

THE REVITALIZATION OF THE HISTORIC WATERFRONT OF OLD CAIRO

By

Eng / Asmaa Kamal Mohamed AbdEl-Fattah Kamaly

A Thesis Submitted to the
Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University and Brandenburg Technology
University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
In
Urban Design: Revitalization of Historic City Districts

BRANDENBURG TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY - COTTBUS, GERMANY
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, CAIRO UNIVERSITY - GIZA, EGYPT

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2017

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Title of Thesis:
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Key Words:
Historic Waterfront; Revitalization Strategies; Old Cairo; Public Spaces; Urban Connectivity

Summary:
Most of the city's built environment has been configured in relation to the Nile. The River Nile is a salient geographical feature of North Africa. It is the only river which is able to carry part of the drainage of Equatorial Africa through the barren and rainless Sahara to the Mediterranean Sea. Subsequently, the urban composition has an impact on the socioeconomic and cultural urban aspects. Historically and economically the waterfronts are urban features that could connect efficiently with the rest of city. The research aspires to propose some strategies for urban design scale interventions that could enhance the accessibility and connectivity between Old Cairo and its surrounding.

Acknowledgments

I am extremely grateful for the support my family has given me during the whole program and before. There is no doubt that I appreciate all the times they stood by me. A lot of praises have to go to my mother who i personally consider one of the most confident and intelligent human beings I have ever encountered with.

In addition, academically, I would like to recognize the credits of all the team of professors and teaching stuff in the master program and in other precedent academic programs I received. I appreciate the interpretations of my thesis supervisors.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the valuable marginalized ones who bring the best in others, to what it is thought of as good, evil or in-between.

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Nomenclature

URHC: Urban Rehabilitation of Historic Cairo

NOAH: National Organization for Urban Harmony

PPP: Public private partnership

Abstract

The Nile is acknowledged as influential environmental and economic feature that manage to impact the social and political urban environment. Thus, the Nile has molded enormously in the urban mass of Cairo and Egypt throughout its entire history. Historically, Babylon the oldest urban settlement is located on the Nile. The current location of the settlement is in the south of Cairo. Subsequently, there was a sequence of urban centers for numerous eras established nearby the Babylon. Therefore, the URHC project affiliated to UNESCO proposed boundaries for world heritage property and buffer zone to preserve its urban and architectural value. The waterfront of Old Cairo is considered the only historic waterfront that is registered as world heritage property based on the UNESCO principles.

Nevertheless, although the area has a prominent historical value, there is an urban deterioration that is associated by low standards of living and quality of life. The deteriorated current situation has a direct relation to the urban growth of Cairo that was primarily towards the north. The urban expansion concentrated on constructing new settlements while, downgrading the old settlements. Furthermore, there was the gradual natural transformation of the eastern Nile bank border of old Cairo that led to unplanned urban crawls without any management.

The National polices have incorporated Old Cairo for the future 2050 development of Cairo. The development vision of the area contradicts with the sensitive environmental conditions and social justice that created a conflict between authorities and experts in various fields.

The development of the historic area begins with the strategic broad approach of heritage led development. From observation of the urban fabric and site location, there are more detailed urban development approaches of public spaces and accessibility. Waterfronts are vitals features in the surrounding urban grid. The revitalization design has the potential to impact on other levels of intervention.

The preservation of the past heritage begins by shedding light on the needs of the present for the future. The proposal of the revitalization of the waterfront of Old Cairo aspires to design more vibrant and innovative spacesfor the needs of people in the present. The proposal aims to capitalize on the potential urban assets in the light of legislations of the historical area. Correspondingly, it focuses on fostering the vibrant connection between the area and its surrounding urban environment.

The urban possibilities for revitalization of the study area rely on two main strategies. The first is to have an adaptive reuse and urban activities that are coherent with the urban historic and cultural context. The second is to have an overview master plan for the urban connectivity in the area that connects between more than one modes of transportation to make the area more accessible. In addition, the revitalization scheme should take into consideration the maintenance and urban management using some methods like Public Private Partnership to ensure sustainability of the design.

Chapter one: overview

1.1. Introduction

The River Nile was one of the first cognitive maps that interpreted the interaction between ecology and urbanity by molding it into concepts and images. It was one of the earliest cradles in which humans coped with nature, a space in which experiences were organized and translated into ideas, practices, beliefs, and orientations. The Nile, as both the site of early beginnings as well as the space of mysterious diversity, has captured the human imagination since the earliest civilizations have resided along its banks [1].

According to Herodotus, the Nile brought floods, which spoiled crops throughout and caused droughts; the latter were the source of long famines. The Nile also, however, sustained the prosperity of Egypt [2]. Most of the city's built environment has been configured in relation to the Nile. The River Nile is a salient geographical feature of North Africa. It is the only river which is able to carry part of the drainage of Equatorial Africa through the barren and rainless Sahara to the Mediterranean Sea [3]. Subsequently, the urban composition has an impact on the socioeconomic and cultural urban aspects. The city of Cairo has been more than twenty-five centuries in the making. It took the efforts of many unlikely characters over time to turn a small residential cluster on the west bank of the Nile into the mammoth metropolis we know today [2].

Old Cairo neighborhood encompasses Babylon fortress the initial historical urban settlement of Cairo. Afterwards, the development of the modern Cairo emerged the historical nodes of Old Cairo, Fatimid Cairo and Khedive Cairo. The constant shifting of the Nile also determined the locations of the many different settlements that constituted Cairo throughout its history [2]. Thus, the Nile was one of the factors in selecting the Babylon geographical setting. According to the UNESCO report, the historical waterfront of old Cairo encompasses the river banks of Rhoda Island. The connection between the river banks of Rhoda Island and Old Cairo has been involved from the establishment of Babylon. Moreover, the Rhoda Island has one of the historic Nilometers which were placed in various places to measure the Nile levels.

Old Cairo has valuable architectural monuments from various religions and historical phases based on the UNESCO assessment. In Egypt, there is a high difficulty to mobilize from place to another. Moreover, like most of other urban areas, there is a struggle to access the historical and cultural sites. Historical sites have even a great priority to strengthen and create more accessible pathway in order to increase its urban value and exposure.

Therefore based on urban observation of the urban pattern in the area, Old Cairo has a monotonous character waterfront. Even though, it has substantial economic and urban values. There is a deficiency in the urban design of the area and the networks between its