



Ain Shams University
Faculty of Engineering
Department of Architecture

People and Open Spaces: Psychological Contentment and Landscape Narratives

A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements Of The PhD In Architecture

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STATEMENT

This dissertation is submitted to Ain Shams University, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Architecture for the degree of Ph.D. in Architecture.

The work included in this thesis was carried out by the researcher in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University.

No part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree or a qualification at any other university or institute.

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DEDICATION

Mom & Dad

I can't repay the lessons that you taught when I was small.
Or give you gift for gift the daily treasures I recall . . .
I can't return encouragement and loving words of praise.
In quite the way you did for me through all my childhood days.
But there is one gift that I can give; it's all the love you've earned.
For love is what you always taught . . . And love is what I learned

My Husband

Everyone needs someone;
Who's reliable and true.
Through the moments I've endured;
I'm grateful there was you.

Thanks For Always Being There

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُوا الْعِلْمِ قَالُوا

بِالْقِسْطِ

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ" (١٨)

سورة آل عمران

Abstract

Human use and gratification is a fundamental requirement in creating and preserving successful open spaces. Studies of parks, plazas, promenades and open spaces in general have shown that fulfilling people's needs is a prerequisite for successful public spaces. However, studies around this area are perplexing and argumentative, and need more interpretation; especially what is relevant to people's psychological and spiritual contentment. Yet, too many spaces still suffer from lack of attention to user needs. Many open spaces work well, but others are abandoned, unsafe, or dysfunctional.

Therefore, this thesis aims at understanding and interpreting how people's psychological contentment can be fulfilled in relation to landscape narratives. This main aim has been demonstrated in four parts: Part One is a literature review that explains the essence of the psycho-physical phenomenon – people's psychological needs in relation to landscape narratives, and pertinent theories and speculations. Part Two is a proposal for an interpretation schema that has been applied on the actual contexts in order to understand the phenomenon according to its dichotomy: story-telling (scene explanation), and reality (the lived experience) in the suggested locations. Part Three is the description of the lived experience in specific locales at the Nile waterfront. This phase of the dissertation has been carried out according to: selecting sites for research, then thoroughly studying the proposed phenomenon in two types of open spaces: controlled and free open spaces; and terminated by findings and discussions in terms of the fundamental psychological needs, and the related concept of space ideality. Finally, Part four is general results and recommendations for creating workable and compatible restorative open spaces at the Nile waterfront.

Key Words

- Phenomenology
- Environmental Psychology
- Psychological Needs
- Landscape Narratives
- Concept of space and place

Preface

People prefer engaging with their environments and going outside. Going outside can mean simply going outside one's home, going anywhere that is open to the sky from back gardens and courtyards to urban streets and parks, as well as to more remote countryside and coastal areas. Thus, landscape spaces are essential to people's life, especially those involved in our everyday life, such as squares, plazas, and may be coast lines. Such public and open spaces play a crucial role in fulfilling users' psychological needs in terms of miscellaneous phases of experiences and landscape narratives that vary from concrete formal aesthetic which is concerned with the physical quality of space to the deepest values and meanings that are associated with intimacy and symbolism.

- **Theme**

The relation between people's psychological contentment and landscape narratives is a psycho-physical phenomenon. It is associated with people's psychological needs in relation to the physical attributes of landscape spaces and their potentials. People's relations with open spaces are experiences. People unconsciously seek to fulfill their psychological needs through different facets of experiences. Thus, this phenomenon is dichotomized into: scene and reader, story-telling and reality or more precisely landscape spaces and people experiences.

- **Primary and Secondary Dissertation Questions**

Psychological contentment is a pivotal aspect in open landscape spaces which are incorporated in people's lives. Consequently, deficiency in this aspect causes frustration, which in turn may lead to negative reactions like creating unused spaces, misused spaces,

vandalism and abuse; namely, fulfilling inspirations in a destructive way. On the other hand, prosperous open spaces positively affect people's life in all ages from childhood to maturity; and hence, lead to a vivid community.

Thus, the **primary** research question involved in this dissertation can be stated as follows:

- How can people's psychological satisfaction be met in relation to landscape narratives?

The **secondary** research questions that this study seeks to find answers to are:

- What are the psychological needs associated with open spaces?
- What are the different physical characteristics of open spaces that affect achieving these needs?
- What are the different types of users (in terms of state of grouping, age and income groups)?
- What are the various experiences of landscape narratives through which different types of users can achieve their gratification?

• **Hypothesis**

Actually, the process of creating open spaces is permeated with narratives because it is constituted within a field of formal, psychological, ideological, and theoretical aspects. However, planners and landscape architects and even architects do not pay attention to these critical issues, thinking that they are just theoretical approaches far from practical use.

Creating open spaces should be approached from a narrative point of view, carried out in relation to users, considering the reality, the lived experiences where values become more evident. Designers should create

spaces not design spaces; they should confront design problems by starting from a story, interacting with reality, rather than ending with it. Applying narrative strategy always leads to ideal spaces where psychological contentment is reached.

- **Main Aim and Secondary Objectives**

The principal intention in this dissertation is interpreting the intended psycho-physical phenomenon – the psychological contentment in open spaces. Namely, defining: first, people's psychological needs, and secondly, the physical characteristics of landscape narratives of everyday life that can enhance achieving these needs in terms of various experiences; and hence, suggesting recommendations for the creation of open spaces on the Nile waterfronts as restorative spaces for the Cairene population as a prototype for other areas along the Nile.

Consequently, this principal aim includes subsidiary objectives that are detailed as follows:

1. Defining the essence of the psycho-physical phenomenon; explaining that phenomenology and environmental psychology are rudimentary disciplines in this study.
2. Reviewing the principal theories and speculations that concern the proposed phenomenon.
3. Inducing an interpretation schema, expounding the psychological needs in relation to the concept of ideal space that can be applied in order to decipher the concerned phenomenon.

- **Study Methodology**

This dissertation is a qualitative research in which the phenomenological approach is applied to understand the intended phenomenon. The approach studies the phenomenon in a holistic manner

in terms of story-telling (the physical scene) and reality (the lived experience), by means of:

1. Tactics for gathering data:

- Observation (primary tactic): observation has been performed considering users' patterns and interests in relation to the concept of space and place.
- Semi-structured interviews (subsidiary tactics): the interview involves eight open ended questions that are based on the area of reaching the psychological contentment.

2. Tactics for generating meanings:

- Description: this phase aims to gain an encompassing and integrated overview through a prolonged contact of the contexts under study.
- Analysis: the principal mode of analysis is through words, using data displays (maps, photographs, freehand sketches and tables) and narrative devices. In addition, numerical measures and inferential statistics have been used.
- Interpretation: this phase depends on building logical chains of evidence and making conceptual coherence.