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## Abstract

Two qualitative case studies of city development projects illustrate possible consequences of contemporary participatory adaptation approaches to planning and development.<sup>1</sup> I investigate efforts to develop and plan green spaces in Cairo and New York City. I trace efforts by the German Development Agency (GIZ)<sup>2</sup> and a small research center in Cairo to plan and construct green roofs and urban gardens in poor urban Cairene neighborhoods from 2014 to 2018. I also follow the planning processes from 2013 until present to increase the social and physical resilience of the Lower East Side of Manhattan done by the NYC Mayor's Office, US federal agencies and many local NGOs and architecture firms who serve as contractors. While the processes of participation were different in Cairo and NYC, they yielded similar unintended and negative results in both the focus of the projects' goals and social resilience. Namely, both Cairo and NYC final plans were not endorsed by community members, despite their participation, and ultimately decreased trust—one key component of social resilience—between planners and residents.

## Introduction

### **The Limits of Participation**

These case studies illustrate the limits planners and residents face when managing and planning green spaces in their communities. In New York City, the future of the East River Park, a fifty-eight-acre green space that was damaged by Hurricane Sandy, was (and continues to be) planned and negotiated through participatory approaches conducted by contractors and city officials. While residents' desires were solicited through the participatory process, they were ultimately deemed by planners too expensive or impractical. This public engagement and subsequent apparent dismissal of input has broken hard-earned and tenuously held trust between residents and city officials. In contrast international development practitioners in Cairo relied on participatory approaches conducted by contractors to hear community input and to plan five community gardens on neighborhood buildings. Yet the promise of participation as a mechanism for advancing residents' desired outcomes (Chambers 1994) and building social resilience (Zeiderman 2016) has not been fulfilled. The local Egyptian government and the disjointed nature of participation through contracting disrupted potential long-term relationships and trust building between planners and residents.

### **Consequences for Residents**

These participatory approaches did not result in residents having their priorities for green space built, but they continue to resist within the limits of the political space in each city. In NYC this means public protests and a forthcoming lawsuit. In Cairo, this means engaging in non-overtly political acts for residents to transform the projects to better align with their needs. For example,

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<sup>1</sup> I identify planning by existing powerful actors and a reliance on contracting as two characteristics of contemporary participatory adaptation efforts.

<sup>2</sup> This is the Germany agency equivalent of USAID. The agency is called Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit in German.

teachers used the green roofs for science education. Many Cairo residents did not trust planners nor viewed them as a source of social resilience, and instead relied on existing trusting relationships with each other to adapt to the challenges of climate change. Similarly, NYC residents felt betrayed by city planners when they announced an update to the park plan that did not include community's the stated desires. In response, NYC residents began to organize, protest, and plan to file suit against the city. While bonds between residents and planners were not promoted through participatory climate adaptation processes, bonds within communities remained present, if reformed.<sup>3</sup>

## Background

### Participatory Climate Adaptation

Participatory approaches to development and climate adaptation plans claim to increase communities' social resilience in the face of climate change yet some scholars suggest that even when these efforts are undertaken in different cities across the globe, they “fail” in similar ways (Anguelovski et al. 2016; Nightingale 2015). I bring together long-standing critiques of participatory development and recent evaluations of climate adaptation plans to further tease out the challenges to achieving equity through contemporary participatory adaptation efforts—efforts administered by powerful institutions with a reliance on contracting. I supplement Anguelovski et al’s (2016:333) call to interrogate how climate “plans and their implementation affect the vulnerability of the urban poor” in cities in the global North and South.

### Field Sites

Topic	New York City	Cairo
Government and civil society relationship	Civil society advocates for state funds and inclusion in state city plan	Civil society urges state agency to stay out of the way. State inclusion is seen as a <a href="#">threat</a>
Main funding source	Government (state and federal)	International NGOs, mainly GIZ for urban greening and rooftop farming
Budget	1.45 billion USD	55,000 USD
Funding Aim	Increase climate resilience and social cohesion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build connections between NGOs</li> <li>• Raise the East River Park and other areas to survive storm surges/sea level rise</li> </ul>	Increase climate resilience by reducing Urban Heat Island effect. Policymakers seek to implement green roofs that look like Brooklyn Grange.
Materiality and neighborhoods	58-acre park	Five gardens built on the properties of Matareya civil society or government partners: the Matareya Public Library,

<sup>3</sup> What this says about social resilience I am not sure. In the conclusion I question how we should evaluate the impacts of these processes on communities.

	<p>Borders the Lower East Side and includes Alphabet City, parts of Chinatown, Two Bridges and several NYCHA campuses including Vladeck Houses</p> <p>Recent history of rapid displacement and gentrification. One activist said that she “goes to funerals almost once a week” for old-time LES residents because the “gears grind you down.”</p>	<p>Matareya Girls’ School, Al Amal School, Caritas, and a local district office.</p> <p>The neighborhood was rapidly urbanized over the past generation. Fifty years ago, Matareya was peri-urban agricultural land. Now the neighborhood is incredibly densely populated with one of the lowest per capita ratings for access to green space in Cairo.</p>
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**Methods**

**Site Selection**

Both sites were selected because they are examples of planners seeking to increase social and physical resilience in a poor urban neighborhood in the face of climate change. The East River Park is a 57-acre public green space in the Lower East Side of Manhattan.<sup>4</sup> The park was slated to be renovated and upgraded to better handle storm surges through the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project.<sup>5</sup> After hurricane Sandy impacted New York in 2012, the city sought to change NYC’s infrastructure to adapt to future destructive storms. The East River Park project is being implemented through a Manhattan wide effort called “The Big U” to strengthen the borough’s shores for future storms. Five urban gardens in Cairo’s Matariya neighborhood were constructed between 2017 and 2018 in partnership with schools and local civil society organizations in order to counteract rising temperatures by increasing urban green space. The German Development Agency (GIZ) funded the initiative through the Participatory Development Program. This program partners with local government and explicitly aims to “address the issue of climate change adaptation.”<sup>6</sup>

Participatory planning and development approaches are common strategies for two groups who would not seem to have much in common: government officials in NYC and international development planners in Cairo, Egypt. Despite vastly different cultural, political and geographic contexts, the officials and planners share a desire to develop socially and biophysically resilient cities, and these two groups apply the same method to advance development—contracting. In NYC, government officials sought contractors to promote innovative approaches and “big ideas” to help the city adapt creatively to climate change. This entailed soliciting project proposals through a design competition called Rebuild by Design instead of the standard mechanism for

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/east-river-park>  
<sup>5</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/escr/index.page>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16278.html>

dispersing funds for disaster recovery. This put the initial plans for Eastern Manhattan's coastline, budgets and community outreach processes in the hands of architecture design firms and local NGOs instead of federal and city planners. In Cairo, planners at an international development agency used contractors to expedite engagement processes not embedded in the existing Egyptian governmental structure. They relied on contractors to visit the Cairo communities, hold community meetings, coordinate with the local government offices and draft and build the community gardens. In both cases, participatory approaches were selected to increase trust with community members and enhance the efficiency of their climate adaptation efforts.

## **Participants**

The researcher followed a snowball sampling approach to conduct in-depth interviews with representative constituencies of planners, community residents and civil society members in NYC and Cairo. Planners in NYC included government employees at the city (NYC Mayor's Office and federal (Department of Housing and Urban Development) levels, and contractors from the Bjarke Ingels Group the BIG U application. Civil society members in NYC consisted of activists from frontline communities in the Lower East Side and Sunset Park, water and energy specialists in Queens. Residents consisted of Lower East Side community members affiliated with the East River Alliance and East River Action groups. Planners in Cairo consisted of GIZ supervisors and employees. Residents in Cairo consisted of Matareya community members affiliated with the groups—government and civil society—who partnered with GIZ and the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment (RISE)<sup>7</sup> to build urban gardens. Civil society groups beyond partnering organizations were not accessible within this research's scope. Since the current military government has taken and consolidated power in Egypt, civil society groups are under increasingly high levels of repression and suspicion. Reaching out to new groups was not advisable for their safety as well as mine.

## **Data Collection**

This qualitative study employed a variety of research strategies. In-depth interviews were conducted with planners, contractors, activists and residents involved in the respective projects. The questions were tailored to each interviewee's experience with the project and investigated the common themes listed below:

- Social and physical resilience and the role of trust between residents and planners
- The history of the projects and their impacts
- The extent to which projects could reasonably meet community members' desires

Document analysis of planning and proposal documents associated with the East River Park and Matareya community gardens provided valuable insight on planners' desires and the project timelines. Documents include, civil society adaptation plans,<sup>8</sup> NYC climate adaptation plans,<sup>9</sup> Rebuild by Design call for proposals and competition announcements, PDP call for proposals,

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<sup>7</sup> This is a small research center based at the American University in Cairo that implements applied participatory development projects in Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.goles.org/environmental-resiliency-disaster-recovery>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/sirr/report/report.page>

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC.pdf>

RISE applications, RISE quarterly and final reports. Participant observation in NYC occurred at meetings of the East River Park Action and East River Park Alliance general and subgroup meetings in NYC and several public hearings related to the NYC planning and approval process for the ESCR project.<sup>10</sup> Participant observation in Cairo occurred at offices of planners (GIZ and RISE) during summer 2019.

In addition to data from summer 2019, the researcher's reflexive practice informs these research questions (Sultana 2007; Attia and Edge 2017). From August 2015 to July 2017, I worked at the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment as a researcher and manager of the green rooftop program. I wrote the application for community garden projects and contributed to discussions that prioritized RISE's ability to build gardens over community members' stated desires to address sewage infrastructure. For me, this means that my identity as a previous RISE employee and radicalized sustainable development reformist influence the approach, research and analysis.

### **Timeline and Location**

Research was conducted in Cairo during four weeks of June 2019 and in New York City for seven weeks during July and August 2019. In Cairo, research occurred at the offices of the GIZ-PDP in Zamalek, site visits at community gardens and urban rooftops in Matareya and offices of the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment. In New York City, research occurred at the East River Park and meetings of activist organizations and public hearings throughout the Lower East Side. Individual interviews were conducted by phone from the Urban Field Station or at the individual's workplace.

## **Data**

### **Cairo: the goals of the project**

National government bureaucrats and international development practitioners promote projects in Cairo that aim to help the city's poorest residents adapt to rising temperatures. In Cairo I trace efforts implemented by GIZ through their office responsibly for participatory development. It is aptly named the Participatory Development Program (PDP). The point of the PDP is to address the "issue of climate change adaptation in poor informal urban areas."<sup>11</sup> Cairo's rapid construction coupled with globally increasing temperatures are expected to combine and exacerbate the urban heat island effect in an already hot city. The urban heat island effect describes how sections of cities with high amounts of asphalt, low areas of green space and high population density will be hotter than the surrounding neighborhoods or suburbs. GIZ's problem statement asserts that "the extremely high population density also places considerable strain on the environment. Furthermore, the effects of climate change impact negatively on living conditions in these areas."<sup>12</sup> In fact, these temperature increases are already being felt by residents. In response to the question "do you feel the effects of climate change in Egypt and in Matareya [a Cairo neighborhood] specially" one schoolteacher responded "of course, Egypt has

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/escr/progress/meetings-workshops.page>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16278.html>

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

never reached 45 degrees before. We used to wear heavy clothes starting from mid-September, now we start doing this mid-December.” This illustrates the global pattern of hot climates staying hotter for longer periods of time. In efforts to target Cairo’s poorest residents—thought to be the most vulnerable to climate change impacts like heat—GIZ uses income approximations for municipal boundaries to allocate their funds and work closely with the local government officials.

During the early- to mid- 2010s, international development agencies, largely GIZ, and some Cairo civil society organizations promoted green roofs and urban gardens as a climate adaptation solution for Cairo’s urban poor. One of the key perceived benefits of these rooftops was an ability to counteract urban heat island effect by lowering the temperature in the immediate vicinity.<sup>13</sup> However, Matareya residents are familiar with this expected outcome of green space through their lived experiences. One schoolteacher provides an example: “yesterday I went to a compound [outside of Matareya and removed from urban heat island effect] to visit some people, and there is a big landscape there, there is a nice wind and a cool temperature there even they are only 15 minutes away.” Another woman continued, stating that: “we started feeling it [rising temperatures—the heat] because they removed the trees from a lot of places and then they built on the agriculture lands. This made a huge difference.”

GIZ planners explained their funding priorities for climate adaptation during this time period by saying that “small pilot measures, such as rooftop gardens, serve to familiarize the target groups [poor urban residents] with options for making urban areas more climate-resilient.”<sup>14</sup> In this case, ‘more climate resilient’ refers first to the biophysical notion of resilience—the gardens will cool the area as global temperatures rise. Secondly, it refers to social resilience. As residents collaborate with neighboring civil society groups in the area, they will increase their social bonds. In follow up visits, RISE<sup>15</sup> staff frequently asked Matareya residents if the gardens had served as an educational model or led to any collaborations. This was codified as RISE’s number one objective in their 2016 proposal. They wrote that the success of their project would be measured by tracking “enhanced environmental conditions, including climate change effects.”

By the time RISE submitted an urban gardening and green roof proposal in 2016, planners at GIZ had begun to realize that rooftops and urban gardening may not have meaningful impacts on local temperature. In short, gardens were promoted as climate adaptation measures, but they would not help residents stay cool. They would not increase the physical resilience of the area.<sup>16</sup> While rooftop gardening became more popular for planners in Cairo, GIZ funded a large green roof agriculture cooperative project immediately before RISE submitted an application in 2016. Planners partnered with a civil society organization and close to forty households in a poor urban neighborhood of Cairo. Planners hoped that the green roofs would reduce the local temperature in this area and provide income by selling produce through this cooperative. The project failed to

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<sup>13</sup> These assumptions are rooted in rooftop gardening guidance documents produced through trials in the US and Germany

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16278.html>

<sup>15</sup> These conversations occurred as researchers at the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment (RISE) developed their proposal to submit to GIZ for funding to work in Matareya.

<sup>16</sup> They were also exclusively funded through EU development priorities to help residents in the global South adapt to climate change. Future EU funding through the PDP focused on improving Cairo’s infrastructure specifically so migrants would not leave the city for Europe. These racially coded priorities can be explored in further research.

live up to expectations of temperature reduction and financial viability. A year after the project finished only twelve of forty-six total farms had anything planted. People were not making money and the environment had not gotten cooler. This colored GIZ staff's view of RISE's proposal and the benefits of urban gardening. One GIZ staff member said that "green roofs are not [economically] sustainable at all" and that "the idea of having an economic output is a myth." Several other GIZ employees agreed that the farms did not necessarily increase the physical resilience of an area—residents were not cooler because of the green roofs or urban gardens.<sup>17</sup> However, GIZ staff consistently focused on the idea that green roofs and gardens promote social resilience. Communities are better able to adapt to climate change because gardens allow them to connect and foster bonds of trust. One planner summarized that "this type of farm leads to social cohesion" and increases a community's ability to adapt to climate change.

Matareya residents also recognize that small gardens will not reduce the temperature in their neighborhood by a meaningful amount. When asked if increasing the green space in the neighborhood could decrease the temperature, they all responded yes. Yet when asked specifically if the gardens built through the GIZ project impact temperature as they experience climate change, everyone said "of course not." Many respondents are also aware that scaling up these projects is incredibly unlikely. Matareya is rapidly densifying. Within the past two generations it has transformed from a peri-urban agricultural boundary of Cairo to an area with almost ten times the population density of New York City (Amer Hegazy and Attia 2009:3). From 1993 to 2013 Cairo's regional population rose from ~15.5 million to 40 million, with 82% of the growth occurring in already densely populated areas like Matareya.<sup>18</sup> This trend is expected to continue. Tellingly Matareya government officials responsible for green space do not hold much hope for the future of their jobs and the existing small parks. When RISE contractors asked them for strategies to promote green space in the neighborhood, they told them not to bother.

While GIZ planners and Matareya residents agree that gardens will not increase the community's physical resilience, they have other reasons for supporting and engaging with the projects. Teachers describe the gardens as a useful educational tool for applied learning. One school employee stated that after students participate in planting they "start to strongly love agriculture...they were seeing the products they buy from the market growing in front of them in the school. This had a huge impact on the students, and we started giving them the agriculture classes on the roof." The same GIZ planner who said that rooftop gardens were not sustainable explained that she supported RISE's proposal because it focused on building community capacity for climate adaptation. If RISE had only written about building gardens to enhance the physical resilience of the neighborhood, the project would likely not have been funded.

### **Cairo: the limits of participation**

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes, these gardens were built in conjunction with solar heaters, building repainting schemes and shading. In these cases, GIZ staff see more possibility for the gardens to serve a physical adaptation function.

<sup>18</sup> (Osman, Arima, and Divigalpitiya 2016:288; Sims 2000:25) (AboElata 2017). The 40 million figure includes the population of "Greater Cairo." These satellite cities and rapidly expanding neighborhoods are very much a part of Cairo's social and environmental fabric; however, they are just outside the legal district boundary of the city. That is why other population measures will say Cairo's population is around 18 or 22 million.



### The new participatory approach—constrained by politics and GIZ policies

The attempts of GIZ planners to increase transparency and engagement with residents illustrate how participatory approaches remain constrained by political realities. In 2018, employees at GIZ inaugurated a new approach. They would foster civil society and increase transparency by planning development projects in conjunction with communities of residents and civil society leaders in each neighborhood where GIZ worked. These community committees will be “elected to represent each informal area.”<sup>19</sup> GIZ had been collaborating with local Egyptian government offices for years. In fact, GIZ trained Egyptian local government employees in participatory strategies and institutionalized them as key contacts for GIZ and its subcontractors in each neighborhood. These employees were called members of the Urban Upgrading Unit (UUU).<sup>20</sup> These collaborations would not stop, but the hope of the new participatory approach was to foster long-term connections with civil society in addition to the formal planning and UUUs. One GIZ employee described it as an effort to be “more responsive to and reflective of community needs.”

GIZ officials were largely reacting to their previous approach’s long timeline and inflexibility. The Participatory Development Program had been designing and implementing participatory approaches in Cairo since 2004.<sup>21</sup> This most recent approach was participatory but the gap between an initial community meeting and a project start date was frequently two and a half years. This delay and reliance only on the Egyptian local government for outreach made it difficult to build trust and long-term relationships with residents or civil society groups. The principal of the Matareya Girls’ School said that the local government official occasionally brings representatives from international organizations like GIZ to her school, but they only waste her teachers’ time because the money and projects never materialize. If funds do come, then they come so late that they are no longer responding to community needs. Other community organization leaders stated that the local government officials only meet with them for photo opportunities with international donors—not to ever hear their concerns or feedback. A GIZ manager provided a different perspective. She said that through the previous participatory process, it was difficult to assess actual needs of the community. The government officials and residents they talked to did not have close, trust-filled, relationships with GIZ employees so they sought to maximize the resources they could get. She stated that when people “see funds coming, they will make everything possible” regardless of whether they actually desire that specific intervention. The new participatory approach was supposed to change all of this by increasing coordination with civil society organizations and speeding up GIZ’s project delivery and flexibility. GIZ planners would build knowledge of the community groups and foster trust through participating in frequent local consultations with a newly established committee—one that included women and the youth.

Planners fully attempted to access community members and groups but were blocked by local government officials and the institution’s own rigid policies. In some communities, GIZ planners

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16278.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16278.html>

“The programme has promoted institutional development in the governorates by providing further training and support in organisation development, for example by setting up urban upgrading units (UUUs) for the informal areas. These new administrative units are not only mainstreamed institutionally by decree, they also function as knowledge carriers for other departments and serve as a model for other governorates.”

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.egypt-urban.net/history/>

never go a chance to implement this new approach. They never met with civil society groups and the new, inclusive, management committees were never established. GIZ has strict written requirements for documentation. They tightly follow their frameworks and Egyptian national law when doing community outreach and development. As such, before GIZ staff could hold a public community meeting, they needed permits from the local government of the respective neighborhood. These forms took significant amounts of time to fill out and be approved.<sup>22</sup> They required the hourly itinerary in the neighborhood, national ID of all employees going to the area and specific date of public meeting. In one area, GIZ staff never received permits and never held a community meeting.

Despite not speaking to anyone in the neighborhood, GIZ staff still needed to produce an outcomes document from their new participatory approach for this area. It was supposed to summarize the findings of the community meetings and narrow community priorities to several technical areas. In the absence of data on residents' desires and development priorities, the GIZ manager made the pragmatic decision to rely on local people he could speak with. The manager instructed his staff and contractors to consult with the UUs and other local government officials to determine priorities for the area. In the end, this new participatory approach, meant to foster civil society and respond to community needs codified and reinforced government priorities under the guise of lessons learned from participation. One GIZ employee succinctly summarized the hypocrisy of a report on a participatory approach devoid of participation by residents from the neighborhood or civil society. She said, "if you dig deep inside the LADP [the report], you will find stuff that is not real."

In communities where GIZ staff received approvals, the UU would accompany GIZ staff on all interactions with civil society members. One GIZ employee reflected that it was incredibly easy for the UU to curate who GIZ staff interacted with from the neighborhood. This staff member was also frustrated because the UU was not meeting GIZ's requirements to involve youth, women or civil society. When they would hold community meetings required by GIZ's new participatory approach, the UU would gather five or six pro-government residents to sit and talk. Even when permits were approved, it was very difficult to reach civil society organizations through this participatory approach. In another neighborhood where permits were granted, the process took three months. After receiving the permit, GIZ staff held an initial community meeting with residents who were not entirely curated by the UU. When they called the UU to inform them of their next visit, the UU required a written letter from the local government and GIZ, outlining new dates and national IDs. This would take another three months and would impair their ability to build trust and partner with the neighborhood residents who they did speak with. In response to this frustrating interaction, the GIZ employee suggested that they drive to the community and speak with the residents without a permit or the UU present. The employee reported that "my boss was out of ideas. I told him, it's easy. We go and don't call him. We already have a letter that has been accepted." He proposed to rely on the already stamped letter if

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<sup>22</sup> Underlying these applications is a suspicion of foreign interference in Egyptian national affairs. Local government officials follow a policy that "you don't know the intentions of [foreign] people so you always have to be awake." Even though the GIZ employees and subcontractors applying for permission neighborhood are Egyptian themselves, GIZ is foreign. Professors at Cairo University were on an application to do participatory development on a GIZ project. They were never approved, but when they applied to the same local government office with different funding for another project, they quickly received their permits.

they run into oversight. This could have opened space for community engagement and a freer method of participatory development, but the GIZ manager refused to approve this plan. They waited another three months for a letter. By this time, they ran into a similar problem as the community above—they again needed to submit a report of community desires without clear understandings of what community members wanted.

#### The previous participatory approach—constrained by politics and GIZ policies

Under the previous approach to participatory development, GIZ planners drafted a Participatory Needs Assessment (PNA) that was meant to communicate residents' development priorities based on focus groups and community meetings. The PNA was written to share the beliefs and desires of civil society organizations and residents of Matareya so contractors could tailor their bids to meet those needs. While the document is meant to reflect the community, politically active residents and organizations were not included and GIZ planners surveyed residents (through a contractor) at an inconvenient time. The PNA excerpt below illustrates the logistical challenges that GIZ policies contended with. The organization's focus on documentation and rigidity likely compounded the ability to meet with residents during this time.

“The period from December until mid-January coincided with midyear school examinations, hence it was a challenge to recruit the members of the taskforce...The study period also witnessed the surge of safety tensions in Matareya district in the memory of January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Violent clashes occurred in the district by the end of January 2015 and led to delays in field work.”

Additionally, while GIZ claims political neutrality, they work closely with the existing government. This relationship and their insistence that no politically active organizations participate would certainly shape and narrow which residents and civil society groups participated in community meetings. In turn, this would influence the data in the PNA. Given the charged political atmosphere of the time, illustrated by violent political clashes related to the upcoming elections, this appears a limitation of the PNA. However, even within this context, planners sought to remain non-aligned, while working closely with the existing government:

“Another major challenge was the approaching parliamentary elections. The consultant had to ensure that the PNA remained neutral to any forms of political interests. Only politically neutral stakeholders were invited to participate in field work or the discussions.”

The next section traces how community priorities gathered through this approach and presented in the PNA were still not enacted by GIZ or contractors.

#### **Cairo: the influence of contracting**

RISE staff read the PNA and correctly identified sewage infrastructure as the most important priority for community members. The Matareya neighborhood is an “informal” area that does not have much sewage infrastructure planned by the state.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the pipes frequently overflow and flood the streets. There is also inadequate drainage. To address this community

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<sup>23</sup> Bayat and Denis (2000:195) define Cairene informal areas as those not planned by the state. They are “illegal” but highly present and permanent settlements. The authors speculate that the state does not recognize them legally in order to avoid provision of adequate sanitation, water or electric services. This status produced the sewage overflows that plagued Matareya residents.

priority with RISE expertise, RISE staff partnered with a local Egyptian NGO called Megawra. RISE employees were experts in agriculture and proposed urban gardens. In order to draft a proposal in line with the community's stated desires, they added Megawra's expertise on water management and building retrofits. The initial proposal described five to ten urban gardens (some rooftops) that would be irrigated by greywater taken from kitchens and sinks of NGO buildings. By diverting water to the gardens, this project would lessen the amount of water that enters Matareya's sewers and hopefully reduce the frequency of flooding and overflow events.

The development priorities identified as community desires in the PNA were not enacted by GIZ or RISE as a subcontractor. After RISE staff planned a project with Megawra to address sewage overflow, they changed the scope to only build gardens. This eleventh hour shift occurred because Megawra had to end their proposed partnership with RISE due to the strict stipulations of this GIZ grant. Large granting organizations like GIZ will only fund up to ninety percent of the budget that RISE and Megawra ask for. Under previous grants, small NGOs could bill staff time as part of their in-kind contribution to the grant. This was a tool to allow them to overbudget and get one hundred percent of the required funds from the donor. This particular proposal cycle GIZ required cash. It would not honor staff time. As a small NGO dependent on grants, Megawra could not allocate ten percent of this total project money (around twenty-five thousand dollars) to this proposal. Because of this, they pulled out. This left RISE without irrigation or building retrofitting expertise. RISE staff had a choice. They could withdraw their entire proposal because it no longer satisfied the community's desires, or they could alter the proposal to meet another part of the grant criteria. RISE staff, guided by the director, chose to submit the application for urban gardens. To apply to GIZ, RISE could fulfill priorities identified in the PNA *or* priorities desired by funders like the European Union. One of the EU's priorities was to enhance the area's resilience to climate change. This is how RISE applied.

Participation by contracting limits the extent to which contractors and community members can form long-term partnerships to share information and build trust. In 2016,<sup>24</sup> RISE staff partnered with the UUU and met with several civil society groups and schools. After a full day of meeting with these groups and hearing their priorities for Matareya's future, RISE staff sat in the Jeep with the UUU representative. They asked the UUU for contact information for the groups, hoping to stay in touch and remain transparent as their proposal wound its way through GIZ's bureaucracy. The UUU representative refused and responded "your job is to disappear. Do not come back until you have the money." While extreme and direct, this reaction illustrates a common constraint of participation by contracting. The UUU representative's comment could reflect a desire not to unrealistically raise residents' expectations or it could reflect a deemphasis on the importance of building reciprocal partnerships with these organizations outside of the timeframe of the participatory approach.

### **New York City: participation and contracting**

Similarly to Cairo, the twists and turns of contemporary participatory adaptation efforts in NYC demonstrate the limitations participation done by powerful institutions to plan and develop. Contractors designing the proposed adaptation measure knew what would likely get funded. A large high-profile project that could raise the profile of the lead applicant and something that

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<sup>24</sup> This is under the previous participatory approach when groups were still more accessible.

focused on Manhattan were key pieces of information. In fact, contractors and NYC resilience consultants strongly believe the levy was a predetermined adaptation measure. This BIG U design is strong in part because it aligns with the wishes of powerful NYC real estate actors and government planners. This makes it fundable. Referencing these limits, one contractor said that “from my perspective there was always a levy that was going to be created around lower Manhattan.” She led community outreach meetings for the participatory process as a contractor under Rebuild by Design. She continued to say that community members’ participation would be limited to what mural to paint on the wall. A prominent city resilience consultant stated that the BIG U won because it supported a view of NYC that aligns with the city’s “permanent governors.” He references the belief strategic planning decisions in NYC are made to support the interests of an urban elite heavily invested in real estate.<sup>25</sup> One NYC civil society member summarized the participatory adaptation process by stating that “the community was only offered so many solutions.” The solutions that most community members wanted was “in the water protection” and no wall. However, this was ruled out by planners in early meetings. This civil society member argues that community members were never offered what they really wanted: a plan that does not destroy the park.

The process of which ideas were ruled out by planners and contractors as unpragmatic and unrelated also illustrates the limits of participation. Community members advocated for closing sections of the highway and replacing lanes with free electric vehicles. They also advocated for burying the highway (FDR) and using that as vertical protection for their communities. In theory, these were the big ideas that RBD sought to solicit, but consultants knew they would never be implemented in NYC even if the consultants were sympathetic. One consultant said “long term they should bury the FDR and that should be vertical protection. That makes sense as something to fund [through RBD] because it needs to be built anyway.” In the end, while this consultant, others and community members raised concerns about the future of their communities, ideas that challenged the status quo “didn’t go anywhere.”

Since the project’s initial community meetings in 2013 until now, residents have raised concerns over gentrification and displacement impacting them as the large park is renovated. The tension between resident concerns and how planners define their scope of work is evident in the contested Draft Environmental Impact Statement released in Summer 2018. In that statement, planners argue that there is minimal risk of displacement. The risk is so small that no mitigating action is needed. This does not fit with residents’ lived experiences or lessons from other poor urban NYC neighborhoods. They also expressed an urgent desire for action and a frustration with the participatory process. They stated that “we don’t need another outreach process, we need resources we need stuff to happen.” In light of the broken trust city consultants and planners see immediate construction as a way forward. The hope is that making concrete progress building some sort of physical protection can rebuild trust.

The Rebuild by Design competition influenced supported participation through contracting, which set limits on long term partnership and the content of plans. The competition was

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<sup>25</sup> While it is easy to decry these claims as conspiratorial, they align with Foucault’s notion of how power is enacted through local centers to give the appearance of a coherent and totalizing effect even though the centers themselves are disparate. In short “power is everywhere not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978:93).

intentionally designed to foster innovation and big ideas. While this necessitates that proposals are unrealistic, one member of the Mayor's Office exemplified a commonly held viewpoint. The subcontractors seeking to win RBD, "overcorrected for community" participation at the expense of city planners. They made promises to community groups that they could not keep, in part because RBD did not specify a budget for the proposals and sought to promote innovation. Additionally, Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), the eventual winners, are a Dutch firm unfamiliar with NYC's legal and social landscape. While they engaged community members, they did so poorly in the opinion of some. One member of BIG's team of subcontractors stated that "BIG had never been involved in community outreach before. It's not a thing that they do." They didn't understand that the LES is comprised of multiple neighborhoods and cultures. They continued, "you can't have just one meeting for everyone—you just can't." Another key aspect is that BIG designed the proposal with limited funds. This disincentivized the organization and their team from investigating the details of how their plan (the BIG U) would be built. When the Mayor's Office took over the implementation process, there were many unanswered technical questions (such as placement of underground pipes, slope of land and maintenance schedules and costs) that heavily influenced the current project design.

## Discussion

### Contracting

Participatory planning and development approaches are common strategies for two groups who would not seem to have much in common: government officials in NYC and international development planners in Cairo, Egypt. Despite vastly different cultural, political and geographic contexts, the officials and planners share a desire to develop socially and biophysically resilient cities, and these two groups apply the same method to advance development—contracting. In NYC, government officials sought contractors to promote innovative approaches and "big ideas" to help the city adapt creatively to climate change. This entailed soliciting project proposals through a design competition called Rebuild by Design instead of the standard mechanism for dispersing funds for disaster recovery. This put the initial plans for Eastern Manhattan's coastline, budgets and community outreach processes in the hands of architecture design firms and local NGOs instead of federal and city planners. In Cairo, planners at an international development agency used contractors to expedite engagement processes not embedded in the existing Egyptian governmental structure. They relied on contractors to visit the Cairo communities, hold community meetings, coordinate with the local government offices and draft and build the community gardens. In both cases, participatory approaches were selected to increase trust with community members and enhance the efficiency of their climate adaptation efforts.

### Participatory Processes Reinforced Planners Desires: consequences for residents

Although the *how* in these stories varies, the consequences of a participatory approach to adaptation were similar for the urban poor in Cairo and NYC—their desires for their communities' futures were not implemented by planners. Under the earlier GIZ participatory approach, Matareya residents' desires for sewage infrastructure reform were recorded and presented as a community development priority. Contemporary participatory approaches

conducted by international development agencies and their contractors prevented this priority from being met. RISE staff decided that their successful proposal was worth submitting to the PDP because it built on RISE’s expertise and matched EU donor priorities—not because it fulfilled a need articulated by community members.<sup>26</sup> In fact, community members who participated in the PNA clearly stated that environmental issues were not a top priority for their neighborhood. Under the new approach—GIZ’s intended fix—planners were unable to meet with residents or civil society groups. They made the pragmatic choice to present local government priorities as priorities that came through a participatory approach of community surveys and meetings. In NYC, residents and planners built trust through a three year planning process that had produced a document community members and civil society groups generally approved of. Yet when faced with budgetary, construction and maintenance constraints, planners decided those realities trumped residents’ vision for their future. In NYC and earlier Cairo approaches, residents participated and were heard by planners. In the new Cairo approach, they never got a chance to influence this participatory approach. Yet in all cases, the result was the same: residents’ designs and priorities for their neighborhoods were not implemented.

In fact, the plans at the end of the participatory process more closely resemble planner’s priorities than they do residents.’ Table 2 summarizes how proposals in Cairo and NYC shifted throughout participatory planning processes. It shows, despite both projects employing participatory approaches, the on the ground realities transformed proposals to reflect planners’ priorities—not residents.’

	Proposal at the beginning of a participatory process	Proposal at the end of a Participatory process
Cairo, Matareya neighborhood	Based on residents’ desires to address sewage flooding in their neighborhood, RISE writes a proposal to build greywater recycling systems that reduce the load of water on the city’s sewage infrastructure. This water would be used to plan community gardens and green roofs.	Due to the stipulations of the call for proposals, RISE alters the project to remove the greywater recycling component. Now it is only community gardens and green roofs. This is a priority for RISE and for the European Union who funds the project. It is not a topic that has come up in conversations with community members.  This proposal is funded and implemented.

<sup>26</sup> In a previous paper I examined contracting pressure that contributed to this decision. In fact, when I wrote this proposal the RISE director instructed me to include a position for myself because otherwise I may not have a job at the end of my current contract—also funded by a grant.

<p>New York City, Lower East Side</p>	<p>Three years of task force meetings comprised of LES civil society members and planners from the NYC Mayor’s Office have led to a “consensus plan” for the East River Park. Berms will be built along the waters’ edge and a wall will be constructed beside the FDR Drive. The park will be floodable. Residents and civil society members continue to negotiate the specifics with planners but are generally accepting of the plan.</p>	<p>Planners do a constructability analysis and unilaterally determine that the berm and wall plan is infeasible. They decide on a new proposal—bury the park under ten feet of fill and close it for three and a half years for construction. Residents immediately begin protesting the plan. They question why the park must be buried and why the construction cannot be phased.</p> <p>This proposal has been approved by the city council. Residents and the civil society group East River Park Action plan to file a lawsuit shortly.</p>
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Table 2: before and after—the limits of a participatory approach

I heed Williams’ call to resist the tendency to draw totalizing conclusions about the nature of participation through nuanced analysis. In NYC and Cairo, participation set the limits on how community members can influence project designs and resist planners’ desires. The end result reinforced planners’ preferred strategies over residents.’ However, “consequences [of development by a participatory approach] are not predetermined and subjects are never completely controlled” (Williams 2004:557). The similar results of a participatory approach in Cairo and NYC appear to support the participation as tyranny argument. In both cases residents’ desires for their communities were neglected in favor of planners’ desires. Participatory approaches justified and provided information for this end result. However, there is also evidence for a post-tyranny focus on residents’ agency. In NYC residents protested and plan to take legal action against planners. Cairo residents, especially teachers, transform the gardens to meet their desires and needs, namely children’s education. These instances when community members exercise agency to manipulate the projects are noteworthy and illustrative of the limits of a participatory approach. Despite both projects adopting participatory approaches, residents could only exercise agency to manipulate an intervention largely determined by planners. This does not mean that we should extrapolate to classify all participatory approaches as tyrannical nor justify all community activities as resistance. I call for cautious analysis that recognizes the shared pitfalls and consequences of contemporary participatory adaptation planning.

**How did Participatory Adaptation Increase Social Resilience?**



While many interviewees describe increases in communication among residents and decreases in trust between planners and residents as outcomes of the participatory adaptation projects, the implications for social resilience remain contested and unclear. By collapsing definitions of social resilience, I refocus the lens on how actors themselves define social resilience. GIZ planners sought to foster social resilience by promoting knowledge sharing and communication between residents. For them, the concept implies collaborating and trusting relationships. They write this into the project design and generally agree that the social benefits from rooftop gardens were positive. Because residents met each other and worked together, the community's social resilience increased because of that communication and trust. One planner argued that the city's breach of trust actually increased social resilience among LES residents. Similarly, this planner sees shared communication and trust as indicators of social resilience. She cited the increase in organizing, protest and forthcoming lawsuit as evidence that residents were forming new relationships and communicating with one another as a result of the participatory approach. She sees residents who only became engaged in planning issues as a result of the city's new proposal as evidence for her argument. For her, the city's participatory approach, including the move away from expressed community desires, fosters social resilience because people were now making connections by protesting it. One NYCHA resident sees this very differently. At a public hearing in July, she said that the project had made her community less, not more, resilient because they cannot trust or rely on the city to meet their needs. In a climate change and disaster context, this would have life-threatening consequences. By breaking trust, she argued, the city made these poor residents even more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

These divergent stories of participation's impacts on social resilience illustrate the importance of recognizing the power differences and broader contexts. These factors of power and political economy contribute to setting the limits to and shaping the consequences of these projects. My simplification of social resilience, community capacity, adaptive capacity and other terms frequently quantified by planners forecloses an analysis that presents a definitive answer on whether social resilience increased or decreased. This follows Thompson and Warburton's (1985:115) conclusion that questioning what different actors "would like the facts to be" is a more productive line of inquiry than asking "what are the facts." In NYC it allows us to speculate why NYCHA residents and NYC planners reached opposing conclusions regarding the consequences of the project. Any attempts to quantify a community's social resilience should not be undertaken without acknowledging and speculating about the causes for possible divergences.

### **What About Trust?**

One necessary addition to this analysis is that efforts to increase trust between planners in Cairo and NYC are aspirational at best under current political structures. The breaking of trust between NYC planners and LES residents is noteworthy because such a low and hard-won level of trust was undone. When the city changed the scope to bury the park, many residents reacted with unsurprised resignation. Many residents and critical scholars view the city as a growth machine to fuel the interests and finances of a landed elite (Menser 2012; Molotch 1976). One activist summarized this common belief by stating that "the whole city is built on gentrification." In Cairo, the violent political clashes referenced in the PNA were part of a broader precession of dissidents, political opposition and critical media outlets carried out by the current regime. Cairo residents and many Matareya residents do not view the current planners as capable of building

trust at all. The actions of this government have been too repressive for too long. This nuance reinforces the claims that contemporary participation adaptation follows the apolitical tendencies of development. Additionally, NYC and Cairo planners' insistence to apply a participatory approach in such contested contexts demonstrates the perceived power and romance of participatory climate adaptation. They promoted the idea that a participatory approach could overcome these real political and violent contestations.

## Conclusion

I extend Anguelovski et al.'s (2016) discussion of how vulnerable urban neighborhoods fail to achieve equity through "acts of omission" by planners. I echo the authors' call to continue analyzing the effectors of participatory approaches and how these effects are produced. I also call for scholars to pay attention to the consequences of participatory approaches' failures to achieve their goals. The attention on the real and material consequences for residents in poor urban neighborhoods is necessary. I argue that it should be supplemented by a focus on the consequences of these neighborhoods' resilience *not* being increased. Anguelovski et al divide the impacts of adaptation planning into acts of commission and acts of omission (2016:334). Acts of commission "disproportionately affect or displace disadvantaged groups. Conversely, acts of omission refer to plans that protect economically valuable areas over low-income or minority neighborhoods..." (Anguelovski et al 2016:334).<sup>27</sup> The stories from Cairo and NYC lead me to offer a broader interpretation of an "act of omission." I argue that acts of omission should include cases in which poor urban neighborhoods have not benefited from protection, but not because resources were diverted to more economically valuable areas. In Cairo the poor areas were targeted, and infrastructure was built. Matareya was not omitted, but neither did it benefit from protection, because the protection was not sufficient. In NYC, there are close to one and a half billion funds allocated for investment in the Lower East Side. Yet protection (physical resilience) has been omitted because the project continues to be delayed. Future work can engage with this broadened category of omission and possibly integrate it with the politics of waiting (Auyero 2012; Oldfield and Greyling 2015).

Future planning efforts and scholarly analysis should challenge the romance with participatory climate adaptation as a natural extension of Nightingale's (2015:182) challenge of the "Romance with Resilience." Resilience is being "institutionalized into policy and practice across the globe in relation to climate change" (Nightingale 2015:182). The link to climate change means that adaptation measures are being built to increase resilience. However, "precisely what resilience is, who is responsible for gaining or conferring resilience and how it is to be maintained over time and space are unclear" (Nightingale 2015:182).<sup>28</sup> Planners recognize this critique and have proposed participatory approaches as a solution. They propose that participation of residents will ensure accountability and transparency to mitigate the power dynamics inherent in working with city planners and development experts. I argue that participation, as it is currently done,<sup>29</sup> is an

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<sup>27</sup> Acts of omission also "frame adaptation as a private responsibility rather than a public good, or fail to involve affected communities in the process" (2016:334).

<sup>28</sup> Meerow, Newell, and Stults (2016:46-47) suggestion that planners should consistently and transparently question "resilience for whom, what, when, where and why" bolsters this point

<sup>29</sup> Here I am referring to contemporary participatory adaptation strategies that rely on contracting and preserve existing powerful institutions' role in planning and development.

incomplete and inadequate fix to questions of scale, power and agency critics of resilience and participation have raised for years.

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