

# Collaboration is the answer.

## The Tale of the Greenest District in Cairo by the Green Hands of the Civil Society.

### Green Infrastructure Co-production

Green infrastructure (GI) is promoted and employed as a key contributor to sustainable development and as a means to creating sustainable communities through community engagement (Land Use Consultants (LUC), 2009; Kramer, 2014; Austin, 2014). Illustrating the value of GI to partners, advocates and politicians continuously is crucial to ensure its continuity in planning delivery mechanisms discussions (Mell, 2017; Austin, 2014). A collaborative approach involving multiple organizations; public, private and civil society organizations is required to achieve the benefits of GI and create nature-people relationship (Manggol, 2015).

Human interactions within the implementation process of GI is central to its success (Maryati & Humaira, 2016; Manggol, 2015; Hansen & Pauleit, 2014; Austin, 2014), it also ensures the delivery of different benefits for people and nature (Dagenais, et al., 2017; Manggol, 2015). Engaging the public ensure

maintaining a long-term link between people and the landscape. When considering people as the true owners of GI, it becomes all about placemaking and would lead to a truly sustainable design (UK Green Building Council, 2015; Town & Country Planning Association, 2012). As building social capital, increasing civic engagement and promoting the right to the city are the cornerstone of placemaking as well as GI (Silberberg, et al., 2013). Hence, in addition to the need for planning and design codes and incentives, there is a need for institutions that educate about nature along with a nudge to explore it and living more outdoors as well as new forms of social capital (Beatley, 2011). This shall be achieved through committed leadership on all the different scales (Austin, 2014; Beatley, 2011). Participatory landscape design adjusts the relation between the people and their local natural environment (Ibrahim & Amin, 2014).

### Cairo Background

Green spaces issue is complex and problematic in the Egyptian context, as the city lacks sufficient areas of green spaces and on the other hand there is also a great need for transforming the existing green spaces into attractive and livable places to contribute to the creation of sustainable communities (Kafafy & Betawi, 2011; El-Zafarany, 2005; Duquenois & Newman, 2009). Cairo's share per capita of green spaces is much lower than the international norms

and standards, and even when compared to more arid cities than Cairo like Dubai, it is still lower (Kafafy & Betawi, 2011). As the per capita share in Greater Cairo Region is 3 m<sup>2</sup> which is comparably very low (GOPP, et al., 2012). Moreover, this share per capita is not evenly distributed among Cairo's population (Kafafy & Betawi, 2011).

### The Problem

The problem of green spaces shortage in Cairo is a collective action problem, where the mechanisms for organizing supply are less developed than they should be (Kafafy, 2010). The absence of green spaces strategies in the city, lack of policies and unawareness of the holistic importance of landscape to the surrounding built environment contribute to the current situation of green spaces supply in Cairo (ibid).

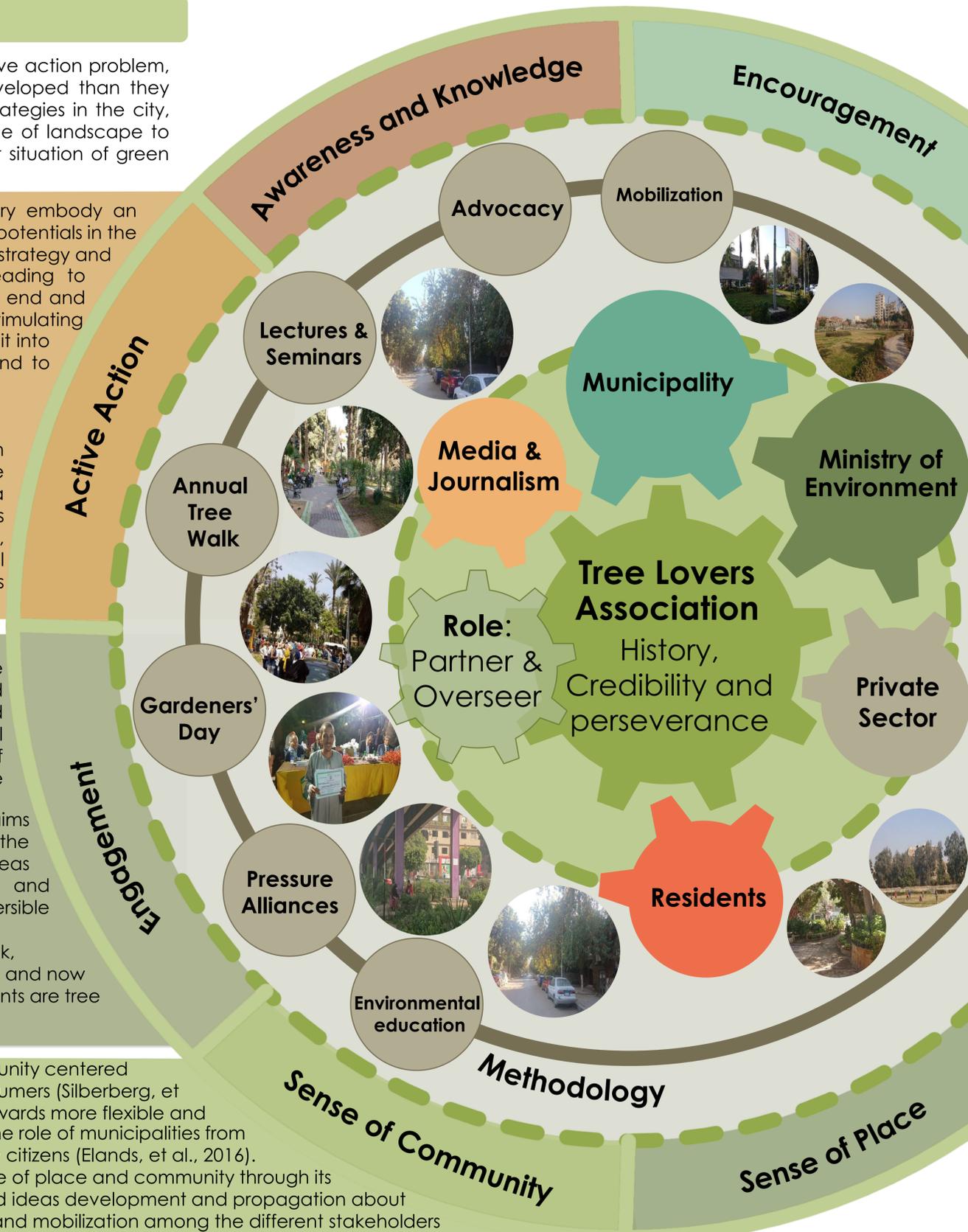
Partnerships & volunteering as pillars of green spaces delivery embody an added value to Cairo, as the present examples show promising potentials in the current situation, but they are still not incorporated in an overall strategy and are not acknowledged on the overall governance set. Leading to fragmented efforts that are not building up to reach a definite end and agreed-on image for the city. There is a crucial importance for stimulating and initiating placemaking at the local level and incorporating it into the governance framework of Cairo to attain its potentials and to yield distinctive places that people feel connected to.

### Maadi – The Greenest District in Cairo

Maadi was laid out as imitations of English garden suburbs in 1905. For over a century, Maadi has been fortunate to earn the reputation of being a "green suburb". It was designed with a vision to enhance the streets with flowering trees, fragrant shrubs and seasonal flowers. Most buildings had grassy pavements, whilst attractive squares and medians flourished with colorful trees that mark the seasons to the delight of residents and visitors (Zeitoun, 2015).

The Tree Lovers Association (TLA) is an NGO focusing on nature conservation and propagation. Founded by Mustapha and Saffiya Moyine El Arab in 1973 with a group of dedicated residents of the green suburb of Maadi, they initiated several programs and projects, and developed guidelines and codes of conduct on how to interact with the environment in Maadi. The philosophy on which TLA is founded is grounded in the respect and love of nature and a commitment to its protection. Its aims continue to serve the community by encouraging and assisting the public at large to protect and increase space for trees, green areas and wildlife. As a pressure group it has lobbied against and successfully prevented projects that would have caused irreversible damage to Egypt's natural heritage (Zeitoun, 2006). TLA is an interface between the different actors, a connecting link, between all stakeholders. So it created a networked community, and now Maadi residents are the district's own guardians. All Maadi residents are tree lovers, that is how TLA board director describes the residents.

The core of placemaking is being a non-hierarchical and community centered paradigm creating a generation of city makers rather than consumers (Silberberg, et al., 2013). Innovative governance arrangements and moving towards more flexible and networked arrangements is essential along with the change of the role of municipalities from being providers of green spaces to creating values together with citizens (Elands, et al., 2016). In that sense, Maadi is a unique district in Cairo with a great sense of place and community through its active and powerful civil society. TLA depends on awareness and ideas development and propagation about nature rather than building projects. TLA also offers consultation and mobilization among the different stakeholders more than being the actual doer of the greening activities in most cases. Collaboration is the main key for TLA to achieve its aims. This remarkable case outlines the crucial role of collaboration in attaining a socio-ecological system in cities through Green Infrastructure.



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