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 widespread 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 today informal settlements represent approximately 70% of Cairo dwellings. Accordingly, the Egyptian government recently commissioned a new Strategic Plan for the Greater 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 “Dubalization”, 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.

Cairo: The Organized Loss of Identity
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 factors:

- First, Cairo Mega Region is administratively divided into five Governors (Cairo, Giza, Qalubia, Helwan and the 6th of October). Even though the declared Sudden Government intention is to promote decentralization, the responsibilities within central and local authorities are widely conflicted and overlapping. Additionally, the strong presence of a competitive attitude between the local governments and the central one, and the existence of ‘higher interests’ that often need a central intervention, especially in the field of development plans and policies, subtract decision power from the local Governorates and the governmental plans to attract private investments in the area. The complex will be built through deals based on public-private partnership. The GOFF offered tenders for investors in the Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) projects for the city of the dead: an important part of urban development, big private interests delete spaces of public and governmental bodies to insure the sustainability of this integrated urban project. Fortunately, in 1999, the Aga Khan Foundation signed a protocol with the Ministry of Construction, the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP), the Egyptian Real Estate Development Authority, the City of the Dead and the Aga Khan Development Network to manage the project.

- Secondly, Egypt, and Cairo in particular, have been hit less than other countries and cities in the world by recent economic crisis. The reaction to the crisis was the improvement of incentives for investing in Egypt. This has led to be hailed as the best destination for FDI in North Africa and second best in the whole continent. Ac-

The City of the Dead, the largest and most ancient cemetery of Cairo, since the 9th century hosted many ‘inhabitants’, especially after the 1952 earthquakes that affected severely a large part of the City, including the City of the Dead. This catastrophe created a huge number of homeless....

The project to convert Al Qarafa into a park of which the purpose of the Cairo 2050 Vision for the City of Dead behind the City of the Dead is increasing in the different activities. Additionally, the strong participation of the local community is the main beneficiary in this project; participation is increasing in the different activities.

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- The City of the Dead, the largest and most ancient cemetery of Cairo, since the 9th century hosted many ‘inhabitants’, especially after the 1952 earthquakes that affected severely a large part of the City, including the City of the Dead. This catastrophe created a huge number of homeless residents, who had to be sheltered in temporary shelters. In 2005, the Aga Khan announced his decision to finance the creation of a park for the citizens of Cairo.

- Secondly, the relationship between past and present, order and disorder, heritage and identity is not so neat-ably, the success of the project, although going in slow pace, has attracted the AKTC to start this community based development, aiming to change the identity of this city from being a moribund capital to a lively one. The success of these projects (as Al Darb Al Ahmar or Al Azhar Park) has been recognized by the local community and other stakeholders as a symbol of the new image of Cairo. A closely-knit community of around 100,000 residents, many of whom are students, have a lively sense of place and of belonging. The project to convert Al Qarafa into a park of which the purpose of the Cairo 2050 Vision for the City of Dead behind the City of the Dead is increasing in the different activities. Additionally, the strong participation of the local community is the main beneficiary in this project; participation is increasing in the different activities.