

“Conservation of Architectural Heritage, CAH” 23-27 November 2015, Luxor

Egyptian Historical Parks, Authenticity vs. Change in Cairo’s Cultural Landscapes

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Abstract

As a historically intense country, Egypt’s built environment has always been the focus of plentiful urban research. However, the natural component in the urban fabric of Egyptian cities has been undermined and understudied in between all the numerous ideas and data. In a historical city like Cairo, layers of history are illustrated in its parks and gardens. Left unearthed and neglected, these vital spaces are subject to negative change and decay under the pressure of land use demands, among various other challenges. Many of Cairo’s parks and gardens date back to the 19th and 20th century, containing endless gestures from the cultural essence of this time era in their design. This paper discusses ten public parks and gardens in Cairo founded in the 19th and 20th centuries, and survive to our present day (whether completely or partially). Viewing the initial design and development of these parks in comparison with their current state is rather intriguing to investigate. These historical parks and gardens are worthy of identification for preservation. With resourceful and directed management, these spaces can dramatically change the view of Cairo as a suffocating dense urban tissue, to a more perforated and engaging urban experience for its community.

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Peer-review under responsibility of IEREK, International experts for Research Enrichment and Knowledge Exchange

Keywords: Historical Gardens, Historical Parks, Cultural Landscapes, Cairo, Originality and Change.

1. Introduction

Historical parks and gardens are a nonnegotiable part of a city’s memory, culture, history and future. They are widely considered to be urban as well as architectural jewels worthy of recognition and conservation. However, in a historically rich city like Cairo, such a fact does not come highly recommended, and the city’s chronicles lying in its

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gardens and parks are deteriorating and fading away under pressures such as low maintenance, absence of a strategic plan for conservation, and time. This is uncompensated by any efforts from either the community or the municipality to save such historical places, yet it's worth mentioning that there are several attempts -though small-scaled- to raise awareness and mobilize the community towards the issue. Even though the dispute of appropriate management of historical landscapes is a vital issue pursued globally with numerous efforts with an inclusive vision for the protection and conservation of not just buildings, but rather whole settings (Lipský and Romportl 2007), this issue remains poorly tackled in Egypt, especially considering gardens and parks. This research focuses on shedding the light on the most important historically valuable gardens and parks in Cairo, established in the 19th and 20th centuries, and how the origination of these gardens versus their current status, passing by all the transitions and alterations. It is quite interesting to investigate and identify these parks and gardens as growing (or rather aging) entities that are affected and mostly pressured by urban growth of the city around them.

Nomenclature

CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics
CLR	Cultural Landscape Report
QoL	Quality of Life

2. CAIRO - Contextual Analysis

As the capital city of Egypt, Cairo the home of seventeen million people and has an approximate portion of 25% of Egypt's population (Nippon Koei Co. Ltd and Katahira & Engineers International 2008), it is also the economic engine of Egypt and the largest city in both Egypt and the whole continent of Africa (Sims 2012). The layers of history carried within each and every archaic part of Cairo have been proven manifold by nearly all researchers and pioneers in the fields of Architecture, Archaeology, Egyptology and other relevant disciplines. As described by Nezar AlSayyad, "the city of Cairo has been more than twenty-five centuries in the making" (AlSayyad 2011). This adds to its contemporary importance to the Egyptian community in numerous ways. These reasons and many more accentuate choosing Cairo for this research that represents all that research is trying to implement.

Cairo is a continuously expanding city. For this reason, it is vital to identify a boundary and scope of study on an urban scale for the sake of this research. Foreseeably, this scope includes the historical part of the city, which indicates the area where all the historical parks and gardens belong. As well as this, this scope should be strictly speaking "formal" in terms of legislative and city approved part of the city. According to David Sims, the urban context of Cairo until 1950 as a whole was considered completely formal, including the old city center, which extended over a thousand years, with its own rules and legislative frameworks, which qualifies as firmly formal (Sims 2012). The scope of study is referenced from Sims' image and division of Cairo city. "Central Greater Cairo", as described by Sims, is the proper border of the old and formal part of Cairo building up until 1950. This area includes all Cairo governorate, Giza city (part of Giza governorate), and Shubra Al-Khayma city (part of Qalyubiya governorate). These areas not only represent the older part of the city, but also the main zone of metropolitan agglomeration in terms of the urban sector in greater Cairo according to the 2006 census of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) (Sims 2012).

3. Overview of Historical Parks and Gardens in Cairo

To assemble a coherent and comprehensive inventory of all urban green spaces classified as historically significant cultural landscapes in Cairo, there was a process of reviewing and identifying these historical spaces, taking into consideration various indicators and resources in order to make sure that the list is reliable and inclusive of all parks in this category. Some parks were more "famous" than others in the sense of being mentioned (and sometimes studied)

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