

## Investigating the Role of Community in Heritage Conservation through the Ladder of Citizen Participation Approach: Case Study, Port Said, Egypt

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### ABSTRACT

Egypt has countless prestigious buildings and diversity of cultural heritage which are located in many cities. Most of the researchers, archaeologists, stakeholders and governmental bodies are paying more attention to the big cities such as Cairo and Alexandria, due to the country's centralization nature. However, there are other historic cities that are grossly neglected and in need of emergency conservation. For instance, Port Said is a former colonial city that was established in 1861 at the edge of the northeast Egyptian coast between the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal. This city is chosen because it presents one of the important Egyptian archaeological sites that archive Egyptian architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries. The historic urban fabric is divided into three main districts; the Arab, the European (Al-Afrang), and Port Fouad. The European district is selected to be the research case study as it has culture diversity, significant buildings, and includes the largest number of the listed heritage buildings in Port Said. Since 2003, several initiative trials have been taken by Alliance Francaise, the National Organization for Urban Harmony (NOUH), some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and few number of community residents to highlight the important city legacy and protect it from being demolished. Unfortunately, the limitation of their participation in decision-making policies is considered a crucial threat facing sustainable heritage conservation. Therefore, encouraging the local community to participate in their architecture heritage conservation would create a self-confident one, capable of making decisions for the city's future development. This paper aims to investigate the role of the local inhabitants in protecting their buildings heritage through listing the community level of participations twice (2012 and 2018) in preserving their heritage based on the ladder citizen participation approach. Also, it is to encourage community participation in order to promote city's architecture conservation, heritage management, and sustainable development. The methodology followed in this empirical research involves using several data assembly methods such as structural observations, questionnaires, interviews, and mental mapping. The questionnaire was distributed among 92 local inhabitants aged 18-60 years.

Though, the research examines the probability of raising public awareness and encouraging community participation by providing them with a real opportunity to take part in the decision-making. This may lead to a positive relationship between the community residents and the built heritage, which is essential for promoting its preservation and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Al-Afrang/Port Said, community participation, heritage conservation, ladder of citizen participation, NGOs.

### INTRODUCTION

HISTORIC cities like Port Said are facing a real threat resulting from modernization, rural-urban migration, and mounting globalization [1]. Reference [2] stated that the regeneration process of any historic city faces many challenges. Some of them are listed as: political shifts, economic crisis, population growth, and climate change. The other important factor is

due to lack of residents' concern and participation in conservation strategies [3].

The sustainable planning of historic centers is based on a community and culture-led approach [4]. Reference [5] emphasized that the sustainable management agenda of historic centers is mainly relying on the balance between inhabitants' socio-economic needs and conservation of heritage resources. Thus, the

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community residents' role is essential in conserving, managing, and developing the local heritage sites [6].

This paper demonstrates the evolution of Port Said (Al-Afrang district) community attempts in safeguarding the city heritage. It investigates the role of local inhabitants focusing on the last 15 years until now. In addition, it explores the willingness of community members' level of participations twice (2012 and 2018).

### METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The research methodology applied in this paper includes literature review, observations, interview with different parties, and focus groups with local inhabitants of Al-Afrang district in Port Said. The study approaches are divided into three parts:

#### Qualitative Approaches

Interviews were held with the co-founder of Port Said's NGO Ala-Adimoh, some local residents and focus groups with representative members of NGOs and CBOs in order to understand the nature of community and the obstacles facing it.

#### Quantitative Approaches

A questionnaire was distributed on 92 Al-Afrang residents to explore the main source of their knowledge about the district's legacy.

Additionally, the questionnaires investigate their willingness to participate in heritage conservation.

### A Ladder of Citizen Participation Method

An attempt to categorize the level of local community participation in the heritage conservation process based on a Ladder of Citizen Participation Method.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Historic City

The historic city centre is the past that represents and forms the basis of urban identity of city's inhabitants [7]. Reference [8] emphasized that in order to sustain our history for future generations historic city must be preserved and developed. The heritage includes different types (tangible and intangible) that are considered to be the most powerful witness of significant buildings, lived culture, and collective memory [1]. Reference [9] claimed that extreme globalization pressure could easily convert historic city centers into featureless, worldwide-similar urban areas without any individual historic value and character. After the Second World War, a myriad of new cities had been constructed from scratch, in particular in developing countries such as Egypt. The Egyptian (government and residents) aspiration to accommodate the modern era, led to believe that only modern buildings are worthwhile to be constructed and kept [1].

Accordingly, historic areas like Port Said were partially neglected and face crucial problems threatening their legacy.

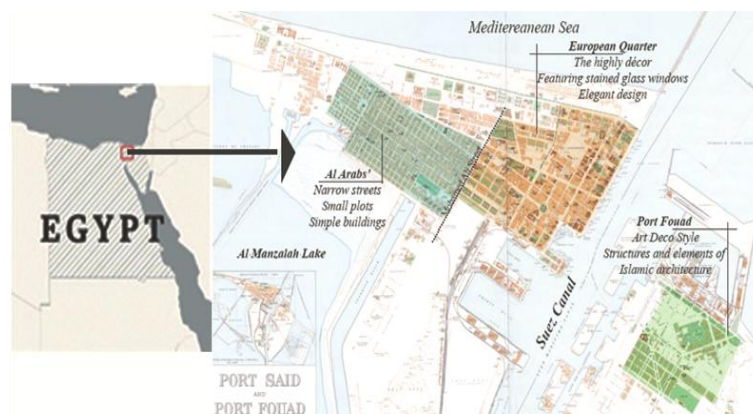


Figure 1(a). Port Said location in Egypt map. (b) The three districts containing city heritage

#### Port Said City

Port Said is a prior colonial city built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in 1859 simultaneously with the foundation of Suez Canal Company (SCC), at the northeast Egyptian coast [10], as seen in Fig. 1. It had a strategic position in the traffic connecting European powers and their faraway

colonies and was an important nodal point in imperial networks [11]. Moreover, the multinational city contained residents from Europe, Africa and the Near East, which followed different religions and cultures living in harmony [7]. The city urban fabric was similar to those in the French colonies. It developed into a cosmopolitan city after the

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opening of the Suez Canal; consequently, it flourished economically. Nowadays, it is struggling between new urban development and urban heritage preservation. Port Said architectural heritage is mainly distributed in three districts: the European (Al-Afrang), the Arab, and the garden city of Port Fouad, which was built later in 1926 [10].

### The European (Al-Afrang)/East District

In 1863, the Al-Afrang district was gradually founded to host both foreigners and elite Egyptians who have worked for the (SCC) or in large trade organizations. Reference [12] stated that Port Said was established as a European

settlement on Egyptian land. The district was distinguished by its large building plots constructed on grid-iron patterned streets with radial main roads that lead to main squares [10]. Al-Afrang was planned to create an appealing, humanistic and welcoming environment, which was reliable for socio-cultural and religious activities that reflected on the lifestyles of its inhabitants [1]. It comprised number of large open spaces, public gardens, and sporting clubs for recreational activities. Those spaces were presented in the wide avenues with trees, shopping malls, restaurants and cafes that extended to the streets pavements [10], as shown in Fig. 2.



Figure 2(a). Wooden veranda of a Port Said Hotel in 1913. (b): Port Said 1900 - Quai Francois-Joseph

Moreover, the district's architecture simulates the cosmopolitan story of Port Said, where it comprises many buildings that follow several styles such as: neo-classic style, neo Greco-Roman style, neo-Byzantine, neo-Gothic, and

neo-Rococo; this is in addition to the wooden Mediterranean and Turkish buildings which are distributed along the canal waterfront giving the city its distinguished image [10], as shown in Fig. 3.

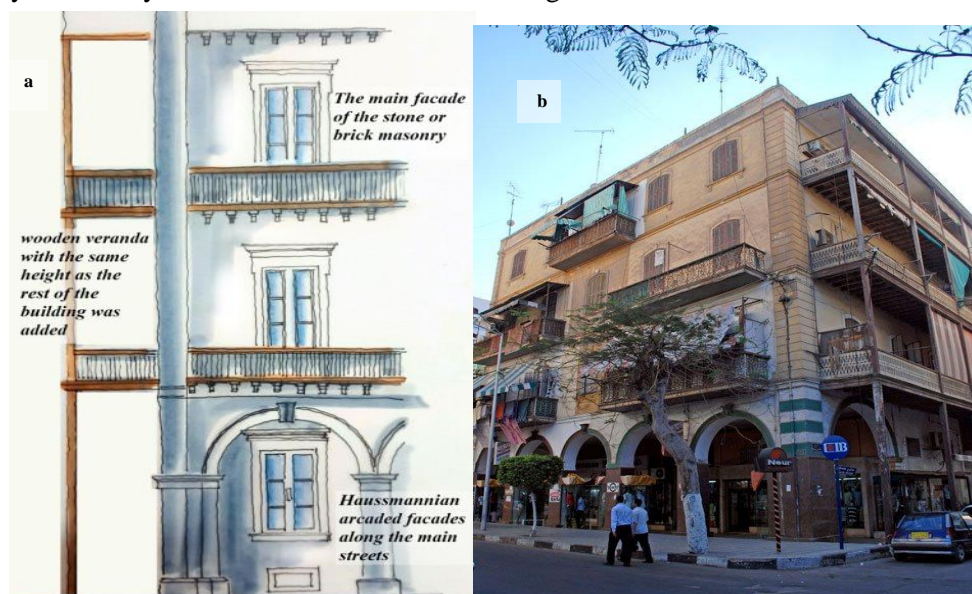


Figure 3(a). Researchers' sketch analyzing Al-Afrang building's elevation. (b) One of the unique district's buildings

## DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

### Community Participation towards Gentrification

Reference [13] defined community in terms of

shared interests. Moreover, communities are particularly strong when these groups live within the same geographic area.

Although, [14] argued that recent research has revealed how communities can be easily



connected in modern life. For example, the internet has created a new generation of 'online communities', where people from different parts of the world could meet online because they are sharing the same interests.

Community Participation objectives can be illustrated as following [15]:

- Encouraging resident's contribution in decision-making processes will increase the local organizations confidence, reinforce the relations between parties, and decrease the conflict between NGOs.
- Empowering local inhabitants in design in order to improve plans and service delivery.
- Strengthening the sense of community identity by sharing common objectives.

In the case of Port Said, both examples could be observed. While, Pierre Alfarroba, former director of Alliance Française de Port Said stated that: "*Everything in Port Said, including culture, has turned into a business*"[16]. In 2013, and based on his belief in importance of saving Port Said's heritage, Pierre Alfarroba started a vast documentation project. Though, [17] stated that whenever heritage sites are protected, gentrification can occur in the form of outside investment and speculation. The challenge in the case of Port Said is, how community participation in protecting their heritage could be empowered to confront gentrification, and as such, several initiative trials from community residents, local organizations, international associations, as well as other individual efforts have been initiated.

### **Review of Previous community Participations in Port Said Heritage Preservation**

From 2003 until 2012, Port Said witnessed numerous attempts from both residents, and local and international associations, in order to protect its cultural heritage. These attempts started in 2003, when the Port Said French Cultural Association collaborated with some local youth residents who initiated a heritage documentation project. That trial initiative conducted several workshops to raise community awareness about the importance of preserving their valuable inherited culture. Also, to establish a defensive force that could protect historic buildings from being demolished. Additionally, in 2004, when the city was selected for its unique colonial architectural heritage, a local centre (GIS Centre) and

international organizations, the Ecole de Chaillot, Alliance Française, and EUROMED initiated another documentation project that aimed to highlight the lack of the authority's intervention in saving the city's heritage and the devastating effects resulting from this heritage loss [18]. Then, in 2009, the *Egyptian Centre for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage* started a new documentation project of the city using Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Furthermore, by 2011 and after the Egyptian revolution, many historic buildings were demolished due to the absence of legislations' implementation and governmental supervision. As a result, community members concerned with rescuing the remained historical assets of Port Said held many protests. Consequently, Cabinet Decree No. 1096 was declared late in that same year to protect the remaining city heritage [19]. Since 2012, the Egyptian government has given the public and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) a chance to participate in saving the local heritage through organized workshops, forums, and consultation events with academicians. Several NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) were formed seeking heritage preservation and urban identity protection. Their aim was to raise residents' awareness and documenting heritage sites. The most effective local NGO, Ala-Adimoh, was established seven years ago, and succeeded in saving the remarkable Greek Club building (one of the important city's historic buildings), as shown Fig. 4. On the other hand, the government involvement in saving city's heritage took place only in three conferences that were held from 2010 to 2012 named as: economics and the future of built-heritage in Port Said; but, unfortunately, these efforts failed to attain any achievable output. The latest initiative referred to a *Civil Campaign for Protecting Port Said Built-Heritage* in 2012, involved collaboration between local youths (60-70 members of Ala-Adimoh) and representatives of Alliance Française. The main goal of these initiations was to alert the community to preserve Port Said's local cultural heritage including its tangible and intangible forms. This was achieved through conducting several workshops, hosting illustrated local exhibitions, as well as organized tours which took place throughout two months. These attempts had succeeded in raising the awareness of local residents, but it could not save many historic important buildings from being demolished due to lack of legislations'

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implementation and inattention of the local government.

Unfortunately, since 2014, all the documentation projects and NGOs initiatives

have ceased due to the negligence of their efforts and the ongoing demolition of district's buildings.



**Figure4(a).** The Greek club in Port Said. (b)Ala-Adimoh held exhibition events to raise public awareness about their heritage

### DATA FINDINGS AND RESULTS

#### Qualitative Approach

As part of the study, the researchers conducted a number of interviews with the co-founder of Ala-Adimoh and other members, as well as some local inhabitants whom took part in past conservation trials. The interviews revealed that NGOs and many local residents are frustrated and disappointed due to their neglect in decision-making, continuous demolition of heritage buildings, and lack of attention from governmental bodies.

#### Quantitative Approach

The researchers conducted a pilot survey in July 2018. The questionnaire focused on the local community of Al-Afrang district, and was distributed among 92 residents aged from 18 to 60 years of age. The survey was divided into four parts: Part one recorded the respondent's demographics such as gender, age, education,

address and employment status. Part two investigates their attitudes towards the values of their architecture heritage, and their willingness to participate in heritage conservation. Part three explores the main obstacles to conservation efforts that affect community participation. Part four consists of their recommendations and vision for their city's future. Likely, most of them were willing to answer the questionnaire representing an effective rate. The analysis is based on 80 questionnaires as 12 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to inconsistent or incomplete responses. Residents of both genders had answered the survey equally, as seen in Table I. About 52% of the interviewees are aged between 30 and 50 years. Such people are important pillars of their families, earning an income and taking on family responsibilities. Port Said's community gives importance to higher education, where 80% of the interviewees have received their high school education.

**Table1.** Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Percentage
Gender	Female	45
	Male	55
Age	Less than 18 years	9.3
	18-25 years	16
	26-35 years	25.3
	36-50 years	28
Education	Junior high school	5
	High school	23.7
	Graduation and above	71.3

Around 63.5% respondents have jobs based on trading activities that is considered the main source of household income in the city. Spuriously, 100% respondents believed that the district's heritage should be protected. However,

most of them were highly disappointed from the repetitive demolishing process; they all have high potential to participate in the conservation process. Moreover, 40% of them admitted that the district's heritage has emotional importance.

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Therefore, the district's local inhabitants are strongly rooted to their identity and totally connected to their building heritage, where they could play an important role in its safeguarding.

The results of the survey revealed that the local NGOs (Ala-Adimoh) had a great influence on raising the community awareness about their city's legacy. Almost 40% of the interviewees

stated that Ala-Adimoh was their main source of information about the importance of the district's historic buildings. Therefore, this highlights the importance of the NGOs roles in society. Though, 40% of respondents gained their information from inherited general knowledge, while 15% gained it from their family and only 5% from the media(Fig. 5).

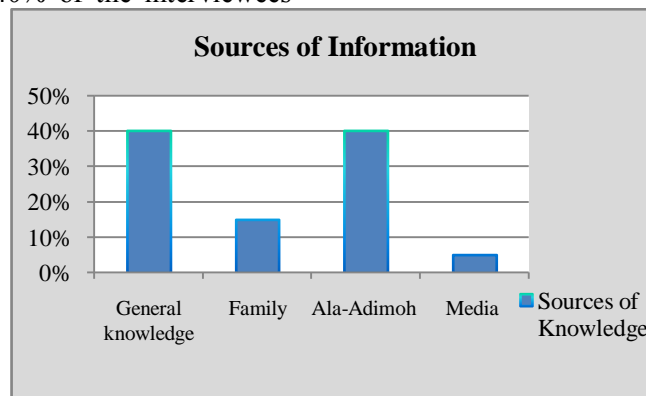


Figure5. Sources of public information about district's heritage

However, 40% of respondents stated that lack of historic buildings' maintenance is the main reason that leads to their demolition, 35% of respondents mentioned that the crucial problem

is the disconnection between the governmental bodies and local inhabitants, whose needs and visions are excluded (Fig. 6).

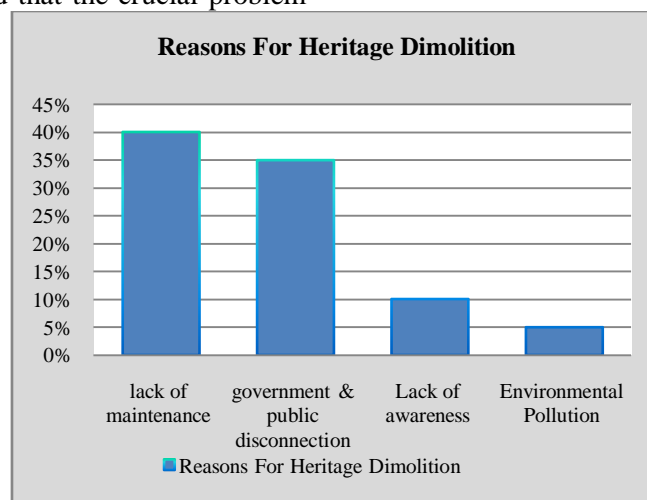


Figure6. Obstacles facing heritage conservation

The last part of the questionnaire includes respondents' recommendations, which comprises the reusing of historic buildings based on inhabitants' needs. Additionally, they recommended the creation of communication channels between the government and local inhabitants, which might facilitate the conservation process.

### The Ladder of Citizen Participation Approach

Before encouraging the community to participate in heritage conservation, their level

of involvement should be categorized first. This could be achieved through several methods. In this paper, A Ladder of Citizen Participation, as in the study undertaken by reference [20], is chosen as the margin in identifying community participation. This method is selected because it has been experimented globally in several developing nations by international agencies including UN, UNRSID, and UNICEF [21]. The study defined eight forms of public participation where at the bottom of the ladder, Manipulation represents the citizens that have the least power. At the highest level, Citizen Control represents

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the dominance of local citizens' capability of decision-making [20]. Port Said public participation is measured twice (in 2012 when public participation had reached its peak and in 2018 which presents the current situation) according to Arnstein's study. Based on the survey and interviews, public participation

outcomes were ranked in 2012 at the lower part of the second stage B Degree of Tokenism between rung 3 and rung 4. In stage B, rung 3 represented only Informing, while rung 4 involved Consultation, where the community voice had an effective role in preserving their heritage (Fig. 7).

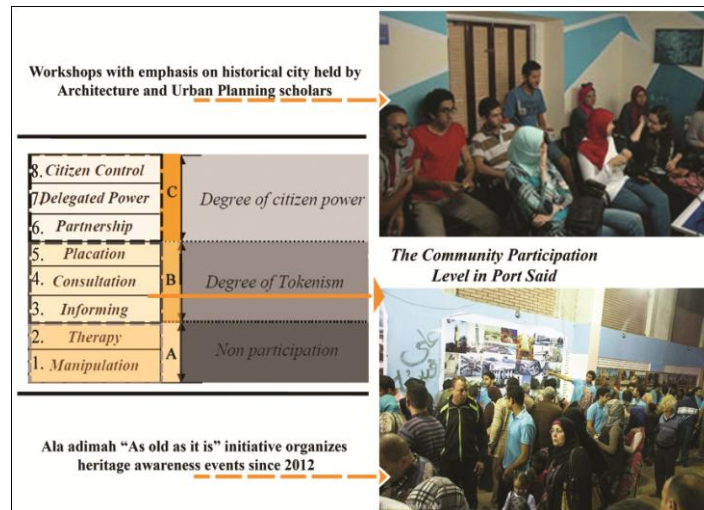


Figure 7. Level of Port Said community participation in 2012 based on the Ladder of Participation

In the last five years, several political and economic crises had a dramatic impact on the city. As a result, Port Said residents have a negative attitude towards losing their identity and lost confidence in their ability to save their culture. Only the local organization, Ala-Adimoh is still organizing a few events annually, as shown in Fig.8. However, Al-Afrang district's community is still facing a lot of challenges, such as:

- Unimplemented preservation legislation;
- Large number of heritage buildings remain unlisted (and therefore unprotected);

- Local contractors are replacing significant buildings with high-rise blocks, as the economic value of land tends to be much more than that of the historic buildings.
- The conflict of assets ownership and the unorganized relations between NGOs, CBOs and the local government.

Accordingly, the community is retreated to stage A, rung 2 Therapy, where they could be described as non-participants

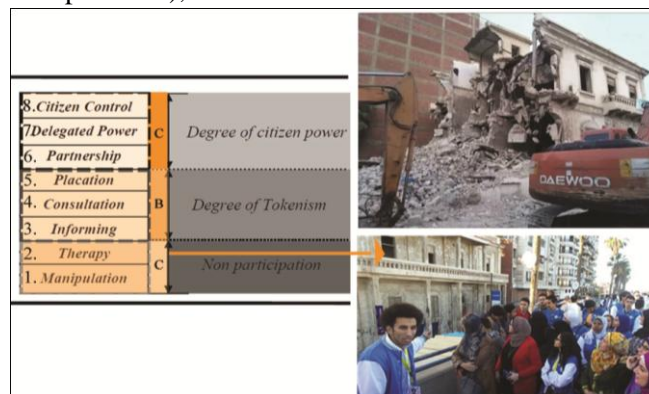


Figure 8. Level of Port Said community participation in 2018 based on the Ladder of Participation

### Suggested Integrated Heritage Conservation Frame Work

According to [22], conservation of deteriorating cultural heritage needs a development strategy

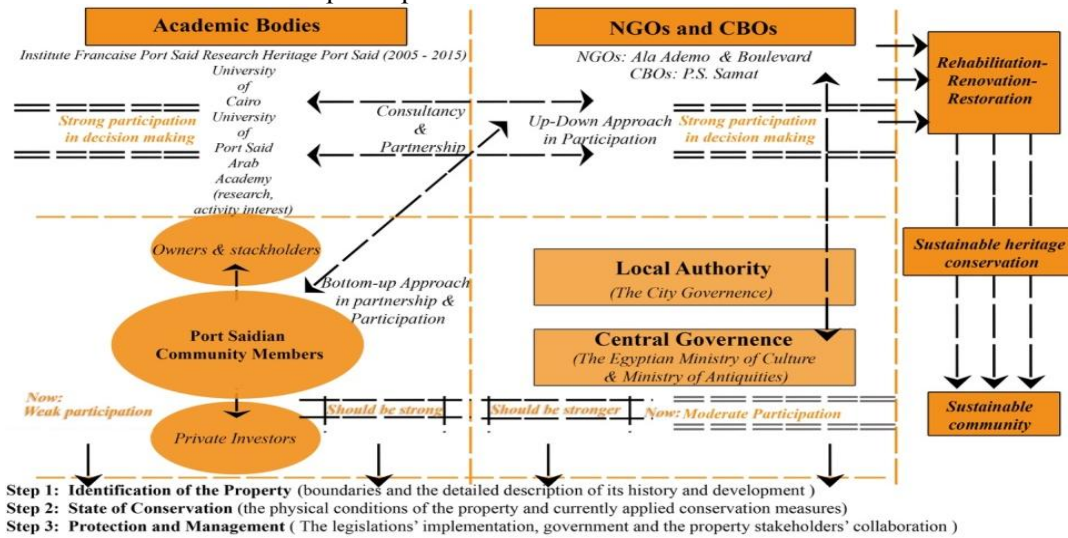
based on economic and socio-cultural factors. However, society development relies on enhancing the quality of resident's life through improving social, economic and environmental



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aspects; though, this will not take place without utilizing districts' historic assets to serve inhabitants' needs and implement sustainable development [18]. Reference [23] revealed that the implementation of the bottom-up approach is effective in both outlining the local residents' actions and managing heritage conservation process. Port Said inhabitants' participation in

decision-making is essential to highlight all contradictions and to set inhabitants' priorities [22]. Accordingly, implementing the suggested integrated framework includes both physical gentrification of deteriorated buildings and community needs satisfaction, may lead to sustainable heritage conservation (see Fig. 9).



**Figure 9.** The catalyst of participation levels between different parties for a sustainable heritage conservation approach in Port Said

### CONCLUSION

Historic cities such as Port Said have sensitive circumstances, where people are emotionally and physically connected to their environment. The city narrates a tale of an important era and its consequences on Egyptian society. This study categorized the level of Al-Afrang community participation twice (2012 and 2018) based on the Ladder of Citizens participation. The survey results explored Al-Afrangin habitants' awareness and perception toward their heritage. Moreover, it investigated the community's willingness to participate in preserving their neglected legacy. Also, it highlighted the main obstacles that threaten historic buildings, which include lack of maintenance, as well as economic factors and political issues. Further more, the interviews and focus groups with different parties revealed the local inhabitants' desperation due to the ignorance of their attempts.

Besides the fact that decision-making in Egypt follows the top-down approach, where the government has the upper hand in decision making while local inhabitants' needs and opinions are given the least priority, this leads to their frustration in participating in the city's development.

Therefore, local inhabitants should be empowered to participate effectively in heritage preservation by being encouraged to take decisions in its management according to their needs.

The results of the study revealed that although the city passed through several crises and dramatic events in the last two decades, the local community still has a high potential to protect its threatened heritage. Therefore, empowering the role of the community is considered as a crucial aspect, particularly in the case of Port Said, for its continued architectural heritage conservation.

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