



Cairo University



Brandenburg  
University of Technology  
Cottbus - Senftenberg

# **RE-DISCOVERING MINET EL-BASSAL HISTORICAL INDUSTRIAL AREA**

By

**Rana Adel Mohamed Abdel Magid Zein**

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

in

**Urban Design: Revitalization of Historic City Districts**

FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, CAIRO UNIVERSITY  
GIZA, EGYPT  
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Under the Supervision of

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Under the Supervision of

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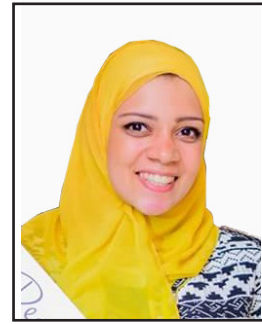
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**Title of Thesis:**

Re-discovering Minet el-Bassal historical industrial area

**Key Words:**

Post-industrial Heritage; Art-based urban interventions; Creative Industry; Circular Economy; Urban Catalyst.

**Summary:**

Industrial heritage is an authentic part of Egypt's heritage that is often overlooked and forgotten. During the era of the viceroy (Mohamed Ali), Egypt was a pioneer in developing large scale industries especially cotton and textile industry. An industry that was once the milestone of local economy and sustained a big sector of the market labor. However, this industry collapsed by the early 90s owing to the neo-liberalization policies causing a huge set back in local economy. Consequently, many industrial areas fell into disuse. This study focuses on Minet el-Bassal area in Alexandria which is one of those withstanding industrial remnants that is now facing deliberate deterioration and trials to erase its history. The study reveals the serious challenges facing the area and highlights its hidden potentials.

By the same token, this research investigates the possibility of reviving such areas using the creative and artistic vernacular practices in the city. Furthermore, it aims to introduce a workable model to transform Minet el-Bassal into a hub for creative circular industries through small-scale urban interventions. The proposed model cherishes the site's productive memory and responds to the environmental and economic challenges given the limited resources. Moreover, it engages the vivid artistic scene of Alexandria in a genuine urban development process by giving it a productive tincture.

“Great cities are built in layers: New buildings can help reinforce older urban forms and old buildings can be re-imagined to serve new uses. It is the juxtaposition of old and new that gives cities their interesting corners, their urban surprises, their texture.”  
(The urbanist, 2013)

## **Disclaimer**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work and that no part of it has been submitted for a degree qualification at any other university or institute.

I further declare that I have appropriately acknowledged all sources used and have cited them in the references section.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to first thank my family for their endless support and their belief in me throughout my life. I would also like to thank my friends that were always there for me and my colleagues who made this journey pleasant and unforgettable.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to those who believe in the power of art to make a difference in our cities.



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## Abstract

Industrial heritage is a significant part of Egypt's heritage that is often overlooked and forgotten. During the era of the viceroy (Mohamed Ali), Egypt was a pioneering country in developing large scale industries especially cotton and textile industry. An industry that was once the milestone of local economy and sustained a big sector of the market labor. However, this industry collapsed by the early 90s owing to the neo-liberal policies causing a huge set back in local economy. Coupled with rapid transformations in urban dynamics, many industrial areas fell into disuse and became incapable of sustaining their future.

Minet el-Bassal or "the former cotton district" of Alexandria is one of those with-standing industrial remnants that has made a great contribution to the Egyptian economy but now is facing deliberate attempts to erase its history and serious urban challenges. This study addresses the different economic, social and environmental complexities of this area that was once part of the city's edge, then became part of its main core. Moreover, it reveals its multi-dimensional historic layers that are usually ignored and overlooked owing to the rapid urban development; in addition it tries to establish new connections with them.

Such areas have great opportunities for development; therefore there have been several large-scale initiatives over the last few years to revitalize Minet el-Bassal area but none of them came to reality. This study highlights the gaps in these trials that did not offer realistic workable solutions to the challenges of excessive deterioration, lack of economic base, social diversity and marginalization. The study also questions the feasibility of projects being implemented right now in the area especially filling el-Mahmoudya canal project that has catastrophic implications as it deprives the area from its only green lung and erases an important part of the city's history and urban memory.

Given this complex situation, this research investigates the possibility of reviving such derelict areas using the creative and artistic vernacular practices in the city. Moreover, it aims to introduce a workable model to transform Minet el-Bassal into a productive hub for creative circular industries especially sustainable textile industries; a model that cherishes a memory of production by creating an economic engine for the area and simultaneously, responds to the current environmental and economic challenges given the limited resources.

The proposed revitalization strategy highlights the critical role art can play in developing the city. It engages the vivid artistic scene of Alexandria in an honest urban development process by giving it a productive tincture in addition to its role in bringing socio-cultural diversity to Minet el-Bassal and opening it more to the Alexandrian society. The strategy employs art to create a network of small-scale urban interventions that can achieve tangible results in short time and relate to the site's different dimensions; history, industry and nature. The network act as a stimulator and incubator for development; reviving local textile industries, improving technical education quality, bringing nature into the consciousness of production and providing more jobs and opportunities.