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# New Cairo's Urban Dynamics: Redefining Gentrification as a Main Actor of Social Resilience

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## Abstract

This paper introduces a new attempt to redefine and re-understand the term of gentrification and its main role in social resilience. Social resilience is a must in order to achieve urban sustainability. However, New Cairo's urban dynamics implicate a new form of "gentrification", that could be described differently (commercial, social or urban) and controversially (positive or negative). This new ongoing process will threat eventually its "social resilience" by creating social polarization and loss of identity. In order to apprehend this new redefinition of gentrification in relation to social resilience, we will focus on the changes that are taking place in New Cairo's real estate market and urbanization trends as well as their reverberation on both the urban and social sustainability.

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## 1. Introduction

Gentrification is an urban process that consists of changing neighborhoods by replacing their original inhabitants by richer ones. This process has changed the urban faces of several districts in many countries over the past fifty

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years. This urban dynamic process is usually accompanied by several and various changes: demographic, cultural and physical. These changes could be considered as positive or negative depending on people's perspective. Nevertheless, they will eventually affect social sustainability, thus social resilience, of the influenced area.

In our opinion this process can happen differently, or maybe it evolved to take place in a different way. We believe that New Cairo's urban dynamics implicate a different form of gentrification; we prefer to call it "pre-urban gentrification". Basically, it is the same urban process but implemented in a different way based on the urban policies and dynamics of the new settlements. In order to seize all the dimensions of the "Pre- Urban Gentrification Process", we choose to scrutinize the way it operates in the new settlement of New Cairo.

### 1.1. On New Cairo's Emergence

New Cairo is a new settlement created, in the nineties, to the east of Cairo by the Egyptian government in the hope of finding solutions for the old city's problems. Getting out of the city to invade the desert has been always approached as a solution for Cairo's unsolved dilemmas. Creating Heliopolis, for instance, marked the beginning of the twentieth century with an audacious experience of concurring the eastern desert. This courageous creation, that was repeated afterwards, was as well in the hope of demographically evacuating the capital and escaping from its endless problems (Mahmoud, 2010). Sixty years later and for the same reason, Nasr city was implanted in the remaining desert between Heliopolis and Cairo. During this era Cairo was still incapable of controlling neither its demographic growth nor its surface expansion. The latter was fed by governmental investments in the economic/public housing sector especially under a socialist regime during Naser's presidency. As a result of the uncontrolled rapid demographic increase, whether natural or as result from rural migration, the capital has wildly expanded extensively in many direction. This expansion wasn't necessarily planned. On the one hand, new planned districts emerged from the desert like in the case of Nasr City or Mohandessin (developed on agriculture land). On the other hand, many informal settlements were formed to absorb the remaining population who missed the opportunities offered by the government. Under Sadat's regime, governmental authorities couldn't come out with other solutions but to repeat the same experience. So, creating new cities and new settlements in the desert was highly considered. Nevertheless, the eighties was marked by a slowdown in the demographic growth, whereas informal settlement kept uncontrollably expanding. This expansion was basically nourished by governmental incapability to face the demand of public housing sector. In the nineties, the Egyptian capital entered a new era, a turning point in the development of new urban communities, especially with Mubarak's well anchored regime that promoted for capitalist developers and private sector investments.



Figure 1: Urban Evolution on New Cairo's Master Plans between 1993 and present (Author)

In 1993, the nucleus of new Cairo was already implanted in the eastern desert, represented by the First, Third and Fifth Settlements. These three settlements were created by the government -even before envisaging creating New Cairo- to accommodate poor families, homeless people after the 1992 earthquake and youth. Basically, it was another governmental investment in the economic/public housing sector. Simultaneously, investors and developers were highly attracted by these new deserted zones; they were motivated by the existence of new infrastructure and road networks. Then the idea of creating a whole new settlement in the east was established, especially with the existence of an emerging similar example in the west, represented by the Six of October City with all its extensions at the time.

In the mid nineties, New Cairo turned from an idea into a master plan. The government decided to include the

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