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The grassroots and citymaking in the Middle East: The agency of tactical participation in Amman, Jordan

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ABSTRACT
In Middle Eastern contexts, like Jordan, the public participation spaces referred to as "invited spaces" for state-led participation are heavily controlled by the state and its representatives. This paper explores the various ways in which grassroots and civic organizations navigate and sometimes manipulate the state apparatus' planning rules and grids to create alternative modes of meaningful participation in the production of the city. Following the Arab Spring in 2011, local grassroots organizations started adopting "new languages and *taktikat*" (تَكتِيكَات,' *tactics* in English, words used by the grassroots to describe their practices) that allowed them to move beyond direct confrontation with the state in the so-called "invented" spaces of participation led by civil society. Building on de Certeau's notion of "tactics," this paper looks at these approaches as tactics used by grassroots to negotiate power and participation within neoliberal top-down authorities. Ultimately, it argues against viewing grassroots initiatives solely in terms of a binary lens of legality/informality or "invited"/"invented" dichotomies, as they neither function as insurgents nor remain passive.

KEYWORDS
Middle East; tactics; invited participation; invented participation; agency

Introduction

Numerous scholars have described the adoption of neoliberal policies in the Middle East since the 1980s, attributing it to the influence of international financial institutions (IFIs; Daher, 2013; Hanieh, 2013; Hourani & Kanna, 2014). As a result of capitalism, many Arab countries embraced free market principles and privatization, prioritizing economic growth over the welfare of their citizens (Abu-Hamdi, 2016). Undoubtedly, the neoliberal restructuring of governments had far-reaching implications for public policies (Hourani, 2014). In Jordan, as elsewhere in the Middle East, the implementation of "neoliberal statecraft" (Simon, 2016) has reinforced state control over political and socioeconomic life while withdrawing from vital sectors that have been privatized for profit. This malleable role of the state allowed for vast collusion with private investors, leading to the creation of exclusive urban environments and control over the political economy of urbanism in Amman, the capital of Jordan (Ababsa & Daher, 2011; Abu-Hamdi, 2016). Over the past decade, Amman has witnessed a rise in gated communities and mega-urban projects specifically targeting the upper-middle and elite classes. In other words, the neoliberalization turn in Jordan was dictated by the political economy of wealth and power, and consequentially reinforced the state's authoritarian politics (Biebricher, 2020).

At the same time, instead of implementing more democratic reforms, the Jordanian government has instead perpetuated what can be described as "virtual democracies"[1] (Joseph, 1997) which impose political constraints on civic engagement and enforce its paternalistic and

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authoritarian governmentality (Peck, 2004). These limitations have depoliticized the work of civil society organizations, social movements, and activists in Jordan (Wiktorowicz, 2002). However, since the Arab Spring, new civic organizations and initiatives have started experimenting with alternative approaches, focusing on a smaller scale and situated activities. These initiatives allow for the emergence of alternative political ideas within less hierarchical structures, and sustain their activities through local sources of income, avoiding reliance on international funding or direct confrontation with the state, i.e., protests. This paper focuses on these organizations and on how they negotiate, "manipulate," and trespass the government's power in order to acquire transformative agency in citymaking and its politics through means of "tactical participation."

Current debates on public participation exhibit a distinct bias. On the one hand, there is a focus on understanding "invited" public participation within formalized planning often inseparable from the traditions of Western democratic contexts. Such notions of participation tend to focus on the possibilities of ordinary citizens in formal mechanisms of governance to influence public policies. As described by Barney et al. (2016, p. vii), this notion of participation has "become a contextual feature of daily life in the liberal, capitalist, and technological societies of the contemporary West." In the past decade, there have been great efforts in suggesting approaches and techniques to allow greater participation, for example, the work of Fishkin and Farrar (2005) and Fung (2003). However, these statutory, state-created and regulated spaces (Mohanty, 2010) reveal very different and far less emancipatory agendas undertaken by governments in different contexts, where elites and experts can easily dominate these proceedings (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Fung & Wright, 2003; Mohanty, 2007). On the other hand, the empty rhetoric of "invited" participation "[made] it necessary for people to mobilize and make their own claims" (Mohanty, 2010, p. 160).

Those claimed spaces of participation are an exploration of spaces that citizens create or "invent" to challenge existing laws and the status quo, usually through protests and demonstrations (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Gaventa, 2004, p. 44; Miraftab, 2004, p. 4). As claimed by Miraftab (2004, p. 1), both "invited" and "invented" spaces of participation are occupied by the grassroots, however, the grassroots in the former spaces tend to "provide the poor with coping mechanisms and propositions to support survival." Wherein the grassroots activity for the latter "directly confronting the authorities and the status quo."

Many scholars, including Brownill and Inch (2019), Miraftab (2004, 2009, 2017), have extensively discussed the dichotomy. This debate has been particularly prominent in Western countries and specific southern contexts, as evident in the works of Frediani and Cociña (2019), Miraftab and Wills (2005), De Carli (2016), Cawood (2021) and Horn (2021), and others. They called for expanding the concept of "participation" beyond the professional framing of citymaking to capture a broader spectrum of activities and efforts driven by civil society. However, the situation in the exclusionary political environments of the Middle East is different. Few studies have interrogated the nature of public participation in the Middle East after the Arab Spring events and its impact on the relationship between citizens and the state. This paper argues for researching public participation in this context by drawing on Lefebvre's (1997) concept of *everyday and everydayness* and de Certeau's concept of tactics, which highlight citizens' creativity in the production of the city, as a response to modes of planning and participation that have failed them (Crawford, 2011). Thus, the paper proposes to explore what falls outside existing explanatory frames by analyzing contextualized empirical evidence and how this differs from existing explanations of public participation. Meanwhile, offering the potential for an alternative vision of "tactical" participation to be imagined and aspired.

The emphasis will be on depicting grassroots practices as sites of participation, production, resistance, reactions, and conflict, in relation to urban policies and the process of exclusion, centralization, and pro-market policies. To do so, it is necessary to challenge the notion of "invented" participation and examine the ambiguities of this concept, especially in the restrictive authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. It requires moving beyond the theoretical and drawing on the everyday empirical realities. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: How and under what conditions is public participation practiced in Jordan from the bottom up? How do these practices of participation subvert power structures and overcome exclusionary processes?

In order to understand these various practices of participation, this paper builds on 12 months of fieldwork of collaborative ethnography and a multi-sited approach in Amman. This involved immersive observations and face-to-face interviews conducted with members and leaders of grassroots initiatives, residents, activists, and staff from international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) officials. The first section of the paper introduces the theoretical framework that underpins the research, followed by the context of participation in Amman, including its historical construction, and its significance. Additionally, an overview of Jordan's civil society structure is provided to offer a proximate look at the evolving political landscape and the openings it presents. Next, two case studies in Amman are discussed as examples of bottom-up participatory planning. Finally, the paper analyses the organizations' tactics of participation and, in this light, presents reflections on participation processes and urban policy in Amman. This analysis seeks to deepen our understanding of tactical participation in Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, challenging the traditional "invited" versus "invented" participation dichotomy while producing operational knowledge and frameworks.

"Tactical participation" based on everyday life needs

The notion of "tactics" in de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (de Certeau, 1984) refers to the way individuals and groups use their creative agency to resist dominant power structures. De Certeau describes as "tactics" the individual "way of operating" within everyday activities that are not profit-driven or planned but rather depend on specific situations and opportunities (p. xiv). These "tactics" represent the limited freedoms allowed within the framework of the more rigid and planned strategies. For this reason, de Certeau (1984) sees everyday practices as a form of political resistance and describes "tactics" as "ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong" and subvert the dominant power structures of society (pp. 37–38). He mainly focuses on the capacity of "users" (of the city) to manipulate the mechanisms of power and to evade their hegemonic influence. The conceptualization of "tactics" here is not one of revolt or rebellion, but rather one of creativity, based on witty and opportunistic forms of resistance that take advantage of any available opportunity. According to de Certeau, the practice of everyday life is also part of the political realm.

This echoes Gramsci's (2009) views on hegemony as a site of contest and ongoing process of negotiation between the ruling class and subordinate groups. In this process, the dominant group tries to maintain its power by promoting its cultural and ideological values, while subordinate groups resist and attempt to challenge these values. The outcome of this contestation is a continuous process of negotiation, as both sides seek to assert their influence in shaping the beliefs and values of society. According to Gramsci, this ongoing contestation is what defines the struggle for cultural and political power in society. The work of Lila Abu-Lughod (1990), who builds on Foucault's analysis of power and resistance dialectics, proposes an examination of these practices of power negotiation. According to Abu-Lughod, power relations cannot be reduced to a single form or aspect; instead form an intricate web of interactions that involve multiple forms of power operating simultaneously, sometimes in concert or at cross purposes. She argues that the tendency to view power hierarchically, with some forms being seen as more significant or important than others, can limit our understanding of the complex and interwoven nature of power relations. Instead, she suggests that we should explore the different forms of power and their interactions and mutual reinforcement to gain a more nuanced and complete understanding of how power operates in society (Abu-Lughod 1990, p. 48). In so doing, tactics may manipulate situations and subvert power, potentially opening up new avenues for social change (McLeod, 1997).

A closer examination of the historical moment known as the Arab Spring indicates the potential of the social "non-movement" (Bayat, 2013). This concept relies on "collective action" through the "fragmented but similar activities" of "non-collective actors" who lack "formal" organization (Bayat, 2000, pp. 15, 20). The aim is to form a basis for actions that can foster a form of collective action (Ismail, 2006). The notion of "quiet encroachment" cannot be underlined as "a politics of collective demand-making" (Bayat, 2002, p. 22) nor as a silent, passive act; it is a "mix of individual and collective actions … that is tolerated in practice as long as it appears limited, but once it goes too far, governments often react" (p. 21). Bayat (1997, 2000) connects individualized and covert forms of everyday resistance with the transient mobilizations of the urban poor, presenting a resistance theory distinct from Scott's "everyday resistance" and social movement theory (Scott, 1985; Scott, 1990). He argues that activism among "ordinary" individuals in Third World cities, particularly within the urban poor and those in the informal economy, differs significantly, rooted in everyday struggles but not necessarily hidden or disguised. However, Bayat doesn't mention the term "everyday resistance," but that of "quiet encroachment." This concept, utilized in reference to marginalized and informal groups, is adaptable and responsive to circumstances, characterized by persistent struggles aimed at redistributing social goods and opportunities. In a conflict-prone region, everyday practices among the popular classes may be misconstrued as mere survival strategies, or as direct challenges to the status quo, serving as the foundation for collective mobilization[2] (Martínez, 2018).

Furthermore, many scholars have expressed reservations about the political awareness of civil society[3] in the Middle East. Daher (2008) suggests that civil society prioritizes "politics with a big 'P,'" contrary to "politics with a small 'P,'" such as urban politics, as "[it] remain[s] outside the domains of politics and public consciousness" (p. 64). Moreover, Wiktorowicz (2002) describes civil society actors in Jordan as depoliticized, primarily addressing "basic socioeconomic issues" like education, healthcare, and vocational training (p. 78).

Accordingly, public participation in urban politics and planning is often caught between the dichotomous categories of what scholars have termed "invited" participation (i.e., taking place in spaces legitimized by donors and government interventions to invite grassroots activists and allied NGOs; Cornwall, 2002) and "invented" participation (i.e., taking place in spaces occupied by grassroots activists and claimed through collective action in resistance to the dominant power relations; Miraftab, 2004). However, the experience of working and volunteering in grassroots organizations in Amman has allowed us to explore participation practices initiated by the grassroots that go beyond the resistance/cooperation or "invited"/"invented" participation dichotomy. Many local grassroots initiatives acknowledge the significant role of the state. For different reasons, they need support from the state, for example, approvals for donors' funds, resources, and services. However, they are neither revolutionary[4] nor submissive "consumers"; instead they negotiate, manipulate, and advocate for new forms of governance that "cannot be critically assessed by mobilizing the separation of public from private, political from personal" (Cruikshank, 1993, pp. 340–341 as quoted in Khirfan, 2018, p. 213).

These citizens appropriate the environments imposed by the power structures through everyday actions. These everyday modes of action do not fit adequately with the claims of insurgent planning (Miraftab, 2017) and are not explicitly counter-hegemonic, as they do not work against the structures of the powerful regime or hide their activities from the state to avoid detection or disruption. They are neither part of a life-long process of "quiet encroachment" (Bayat, 2000). Rather, they are often unplanned, temporary, overt and fluid modes of action that the grassroots inhabit actively to fulfil their needs within restrictive political environments. Moreover, these "tactics" are not exclusive to a particular group, whether peasants (J. Scott, 1985) or subalterns (Roy, 2011), but rather utilized by diverse individuals from various class backgrounds, operating between "invented" and "invited" spaces.

We can understand them as tactics in line with de Certeau (1984), referring to the creative subversions of the rational order, operating on a principle of temporality by seizing fleeting opportunities that arise from time to time. This paper aims to highlight the countless everyday practices of participation that resist and challenge the discursive regime imposed by the state's dominant strategies, represented by GAM, as well as by the INGOs operating in Amman.[5] Additionally, the paper offers the potential for an alternative vision of "tactical" participation to be imagined and aspired through everyday practices of participation. These practices can serve as a potential space for subversion and change, aligning with Lefebvre's notion that they are "the starting point for the realization of the possible" (Lefebvre, 1971, p. 14).

Context of participation in Amman

Amman, a contemporary metropolis with a population of four million, is symbolized by mega neoliberal developments realized by top-down urban practices (Ababsa & Daher, 2011). However, the authoritarian implications of the neoliberal shift in the Jordanian society were far from popular. Over the last 2 decades, Jordan has witnessed numerous riots and demonstrations in response to the state's tight fiscal policies.[6] These protests have ranged from opposition to the first IMF loan in 1989 to unrest caused by fiscal plans, subsidy cuts, and unemployment, culminating in the demonstrations of the Arab Spring. Faced with the risk of widespread unrest, the government was forced to create a more accommodating environment for Jordanians. In practice, this involved asserting democratic legitimacy based on established conventions such as representative democracy and accountability (Khirfan, 2018), or through processes of decentralization (Al Rabady et al., 2014), to avoid political risks associated with genuine democratic processes (Ottaway, 2003; Schedler, 2002). However, the many complex laws[7] regulating civil society organizations (Wiktorowicz, 2000) contributed to increased control over the political space of civil society, and a limited perception of its role as being primarily concerned with charitable non-politicized functions (AlNasser, 2016).

The emergence of a hegemonic planning system within Jordanian civil society can be traced back to 2006, prior to the Arab Spring, when people actively participated in protests and strikes against the explosion of large-scale investments benefiting from the oil-Gulf surplus. These investments were responsible for creating new exclusive high-end urban developments that promoted a lifestyle of excessive consumption, catering to only a very small percentage of Jordanians (Daher, 2008; Hourani, 2014; Khirfan, 2018). However, the government also sought to create more favorable conditions, for example, by introducing public participation as a more democratic attempt to shape the public realm of Amman. Similarly to the previously adopted reforms, the "citizen-centred governance" (GAM, 2008) approach was primarily intended to secure legitimacy for the economic policies the regime considered necessary for its survival. The government's efforts to protect the imperatives of technocratic governance and market requirements (Parker, 2009) have worked effectively to empower the state and the market, excluding civil society again from planning activities despite these reforms (Khirfan, 2018).

The protests following the Arab Spring involved a broad spectrum of society, mostly unaffiliated youth movements. These movements were characterized by a strong display of patriotic symbolism and a demand for *real* change. However, the government either quelled these protests or eventually dwindled as participants became increasingly apprehensive due to the violent suppression witnessed in neighboring countries (Ryan, 2011). However, the state adopted soft authoritarian strategies to suppress popular opposition. This was achieved by embracing generous funding from INGOs that advocated for participation in various civil society realms, including urban planning.

Today, the "invited" spaces for participation in Jordan, whether led by the state and/or INGOs, claim to foster inclusive, empathic, and neutralized power differences between participants to reach valid and consensual processes. However, these spaces reinforce existing power relations by appointing "gatekeepers" of power within their communities, thereby perpetuating existing exclusionary relations (Cornwall, 2002). As a result, participation in the formal planning structure is seen as incomplete, fragmented, and unstable. The GAM and INGOs, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), represent the main participation actors. While the process lacks institutionalization, occasional collaborations between the state and international NGOs involve other actors such as multinational corporations or local NGOs.[8] This has transformed international NGOs as Western-aligned allies of the government, who are unaccountable to their constituencies and whose operational practices are at odds with their professed missions.

Consequently, international donor agencies are generally perceived as Western structures detached from the realities on the ground, further exacerbating the corruption already rooted in the government. Thus, these spaces are inherently fraught with numerous challenges that impede the realization of their objectives. The INGOs vertical organizational process that will not aim to challenge the structure within which it functions, instead serving as tightly controlled spaces for citizens who already fit the state's normative assumptions of "good" citizenship, undermines people's participation. Besides the central role of the state (GAM, here), in terms of getting permissions, decision-making, and informing, among many others, renders the process as a top-down exercise of power that results in "illegitimate and/or unjust uses of power," as Cooke and Kothari (2001, p. 14) suggested.

On the other hand, the ambiguity of this process was accompanied by the emergence of various social actors striving to create, preserve, and expand participatory spaces for social reproduction and grassroots control that do not neatly correspond with the state's classificatory logic (Elden & Brenner, 2009). Drawing on Margit Mayer's work, these efforts can be seen as attempts to redefine and reshape urban governance by fostering inclusive decision-making processes (Mayer, 2013). Moreover, the events of the Arab Spring offered hope for radical change, creating many new possibilities and opening new pathways for emergent grassroots initiatives (AlNasser, 2016; Halaseh, 2012; Khirfan, 2018; Phenix, 2021). These young "grassroots organizations" stand outside the technocratic control of the government, focusing on situated small-scale activities within less hierarchical structures, rather than totally relying on significant international funds. In this light, the new grassroots organizations call for a profound rethinking of normative conceptualizations and the application of Western terms such as democracy, participation and liberty (Cavatorta, 2012; Kiwan, 2014). They are better understood as an urge and a response to the political climate in experimenting with new ways of doing outside the capitalist production paradigm. These organizations are willing to take action but are also aware of the fraught landscape rendering the scene in Jordan after the Arab Spring. Thus, they creatively create many new possibilities "that have the potential for inventiveness within the ordinary and is thereby genuinely 'of its moment'" (Berke, 1997, p. 223). However, as argued by AlNasser (2016),[9] these initiatives perform in loose grouping structures and are usually fragile to the technocratic state policies. Notwithstanding restrictive laws imposed bureaucratic obstacles, sporadic edicts, and many other factors that hinder the work of civil society organizations (CSOs'), grassroots organizations' members try to be more *tactical* and creative when asking for their rights or engaging with the government. Echoing Manuel Castells' insights from *The City and the Grassroots*, the dynamics of these emergent grassroots initiatives reflect the power of localized, bottom-up movements in challenging established norms and hierarchies (Castells, 1984).

While Wiktorowicz (2000) argues that in a political context characterized by top-down political liberalization, civil society extends the state's social control over its citizens through visible grassroots organizations, making them controllable and predictable to the state, we contend that the new forms of activism do not necessarily try to be invisible or work under the radar. Instead, they *tactically* negotiate their agency without relying on any political party or formal structure, employing similar tools and channels as those operated by individuals in power. Consequently, they both recognize their dependence on the state while simultaneously subverting it.

Methodology and case studies

In order to better understand "tactical participation" in Jordan, this research selected two case studies involving the activities of two grassroots organizations. These cases not only shed light on the production of participatory spaces and their fulfillment but also demonstrate how such spaces are re-appropriated and re-imagined within a fraught urban landscape. These cases are representatives of a particular way of acting which is embedded in everyday life. A crucial criterion for selecting these case studies was the timing of these cases, emphasizing the importance of investigating ongoing cases during the research period. This approach allowed immersion in the site and participation in various activities. Importantly, those cases exemplify the practices of grassroots organizations that fall outside the purview of the traditional civic organizations in Jordan (for example, the local NGOs, CBOs and social associations).[10] Both case studies focused on long-term projects that were active during the fieldwork period. A range of participatory methods, including interviews, focus groups, interactive workshops, diary writing, photography, and on-site ethnography were employed to allow us to fully immerse in the projects and their everyday life.

The first organization, Zikra for Popular Learning,[11] was founded in 2007 by two activists who aimed to restore popular knowledge that had been passed down through generations. They aimed to enable communities to live independently and sustainably, drawing from their historical experiences without the need for development organizations or donor funds to improve their way of living. In addition, they supported individuals in developing new ways of thinking to challenge the domination of foreign knowledge and supporting community-driven thinking about the place and land, empowering people's agency over their local knowledge. The founders Rabe' Zuriqat and Lama Al-Khatib looked into presenting an alternative model for creating independent, productive, and empowered societies, one that stands in contrast to the prevailing global capitalist economy characterizing in today's cities. The organization has worked with many communities in different places around Jordan and has developed a working method based on knowledge exchange and reciprocity, rather than relying on charitable donations. The second organization is the Hara[12] Initiative,[13] located in one of the poorest areas in Amman: Al-Ashrafiyah. Founded in 2005 by a former advisor of Amman's mayor, the initiative emerged after attempts to persuade the mayor to develop and enhance the resilience of the city's poorer areas proved unsuccessful. Consequently, the founder left the institution to work collaboratively with citizens. Today, the initiative has eight volunteer members who operate in different *Hara(s)* in Eastern Amman. Between 2005 and 2022, the initiative worked in five different Hara(s) in three different districts in Eastern Amman: Al-Yarmouk, Jabal Al-Joufeh and Al-Nasr districts, one of the most deprived areas in the city. The initiative looks beyond mere physical improvements to the worn-out built fabric. Instead, it aims to promote social cohesion and resilience among communities, while cultivating a sense of collective ownership that will eventually strengthen relationships between residents. In order to achieve this, the initiative builds on the caring attitudes that once existed in the old *Hara(s)*, seeking to repair the broken social relations in the city. This approach bears similarities to feminist perspectives in the politics of urban planning (Trogal, 2017; Petrescu & Trogal, 2017; Tronto, 2019) which explore the potential of care as a relational activity in creating sustained relationships.

Case 1: Zikra—Self-organized participation

> Hundreds of people would wait for hours just to receive one kilogram of bread (*khubz ʿarabī*) that won't cost more than 16 qirshes [17 pennies in GBP]; this situation lasted for weeks . . . people fought over bread when it was delivered by the governmental buses in the first days of the lockdown. (Interview with a Jordanian farmer, Amman, Jordan. June 2021)

Ahmad was trying to explain the COVID-19 lockdown scenes in its first weeks in Amman, stood next to one of the city's largest shopping malls adorned with logos of international franchises. He carried his sickle over the golden wheat, dressed in his casual dishdasha (kaftan) with the red Shemagh (šumāġ) to protect him from the hot June sun. He pointed to the prestigious villas around us in one of western Amman's affluent neighborhoods and described how these lands were once wheat fields, as Jordan lies within the Fertile Crescent, where wheat has been domesticated since antiquity. Accompanying Ahmad were dozens of people reaping the crops. They were part of a local grassroots initiative promoting food sovereignty by collaborating with people who cultivate their own lands or other privately owned unused land that is appropriate for agriculture. This initiative, called Al-Barakeh Wheat (in English, blessed wheat), took off in late 2019 as one of Zikra for Popular Learning's social enterprise projects.

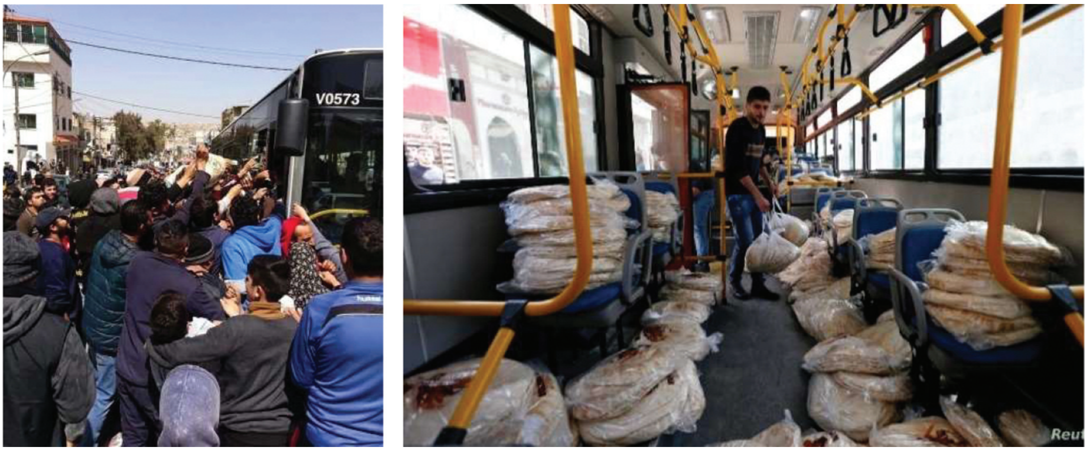

Figure 1. Left: people waiting to buy bread from one of GAM's buses. Right: inside one of GAM's buses that were used to distribute bread during the pandemic's first days in Amman. Source: GAM (2020).

> During the pandemic, we didn't use any ready-baked bread from the bakeries. We had enough flour for the whole year, and we still using from last year's crop . . . So, people are now queuing for bread while Jordan once used to export crops. (Interview with Lama, the co-founder of Zikra organization. Amman, Jordan. July 2021. See Figure 1)

The project aims to reintroduce local wheat back to the table and restore the concept of "Barakah" as a guiding principle for reclaiming food sovereignty and reestablishing a harmonious relationship with the land and society. The regions of Jordan, which previously formed the most suitable areas for rainfed agriculture, have been turned into overcrowded cities and fragmented properties. This project seeks to draw attention to the agricultural potential within urban areas by cultivating wheat and inviting families and schools within the city to participate in collective farming, building a relationship with grain farmers and promoting the reuse of wheat in various food products such as flour and groats (see Figure 2). The project is also working on restructuring the current economic system for local

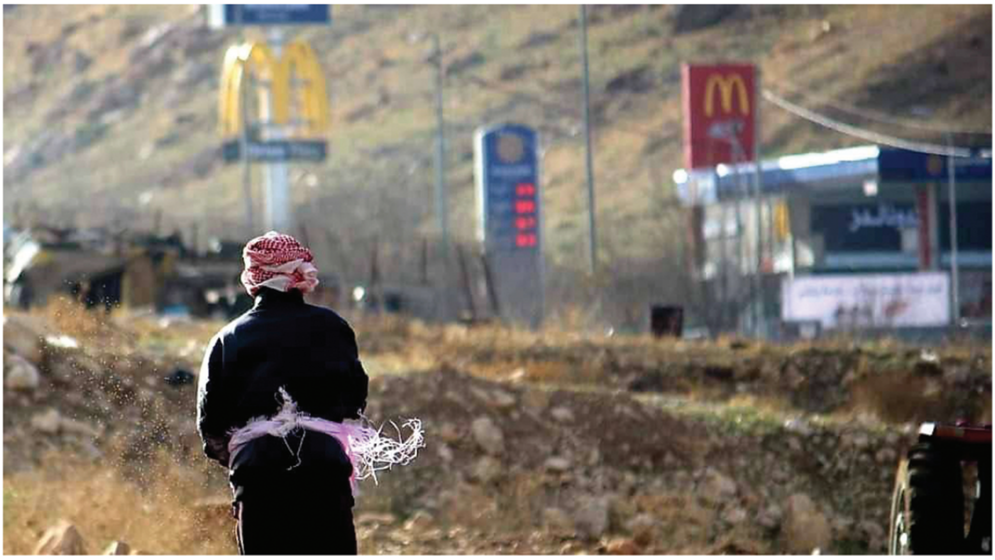

Figure 2. Jordanian farmer growing wheat in Amman within the Al-barakeh wheat project. Source: Zikra for Popular Learning (2021).

wheat, by linking wheat farmers to an alternative market that is economically feasible and providing primary cultivation costs when needed, thereby increasing the wheat cultivation areas in Jordan.

Currently, Jordan imports more than 97% of its cereals, with American wheat dominating the Jordanian family table since the 1970s. During this period, Jordan gradually adopted market liberalization policies and removed subsidies for local wheat production. As a result, the government only subsidized imported flour, which prompted farmers to cultivate more profitable fruit and vegetables instead of wheat. Moreover, the government paid no attention to the rapid urbanization taking place over fertile agricultural lands in large parts of the country.[14] Reflecting on this, one local farmer remarked: "The real problem of urbanization started in the late 1960s when the government lent the land to [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in Near East] UNRWA to build a Palestinian refugees camp in one of the most fertile lands in Jordan" (interview with a local farmer living near the Baqa'a Refugees camp. Amman, Jordan. August 2021).

The project's founders are aware of the political consequences of Jordan's import dependency and how it affects the country's stability.[15] However, they also acknowledge the limited capacity of CSOs and NGOs in Jordan to influence national-level policy decisions due to the lack of dialogue with decision-makers (AlNasser, 2016). The project aims to reclaim people's food sovereignty by creating a network of self-cultivated native wheat lands in vacant urban lands to "liberate food and rebuild the relationship with the land and the society" (interview with the founders of the project, Amman, Jordan. August 2021). The Al-Barakeh Wheat project serves as an example of a tactical confrontation with the state. While the organization adheres to governmental regulations and avoids breaking any rules theoretically, they do not however passively accept them; instead, it actively defies them by changing its mode of confrontation. Consequently, Zikra does not request vacant public land from the government for cultivation but instead takes direct action by cultivating wheat within the city, securing land from private owners. Through social media platforms, they have mobilized other people[16] to join the project by either lending their own lands to people interested in cultivation or directly cultivating their own lands. The use of private land was one of the *tactics* to evade state control over the project which would have potentially caused disruptions in wheat production. The absence of power, in this case, the state power, becomes a strength of their tactic (de Certeau, 1984). In the same way, the organization has asked the support and help from the National Seeds Bank to secure the original local wheat seeds for their project. Although, as claimed by the founders, they could have secured it from any local farmer. However, they had intentionally approached the formal system to acknowledge their support and help to show them that they were not against the state or trying to confront the state's approach to managing food security or sovereignty. The founders perceive this action as necessary to support their precarity by tactically demonstrating mundane acknowledgment and recognition to the state.

Their everyday practices of growing, harvesting, grinding seeds, baking, and now selling locally-made bread using 100% wheat in partnership with local bakeries, signifies a different mode of criticism and opposition to governmental policy. This showcases resistance to a capitalist consumption model and challenges the current economic model. De Certeau argues that tactics survive through their mobility and by playing with time; the Al-Barakeh project involves forms of temporariness and locality. It is a way of re-appropriating space in different areas for a limited duration by capitalization on available opportunities while acting within the broader power structure and operating within the legal confines of the state. For De Certeau a tactic is "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" and the "space of a tactic is the space of the other" (pp. 37–38).

Rather than contesting the sovereignty of state institutions and recognizing the restricted role of civic organizations in Jordan, the project is politicizing the non-politicized. The relationships between different social actors and their "worlds" can also be considered a political practice (Petrescu, 2006, p. 85). They tactically navigate and reclaim political agency within the state's domains without explicitly challenging institutional power. They neither directly participate in the state's "invited" spaces, nor are they creating "invented" spaces to challenge the state directly. As one of the participants expressed: "We are only baking bread with our own wheat from our own lands." They are skillfully reclaiming local knowledge to make local wheat production possible, defying governmental regulations by tactically manipulating ordinary activities and imbuing their productions with political meanings. Moreover, they bring new meanings to what is considered "public space" in architecture and planning. This is a form of "production of space" in the sense described by Lefebvre (1991) that looks beyond the physical dimension to encompass the social and political relationships that constitute these temporary wheat lands.

Case 2: Hara Initiative—Opportunist participation

The members of the Hara Initiative[17] have been working with several Hara(s) and communities in Eastern Amman for over 15 years, operating without a fixed office, instead using various available shared spaces in the Hara (see Figure 3). However, in 2020, they decided to rent a small office in Al-Ashrafiyah, next to a public community center affiliated with GAM (see Figures 4 and 5). The founder perceives the new location as a tactical statement, challenging GAM and, more specifically, the official employees working next door, in the community center. As described by the team, the center is mostly unoccupied, and it is unclear how the multi-million JOD community facility is involving or collaborating with people in the neighborhood to create communal cohesion, as the municipality claims.

According to the initiative, long-term commitment and building trust are vital for social mobilization. Despite having little funds—the entire fund was sourced from the community itself through fundraising, and each family had to participate in a small monthly payment to help improve their Hara—the founders managed to slowly gain people's trust and unite them based on common needs and responsibilities, resulting in the improvement of several Hara(s) over an extended period.

However, the initiative's bottom-up, long-term commitment has disappointed many potential collaborators and funders who wanted to see their efforts and money recompensed in the short

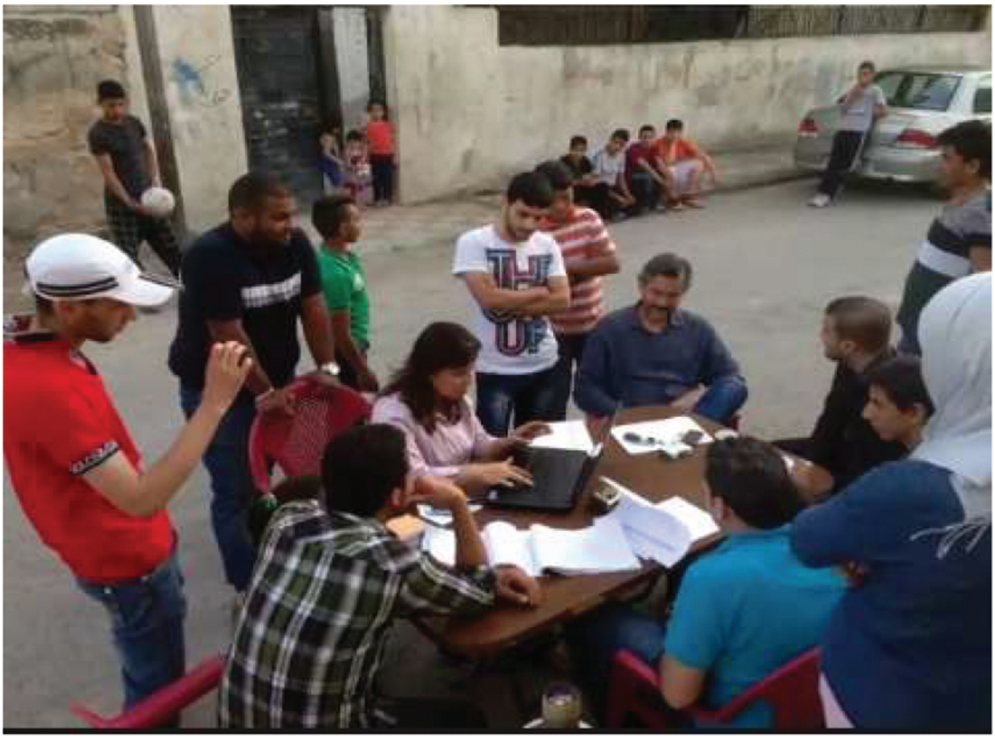

Figure 3. The hara team using the public street as a meeting area. Source: The Hara Initiative (2013).

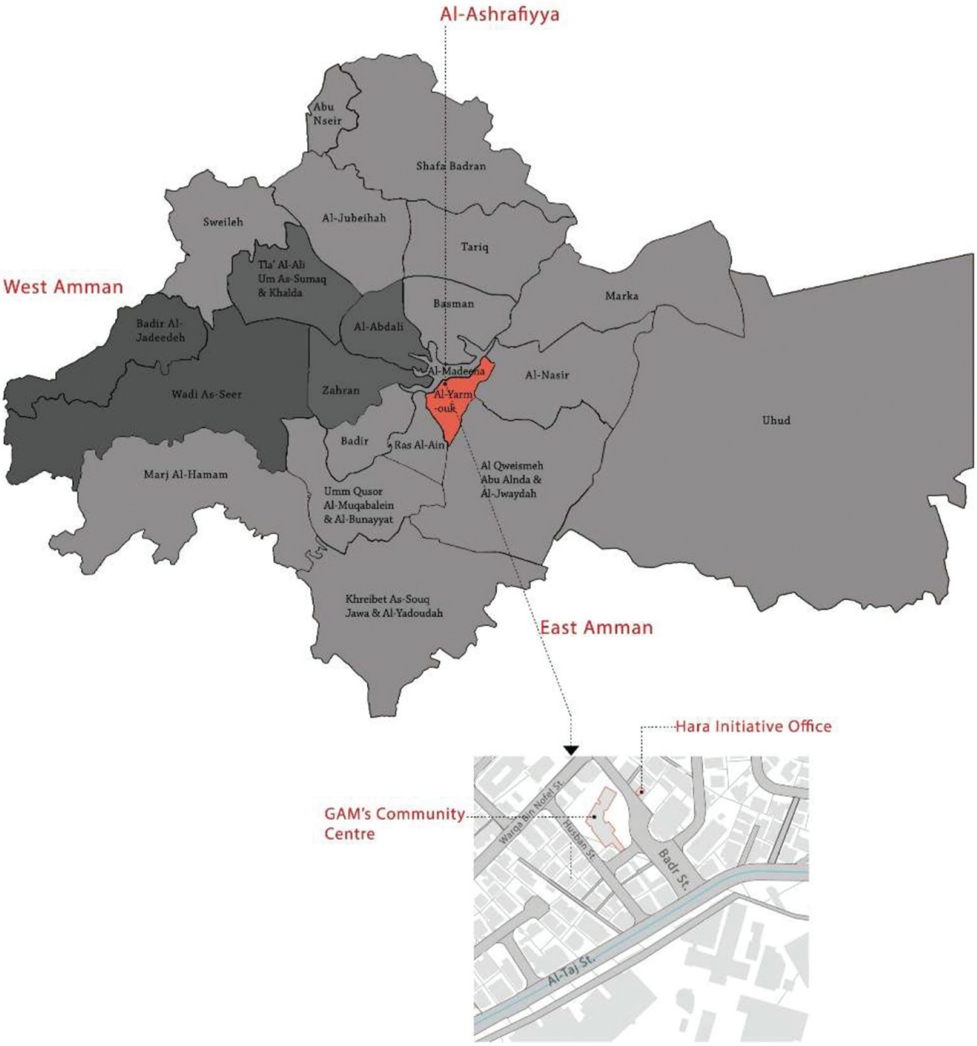
Al-Ashrafiyya
Abu Nseir
Shafa Badran
Sweileh
Al-Jubeihah
Tariq
Tla' Al-Ali Um As-Sumaq & Khalda
West Amman
Basman
Marka
Badir Al-Jadeedeh
Al-Abdali
Al-Madeena
Al-Nasir
Wadi As-Seer
Zahran
Al-Yarm-ouk
Uhud
Badir
Ras Al-Ain
Marj Al-Hamam
Al Qweismeh Abu Alnda & Al-Jwaydah
Umm Qusor Al-Muqabalein & Al-Bunayyat
Khreibet As-Souq Jawa & Al-Yadoudah
East Amman
Hara Initiative Office
GAM's Community Centre
Warqa Bin Nofel St.
Husban St.
Badr St.
Al-Taj St.

Figure 4. Above: Amman's map showing the 22 districts of the city. Below: the location of Hara's initiative office. Source: the author.

term. Nonetheless, the founders tried to eschew relying on donor money to maintain credibility and authenticity. Instead, they explicitly placed value on the residents of Hara, allowing them to set priorities for themselves rather than focusing on donors' predefined objectives. As one resident explains: "We know our problems and are aware of our needs, too; we just need someone to listen to us and help us with our problems" (interview with a Sudanese refugees living near the site of the project. Amman, Jordan. May 2021).

Nevertheless, in May 2021, the founders of Hara agreed to accept a small fund from the international organization USAID, which provides funds for social enterprise in Jordan as part of its vision to develop sustainable cultural heritage through funding projects that engage with local communities.[18] The founder comments: "Muttarreen (we had to)." The founder continued: "What can we do? We had no other alternative; we tried many ways to make this initiative work, but people started to lose faith. We cannot simply expect them to keep paying from their own pockets" (interview with the founder of Hara Initiative in Amman, Jordan. June 2021). However, they tactically planned how to use USAID's funding in a way to benefit the local people of Hara. Moreover, the founders acknowledge that the state is key and is

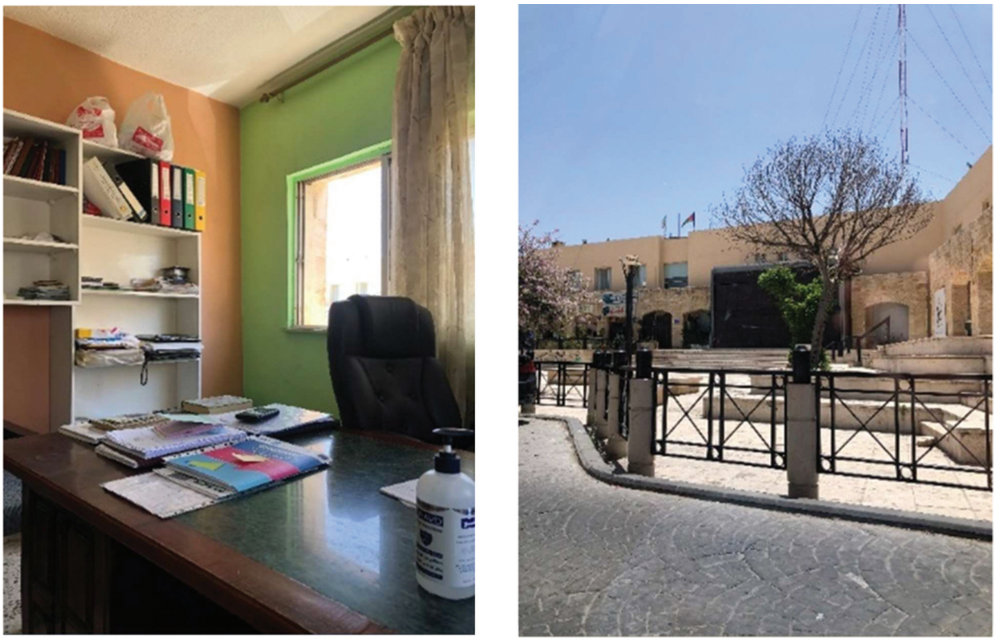

Figure 5. Left: a view from inside the hara initiative office. Right: Al- ashrafiya community center next to the hara office. Source: the author.

much needed in their work regarding approvals, permissions, and funds. While they could not convince the state to embrace Hara's vision, they decided to nurture relations with the residents and international donors, while also negotiating and mediating power via their connections with GAM.

The founders hoped to gain some support from the state by establishing a formal relationship with well-established NGOs like USAID. Their goal was to bring "Hope for people, hope for Hara" (interview with the founder of Hara Initiative in Amman, Jordan. June 2021). According to the initiative, the donor's money is a tactic to implement a part of their vision while also quickly getting approval from the state under the USAID umbrella. Tactically, the initiative invented a project: The Al-Ashrafiyah Heritage Trail, and applied for a fund from USAID, which specifically targeted the heritage sites in Jordan. They recognize the funding as an opportunity to not only focus on conserving heritage sites in Al-Ashrafiyah but also use the fund to improve the local economy and enhance social cohesion by promoting sustainable tourism. The trail manifests in the Al-Hara experience (Live the Locals' Life) while emphasizing cultural heritage through physical and nonphysical interventions. The project's purposeful navigation between the state and the international NGO is also a way to disrupt the state's regulatory planning system without directly challenging its authority. However, this approach does not shield the project from imposed decisions or dramatic changes from the powerful donor (USAID, in this case). Thus, it is a continuous maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision" (Von Bullow quoted in de Certeau, 1984, p. 37) and a continual search for being "opportunistic." As such, the initiative is constantly manipulating events, turning them into opportunities to benefit their Hara.

Hara's tactical approach aligns with the "art of the weak" that de Certeau speak about. It depends on time and opportunities in the least expected places. Although the organization members lack a comprehensive overview and cannot proceed with further planning once the fund ends, they use it as a means to take action, even if it means trespassing on the rules of the organization. In their approach, the Hara initiative tactically planned how to use USAID's funding in a way to benefits the local people of Hara. For example, the funds were not only spent on researchers' salaries and social

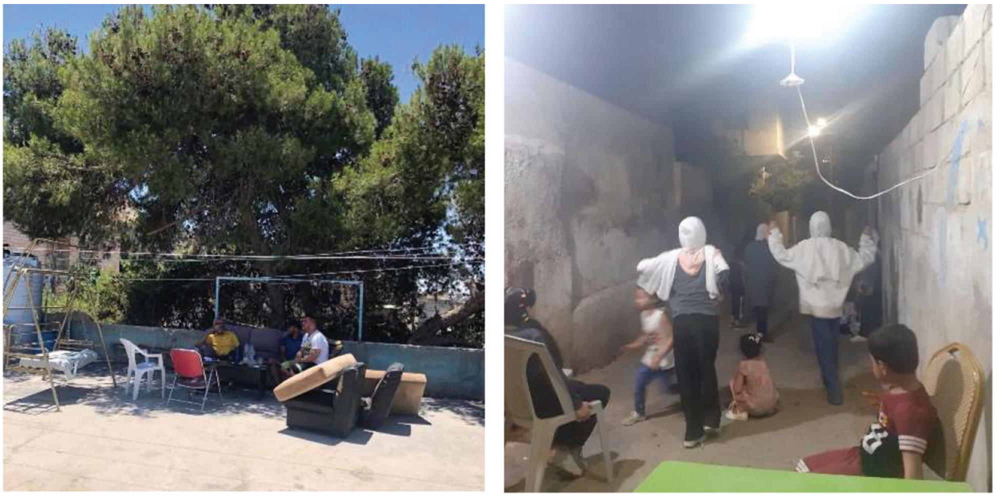

Figure 6. Different participatory activities of the Hara's project: Al-Ashrafiya Heritage Trail. Source: Hara Initiative (2021).

mobilizers or renting luxury conference rooms for meetings. Instead, local researchers and social workers were recruited from the local area of the project, Al-Ashrafiyah, who possessed considerable knowledge about the area and facilitated the participation process. Furthermore, the meetings were held on the project site, in Hara,[19] allowing for diverse forms of participation to be experienced and imagined together. For instance, activities such as the creation of games for children, the cleaning of Hara together with residents, or informal group meetings over lunch were organized (see Figure 6). One resident of the Hara comments

> We didn't receive a substantial sum to address major issues like broken stairs or ageing infrastructure in our Hara. Nonetheless, we're pleased to have allocated it towards minor upkeep and assisting individuals in launching their sustainable tourism projects, which embodies the ethos of Hara. (Interview with one of the Al-Ashrafiyah Hara residents. Amman, August 2021)

Regarding the Al-Ashrafiyah Heritage Trail Project, the USAID funding was limited only to providing a study on the potential of creating a heritage trail in the area that could be sustained by the residents who would benefit from it. However, to overcome the constraints of donor-funded projects in less developed countries, which typically propose frameworks without any on-ground actions, the initiative used their connections and the spaces they were granted access to as part of their partnership with USAID. This allowed them to negotiate additional needs, such as cleaning and temporarily transforming vacant, abandoned lands into public areas for residents (see Figure 7). They have also bypassed USAID regulations by inviting a wide range of participants rather than restricting participation to a select few, thereby ensuring inclusive activities took place on the streets. The active participation and the on-site activities turned out to be more than a phase within the project. Ultimately, the Hara initiative has chosen not to directly contest the legitimacy of GAM or other state institutions. Instead, their tactical maneuver is to recognize GAM's authority as an opportunity to do work that will improve people's living conditions.

Discussion: The agency of tactical participation

Despite the apparent differences between Zikra's and Hara's formal relationship with power structures, both practices acknowledge that certain forms of negotiations and arrangements were always possible. Zikra tried to avoid direct contact with the municipality by not requesting vacant public lands for the Al-Barakeh Wheat Project.[20] Instead, they aimed to demonstrate publicly that active individuals and groups can initiate transformation processes at micro-scale level without relying on power

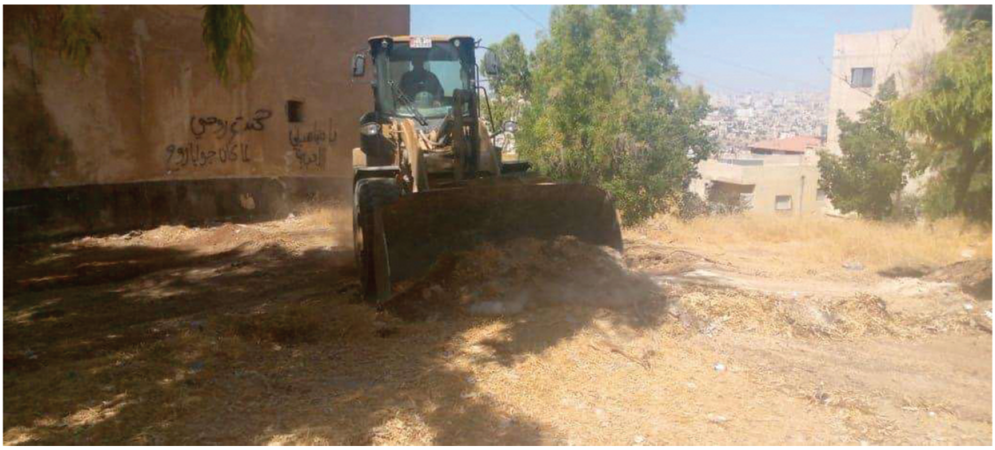

Figure 7. GAM's vehicles cleaning one of HARA's project sites: the abandoned areas in Al-Ashrafiya. Source: Hara Initiative (2022).

structures for larger societal transformations. In contrast, the Hara initiative sought to build a constructive relationship with GAM. After 15 years of working independently with the community, the organization chose to work with "power" in order to sustain a long-term transformation process. In doing so, they acknowledged that Al-Ashrafiyah has the potential to attract government investment and tourists, and hoped to draw attention to the basic services, infrastructural improvements and residents' needs. For Hara, it was essential to work with a formally structured, well-recognized body like USAID, which would help them facilitate funding, access, and visibility within the existing power structures. However, it is important not to overlook the limitations faced by new grassroots organizations, as they often contend with conflicts, tensions, cracks, and shifts these organizations operate with. Nevertheless, this study celebrates the potential for inventiveness within the ordinary (McLeod, 1997) detecting possibilities when these were barely visible (Lefebvre, 1971).

In this context, de Certeau's understanding of tactics to explain acts of resistance in the face of power offers a less decisive, less ideological lens to analyze the many ways citizens inhabit spaces of participation. Our empirical study points to the multiple and tactical ways grassroots organizations navigate the rules imposed by public authorities. These approaches range from the opportunistic alliance of Hara to the indifferent practices by Zikra, and occasionally even oppositional actions (as witnessed through resistance to involve officials in the opening of the new season of wheat growing in one of Zikra's sites). Furthermore, the practices of grassroots organizations do not only investigate aspects of participation in citymaking, but also tend to explore new ways of initiating and sustaining participation beyond "*confronting the authorities*" (Miraftab, 2004, p. 1). This is done to avoid further violence and state resistance. Yet these new grassroots organizations are aware of the control they are subjected to and the web of bureaucratic regulations and legal codes designed to regulate their activities. As a result, they operate within varying degrees of independence and innocence, as one of the urban activists puts it: "We've found other ways, languages and tactics to speak back to the state; we cannot rely on the streets only for our voices to be heard" (interview, Amman, Jordan. August 2021).

Thus, today, grassroots organizations are not only fighting on the streets for political change but are also more entangled in constantly agile, changing and re-active practices that have the potential to create heterogeneous nodes of change embedded in everyday life. In many ways, these tactics are not visibly directed against the authoritarian regime but are instead more entangled in a "contingent constellation of practice, milieu and materiality" (Moore, 2005, p. 44) allowing people to reclaim their agency in shaping the city. However, it is important to note that not all new organizations will work similarly to enable substantive rights; some are not necessarily as successful in negotiating the fine lines between pragmatism, necessity, and resourcefulness. Nevertheless, the multiple embodied tactics of negotiation and resistance of the new grassroots organizations described above (and similar to other organizations in Jordan) do not constitute straightforward forms of subaltern resistance or acquiescence with a governmental apparatus, nor "invited" or "invented" spaces of participation. Instead, they coexist with and subvert the existing system of power by building resilient social systems that can act within or alongside other systems, thereby providing avenues to bypass various barriers. However, this mode of participation doesn't look at the need for well-framed strategies to counter the top-down planning in Jordan as claimed by many scholars (i.e., Brenner, 2017). Instead, it is the "possibility of things being together without the hint of a system or framework, that things can be with each other without being subsumed into an imaginary of a larger totality" (Simone, 2023, p. 357). Thus, the space of "tactics" is not just another site of "resistance" with a smaller form of power, loaded with political intentions (disguised or hidden, as argued by Scott), nor a sustained, prolonged, silent resistance of the ordinary people in order to survive and improve their lives (as discussed by Bayat), but a continuum between public confrontations and hidden subversion. The transformative capacity of these grassroots initiatives lies in their ability to reclaim agency and challenge the urban status quo through a dynamic and contested process. However, "tactical participation" does not replace hegemonic narratives but actively inhabits the spaces in between, navigating a middle ground between the status quo and transformative potential. This nuanced approach does not wish—at least for the time being—to replace the powerful authorities but to coexist along with the centralized governance.

The co-existence of these multiple systems requires an understanding of the ways in which power operates, where power is not simply a matter of force or domination, but is a much more complex and subtle process that involves the construction and maintenance of cultural beliefs, values, and norms (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Gramsci, 2009). Through an understanding of the manner in which power operates in subtle and indirect ways, grassroots organizations are able to develop their own tactics for resisting, challenging, and transforming dominant power structures. Therefore, the capacity for civic agency can be observed in the multiple ways people engage with power, not limited to dependence on dominant structures (Mahmood, 2012). Failing to understand the complexities faced by individuals living and operating in authoritarian settings, with their distinct modes of participation, we foreclose certain questions about agency and the workings of power (Abu-Lughod, 1990). The assumption that power operates in oppositional patterns (civil society versus the state) and the received notion of viewing civil society as passive or directly confrontational toward the state, or indeed, confronting the dichotomy of "invented" versus "invited" spaces, is inadequate for analyzing participation in Jordan.

Conclusion

The aftermath of the Arab Spring in Jordan has sparked a renewed imagination that has influenced the emergence of new spatial practices. This paper exemplifies this through two case studies, through which the idea of "tactics" (de Certeau, 1984) is discussed in relation to participation in planning during the post–Arab Spring era. The paper proposes an expanded understanding of grassroots participation in Jordan, moving beyond the notion of "invented" participation to tactical participation. These activities, whether hidden or visible, direct or unselfconscious, collective or individualized (Berke, 1997), taking place at the everyday level, hold the potential to reimagine, challenge and transform "the urban" (Crawford, 2011). By exploring the participatory lived experiences of grassroots organizations in Amman as a starting point, this work offers an analysis of the alternative possibilities that could actively initiate the process of social transformation, as described by Lefebvre, and acknowledging that these everyday activities stand on shifting ground but continually offer new potentials (McLeod, 1997). Moreover, those grassroots practices operate within the context of the Middle East, marked by a history of colonization and coloniality and the existence of authoritarian regimes, as well as the post–Arab Spring era.

The practices and spaces of tactical participation are different from both the organized spaces of "invited" participation and the demonstrative spaces of "invented" participation. These opportunistic, manipulative, agile, self-organized, indefinite practices provide a fresh understanding of participation that functions within relational, dynamic and mobile agencies. At the same time, the Zikra and Hara initiatives embody resistance to oppression and potential for transformation, creating different experiences of participation that unsettle the normative assumption of a binary between the state and civil society. Thus, these practices represent a new type of participation in the Middle East, existing between rebel resistance and acquiescence, posing the possibility of re-imaging the co-existence of diverse power systems and governance structures that foster participation in radical and diverse ways, that deviate from the center or the norm (Kamal, 2023). This new language of participation is the result of negotiation between dominant and subordinate actors, oscillating between resistance, "quiet encroachment" and incorporation. Thus, tactical participation is another emerging concept that helps in understanding citymaking, by departing from "resistance" and direct confrontation, and closer to Bayat's "quiet encroachment." Moreover, it "gives us new knowledge frameworks for praxis" (Bhan, 2022, p. 83). In conclusion, planning and participation theories would benefit further from exploring these practicing configurations and spaces that enable new forms of transverse decentralized governance and participation in the Middle East. Nonetheless, these tactics do differ across space and time as this agency is "culturally conditioned … historically constructed" (Hou, 2016), and played within specific configuration of power. On this basis, future research could be extended to other authoritarian contexts that would offer a productive debate in multiple publics and places in contested and shifting power dynamics—in the specificities of cities—that could embrace the new vocabularies of "tactical participation" and extend it to new knowledge frameworks and practices. A further strand of future research might involve expanding on the notions of the co-existence of governance to operate in contested and authoritarian cities.

Notes

1. This refers to democratic systems in authoritarian countries that dismantle their ideological complexion without threatening established interests.
2. See the work of Charles, 2013; Ismail, 2013; Ryan, 2015.
3. The extensive work of Elsheshtawy, 2008.
4. This does not mean that many grassroots will not show opposition or forms of subversion (In Jordan, subversion was manifested in acts of vandalism and littering. See Khirfan, 2018).
5. In Jordan and as any other Middle Eastern countries the INGO plays a significant role in terms of the funding and development projects, for many reasons, they work in imposing rule, and power over the regular citizens. However, delving into the intricacies of INGOs' strategies and work exceeds the scope of this paper.
6. Convinced by the (IMF) and the World Bank, the Jordanian government implemented austerity plans alongside with liberalizing interest rates to pay its debts. For more see Ryan, 2011.
7. Today the CSOs fall under "the Law on Societies and the Law on Non-Profit Organizations." In addition to these two laws, other laws were adopted that further curtail CSOs' engagement in public life, namely the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Law, Law on Cyber Crime, Law on General Assemblies and Law on Publications & Press.
8. The local NGOs are hired by the INGO or the municipality for a short period of time to facilitate the participatory activities within a strict structure.
9. AlNasser's study highlights over 100 new grassroots organizations in Jordan post-Arab Spring. Yet, this landscape is shifting due to factors like restrictive laws and sustainability concerns. Despite these challenges, many grassroots organizations operate informally as collectives without formal registration.
10. These organizations typically register with the Ministry of Social Development and partner with international and local funders to support their work. However, they often enter into contracts with private enterprises, government bodies, or INGOs, a practice criticized for depoliticizing their work and detaching them from activist actions (Bebbington, 1997; Burlin, 2020).
11. Zikra for Popular Learning primarily relies on volunteers and eschews a membership-based approach. Since 2007 they have been working with marginalized communities in more than 20 localities in Jordan. The organization aims to preserve the indigenous knowledge of marginalized communities by facilitating exchanges where individuals from urban areas visit these communities to learn, with a nominal fee benefiting the marginalized groups. Zikra views these experiences as crucial for revitalizing local knowledge through citizen empowerment, by facilitating access to educational opportunities and resources.
12. The concept of Hara translated as "quarter" is popular in Islamic cities and refers to a cluster of neighboring houses smaller than a neighborhood. Although it lacks formal recognition by municipalities, residents typically

recognize its boundaries. Hara(s) often shares commonalities such as religion, backgrounds, family ties, tribes, or other affiliations.

13. Similar to Zikra, this initiative relies on volunteer members for its projects. Between 2005 and 2022, it operated in five different Hara(s) across the most deprived areas in Amman.
14. According to the project founders, Jordan achieved 200% self-sufficiency in wheat until the late 1960s, with Amman being the prime landscape for rain-fed agriculture.
15. A recent report by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace indicates that 53% of Jordanians are food insecure. For further details, visit https://carnegieendowment.org.
16. Ten local schools actively participated in the project alongside ordinary citizens and farmers. Their involvement, integrated into the educational curriculum, emphasizes the key role of local agriculture in bolstering the nation's economic prosperity and social standing.
17. Coupled with its 8 volunteer members, the initiative involves over 35 volunteers from different Hara(s) and maintains ongoing collaborations with activists, researchers, and small local social associations dedicated to socio-spatial justice.
18. Projects funded by these small grants often prioritize short-term theoretical studies, reports, and guidelines rather than on-site implementations.
19. People used to voluntarily offer their houses, rooftops or their shops for holding the meetings.
20. The project founders initially requested original seeds from the National Seed Bank but were denied.

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