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GEOGRAPHY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Urban planning, political system, and public participation in a century of urbanization: Kabul, Afghanistan

Rashid A. Mushkani^{1*} and Haruka Ono²

Abstract: This study examined the role of centralized national, decentralized supranational, and multiplied Foucauldian powers in a century of urbanization and urban planning in Afghanistan's capital city. Centralized domestic and decentralized foreign powers are framed as vertical planning and technical rationality, whereas the multiplied Foucauldian power is framed as participatory planning and discursive rationality. Within this theoretical framework, the available urban planning literature concerning Afghanistan's urbanization process from 1919 to 2020 is surveyed. The period starting from 1919 to 1921 marks the country's independence and first major undertaking of urban development, whereas the period of 2018–2020 denotes the urban design framework preparation and tendency of its application for Kabul City. Three distinct paradigms; namely, biopower, complementary, and sporadic urban planning and development can be demonstrated by tracing the role of power and the political system in scope, method, vision, and authorization of urban plans for the country. In complementary and sporadic planning paradigms, the decentralized supranational powers guide urban development and planning, whereas the centralized domestic power guides urban development in the biopower

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Rashid's research and teaching interests include the intersection of urbanization and human rights, public space and public life, principles of equity and inclusivity in urban spaces, and urban genealogy of justice. He has a multidisciplinary background in architecture, urban design, planning, and building conservation. He has taught environmental behavior and design courses in the Architecture Department of Kabul University (2017–2019).

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

In a rarely researched domain, by exploring previous studies, reports, and archival materials, this study tells a century length tale of the planning history and conducts an analysis of the role of different forces in shaping and guiding urban planning and development in the capital city of Afghanistan. Simultaneously, this study frames and discusses the questions of what has been, and prior to the return of the Taliban in August 2021, what was the role of power and political systems in the scope, method, vision, and authorization of urban plans for the city of Kabul.

It finds that, despite the claims and leaps of democratic political regime exercises, a few traces of people's participation in upgrading projects of unplanned settlements occurred only recently. However, historically the urban planning practices have not accepted meaningful citizens' participation in the planning process.

paradigm. Within these paradigms, despite the claims and leaps of democratic political regime exercises, a few traces of participatory planning in upgrading projects of unplanned settlements occurred only recently. However, the urban planning regime has lacked discursive rationality and has not accepted meaningful citizen participation in the planning process.

Subjects: Political Behavior and Participation; Urban Politics; Urban History; Urban Politics; City and Urban Planning; Politics & Development

Keywords: urbanization; urban planning; modes of power; participatory planning; Kabul

1. Introduction

In conventional discourse, the origins of and the pragmatism in the rationality of centralized domestic and decentralized foreign powers, what Foucault called sovereign power, are specific and apparent, whereas in modern discourse, power is considerably fragmented and ubiquitous—not destined by limited special hubs or the sovereign (Gutting & Oksala, 2019; Sadan, 1997/2004). Foucault argues that power is not merely the ability for action concentrated in a particular hub, but a multifaceted dynamism scattered throughout society and works via an augmented set of social networks (Hall, S., 2001; Moghaddam & Rafeian, 2020).

Foucault distinguishes sovereign power by what he calls biopower. Sovereign power is historically founded on violence and exercised by taking something away from the subject, for example, by imposing taxes or demanding subjects' time or life (Gutting & Oksala, 2019). Pursuing warfare in the best interest of the sovereign and the death sentence for acting against the power's will are the clearest forms of such power. Furthermore, Foucault claims that since the 17th century, a profound transformation has occurred in power mechanisms. Biopower has progressively replaced brutal sovereign power, exerting constructive influence on the subject, and administering and optimizing the individual's life through controls and inclusive regulations. As an example, and to frame his epistemes, he used Alfred de Vigny's plan for Nantes (a city in western France) in the 18th century to characterize the mode of security in cities. This shift in thinking is evidenced by applying various methods for attaining the control of populations, for example, practices to organize medical care, methods for regulating behavior (policing and security), and rethinking techniques of urban planning. Although the overall aim is to efficiently manage bodies and the scientific and constant computed administration of life, systems of power and knowledge have taken on the duty to control, optimize, and modify life. In this new epoch, the power exercise no longer threatens the subject with death, but, as a substitute, takes charge of their lives. Thus, biopower infiltrates conventional modes of political power, making it the power of administrators and experts (Foucault, 1991; Gutting & Oksala, 2019).

A critical review of power modes in Afghanistan's history reveals that the process of paradigmatic transition from sovereign to biopower has gradually started after the second Anglo-Afghan war of 1880 and intensified after the third Anglo-Afghan war of 1919, when the country gained its independence (Arez & Dittmann, 2005; Ghobar, 1967; Gregorian, 1969; Gregory, 2004; Johnson & Leslie, 2004; Kakar, 1979). Applying a series of reforms in political, social, and economic domains and the first major undertaking of urban development by establishing an urban planning method of district-by-district development were apparent traits of this paradigmatic shift. Hence, this article analyzes power structures in the urban planning domain from this historical juncture, which will be discussed later under the first paradigm of biopower planning, followed by the complementary planning paradigm, which mainly comprised two supranational Cold War powers of the East and West blocs. This paradigm, which some scholars referred to as competitive planning because of the competition between the capitalist and communist blocs in showcasing their superior planning expertise, gradually started after the 1950s and later shifted toward the East bloc when the USSR invaded the country. Subsequently, the third paradigm began after the US

invasion of the country in 2001. This paradigm is called sporadic planning because of too many parallel, often uncollaborative, planning organizations working for the country's rehabilitation, which was initiated and guided by the decentralized supranational powers and centralized national powers.

However, the history of urban planning coincides with the earliest cities of which the evidence is known, whereas the origins of modern urban planning lie in the urban reform movement against conditions of housing in industrial cities of the 19th century (Mumford, 1989). A historical review of urban planning yields that public participation in the planning process was neither fundamental nor an attribute of urban planning, but it came to being by the evolution of planning theories through time (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2019; Watson, 2009). The rational planning movement based on blueprint planning initiated by the urban reforms of the late 19th century had no tendency or margin for public participation (P. Hall, 2014). Later, in the mid-20th century, under the theme of synoptic planning, a margin for public participation in the planning process existed, albeit minimally (Lane, 2006). Finally, after the 1960s, participatory planning aiming for community involvement in the plan production and decision-making process functioned as a standard paradigm for urban planning in much of the industrialized countries (Hajdarowicz, 2018; Lane, 2006; Vos et al., 2011). Furthermore, parallel approaches of advocacy (planners use their knowledge and experience to represent the needs and advocate for the ideas of those who are unable to access the resources and means to represent themselves such as groups of lower socioeconomic standing), transactive (planners knowledge and expertise are combined with the experimental knowledge of the population and transformed into a shared plan), and communicative planning (planning approach that engages and respects all the stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process) evolved under this paradigm (Allmendinger, 2017; Innes, 1995). Currently, besides the mentioned planning approaches, many nations are extensively practicing newer planning theories focusing on communicative rationality and decision-making based on public accord (Sager, 2019; Woltjer, 2018; Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020)

However, concerns exist regarding the potentials of communicative planning theory. Huxley (2000) argues that communicative planning theory tends to obscure the problematic relation between planning and state. He pinpoints the opposite positioning of the state and economy in Habermas's communicative rationality. Fischler's (2000) Foucauldian assessment of Habermas's communicative rationality in correlation with history and theory raised challenges of situating the historical context of communicative planning. Hillier (2002) used the Foucauldian power definition and Habermas's communicative rationality to reveal what was hidden from citizens' and urban planners' sight in urban environments by elucidating the intricate and obscure power structures in land-use planning. Flyvbjerg (1996) discussed environmental degradation, social subjugation, and economic retardation through planning manipulation. He explains that through government or urban authority power exercises, the level of public participation is minimal and rather nonparticipation. Nonetheless, communicative rationality and participatory planning theories are evolving and essential for social sciences research (Machler & Milz, 2015; Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020).

Within a less studied domain, in a historical analysis, this article explicates the modes of power and participation in a century of planning in Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul. Although citizen participation is mandatory for the planning process in most countries (Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020), in Afghanistan, with the experience of several forms of government, such as monarchy, pro-Communist, theocracy, and republic in the past century (Nasimi & Howk, 2021), in which democratic governance exercises are also claimed by some of them, the extent of citizen participation in the urban planning process is unknown. By tracing different modes of power that shaped the urban planning history of the country, this article clarifies this ambiguity.

Few studies have explored urban planning in Afghanistan. Calogero (2011b) explored the politics of urbanization and different modes of planning in the capital city of Kabul. In his doctoral dissertation, he identified three modes of planning: concrete as formal planning, clay as informal

planning, and mirror glass as exceptionalist planning. He highlights that the political rationality of these three planning modes lies in the outcome of different intersections between sovereign power and biopower. He concludes that a century of modernization and three decades of political violence considerably fragmented sovereignty. Beyer (2012) and (Beyer, 2019) explored the *Soviet town planning and housing projects in Kabul in the 1960s* and *Building institutions in Kabul in the 1960s*, respectively. She reviewed Soviet technical support linked to town planning and housing projects in Afghanistan and situated the capitalist and communist development missions in the context of competitive coexistence in Afghanistan. She concluded that the vision of Kabul City's first master plan and wisdom of international planners of the 1960s offered an average experience of modern urban life for a minority of city residents, but overall, had trivial tangible effects on the fabric of the city and ultimately the gradual progress interrupted by internal conflicts and foreign invasions in years that followed.

Pathak (2011), on the challenges of governing a conflict-afflicted city, discusses that realizing sustainable urbanization in Kabul City necessitates several reforms for clarifying institutional authority, municipal boundaries, and spatial jurisdictional issues. Additional efforts are required in inter-agency cooperation and coordination and by law institutionalization of citizen participation in urban management. She concludes that Kabul has made considerable progress post-2001 through project-based development approaches, for having prolonged sustainable urban development, a steady shift from project-based to broader governance reforms, and a citywide programmatic approach are required.

Furthermore, rapid urbanization because of population growth and weak urban institutions post-2001 substantially increased the rate of unplanned settlements. Therefore, the international community and donors invested significantly in mobilizing residents into Community Development Councils (CDCs) and initiated urban upgrading projects through a coproduction process. Gradually, the ad hoc upgrading projects with the international community and residents' support, backed by reliable researched data and reports on improving land-tenure security led to the institutionalization of participatory upgrading of unplanned settlements by the government (French et al., 2018).

2. Article overview

To explicate planning paradigms, modes of power, and participatory planning in a century of urbanization in Kabul, this article primarily provides a brief overview of the country's sociopolitical history since 1919 to better contextualize different epochs of stability, modernization, multilateral collaboration, violence, and fragility with the planning paradigms in the past century. A theoretical framework on the modes and concepts of power in an urban political context and modes of participation in urban planning is presented. Subsequently, under the three paradigms, urban planning from the beginning to the most recent exercises is analyzed. Each paradigm draws on distinct turning points in the political and urban planning history of the country. In the first paradigm, the district-by-district planning method of aggressive modernization is examined. In the second paradigm, the appearances of the first, second, and third master plans for Kabul City are discussed. Finally, in the third paradigm, discussions on the method, vision, and authorization of the fourth master plan and Kabul Urban Design Framework alongside the exercises of participatory planning in unplanned settlement-upgrading projects complete the narrative of this article.

3. Brief overview of Afghanistan's sociopolitical history of the past century

After strongly defying colonization during much of the 19th century, Afghanistan achieved sovereignty from the British Empire immediately after World War I. Squeezed between the borders of Iran, the Soviet Union, and a rising Pakistan, the country found itself in a highly fractious geopolitical arena after World War II. At this juncture, as the USSR and US were forming their domains of influence, Afghanistan was ruled as a parliamentary government and constitutional monarchy by King Zahir (1933–1973). He inherited a legacy of rapid modernization from the toppled King Amanullah (1919–1929) and a residue of minimal modernization from King Nader (1929–1933);

hence, he balanced the two approaches and proceeded with a measured and steady program of cultural and political modernization (Beyer, 2019; Ghoobar, 1967; Gregorian, 1969).

Along with Khrushchev's development doctrine through urbanization after 1955, the USSR's technopolitical and economic involvement in Afghanistan intensified, paralleled with the US initiating the international development assistance program (International Relations, 2003). Subsequently, this process prompted collaboration and competition in implementing several development cooperation projects in Afghanistan between the USSR, US, France, Bulgaria, Japan, and the Federal Republic of Germany, who were enthusiastic to peddle their modernization expertise. While Afghans were presumed to be on the receiving end of the services produced by development cooperation projects, these instances drifted and led to political instability and sociocultural rivalries and resentments that ended with a coup against the King in 1973 and the establishment of the republic by Daoud Khan with the help of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA; Beyer, 2012; Calogero, 2011a; Dibb, 2010; Hughes, 2008; Jardine, 2012).

In the years that followed, President Daoud's relationship with the PDPA and Soviet government deteriorated because of his proximity to the Non-aligned Movement. He was ousted in the violent coup of 1978 and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was established under PDPA leadership. In 1979, the Soviet Army invaded the country amid intense factional struggles and remained until 1989. The Soviets fought an inconclusive and costly war against the Mujahedin militias backed by the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. The USSR's development assistance in this decade expanded significantly as the other development partners retreated. In 1992, when the USSR collapsed, the Mujahedin established the Islamic State of Afghanistan. After the brutal civil war and the rise of the Taliban in 1995, post 9/11, the US and NATO intervened militarily and established the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Beyer, 2019; Jardine, 2012; Johnson & Leslie, 2004; Kakar, 1978).

From 2001 and the outset of the Islamic Republic, until its fall in 2021, the West attempted to erect a robust centralized Afghan government. Some scholars believe that such an approach does not fit with Afghan sociopolitical history (Biddle et al., 2010). The power centralization process in Afghanistan was emergent throughout the rule of Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), later under the PDPA (1978–1992), the Taliban (1996–2000), and the government of Ashraf Ghani (2014–2021; Barfield, 2012; Burhanzoi, 2020). However, the coexistence of centralized formal and decentralized informal governance was predominant during the reign of Habibullah, Amanullah, Nader Shah, and Zahir Shah (1901–1973). This period is characterized as the state's focus on modernizing Kabul as the capital city against bypassing and giving the rural autonomy to the decentralized regional or tribal power structures (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). Hence, in this era, Kabul has been perceived as a socially diverse place within which the rapid societal progression and its export to rural regions occur (Esser, 2009).

Overall, in the past century, Afghanistan cities have experienced continual and immediate military, economic, and administrative transnational intrusions. Consequently, the domestic and foreign sociopolitical structures are significantly different from modern-day capitalist cities in other developing countries (Calogero, 2011b; Esser, 2012). Seemingly, Kabul City is not on the expected road to future sociopolitical convergence with modern industrial cities, unlike conjectured by the modernists of the 20th century (Sjoberg, 1960).

4. Theoretical framework

Foucault posited that in a discursive setting power and knowledge are unified, in which discourse bears the responsibility of power production and transfer; it can either reinforce or weaken power (Moghadam & Rafieian, 2019; Townley, 1993). Hence, in this study, the Foucauldian power based on discourse can be presumed as communicative rationality, whereas the sovereign powers of national and supranational can be equivalent to instrumental rationality (Sanderson, 1999). Furthermore, in a communicative setting, as explained by Habermas's communicative rationality, the emphasis should be on minimizing the surrounding distortion impeding communication. He underlines that in

Figure 1. Partnership ladder.

Citizen power			Tokenism			Non-participation	
8- Citizen Control	7- Delegated Power	6- Partnership	5- Placation	4- Consultation	3- Informing	2- Therapy	1- Manipulation

this setting the ideas should be presented and defended against critics freely. In this rationality, the critical acceptance of the other based on reason lies in a discourse without external pressure or fear (Habermas, 1985, 1989). In a wider view, establishing this type of rationality in a society depends on rational consensus and compromise between different layers of society through unconstrained communicational actions (Flyvbjerg, 2000; Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020).

However, the Weberian instrumental rationality contrasts with the Habermasian communicative rationality. The roots of instrumental rationality lie on experiential and technical reasons that leave no margin for value or purpose of an endeavor, heavily dependent on the efficient means of task accomplishment and scientific management (Raz, 2005; Sanderson, 1999). In this rationality, no compulsory margin exists for any types of moral arguments, values, and aims. Passing criticism is allowed only when science and scientific methods fail to address the challenge at hand (Kelly, 2003). In a wider view, this rationality, also called scientific rationality, means adopting the cheapest and easiest means of task accomplishment (Moghaddam & Rafieian, 2020).

Correspondingly, in urban planning, conventional sovereign powers are framed as instrumental/technical rationality and top-down planning, whereas the Foucauldian multiplied power is framed as communicative rationality and participatory planning, demonstrated by the city’s citizens’ control on decision-making and planning process for their future city. Overall, in a society, to realize participatory planning, there must be a fair power distribution and often redistribution to climb the participation ladder from nonparticipation to citizen control (Amy, 1987; Arnstein, 1969). Relevant to this, Arnstein (1969) devised the following Partnership Ladder to elaborate on different degrees of citizens’ power and participation in the planning process (Figure 1).

In an urban regime, if the planning method relies on communicative rationality, the role of the urban planner could be defined as the one who is mediating between different stakeholders and cutting discrepancies between different actors in the planning process (Lane, 2006). In contrast, if the planning method relies on instrumental rationality, he is the one who gathers and analyses all relevant data and by using experiential and scientific knowledge conducts the planning process (Etzioni, 1973; Fainstein & Fainstein, 1994; Friedmann, 1987; Lane, 2006; Mitchell, 2019). Finally, by using the above-discussed theoretical framework on power, planning, and rationality, in this article, we address the questions of what has been and what is currently the role of power and political systems in the scope, method, vision, and authorization of urban plans for the country and, especially, for the city of Kabul. Do the residents currently have or had historically any control on the outcome and preparation of plans for their city?

5. First paradigm: biopower planning

As an urban settlement, Kabul’s genesis precedes 3500 years; however, the oldest written description about the city dates to Alexander the Great in 329 BC. The Greeks called today’s Kabul Parapamissos. In 150 AD, Ptolemy identifies Kabul as Kabura the land of Kabolitae. Kabul’s political genesis dates to the late 18th century when it was crowned as the capital of Afghanistan (Schadl,

2004). During most of the 20th century, it witnessed waves of strain between polity and urbanity, and served as a stage for national politics, on one hand, whereas experiencing and guiding social change by being an urban place, on the other. Power structures and distribution fluctuated between the centralized formal governance based on Kabul and the decentralized informal governance based on regional or tribal structures (Barfield, 2012).

After the emergence of an Afghanistan with fully demarcated borders under the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), who had started the administrative construction process by accumulating total power in his own hands, in rural regions, he appointed provincial representatives and decreed that local revenue surplus should be forwarded to Kabul (Ghobar, 1967; Gregorian, 1969; Kakar, 1979). In cities, he introduced government officials Kotwal and Kalantar. He directly appointed Kotwal, whereas the residents were given the right to elect Kalantar. Kalantar had to maintain civic order, exerting constructive influence on the people, and administering their life through controls and inclusive regulations (Kakar, 1979; Rubin, 1988). While Abdur Rahman Khan's central bureaucratic regime did not extend beyond much of Kabul, he succeeded in creating ground for the emergence of an intellectual urban class in the city and the basis for what Foucault called a regime of care (Kakar, 1978; Rubin, 1995a; Esser, 2012). Under the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan's son, Habibullah (1901–1919), Kabul was expanding westward by adding new neighborhoods in the 2nd and 3rd districts. Many buildings constructed at that time were influenced by Renaissance European architecture, which was mostly favored by him. Much of the urban elite preferred living in a villa housing style (Schadl, 2004).

After Habibullah, his son, Amanullah came to power in 1919. After WWI, during a brief struggle with the British Empire, Afghanistan achieved full sovereignty. Amanullah had radical developmentalist agendas. He subsequently declared the first constitution in 1921, and with the aid of European state bank loans, he concurrently conducted infrastructural investments, tax harmonization, land reform, and school and education system upgrading (Johnson & Leslie, 2004; Rubin, 1995b). He instigated creating Baladeya (district level administrative unit) in Kabul, which became Sharwali (Municipality) in 1964 (Viaro, 2004). Through Wakil-Gozar (neighborhood representative), Baladeya provided public services and collected municipal taxes. In subsequent years, the law of electing municipal officials by vote was passed but was never implemented and assigning officials through the electoral process was bypassed in favor of political relationships (Esser, 2013).

To promote urbanization, a share of the central government's provisional income was allocated to the cities. Roads, public spaces, and buildings were constructed, electrical power was supplied, and a new town, southeast of the Kabul Old City, Dar ul-Aman, was developed. In this town, the intended building for parliament was at the focal point and neo-classical style villas constructed on the street sides were leading to it. While the municipal expenditures were mostly contingent on the prime minister's approval, the vision and approval of plans for the city were King Amanullah's (Viaro, 2004). Nonetheless, in this period, Afghan cities, especially Kabul, were presumed as the exclusive milieu for practical democratic exercises (Esser, 2012).

Later, under the long reign of King Zahir (1933–1973), the urbanization process gained momentum with his urban-friendly vision. Consequently, from 1942 until 1976, eight separate municipal districts were added to the three existing ones. Large-scale aristocratic housings were constructed in the Shahr-Naw and Wazir Akbar Khan neighborhoods (Arez & Dittmann, 2005; Najimi A. W., 2004; Newell, 1972). The land expropriation law for public interest was enacted in 1935 and added to the constitution of 1964 (Habib & Kidokoro, 2015, 2016). The Kabul municipality had the sole responsibility of urban management for the city in 1948. Under the municipality's supervision in subsequent years, the fabric of Kabul Old City endured rapid changes, the construction of Jade Maiwand (Maiwand boulevard), and offices and tall commercial buildings made of concrete lining both sides. While the new constructions disjointed the traditionally dense and vibrant character of the Kabul Old City into two parts, it also left an increasingly disfigured image (Najimi A. W., 2004).

Evidently, by applying force, the government tried imposing elements of Western urbanism on the city, not considering citizens' demands and sociocultural conditions. Parallel to this paradigm, in Western countries, the common approach to urban planning was blueprint planning based on technical rationality, which had no margin for public participation. Furthermore, modern methods of urban planning were not evolved at the time, and what happened in Kabul was reminiscent of the Haussmannization of Paris in the 19th century (Jordan, 2004).

6. Second paradigm: complementary planning

Afghanistan's status in the geopolitical arena was faded after the invention of sea routes to the East Indies. Until then, as a part of the Silk Road, it was a critical connection for channeling trades between the East and West (Dupree et al., 2020). During the 19th century, there was a burst of interest by the Russia and Britain in the context of spreading their control over central Asia, in which Afghanistan was a geographical buffer (Rubin, 1995b). Finally, in the mid-20th century, the Cold War reawakened the appeal for the country's geopolitical significance. At the time, an American magazine (*The Atlantic*, 1958) wrote that "Afghanistan realizes there are dangers in being too friendly with the USSR. It hopes it can survive by playing Washington against Moscow, just as it once played St. Petersburg against London."

After the end of WWII, with a developmental agenda, the Afghan government first attempted to establish a partnership with the US for technical and financial support. While the US demanded military presence in return, the USSR came forward with more favorable conditions, leading to an era of so-called competitive coexistence, in which the developmental aid missions from capitalist and communist blocs competed to showcase their superior expertise (Beyer, 2012; Calogero, 2011b; Franck, 1960). This coincided with the start of Nikita Khrushchev's tenure as the leader of the Soviet Union. Unlike his predecessor who supported rapid industrialization, he focused on promoting urbanization. He initiated urban development with the planning ethos of the City of Socialist Man from the early 20th century along with the Soviet's sixth five-year plan of 1956–1960 for the economy. Overall, his strategies framed the communist bloc's urban planning and technological assistance to Afghanistan from 1955 to 1992 (Calogero, 2011a).

In synchrony with the Soviets, Afghanistan also initiated five-year economic plans. The first plan was introduced in 1956 with great emphasis on industrial growth by infrastructural investments, mainly road construction (Bossin, 2004). While the third five-year plan of 1965 emphasized promoting the productive capacity of industrial and agricultural activities by providing state bank loans, it also planned to increase state revenue by better keeping private income and land ownership records (Esser, 2013; Goodhand & Sedra, 2016). Similarly, efforts were made to restructure the national and urban polity by enacting the 1964 constitution. Parliament was established and legislative, judiciary, and executive functions of the state were devised (Ghobar, 1967). Indirect citizen participation by selecting the city's mayor through voting was mandated. For the first time, in 1966, the municipal elections for major cities were held (Esser, 2009). Consequently, these changes led to the belief that the primary steps of creating a local power structure below the national government had been taken, but the executive and legislative functions of the state were untouched and the provincial representatives' roles were framed as consultants (Kakar, 1978; Newell, 1972). The practice of selecting a mayor by vote continued until 1992. Ever since, the president bypasses the election process and directly appoints the mayor and deputies (Calogero, 2011b). Similar to the biopower-planning paradigm, in the complementary planning paradigm, urban planning for Kabul and other cities has been a state-led phenomenon, the major difference being the role of supranational powers, who not only guided the urban planning and urbanization, but also led the institution-building process in the fields of architecture, urbanism, and education, and even influenced methods of governance (Beyer, 2019).

Mostly, in this era, numerous projects of development assistance from the USSR, US, and other transnational actors to Afghanistan can be framed as complementary, if not collaborative or

overtly competitive. For example, the USSR assisted in constructing the Kabul International Airport Terminal, while the US provided technical and communicational equipment (Beyer, 2012). In subsequent years, the US constructed Kandahar Airport and Pan Am partnered in founding Ariana Afghan Airlines. For the first time, the Soviets prepared a survey map of Kabul to be used for the master plan preparation (1963). They constructed Kabul Polytechnic University and provided its academic material (1963), and they installed a prefabricated factory of housing construction units (1965), which constructed social apartment housing called the Microregion (Beyer, 2019). Hochtief, a West German company constructed several private and public buildings in Kabul and other cities. Kabul City's electric power network and stations were built in turn by both West Germany and the USSR, the water supply was planned by Japan, financed by West Germany, and erected and extended by the USSR. Even Afghanistan's military were receiving training and equipment for the air force and police by the US and army by the USSR (Maley, 2014).

Overall, Afghanistan was “winning,” as L. Dupree (1973) noted that the “Czech engineers advised the Afghans on coal mining operations [...] where the Russians drill for oil, American mining engineers, until recently, advised the Afghans in another coal mining operation. American pumps fill the tanks of Soviet-bloc and American trucks with Russian gasoline [...] at the Ministry of Planning, Afghan planners, United Nations planners, Soviet planners, and US planners [...] sit in on conferences at the ministry and spend one another's money in overall projects [...] none of these joint endeavors came about voluntarily, and most of them occasioned bitter arguments between participants, but the practical result has been American-Russian cooperation in Afghanistan.”

In the early 1960s, the first master plan for Kabul City was also prepared in collaboration between Soviet urbanists, Afghan Ministry of Public Works representatives, and UN technicians, whereas, earlier in the biopower-planning paradigm, the city lacked any type of general plan to direct urban development and its structure solely portrayed the King's visions (Beyer, 2012). The first master plan was brought forward for King Zahir's approval in early 1965. It was assembled in 1964 in Moscow by the Soviet's Central Scientific Research and Design Institute for Town Planning with the UN agent Roger Aujame's assistance, who was previously a CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture) member and had experience working with Le Corbusier, and inputs from Esmatullah Seraj, as the Afghan government representative (Beyer, 2012; Calogero, 2011b). Kabul's master plan received its first revision in 1970, second revision in 1978, and last revision in 2012 (Arez & Dittmann, 2005; Jica, 2009; Sasaki & Mudh, 2018). Overall, as the urbanization process was taking impetus at the time, the plan was envisaged for more than 25 years and suggested applying some modernist ideals brushed by local insights and advocated by the international experts from the East, West, and South (Beyer, 2019; Esser, 2009; Jica, 2009).

The master plan introduced zoning based on functions, road networks for motor vehicles, a network of public parks, and updated systems of water supply, electricity, and public transportation (Calogero, 2011b). It proposed constructing modern monumental buildings in the city center similar to Brasilia and Chandigarh. A central business district and ministries were placed adjacent to the Arg (King's Palace), and the Old City quarters needed to be torn down and replaced with multipurpose high-rise commercial and office complexes, a common practice of that era (Beyer, 2012; Issa & Kohistani, 2007). The employment growth rate was projected to predominantly rely on governmental administrations and businesses. Industrial growth, which was concentrated on the city's fringe, would focus on consumer goods and construction material production (Beyer, 2012). Overall, the master plan envisioned developing Kabul based on a hierarchical matrix, which was more oriented on political centrality than economic or social centralities.

During the initial master plan preparation, Kabul City had an estimated population of 250,000 people; therefore, it provided for 800,000 people. However, the city had a much faster growth rate. To accommodate for a projected population of 1.2 million and later 2 million by 1995, the plan was revised in 1970 and 1978, respectively (Calogero, 2011b; Habib & Kidokoro, 2015). The revisions proposed large-scale construction of high-density residential units, mostly focused on extending

microregions from 1 to 4. The nonexistence of semi-private spaces in the housing units was a major criticism. Locals disliked the sharp transition from public to private space, and far fewer applicants approached the municipality for buying property (Beyer, 2012). Additionally, it remained unaffordable for most of the residents, especially, the migrants moving from rural provinces. Besides, the undertaken large-scale constructions ignored the state's financial and industrial limitations and was soon abandoned (Issa & Kohistani, 2007; Viaro, 2004).

Kabul residents immediately felt the influence of master plan's adaptation and its often being evaluated as a milestone achievement in the institutional development of the country, leading to establishing the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning, co-funded by the UN and headed by Abdullah Breshna, with the responsibility of town planning supervision for Kabul and other cities (Beyer, 2012; Omar, 2018). Moreover, the master plan and ensuing projects highlight the multipolar transfer of technology and knowledge framed in a complementary pattern between different organizations and the two opposing camps of the global Cold War (Beyer, 2019). Whereas the Soviet undertakings excelled in the short-term political sphere, the US efforts manifested in the long-term economic domain (Franck, 1960). Furthermore, because of excessive resources allocation to the capital city and the state's persistence on a central polity, in the late 1970s, the Kabul municipality budget was more than the combined budget of all remaining cities. Local Afghans outside Kabul lingered a sense of hostility toward an urban-based Kabuli lifestyle (Esser, 2012; N. H. Dupree, 2002).

Subsequently, projects framed in this paradigm can be epitomized as authoritarian urban planning because none of these technical cooperation projects involve residents' participation at the decision-making and vision formation levels. These cooperative instances, while relying on the decentralized supranational and centralized national powers, sought to systematize Kabul's future development based on technical rationality. At the time, common approaches to urban planning in Western countries were advocacy, incremental, and synoptic planning methods, in which public participation is critical (Lane, 2006).

During the 1970s, aid flowing from communist and capitalist camps declined for the first time because of a freeze in the Cold War, and later disappeared as political turmoil was taking shape at the end of the decade (Dibb, 2010; Shahrani, 1986). For the next two decades, Kabul experienced a backward transition from a relatively modern urban hub to a ghost city (Calogero, 2011b; Esser, 2009). The ensuing war after the Soviet invasion (1979–1989) was paralleled with the expansion of unplanned settlements in Kabul because of war-induced migrations from rural areas (Arez & Dittmann, 2005; Goodhand & Sedra, 2016). As the political turmoil exacerbated and the civil war erupted in 1992 in Kabul, the urban cosmopolitanism was wrecked and later destroyed under the Taliban regime (1995–2001), which had an anti-urban ideology (Calogero, 2011b). During a relatively stable period of the Taliban ruling, the United Nations Human Settlement Program UN-Habitat initiated the urban rehabilitation program by creating community forums, emphasizing assisting the urban recovery process through aboriginal means (Esser, 2009; French et al., 2018). The program placed an effort on the planning, implementation, and institutionalization of urban recovery using a participatory approach.

Overall, the city was left with much fewer residents, and their lives mostly depended on international aid from the World Food Program. At the beginning of the 21st century, Kabul City was under severe social control and the inhabitants' "right to the city" was more limited than anywhere in the world (Arez & Dittmann, 2005; Barakat, 2002; Butler, 2012; Goodson, 2001; Johnson & Leslie, 2004).

7. Third paradigm: sporadic planning

Unlike the previous paradigm, in which urban planning and urbanization were influenced by the two supranational foreign Cold War powers on complementary grounds, various supranational and national powers influence this paradigm on sporadic and often uncollaborative grounds. It began after the US-led NATO military intervention in 2001, with too many parallel organizations planning

and working for the country's rehabilitation (Habib & Kidokoro, 2015; Pathak, 2011). In this era, as American geopolitical interests compromised the sovereignty of planning organizations across the world, the urban development process in Kabul is outlined by the notion of state-building measures undertaken by foreign actors (Calogero, 2011a). The physical manifestation of state-building measures was primarily demonstrated during the process of urban space appropriation by acquiring offices from humanitarian aid agencies and military bases from international forces (Goodhand & Sedra, 2016; Rondinelli & Montgomery, 2004; Schütte, 2006).

To attend to their relevant activities, foreign actors created a network of bubbles. Christopher Hitchens (2007) puts this into words: "an interlude of arduous phone-calling got me inside the 'bubble' that is formed by the coalition forces, the United Nations teams, and the NGOs. [...] This international bubble, in theory, stretches protectively across the whole jagged country. But boy, is it pulled thin and tight, and you [do not] want to be there when it punctures or leaks. Warlord: [...] It is the fear of this that keeps many Afghans ghettoized in their miserable villages, and that keeps many humanitarians and diplomats penned up in the safety of the cities or traveling only within the bubble." Establishing bubbles increased the urban growth surrounding the bubble, especially in the capital city, increasing land value and housing rent prices (Calogero, 2011b). Furthermore, post-2001, Kabul City experienced a process of rapid unplanned urbanization fueled by population growth, which was paralleled by the lack of any type of citywide urban framework, weak urban-related institutions, unclarified institutional authority, the nonexistence of municipal boundaries and spatial jurisdictional issues, and less inter-agency cooperation and coordination (Hidayat & Kajita, 2020; Pathak, 2011).

The urban growth pattern from 2001 to 2017 signifies a 4.5 times growth rate for unplanned settlements, mostly concentrated in the urban fringe and hillsides, and 1.25 times for the officially planned settlements, mostly concentrated in the urban center (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). Both typologies have been influenced by an increase in population density mainly because of the return of refugees from neighboring countries and the location of foreign and national military bases. Security and the availability of a certain level of infrastructure have driven the growth rate of planned settlements, whereas the availability of land and an opportunity for urban life have increased the growth rate of unplanned settlements (Chaturvedi et al., 2020; Hidayat & Kajita, 2020; Shahraki et al., 2020).

Given the mentioned challenges, the international community and donors invested significantly in mobilizing residents into CDCs and urban upgrading projects through coproduction processes (Turkstra & Popal, 2010). Consequently, no shortage exists of improvised participatory unplanned settlement-upgrading projects since 2002. Generally, these projects are planned and implemented by non-state actors with extra budgetary funds, driven by foreign donor financing and timeframes. Recently, steady ad hoc upgrading projects with the international community and residents' support, backed by reliable data and improved land tenure security, led to the government's institutionalization of participatory upgrading of the unplanned settlements (French et al., 2018).

However, amid the mentioned urban challenges, the governmental institution of the Central Authority for Housing and Town Planning, which was promoted to the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MUDH) in the 1990s, caught up in a deadlocked struggle with the Kabul municipality over which organization has the authority to plan Kabul (Pathak, 2011). The ministry sought to undertake participatory planning and urban neighborhood upgrading within the existing situation and the private sector-led development of new towns on the urban periphery. The municipality sought to tear down the unplanned settlements and rebuild a modern city from scratch—in a sense implementing the second revision of master plan 1964. In 2005, President Karzai, in a decree formally suspended the 1978 master plan until the preparation of a new one (Calogero, 2011b). Furthermore, in the years that two governmental institutions were locked in an argument of an appropriate planning method, the city had grown twice the size it had in 2003. In 2007, Kabul had more than 70% unplanned settlements (Setchell & Luther, 2009). The municipality

maintained the status quo (illegalness of unplanned settlements) and the ministry performed only a few ad hoc upgrading projects (Calogero, 2011b). The outcome of this entanglement was blocking infrastructure provisions and land-tenure security for two-thirds of the city's residents. Meanwhile, globally, various planning methods under participatory notion were rapidly growing. Residents' participation in decision-making and planning processes was the core element of emergent and flourishing communicative, transactive, and inclusive planning methods (Lane, 2006; Miraftab & Mcconnell, 2008).

Amid the urban challenges, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), upon request from the Kabul municipality, started revising the third Kabul City master plan, which was approved in 1978. By using the previously analyzed data from the Intercontinental Consultants and Technocrats study (2007–2008) and the Kabul Metropolitan Area Urban Development Master Plan (2008–2009), also supported by the JICA, the fourth master plan was prepared in Japan and approved by President Karzai in 2012 (Jica, 2009). It was targeted for 2025 and in the case of adequate infrastructure provision, it proposed a population assumption of 3.7 million for the city. Furthermore, while this plan provided macro-level development guidelines, zoning ordinances, and road and infrastructure networks, it also envisaged public participation in the planning process at the neighborhood level. The municipality needed to develop neighborhood-detailed plans in close coordination with the neighborhood residents (Omar, 2018).

Although the newly revised plan was more holistic and envisaged a participatory approach on a neighborhood scale, the municipality was slow in the neighborhood-detailed plan preparation process and its implementation, partly because of a lack of institutional authority and political will, the nonexistence of required urban regulations, outdated land expropriation law, missing technical expertise and warlord predicaments (Abdullaev, 2004; GPC, 2019; Habib & Kidokoro, 2015). Nonetheless, this master plan brought a major change in the cycle of plan preparation, engaging the residents, even though minimal, undermining technical rationality and preparing the path to the citizens' power (Omar, 2018).

During the Karzai administration, in 2005, attempts were made to expand Kabul northeast in the Dehsabz district, which was decided after a study conducted by Jica (2009) as “the only area, which has the potential for a larger urban development.” Hence, the concept of establishing a new city in response to the challenges of the current one emerged as a feasible resolution (Hamidi, 2020). Consequently, in late 2006, Karzai instituted the Dehsabz City Development Authority (DCDA), an executive agency to manage developing the Kabul New City (Habib & Kidokoro, 2015). JICA in collaboration with German and French enterprises prepared a master plan for the new city, and later, in early 2009, the national cabinet approved it. The new city was planned housing provision for three million residents by 2040, promised one million job creations, and benign educational, industrial, and commercial environments (Jica, 2009). However, several problems in land-tenure, infrastructure provision—especially water supply and warlord predicaments—previously described by Christopher Hitchens, and a lack of political will helped uphold the progress only on paper (GPC, 2019; Hamidi, 2020). In mid-2016, upon a presidential decree, DCDA was converted to the Capital Region Independent Development Authority (CRIDA). Ever since, CRIDA has been constructing roads, schools, industrial parks, and often gets caught up in spatial jurisdictional and institutional authority entanglements with the Kabul municipality, whereas the Kabul New City initiative has long been forgotten (Hamidi, 2020).

The community forums which were established by the UN-Habitat during the Taliban regime to mobilize urban communities in the face of limited resources, conflict, and nonexistence of functioning urban governance in Kabul and other major cities, post-2001, they evolved into locally known CDCs: a region-based system of elected male and female community members responsible for leading the process of planning and implementation of development projects at local level, while having the external support of foreign or national actors (French et al., 2018). In Kabul City, CDCs are at the lowest level of urban governance structure, followed by Gozars and Nahias

(Districts), which covers a broader region than the CDCs. In turn, Nahias report to the municipality and the municipality to the president (Turkstra & Popal, 2010). After major in situ upgrading programs, such as the National Solidarity Program (2003–2016), Kabul Urban Reconstruction Program (2006–2011), and several other projects financed by different foreign actors and implemented by the UN-HABITAT and other agencies, the Kabul Municipal Development Program (2014–2021) was initiated to integrate community contribution toward unplanned settlement upgrading through the CDCs (French et al., 2018; Katz, 2017).

Moreover, based on the evaluation of the mentioned projects' results, the participatory approach through CDCs was institutionalized for unplanned settlement upgrading by the national government under the supervision of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance. Consequently, the Citizens Charter in Cities started in 2016 to further strengthen the CDCs and infrastructure provisions (French et al., 2018). However, in the Afghan government context, institutionalization does not mean that the government will solely implement all relevant activities, as the above-mentioned projects had several external facilitating partners (GPC, 2019). There are critics of the participatory model of planning, particularly in the case of unplanned settlement upgrading. This method is often undermined by being ad hoc, lacking funds and follow-ups, strengthening the community's inequitable power and social dynamics, and sometimes leading to a privileged seizure of resources and gender disparities (Allen & Slotterback, 2017; Friendly, 2019; Pathak, 2011; Pinera & Reed, 2013).

Some challenges that have influenced the outcome of participatory urban upgrading in Afghanistan were discussed by a team of onsite practitioners and stakeholders (French et al., 2018) as “cities in LMICs (low- and middle-income countries) have major issues that cannot be addressed only at [neighborhood] level, for example, the delivery of basic urban services like water, electricity and sewage, public transportation and urban mobility, jobs and livelihoods, education and health services, and solid waste management. For example, in situ upgrading of all informal settlements in Kabul, which house 70 per cent of the population, will not in itself result in a [livable] city. Given the challenges of limited public space and traffic congestion, which require citywide planning and investment, in situ upgrading may actually be counterproductive to sustainable urban development. When CDC-level infrastructure interventions are not connected to precinct- and city-level infrastructure, it can actually exacerbate urban problems. In our experience, this has been the case with surface drainage, where CDC roadside drainage channels have not always been connected to larger municipal drains and have thus exacerbated flooding in downstream [neighborhoods].”

Overall, rehabilitation efforts post-2001 were concentrated on establishing a strong central state in Kabul for the rural population (Burhanzoi, 2020). Mostly, planning and investment for the cities were overlooked, of which the implications are visible today. However, participatory urban upgrading cannot be limited to paving streets and constructing drainage at the local level, while missing considering the economic and environmental opportunities and threats. Foreign actors were critical in the efforts, yet the sporadic nature and sectoral rather than a citywide programmatic approach of the undertaken urban development did not sufficiently help mitigate the undesirable outcome of rapid urbanization in the conflict-afflicted city (French et al., 2018; Najimi, 2018).

Nonetheless, Kabul has made considerable progress post-2001 through the project-based development approach induced by foreign aid (Pathak, 2011). To guide the city's growth more sustainably and attract private sector investment based on the President Ashraf Ghani's vision under the National Unity Government, a citywide planning framework by the name of Kabul Urban Design Framework was prepared in 2018 by SASAKI, a Boston-based American company in coordination with the MUDH (Pieprz, 2020; Sasaki Associates, 2021). The urban framework functions as a visionary roadmap that establishes the president's vision for Kabul to evolve and grow in future years. It contains a citywide framework and two corridor designs for major roads, Dar ul-Aman and Massoud boulevards (Pieprz, 2020; Sasaki Associates, 2021). Throughout the planning, designing,

Table 1. Planning paradigms compared with political systems, modes of power, and planning methods

Paradigm	Political system	Mode of power	Rationality	Planning activity	Planning method	Globally dominant planning method
Biopower planning (1919–1955)	Monarchy	Centralized National	Technical	Preparation of Kabul-Jaded Map (Dar ul-Aman)	Blueprint planning (district-by-district method)	Blueprint Planning
Complementary planning (1955–1992)	Constitutional Monarchy/Republic/Democratic Republic	Decentralized Supranational/Centralized National	Technical	Preparation of Master Plan 1–3	Comprehensive Master Planning	Synoptic Planning/Transactive planning/Advocacy planning/Communicative planning
Sporadic planning (2001–2020)	Islamic Republic	Decentralized Supranational/Centralized National/Multiplied Foucauldian	Technical/Communicative	Preparation of Master Plan 4/Kabul Urban Design Framework/Kabul New City Master Plan	Comprehensive Master Planning/Participatory Planning	Inclusive planning/Communicative planning/Participatory planning

and the decision-making process, the framework is considered a step backward from the 2012 master plan regarding the public participation. Specifically, the proposed design for two major boulevards, while the inhabitants are not even aware, the framework completely ignores the existing built environment components by proposing tearing down the buildings facing the streets and reconstructing the envisioned corridors (Beyani, 2018; Sadid, 2020; Sasaki & Mudh, 2018).

Furthermore, during the framework approval in The High Council for Urban Development session, President Ghani remarked “now, a clear and vibrant vision is in place for the development of Kabul City.’ He furthermore called for MUDH to provide Dari and Pashto translations of the framework with a view to subsequently disseminate to residents of the city.” (President, 2018) The remark symbolizes the totalitarian nature of Afghan urban regime. For citizens to know about the future of their city, a governmental institution is tasked to translate the framework in local languages.

8. Discussion and conclusion

In a rarely researched domain, by exploring previous studies, reports, and archival materials, this study articulated modes of urban planning, the role of national, supranational, and multiplied Foucauldian powers in plan preparation and implementation, the plan’s vision, and approving authorities in a century of urbanization in the capital city of Afghanistan. Overall, while looking at Kabul’s urban history, a paradigmatic case of a city evolving under compromised sovereignty can be epitomized. Although, predominantly, the decentralized supranational powers have guided urban planning from the mid-20th century, citizens have found a voice in the early 21st century, albeit only limited to the context of unplanned settlement upgrading. Moreover, while citizens’ roles in shaping their future place of residence have not been substantial, their opinions about it are also marginalized. Finally, in the last century of urbanization, technical rationality has controlled the urban regime and the government has been the only authority in charge of approving urban plans. Table 1 shows the outcomes of this study compared to different political systems, planning rationalities, and different methods of urban planning in global literature.

In the first paradigm, biopower planning, traces of gradual shift in the power exercise can be seen. Manifested through exerting constructive influence on Kabul residents by Kotwal and Kalanter, administering and optimizing their life through controls and regulations, and initiating district-by-district urban development method. King Amanullah, as an advocate for a prospering Afghanistan, influenced by the Western philosophy of life and city space, tends to form the city space based on his idealistic visions. By challenging the existing sociopolitical structures and urban fabric of the city he pushed his rapid modernization agenda. In this era, activities regarding city planning were undertaken imperatively and coercively, and city residents knew nothing of why and how physical changes occur. Visitors of Kabul City from rural areas expressed their frustration over what is happening. Overall, this paradigm epitomizes the emergence of a regime of care through the government’s control over residents’ way of life.

In the second paradigm, complementary planning, King Zahir took a steady approach toward modernization. The East and West blocs’ supranational powers not only guided the urban planning and urbanization, but also led the institution-building process in the fields of architecture, urbanism, education, and even methods of governance. The first comprehensive master plan for the city was prepared and subsequently revised to enhance the residents’ quality of life and guide urbanization. The master plan did not consider citizens’ participation during plan preparation and implementation. Similarly, in the ratification process, residents were also marginalized.

The complementary instances of the East and West blocs’ participation in constructing urban space in this paradigm are fragments of a post-colonial narration to wield sociopolitical and economic bonds over technical assistance in the context of the Cold War. Simultaneously, they and their outcomes can be epitomized and further researched from the backgrounds of culture and space production and exportation of modernity, induced by communist and capitalist political philosophies (Lefebvre, 1992/1974). For example, two obvious outcomes of the 1964 master plan—

as emergence of constructive negotiation between participants in producing urban space—are a series of microregions and urban public parks (Mushkani & Ono, 2021a). Currently, both are integrated into the culture and urban fabric of the city, while being appreciated by their users (Beyer, 2019; Mushkani & Ono, 2021b). However, agents and experts of technical assistance and humanitarian aid in the 1960s and post-2001 are criticized for displaying a comfortable lifestyle to locals. Luxurious hotels, accommodation, swimming pools, theaters, super-markets, and extravagant parties inside and outside the bubble created a different type of cosmopolitanism but often leads to negative alterations in the community structure (Calogero, 2011b).

In the third paradigm, sporadic planning, which began after the US-led NATO military intervention in 2001, various supranational and national powers on uncollaborative and parallel grounds started planning and working to rehabilitate the war-ravaged city. The fourth master plan and an urban design framework were introduced to formalize unplanned settlements, attract investments, and solve several issues. These plans have not been executed yet because of missing legal features or political support. We recommend further future research to assess and situate their impacts on the planning and urbanization of Kabul. Furthermore, in their preparation process, the aims and visions of citizens are not considered. However, in the detailed technical plan preparation process in the fourth master plan, citizens were meant to have a role. Overall, in this era, the urban development process is outlined by the notion of state-building measures undertaken by foreign actors.

However, over the past three decades at an international level, we have witnessed two major shifts in policy toward unplanned settlement upgrading: first, the in situ upgrading approach by infrastructure provision, second, the participatory upgrading approach, where citizens are partners in the decision-making process. Furthermore, UN-Habitat (2016) reports that “community participation can at many stages both preserve residents’ sense of belonging and ensure that the services provided are what local people want, value and are ready to look after.” Additionally, ad hoc and project-based upgrading practices are presumed to be insufficient, especially in the case of Afghan cities, where municipal officials are not elected, and authorities can use their power to wield political influence. Hence, it is progressively evident that a citywide programmatic upgrading approach should be an international norm (French et al., 2018).

Inserting participatory unplanned settlement upgrading in the Citizens’ Charter is a remarkable change in the Afghan government policy and resource distribution. Beyond the environmental benefits of this approach, project financial supporters and implementers propose considerable social and economic benefits, such as reducing ethnic tensions, enhancing communal solidarity and cohesion, improving the benign relationship with the municipality, enhancing residents’ engagement in the civic activities, including women and youth, stimulating the local economy and forming livelihood opportunities, increasing the land-tenure security and private investment, and improving communities’ contribution to project costs (French et al., 2018; Khalifa, 2015; Najimi, 2018).

Seemingly, producing citywide and piecemeal plans based on technical rationality by foreign and domestic urbanists with special power has not helped resolve urban problems. However, in the global literature, the role of an urbanist is framed as an organizer and mediator, which via discourse generates a balance among residents’ visions and demands (Friedmann, 1987; Lane, 2006; Sandercock, 1998). Citizens confront urban issues daily and their proposed visions and solutions are based on everyday living experiences. Thus, their role should not be undermined in resolving urban problems and guiding their future city (Kazimee, 2006; Shahraki et al., 2020).

Consequently, throughout the planning history, no evidence of public participation can be found in major urbanism plans. Alternatively, technical rationality framed under the supranational powers has governed over the country’s urban planning environment, whereas the communicative rationality has only governed at the backgrounds of the unplanned settlement-upgrading projects.

In the context of Afghanistan's urban regime, prior to the return of the Taliban in August 2021, despite claims of having a democratic political system, centralized national and decentralized supranational powers guided the urban planning process in Kabul. There were no seats reserved for people or their representatives near the power table that was tasked with determining Kabul City's future destiny. Because critical acceptance of the other based on reason lies in a discourse without external pressure or fear, and establishing communicative rationality relies on rational consensus and compromise between different layers of society through unconstrained communicational actions, therefore, a fair power redistribution in the society will lead to realize participatory urban planning, and to climb the participation ladder from nonparticipation to citizen control.

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