imaginative, highly relevant and of real significance for larger cities in Syria. [..] While direction and overall approach were sound, ultimate results were limited in a number of aspects. This was due to serious weaknesses in planning and in actual operations. The broad strategies as conceived in 2003 may have served as a reference point and as inspiration for the City Council and selected staff, they have not been sufficiently effective in setting operational goals, in allocating financial and human resources, in monitoring progress and in holding all accountable. Planning was, often, weak and internal efficiency continued to be lower than inevitable. The fundamental problems of an historically inert, non-transparent and non-responsive organisation have, to some extent, been*

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[4] The first local urban observatory in Syria was established following the decision of Aleppo City Council No 90 during its 13th session held during the regular 5th meeting on the 30th of November 2003 for the aim of developing and measuring urban management indicators in the city of Aleppo.

put on the table, but have not been resolved. The same for the weaknesses in quality, attitudes, motivation and commitment of staff at all levels. Neither have these efforts resolved the very real problem of the wider environment which is not always supportive to innovation, local initiative, transparency and accountability. What was accomplished in Aleppo was, to a considerable extent, not thanks to purposeful support by higher level institutions and some of the improvements are rather in spite of that environment. This reflects a painfully missed opportunity.[5]

Work thus started, and participants found themselves in the midst of a complex effort aimed at linking all stakeholders together in a development operation in which each were accorded their specific roles. This was followed by a process of enhanced strategic thinking. This included efforts to build necessary partnerships as Aleppo's City Council alone cannot steer the entire operation. It needs partners to change the course and direction of development in the city. Project planning also was essential, as available capital will always be attracted to cities that plan well ahead and that have a clear vision for the future.

<u>Operating Procedure</u>

With the launch of Madinatuna programme in 2008, seven areas of intervention were identified:

- Develop the local economy to become more competitive and adaptable to transformation and change, in addition to create jobs opportunities;

- Develop urban spatial in the city to increase the number of multi-purpose public spaces, and to create multi-city centres linked together via an effective network of public transport, and to reach the optimal population density and the right mixture for the use of land;

- Improve the situation of informal settlement in the city and limit its future spread through a host of economic, social and planning measures, anchored in public participation;

- Improve access to urban services and re-establish the balance between the eastern and western parts of the city;

- Exert more efforts in protecting the urban environment, and create more green spaces in the city, as well as improve waste management, and increase environmental awareness among citizens and decision-makers alike;

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[5] Planning and implementation of Urban Management in Aleppo – Evaluation of Approach and Results over 2003-2007 by Martin de Graff – October 2007.

- Make Aleppo more children and youth friendly and help engage them in the management of their city to the possible extent;

- Modernise the management style of Aleppo's City Council and strengthen and increase its financial resources.

A work force was established according to a clear organisational structure, and which enjoyed the necessary political support. The Mayor of Aleppo dedicated time, political efforts, and resources for the course of Madinatuna so that it acquired the rights mixture of patrons. It established a steering committee chaired by the Mayor, and composed of a programme manager, members of experts (from Aleppo University), and a broad representation of merchants and businessmen (drawing on the Chambers of Industry, Tourism and Commerce), GTZ, NGOs, and the Engineering Syndicate. The work force also had a number of working groups consisting all of volunteers. The size and diversity of these groups, and their experience, allowed them to effectively help in matters of strategic development and collective planning, while each included an international and a local expert to support its activities.

The work was divided to six phases:

Inception phase:

Here Madinatuna set up its core the team, institutionalized the process, established a vision for development and its methodology, assessed who the key partners were and how to gain their support and cooperation, assigned roles and responsibilities, and cultivated a sense of public ownership of the program. It also started to identify initial projects, and designed procedures for monitoring and evaluation, and for performing a quick initial analysis through various working groups.

Assessment phase

In order to present ideas for a better future, we have to understand the past, and how it led us to the current situation. What makes Aleppo unique? What are the aspects and characteristics that distinguish Aleppo and which may lead to future development? The essence of this assessment exercise is to ask ourselves the question: "Where are we now?" Hence, assessment process of the city identified the many challenges facing the city in the seven intervention areas listed above. All Our City team members, all of them residents in Aleppo, worked on classifying the city's weaknesses and strengths, identifying opportunities and challenges, and preparing methods and courses of action, with the help of international and national

consultants who gave advice, suggested choices and presented available international experiences and lessons learned in this context.

Agreement Shared Vision phase

Deciding on Aleppo's future over a period of 15 years according a collective vision requires this vision to be specific, coherent, realistic, meaningful, and at the same time to be challenging. The Madinatuna team established this vision utilising all information collected through the assessment report, in addition to information gained from the target groups in the city. It also relied on the results of gathering information directly from citizens in various parts of the city, and on the know-how needed to establish their dreams of the future of their city. This vision represents a powerful tool that, in addition to providing a clear idea that can be exchanged, shared, discussed and sought after, reflects Aleppo's unique qualities, its competitiveness, its inhabitants' ideals and values, its links and relations with the global and national economy, its history, civilisation and culture, as well as its physical characteristics be they its location, landscape, availability of water or aesthetic qualities.

Agreement Strategic options phase

Accordingly, the Madinatuna team identified and specified available strategic choices. This resulted in the presentation of clear and specific choices that matched available expertise and financial sources. Hence, it was not a mere wish list, but a range of actions that best serve our needs in the best and most cost-effective way. The choices involved investing capital in both public and private sectors, in modifying policy and organizational frameworks, in raising awareness and education campaigns, or in promoting best practices in civil society.

Specifying key projects phase

By specifying the main projects, key programmes and funding mechanisms had to be clarified. In the case of Aleppo, this meant achieving a long-term vision for a large number of activities, interventions, investments and institutional reforms.

Implementation and Experience Dissemination phase

Ultimately, of course, Madinatuna programme derived its value from its implementation and its effects on residents' quality of life. Each project goal therefore prompted the establishment of a specific team, which prepared detailed working plans specifying responsibilities, timeframes, purposes, aims and all the

necessary information and the expected results. Also here it was hoped that citizens would actively participate in this process through formal committees and through local and neighbourhoods' committees, as well as through establishing committees for the follow up, supervision and monitoring of all these projects. For the purpose of a successful launch of Madinatuna plan emphasis was put on low risky initiatives, with riskier ones being postponed to a later stage. Madinatuna, being the first programme of its kind in Syria, will this way set a new trend and model for other Syrian cities thanks to lessons learned and henceforth allow for the implementation of urban governance in a more effective way throughout Syria.

Concept of Madinatuna in the urban development process

The Madinatuna programme relies on two main approaches of work:

Participatory Approach

In turn, participation in the city development goes hand in hand with a sense of responsibility, foremost by changing the way citizens view their city. Instead of only expecting services and orders from the state, the citizens will work together, and share responsibility for making the city a better living space. Also, through participation of the inhabitants in explaining their problems, it became easier for them to sympathise with the suggested solutions and understand them. This requires participation, delegation, and commitment from all parties involved, which in turn will help form the overall strategy and serve as a way of monitoring progress in achieving these goals. In fact, Aleppo's City Council has gone even further through developing a common consultancy framework for the Mayor comprising the private sector and civil society, as well as government officials and elected teams.

Integrated Approach

Madinatuna depends on a concept of integration, not only for preparing a strategy, but also for achieving goals taking into account available resources and capabilities. Accordingly, activities included small urban and economic projects, training projects, cultural activities, and awareness campaigns, in addition to forming local, national and international partnerships, and cooperation agreements; all these help build a new culture in handling the city and dealing with its main challenges.

There are also pillars for the seven areas of intervention listed above, and these are: a communication strategy, cultural strategy, and voluntarism strategy. From the start, Madinatuna established a communication strategy, so that the exchange of information and viewpoints on all development items would be ensured

from the very beginning and enhance the accumulation of expertise. Local public participation was viewed as essential, as past experiences commonly involved a very limited extent of such participation and often only temporarily so. For this reason There was a clear and urgent need for clear communication between the planners and beneficiaries, as well as partners, citizens and implementers for all development operations, including the funding bodies and donors. This was achieved through internal dialogue groups' tasked with spreading or establishing a common understanding for the development process, as well as external dialogue groups involving other parties in the city. In the early stages, and because of limited resources, this depended on an accumulative effort. Communication focused on groups who had a direct influence on the public, after which the work began on expanding the project's outreach. In this process culture was considered a cornerstone and a main avenue toward social development, whether in terms of social practices or as artistic expressions. Taking culture seriously helped improve communication between various components in the city and build bridges and social connections. The support of the private sector and of civil society for these cultural activities helped improve the city's image, and helped establish a wider dialogue with partners seeking the best way to build a local cultural strategy. The Madinatuna programme also contributed to building a culture of volunteer work in the city. Volunteers are organised into groups each targeting a specific aspect of the process. Indeed, voluntary work is an effective way to engage people in facing development challenges in the city. The project initiators believe that voluntary work could change the pattern and the nature of development in the city. It benefits society as a whole, and it benefits the individual through strengthening their confidence and through establishing unity and common interest among citizens, and also through opening participation opportunities for these volunteers. The goal then is to include and integrate voluntary work in the development programmes. Free will, commitment, the freedom to take initiatives, and the ability to reach common decisions are all prerequisites for making voluntary work a sustainable solution.

Participation and linking up all partners in the development process

If you do not have a plan, you will be part of someone else's plan. Yet the question remains, in light of the acceleration and competition between cities, is it enough to have a plan? If the plan is not realistic, and it is not based on a vision that fulfils the needs of all partners in the city, no real progress will have been made. The process underlying planning is therefore crucial. Plans should be built on a dialogue and negotiations that take into account the

various interests of sectors in the city, and achieve a dynamic balance between the main parties in the development triangle, including local authorities, the private sector and civil society. Faced with this reality, and in order to overcome challenges, this no doubt requires building a new culture for the management of the city that goes beyond the system in which the local authorities play a patriarchal role of providing services, monitoring and offering building licenses, and planning single-handedly. Instead, local authority should take on the role of catalyst among a wide range of partners, work on the integration of its service, cultural, social, economic and environmental roles, and provide an economic environment capable of providing jobs, and increase opportunities for private investment in support of cultural and educational activities. It also entails a cultural strategy for the city that will contribute to increase awareness and strengthen connections between various social groups and strata, whether in economic, religious or ethnic terms.

The participation of citizens in planning and forming the local environment reap many benefits, whether though providing addition resources, or through creating a better awareness of their own affairs. Here the program tried to gauge the depth of society in Aleppo, and to redirect citizens toward public interests even with small steps that started in working with target groups, and that were followed up by encouraging citizens to express their views through a media campaign using key personalities representing all groups and shades of society. It then moved even further to directly collecting citizens' opinions to help form a common vision for their future. The belief in the role of the city's inhabitants as citizens qualified to participate, each in their own way, in what goes beyond defending their own private interests, is one of the priorities in helping to enhance citizenship, and to establish clear mechanisms for ensuring transparency, accountability and a sense of responsibility. This, in turn, enhances the project's durability necessary for the implementation of development programmes in the longer term.

Modern democracies originated in cities. The social fabric of the city imposed more individualistic relations between citizens. The development of cities, and with it the development of laws and regulations, is closely linked with the development of individual freedoms that resulted from the departure of the city inhabitants from their other affiliations such as those related to family, tribe, religions, region and language. It pushed them towards expanding the sphere of private and public life, and it increased the need for individual freedoms. Democracy is, without a doubt, the best organised form for societies, capable of solving urban problems. It is also the best in providing the space necessary in these societies for continuous and sustainable progress.

Generally speaking, the city of today liberates the individual from the weight and burden of the social group, their constant monitoring and pressures, and from the loyalties endemic of

earlier stages of development. Yet the city became the place of another form of domination. Everything in fact functions as if the large cities of today demote the individual to the rank of a free rider theoretically free to express his views in all matters, through mass media, while in reality depriving him or her for a large part of his capability and responsibility as a political player.[6]

The institutional structure of Madinatuna tried to take into account political and civil society as a whole in a way that reflects the local mosaic but firmly upholding citizenship. This approach is consistent with the important role ascribed to components of civil society that in sociology are called secondary institutions such as community-based organisations, workers and professional unions, public organisations, and business groups and chambers (commerce, industry, tourism, etc.) These organisations should be enabled to take on bigger roles and responsibilities in the management of society. Madinatuna tried to go even beyond this through the integration of popular and elite civil society by making them work together in planning and implementation.

Added to that was the opening of volunteering opportunities. The role of volunteers in our society plays the role of both a motivator and a mediator. Madinatuna encouraged volunteers to be creative and innovative in finding means and methods to enhance their capabilities, and to promote voluntary work and its investment within the boundaries of their professions and beyond. This bridged the current gap between the family and the state on the one hand, and widened the concept of civil society as it is often restricted to a select group of organisations, for instance by also including charitable organizations that, in Syria, play a very important role. Similarly, Madinatuna helped bridge the gap between community-based organisations formed to face the new challenges in the city and its communities. The formation of such new societies and community-based organisations around fragmented and partial goals, while failing to link them to the common causes of these challenges and problems, will always limit their role without clear visions on collaboration.

Civil society at the international level may be able help mitigate social, economic and cultural problems resulting from globalization and its effects on society. Locally, it will be seen as a welcome by-product of the development process and congruent with the dynamic balance proposed in Madinatuna wherein a collective vision for the future of the city is made possible by establishing coalitions and links at the horizontal level for the city among all partners. Yet the ways in which local civil society actors may join or contribute to this process is likely to reflect the peculiar Syrian way of calm or gradualist attitudes toward the international arena generally, in order to guaranty local stability and preserve the Syrian identity. Yet steps for

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[6] Managing Cities with Participation of their Inhabitants, page 9

dealing with international influences, though steadily and measured, always come following certain time intervals. External pressures in this respect are likely to invite resistance to. This underscores the need to allow for time and wait for the maturing of locally developed motivations that are more easily comprehended and accepted by the Syrian political and civil societies.

Just prior to the uprising in Syria in March 2011, expectations were that a new law would re-organize the status and work of civil society organisations in Syria, which could prompt the emergence of clear mechanisms for coordination and communication between various partners in the urban development process based on a suitable legislative framework allowing for participation and funding. Indeed, this is what the first lady, Mrs Asmaa Al Assad announced during the opening of Syria's first international development conference held in January 2010 under the motto: "The Role of Civil Society in Development":

> *Civil society plays an increasingly important role in supporting development throughout the world. In Syria, the number of organisations and active societies in this field increased noticeably; an increase of 300% during the last five years. However, what is even more significant is the engagement of this sector in fields it had not been involved in before […] Therefore, it is important for non-governmental organisations to follow suit to avoid being marginalized and to avoid the risk of Syrian society losing a very important tool capable of enabling actual participation in achieving a qualitative leap in many fields. In order to achieve that, certain basic requirements need to be present; first and foremost among these is the legislative environment that shapes the legal framework within which this sector operates. Accordingly, the government has taken steps towards drafting a new law for NGOs and societies in collaboration with the civil sector which is now in the final stages of study and analysis in collaboration with stakeholders.*

This new law on NGOs is expected to re-energize interaction and to foster networks of dialogue linking all partners at all levels. Joint efforts, and the exchange of expertise among civil society organisations depends, on the one hand, on coordination and collaboration, and, on the other hand, on enhancing equal and friendly relationships with the private and public sectors within the rule of law.

Therefore, we can benefit from the vitality of civil society in organizing citizens' participation in the public sphere and in order to develop and foster values of participation via mass media and communication technology, including social media. This, in turn, would enhance and

help strengthen transparency and accountability, and activate the role of the private sector as a main partner in the urban development process. After all, the private sector has a great potential for economic initiatives and remains the focal point for human and financial resources, as well as cultural activities. Equally important is the link between the private sector and universities, research, development and training centres for linking education outputs to market needs, and combating unemployment and urban poverty.

Empowerment of women and their participation can also be considered a starting point for development. Women are key to the relations between education, poverty and population growth. Fertility rates and the awareness of women of the importance of family planning directly affect population growth. Indeed, the inability to maintain a balanced relation between population growth and economic growth leads to the decrease of individual income, and subsequently to poverty.

Education also is one of the main factors in empowering and enabling women. It improves their participation, and allows for family planning, which directly affects development. More concretely, official sources found that every extra three years of education for women inversely correlates with the number of children at a rate of 20%.[7] Educating women saves them from poverty, and encourages them to use family planning methods, and thus increase their negotiation powers in the face of traditional values and habits, ultimately elevating their position in family and society.

Conclusion:

Just prior to the crisis in March 2011, we found ourselves in the midst of efforts aimed at building a development strategy for the city of Aleppo. On the one hand, our success prompted a profound change in the attitude of politicians as the concept of transparency began to become more current in financial management generally. So did our fulfilment of promises, the continuity of work, and efficient evaluation methods leave a positive mark? The level of trust that this generated will help to negotiations on rehabilitation and development policies that require the presence of specific and durable structures capable of providing contractual commitments in the long term.

On the other hand, real improvements in urban governance require a genuine cultural transformation in the attitude of citizens, at the level of both the private sector and civil society. This requires training and capacity building, in addition to the development of legislative frameworks that would allow and encourage relations in support of the development process.

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[7] Central Office for Statistics, Statistical Group2004

In spite of Madinatuna had stopped at fourth phase based on the situation in Syria, but, it kept Aleppo as a metonym of local urban development, it has all its volunteers, a group effort promoting development in ways that make it an effective and sustainable process. Citizens need to take matters into their own hands, and collectively push toward achieving their visions. The extent of successful urban governance will depend on how far we will see Madinatuna giving local authorities, the private sector and civil society the voices they need to be able to work, participate and mobilize joint efforts to achieve a better future.

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