

Cairo: The Organized Loss of Identity

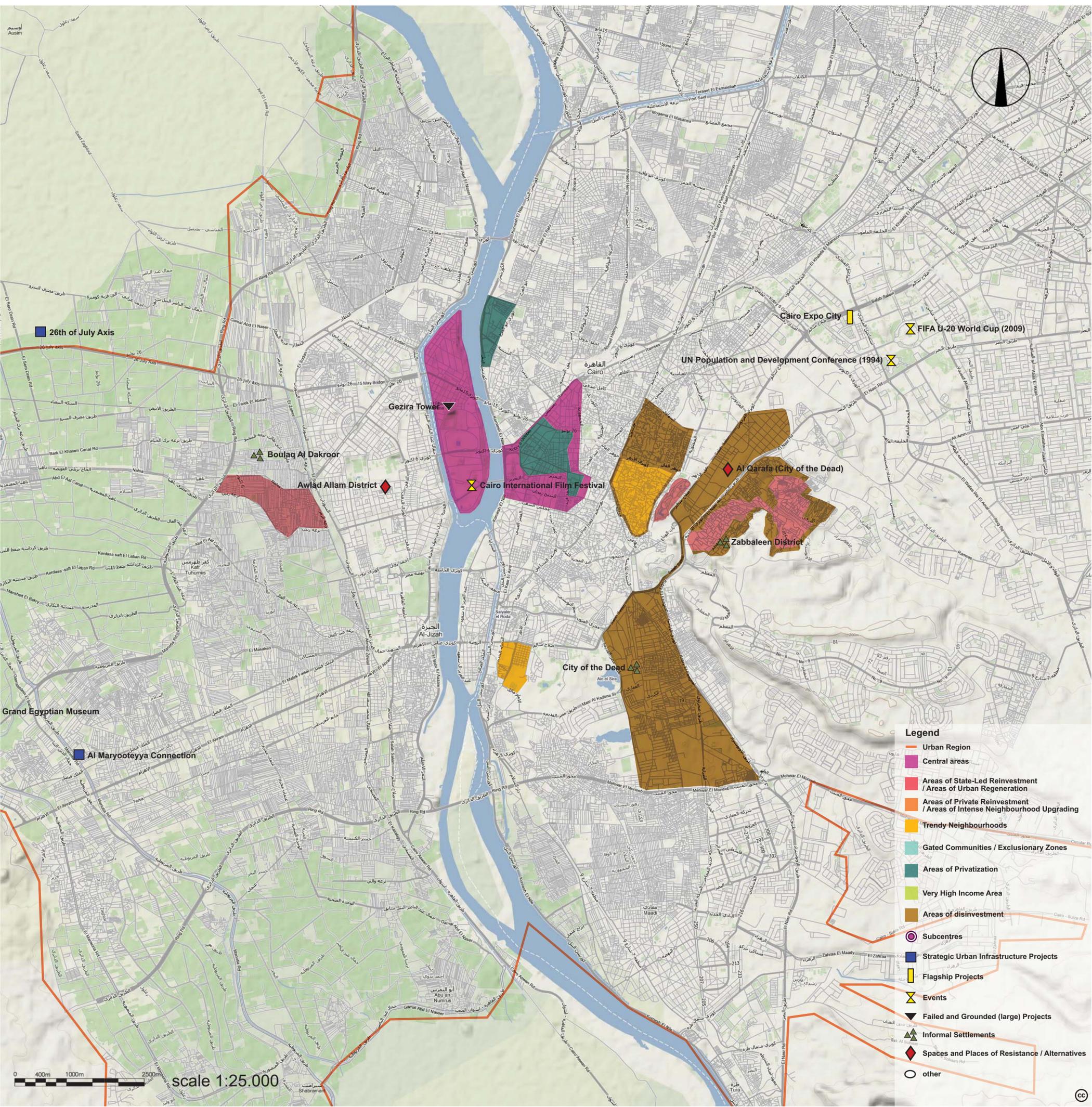
between heritage and touristic globalization

Cairo or "Al-Qahira" is a world known historic city founded in the 10th century. Islamic Cairo, the core of the ancient city, has the highest concentration of historical sites per square kilometre in the entire world (500 registered historic monuments within an area of three square kilometres). Unfortunately, most of these ancient and stunning beautiful districts are in miserable conditions, being abandoned since decades. The real interest in the preservation of historic Cairo arose after the damages caused to a lot of monuments by the 1992 earthquake. However, this interest has always been for touristic purposes, since tourism represents an important income factor for the city and the second one for Egypt after Suez Canal. Because of radical changes in the socialist era in the 50s and 60s, the main economic and political life and, accordingly, the major job opportunities related either to industry or secondary and tertiary sectors, are concentrated in the city. In the recent past this has led to a massive migration from the rural areas of people aiming to improve their life. Consequently, in the late 70s, the government started a policy called "colonization of the desert" through the construction of new towns, such as the 6th of October and Nasser City, to attract this population. Since

then until today many new towns have been built, offering to the Cairenes incentives for their "relocation" in these satellite towns. But, even though today many of these areas offer housing, shopping facilities and services, and many business activities have relocated here, the truth is that most of housing projects are unaffordable for the majority of the Egyptian population. This policy instead of decreasing the pressure on the city; enlarged the urban region to include these new towns, originating the Greater Cairo Region and contributing to increase the massive volume of car traffic and pollution along the city and the ring road. Nowadays Cairo is the largest city in the country and one of the biggest megalopolis of the world, hosting almost a half of the Egyptian urban population. According to the 2006 census the population in the region is more than 16 millions, even though local experts think they might be about 20 millions. A view from the satellite reveals both a variety of settlement patterns by different periods of development and a wide spread urbanization in all directions. This relative failure of the government's policies combined with the exponential population increase generated more than 30 slums and informal settlements in the inner town and pushed low income people to occupy the historical abandoned districts and all kinds of private or public free land. The result is that to-

day informal settlements represent approximately 70% of Cairo dwellings. Accordingly, the Egyptian government recently commissioned a new Strategic Plan for the Greater Cairo: Cairo 2050. Following its guidelines, most of these informal settlements will disappear using the "Bulldozer" policy, relocating the inhabitants and deleting important pieces of city's history and social patterns. Moreover many "Mega Projects", some of them designed by famous "Archistars" like Zaha Hadid, will transform Cairo in the direction of what local experts call "Dubaiization", following the policy of a progressive privatization of spaces and services, especially in tourism facilities and real estate market, and without any concerns for what is representing Cairo's identity, pushing it in the direction of a real globalized touristic destination. In this sense Cairo is a perfect lens to read the main changes in Egyptian society, culture and lifestyle and especially of the main Egyptian characters: a contrast between pride of history and local culture and the progressive loss of identity, intangible heritage and proper cultural roots.

Egypt	1'000'000Km2	* Inhabitants	77'420'000
Urban Region	400Km2	* Inhabitants	19'500'000



Urban Regeneration: Al-Azhar Park

Purpose	a step towards the increase of the amount of green spaces per inhabitant in Cairo
Dimensions	30 hectares
Projets costs	30 Million \$
Investors	Aga Khan Trust for Culture
Final master plan	Sites International



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Located at the eastern edge of historic Cairo, the birth of Al-Azhar Park project date to 1984, when the Aga Khan Award for Architecture organized a conference on the subject of "The Expanding Metropolis: Coping with the Urban Growth of Cairo". It was on the occasion of the conference that His Highness the Aga Khan announced his decision to finance the creation of a park for the citizens of Cairo.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

The significance of this project is mainly in the dedication of this relatively huge area in the center of the city with a very high land value to an open public space that will improve the quality of life of mainly a marginalized population that has lived in the neighboring areas where some of them are officially considered informal ones. The project has been long considered a best practice and a sample to follow in historic cities rehabilitation processes. But now this positive sample is used as a justification to make similar plans in totally different areas as the historic cemeteries of Cairo, with totally different purposes and approaches.



Stakeholders and their interests

There might be three main stakeholders in this project. First, the Aga Khan Trust for culture starts to contribute in the rehabilitation of Historic Cairo through this prestigious project in the form of a gift to the Egyptian government. Secondly, the ministry of culture cares mainly about the restoration activities that took place within the project especially for the ancient Ayyubid Wall. Finally, for Cairo Governorate the project is a very good bargain through the transformation of a hill of debris and rubble to a prestigious Park without paying a lot of money.

Deals

Although bureaucracy delayed the realization of the project couple of decades, it was not too hard for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture to convince the public authorities to construct this Project. Politically, the AKTC is quite powerful in Egypt. Additionally, the government did not pay anything for the construction, except extending some infrastructure to the site. Finally, the area, dedicated to debris and rubble, was of zero population which means that there was not social cost. Instead of, from a polluted dump, it created a green and leisure area for the whole population.

Impacts

After a long time of considering public parks a recreational destination for lower social classes, Al-Azhar Park has reintroduced the model of parks that can attract also the upper social classes especially since it offers reduced tickets for inhabitants from some close poor areas. However, services offered within the Park are quite expensive for lower and middle classes. Furthermore, the relative success of the Park in attracting upper social classes to the historic area might be one of the reasons that have attracted the attention of both the public authorities and the private investors to replicate the experience in the other side of Salah Salem Street, in the cemeteries area, to create what will be called, according to Vision 2050, Al-Azhar Grand Parks: the destruction of an important heritage of the city and the eviction of thousands living people.

Alternative: City of the Dead or Al Qarafa

Purpose	the most ancient necropolis of the city offering a shelter to hundreds thousands homeless people
Dimensions	about 6 Km2
Projets costs	-
Investors	Real estate Companies would like to put their hands on the land in which cemeteries lie.
Architects	-



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

The City of the Dead, the largest and most ancient cemetery of Cairo, since the 9th century hosted many "inhabitants", especially after the 1992 earthquake that affected severely a large part of the historic Cairo creating a huge number of homeless. Within the most recent plan, "Cairo 2050", the cemetery would be converted into gardens and parks over the next few years. Until now a big resistance has been made either by the inhabitants or by the graves owner families (since the land is state property but the graves belong to the families of buried people) and by local experts, avoiding that.



Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream

Starting from the good practise of Al-Azhar Park, the GOPP (General Organization for Physical Planning) is "hiding" the real purpose of the Cairo 2050 Vision for the City of the Dead behind the idea of increasing the green areas of Cairo. Nevertheless this time the Parks will replace the historic cemetery where a number that varies between 600,000 and 800,000 people live! They will replace a rich pathway of alternative informal economies, community spirit, history and identity of the entire Cairo to let speculate private investors in "tourism facilities". Even though this is not yet a realized project, it shows very well contradictions and lack of democracy in Cairo's further development plans.

Stakeholders and their interests

While officials from Egypt's ministry of housing say the plan would answer the capital's gaping need for green space being a benefit for the entire City, critics of the project contend that the city's plan will deprive them of hundreds of thousands of their living spaces among the dead. Thus on one hand we have the interest of the inhabitants threatened to be relocated, and the tombs owner families. On the other hand there are the interests of big companies in joining the implementation of the project.

Deals

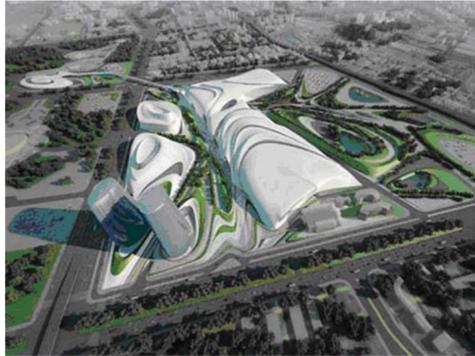
Deals within the Vision Cairo 2050 in general and accordingly the part concerning the city of the dead are full of political dimensions. The increasing role of private investors in the government and the ruling party increase the deviation in the target population of this Vision. Additionally it increases the consideration of the Vision as a political campaign for the next presidential elections in 2011.

Impacts

The proposal to convert Al Qarafa into a park of which the entire Cairo will benefit, is only a cover-up for the true plans of the businessman since creating parks is always popular in Cairo. The truth is that the story concerns just construction and real estate and that the government doesn't realize how many people are living in the area, and that hundred thousands of people are going to be forced from their homes under the guise of development. It is irking many, who see the project as an attempt to displace people in favour of increasing tourism. The impact on the life of the actual inhabitants will be overwhelming, as much as the lack of memory and heritage for the entire City.

Flagship Project: Cairo Expo City

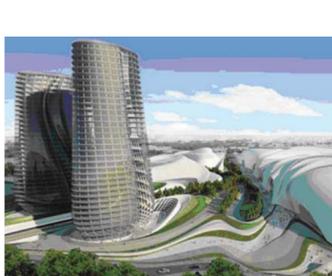
Purpose	Create an attractive Fair Centre following international standards, with mixed-use areas
Dimensions	over 450.000 square metres
Projets costs	Foreseen cost of \$ 600 million as a first stage on an area of 110,000 square meters.
Investors	(General Organization of International Exhibitions and Fairs) GOIEF Cairo, Private Investors, Real Estate Corp
Architects	Zaha Hadid, Buro Happold



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Among the many infrastructure, real estate and tourism projects scheduled or underway across Cairo, a new exhibition and conference complex is going to replace the old Nasr City Fair Grounds. Therefore two towers, containing offices and a shopping centre will be built. Even though the project has not yet been built, we have chosen it as emblematic of a certain development policy in Cairo and of a general economic policy in Egypt as well.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream



The CEO of the GOIEF said that the project has great significance for Cairo since the current exhibition halls do not meet the international standards. This new project, symbol of the triumph of global trade, shows the political class ambition of making Cairo one of world's top cities attracting huge foreign capitals. In fact, as happened with many other representative buildings and services needing improvement, the political choice is always to rebuild them as new "shiny" project designed by Big firms, using them as foreign investments attractors.

Stakeholders and their interests

Officially the government's aim with this project is to continue the "path of progress", sharing the benefits among all income levels. They say that the amount of Egyptians entering middle class incomes will rise with new job opportunities created, especially for graduates and trainees in new and sustainable technologies. The truth is the real beneficiaries will be the local middle-high and high classes, the main local building companies and several foreign investors, attracted by the financial incentives and specific development policies.

Deals

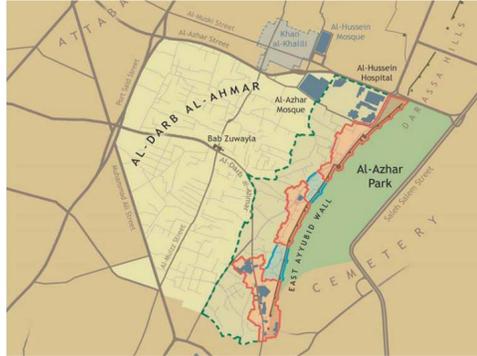
The complex will be built through deals based on public-private partnerships. The GOIEF offered tenders for investors in the Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) projects for the hotel, the shopping mall and the offices. Revenue shared from these three projects will build the exhibition centre. Different kinds of economic incentives are offered to foreign investors, including tax breaks, reduced tariffs on imported inputs, and guarantees against confiscation. In order to favour these big projects the government is currently working on a detailed program for fast tracking and streamlining bureaucratic procedures for investments, with the aim of upgrading the business environment and introducing further deregulation both in finance and in planning procedures and projects.

Impacts

The project intends to make a modern international exhibition and convention centre in Egypt to attract foreign exhibitions and conventions. As a matter of fact Egypt, through projects as Expo City, is trying to rank as Best Destination for foreign direct investment in North Africa. Due to recent reforms, the process of property purchase in Egypt has been streamlined, facilitating property purchase for overseas buyers and focusing investors' attention on Egypt as a prime investment location and the next property and tourism hotspot. The impact of CEC in urban development is mostly related to increase Cairo foreign capitals attraction capacity, but moreover to draw a new formal identity of the city as new middle-east capital city of contemporary architecture..

Trendy Neighbourhood: Al-Darb Al-Ahmar

Purpose	rehabilitation of one of the richest districts of Historic Cairo
Dimensions	about 1.3 km2
Strategy	Historic Cities Support Programme
Investors	Aga Khan Trust for Culture AKTC
Management	Al-Darb Al-Ahmar Community Development Company



Description / Reason for this choice / Background / context

Al-Darb al-Ahmar is an area that has witnessed more than 900 years of continued urban development; and features an exceptionally rich concentration of Islamic monuments. It is home to a closely-knit community of around 100,000 residents, many of whom have lived there for decades. It's located south of the prestigious al-Azhar Mosque and the popular Khan al-Khalili bazaar. It is a vital and socially cohesive residential district with many artisans and small enterprises; however, the district has suffered from insufficient public interest, accordingly inadequate infrastructure and lack of community services which have attracted the AKTC to start this community based development project.

Significance for New Metropolitan Mainstream



The project of rehabilitation of Al-Darb Al-Ahmar district might be considered a turning point in the philosophy of preserving the urban heritage in Egypt. This consideration is referred to the first introduction of an integrated vision for this scale of projects that merges physical, social and economic aspects. Additionally, the strong participation of the local community is another aspect for the significance of this project. However, it might represent a model for the deviation in target population in development projects where the starting goal is different than the achieved one.

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Stakeholders and their interests

Stakeholders within this project are almost the same in Al-Azhar Park. First, the Aga Khan Trust for culture through the Historic Cities Support Programme considers this project a major one for the rehabilitation of all historic Cairo. Secondly, the ministry of Culture considers mainly the restoration of the big number of historic buildings. Thirdly, for the governorate the project is one of the urban development projects that are taking place in the city without any specific interest. Finally, since the local community is the main beneficiary within this project, participation is increasing in the different activities.

Deals

In 1999, the Aga Khan Foundation signed a protocol with the ministry of culture that delivers the upper hand in dealing with monuments in the area to Aga Khan Cultural Services Egypt. Since then, different deals have taken place with different governmental and non governmental bodies to insure the sustainability of this integrated vision of the project. Fortunately, till the moment the slow pace of the project impedes the dedication of the private investments to the area.

Impacts

This project has successfully had the missing confidence of the local community which is clear in the increasing participation in the different programs for social and economic development. Additionally, many international organizations have involved in different programs such as the GTZ and CIDA which assures some stability for the project in the near future. Finally, in 2004, a private company was founded as an initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network to manage the project. However, the absence of a strong state role in this project raises some inquiries about the capability of the official administration in dealing with the project after the Aga Khan leaves. Additionally, the success of the project, although going in slow pace, and the governmental plans to attract private investments in Historic Cairo in general have grabbed the attention of some regional famous brands, banks and architecture consultants to consider the area for future expansion plans. Accordingly the area has started to be gentrified.

Synthesis over all four projects and outlook

The four selected samples clearly show a complicated system of factors and contradictions that have characterized Urban Development in Cairo. However it might be important to shed light on two facts:

- First, Cairo Mega Region is administratively divided into five Governorates (Cairo, Giza, Qalubia, Helwan and the 6th of October). Even though the declared Government intention is to promote decentralization, the responsibilities within central and local authorities are widely conflicted and overlapped. Additionally, the strong presence of a sort of competitive attitude between the local governorates and the central one, and the existence of "higher interests" that often needs a central intervention, especially in the field of development plans and policies, subtract decision power from the local Governorates and centralizing the decision system in the hands of GOPP (as has been done with the Strategic Plan "Cairo 2050").

Accordingly, this kind of highly centralized system often drops some main tasks.

- Secondly, Egypt, and Cairo in particular, have been hit less than other countries and cities of the world in the recent economic crisis. The reaction to the crisis was the improvement of incentives for investing in Egypt. This has led to be heralded as the best destination for FDI in North Africa and second best in the whole continent. Accordingly, an incredible increase of speculations in real estate market, influenced development policies in order to favor private sector, a practice that is going to affect the city identity and richness, without really improving the quality of life of the poorer population.

According to these two facts of highly centralized system and privately led development strategies, the following points could be better understood.

- First, a distinction between "formal" and "informal" is not so clear in Cairo. Informal settlements have aroused in both rural peripheral areas and inner historical ones. Additionally, in recently planned districts we can see 3-4 storeys of illegal super-elevations on the top of the buildings. The answers to the City problems have always been faced as "policies of emergency", often deceptive, to compensate the shortcomings stratified and structured ones.

- Secondly, the relationship between past and present, order and disorder, heritage and identity is not so neatly defined. More than often, under the definition of "urban development", big private interests delete spaces of memory, difference and democracy, as is going to happen with the City of the Dead: an important part of urban tangible and intangible heritage that is going to disappear instead of being considered a resource.

- Thirdly, the weak role of the state and lack of community based regeneration projects have attracted local and international organizations, trying to replace the role of the local government. But beside the positive effects of these kinds of projects (as Al Darb Al Ahmar or Al Azhar Park) the truth is that these experiences are not internalized by the local administrative and political system.

- Finally, The NMM in Cairo shows while the city plans to compete with other world capitals, aiming to change completely its image to attract more and more capitals for investing in shiny projects (as Zaha Hadid's Cairo Expo City) social gaps are becoming wider and deeper. Today most part of the city problems are delivered to private sector ignoring social costs.