



Urban Management of Informal Commercial Public Spaces

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List of Acronyms

CBD – Center Business District

SV – Street Vendors

GDP – Gross domestic product

PPS – Project for Public Spaces

FEDA –Federation for Economic Development Association

LED – Local Economic Development

MTC – Metro Trading Company

CJP – Central Johannesburg Partnership

NASVI – National Association of Street Vendors in India

CFPPS – Citizen Forum for Protection of Public Spaces

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Abstract

Urban Management is the act of taking sustainable action to reach a certain goal. The core objectives of urban management are seen as understanding dynamic urban processes and developing effective interventions that contribute to the sustainability of urban development.

In many cities all over the world, urban public space has become the place of work of the urban poor. In these places of work, a set of processes arise due to a need for a hierarchy to organize and sustain the urging needs of the urban poor. As chaotic as these processes may seem at first glance, they are planned and are constantly modified according to needs and repeated mistakes. Through some studying and monitoring to these places one can find some concepts from urban management being applied, with further modification and effort, this thesis suggests room for improvement.

This thesis seeks to examine how street vendors use public space for their livelihood. The research is carried out in the Cairo metropolis, a nodal commercial center, with proliferation of street vending activities. The study employs a variety of research methodologies in gathering the data, including personal observation, focus groups, surveys of different stakeholders, and a field survey with a sample of street vendors.

This is an attempt to understand the current state of informal commercial public spaces, the typology of street vendors and compile a series of similar case studies from cities around the world in reflection with the case of Cairo.

Keywords: Urban Public Space; Street Vending; Urban Management; Livelihood Strategy.

Introduction

This thesis is an effort to find an unambiguous understanding of informal market spaces in Cairo that can aid decision-makers, urban designers and planners alike in proposing solutions for a pulsating problem that is currently expanding at such enormous measures. If in fact, the way governments deal with the problem, not nearing any practical solution to at least minimize the speed at which markets are spreading, we might as well decide to study in depth who street vendors are, how they affect the spaces they resort selling in and the reasons behind conflict between street vendors & government planning.

What has recently shed light to this phenomenon in the middle east is the spark of the entire “Arab Spring” in 2011; one street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi, 26, a Tunisian young man who didn't have a college degree, having only reached the baccalaureate level, which is roughly equivalent to high school, set himself on fire in front of the headquarter of state in Sidi Bouzid in protest to the confiscation of his cart



Figure 1- Bouazizi's Poster held during protest in Tunis

which was his only means for a living and all that he'd had for seven years by selling vegetables, after severe negligence to his complaints filed to the state against one police officer who allegedly slapped Bou Azizi in public and told him “dégage” which is French for leave (which later became the call of the spring revolutions calling

presidents to leave) This lead to a Tunisian revolution that lasted for a month until Tunisian President Zein El Abedin fled from the country, meanwhile Bou Azizi died almost 18 days after setting fire to himself.¹

¹ Bouazizi: The Man Who Set Himself and Tunisia on Fire- TIME magazine 2011

The fact that one street vendor led to a humongous wave of change throughout the Middle East speaks volumes of the way these governments deal with public space management and is worth looking into the basis to why street vendors are claiming space in the urban realm. The events of the Arab Spring that took place in 2011 represent an “urban revolution” as Omar Nagaty and Beth Stryker have termed it; they claim that the revolution is seemingly rooted in unjust urban conditions and has been demonstrated in the public spaces of large cities across Egypt. (Nagaty & Stryker, 2013) The implications of unjust urban conditions continue to change the face of streets and neighborhoods where shifting local and national politics are contested on a daily basis.

The sidewalks of Cairo are for much more than transport; they are dedicated for other uses such as being a marketplace, a workshop, a billboard, a parking lot, an extended space for coffee shops or a range of other uses one may witness while commuting on the sidewalks of the city. Cairo visitors who are not accustomed to this constant circus of multidisciplinary events are constantly intrigued and overwhelmed when witnessing tens of pedestrians in Cairo embark on a vibrant obstacle course during their commute in the city center. This thesis focuses on the informal commercial activity in the streets of Cairo.

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I. Overview

In recent years, academic research has shed a spot light on people's use of public space and has demonstrated a unique interest in the role of public spaces in urban life. This thesis acts as a compilation of ideas, case studies, theory and models of how informal commercial² public spaces can be dealt with, specifically in the case of Cairo. The work involved within this thesis is towards a unique approach for these spaces out of a belief that no two commercial public spaces are the same, each has its own problems, advantages and disadvantages that need to be approached individually. Also, one of the pillars of this thesis is the human component; street vendors, buyers, residents, pedestrians among other significant stakeholders.

In order to have a better understanding of our use of public spaces, the substance of urban management must be clearly identified, if its responsibilities are to be accepted or assigned and if they are to be carried out. A principal cause of weak management of urban areas in developing countries may be this lack of awareness of what urban management is what it entails, and who then must do it or might benefit from doing it. (Mattingly, 1995)

II. Research Problem

The research problem is; the threat informal commercial public space poses on the public realm due to poor urban management.



Figure 2-Downtown Cairo Congested with street vendors

² Commercial Public Space: a public space which is used for commercial reasons such as; selling of merchandise on public property.

III. Research purpose and objectives

This thesis aims to look at urban management as one of the most important aspects to ensure that a public market design works on a day-to-day basis.

- Focusing on the importance of urban management and shedding light on how improving this aspect can change the way pedestrians interact with spaces effectively specifically for Egyptian city climate, culture and space usage.
- Analyze current conditions and criticize current management aspects concerning the policies made towards informal commercial public space usage.

IV. Research questions

To which extent could public markets be used as a component in the broader civic agenda in Cairo; in terms of planning & economic added value?

- How Urban Management could help redefine the way government considers public markets in the 21st century?

V. Methodology

The methodology of this research is divided into three main sections; a) Justification, b) Informal Management, and c) Learning from Experience.

- Justification, a validation of the existence of informal commercial public spaces, and what they add to the city (economically, socially, and urban)
- Informal Management defines what urban management is, how informal commercial spaces are managed – how public space is managed, and their justification for maintaining their informality.
- Learning from experience brings forward ideas from similar conditions and from relevant experiences in the city throughout the past few years that can be translated into a means to deal with these spaces.

In order to understand the existing system of sidewalk uses, this thesis analyzes official reports and policies, uses the tools of interviewing and mapping fieldwork done in Cairo with street vendors around the city. The research was based on extensive theoretical background, from urban design science as well as management dimension. Also, the thesis benefited from studies of; human behavior and an empirical study based on analyzing data from observations.

Added to that, the research includes a few examples from similar cities dealing with these commercial spaces “formally” through organized governance which does not affect prices to cater for the marginalized citizens.

Furthermore, this thesis utilized primary data such as conducting a focus group, and a 6-day workshop with a team of undergrad and postgrad architecture & urban design students to examine the urban management of public markets in Cairo; their effects on city neighborhoods, how street vendors use public space for their livelihood, and to creatively seek participatory solutions to common problems these informally managed markets contribute with in the community. The workshop was carried out in the Cairo metropolis, a nodal commercial center. Firstly observing 3 different markets in Cairo, and later on choosing one of the three to further examine and study in terms of; day-to-day activities, movement pathways, critical points. From this process a few conclusions were gathered on the current management system; a) From the status quo of these spaces and b) the governance of these spaces. Added to that, observations were made on a range of different months in order to get a realistic perspective on the use of space and its management. A survey was utilized and photo analysis was used along with videos in order to understand the maneuvering of customers inside informal public markets.

Finally, the research will conclude some theoretical concepts that can be implemented locally and suggesting a few open-ended ideas for future researchers interested to take on a completion to this research.

Chapter 1: Informal Economy in Public Spaces

The first chapter introduces informal economy and seeks to give an overview of the complexity of public space, its use and users. The chapter is divided into two main sections; first section discusses related literature as an overview of the background of the thesis, public space uses with a focus on commercial activities, their history and uses. This is done as a means to understand the physical and human components of urban public space, the key subjects of management. The second section later on tackles the broad lines of certain theories that contribute as a strong factor in the research problem. Initially introduces the first commercial capitals, with a strictly economic and urban stance, and then discussing commerce in the Islamic city.

1.1 Informal Markets

The informal markets phenomenon is like any other phenomenon; widely spread in different parts of the world and increasingly in developing countries. Low employment rates, and high levels of poverty contribute to the high share of informal sector to some economies; such as in India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, where it reaches a percentage of around 40% GDP-according to World Bank. (Alter Chen, 2000)

Selling on the streets informally began to grow in Egypt under Abdel Nasser's rule in the fifties and sixties, and later widespread in the decades that followed, significantly rising after the Jan 25th revolution of 2011. (Qotb, 2013) What remains unchanged throughout the years is severe ignorance of the problem. Random raids are held to prove the government's vigilance, with minimal planning or means for a solution.

Street vendors have long been blamed for causing traffic congestion. Road's congestion is one significant and well-documented problem of the informal sector. According to a study conducted by the World Bank on Cairo Traffic Congestion in 2010, it costs the city 13-14 billion EGP (\$2.1-2.3 billion USD) (Nakat & Herrera, 2010) annually in wasted fuel and time: Bearing in mind that this was before the outburst of street vendors taking the streets which has occurred after the 2011 revolution. To allow traffic to flow more easily, the government constantly attempts to relocate street vendors to side streets or enclosed marketplaces. However, vendors, inevitably gravitate back toward the busiest and most profitable thoroughfares, where some would be willing to pay a fee for the right to do business, which causes it to spread due to widespread poverty, corrupt micro & small scale business environment, licensing complications, and the multiplicity of laws and legislation that hold a tight grip on those projects, the latest of which was the