



The nuances of the supplied urban fabric in the MENA Region: Evidence from Alexandria, Egypt

Mohamed R. Ibrahim^{a,*}, Houshmand E. Masoumi^b

^a Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering, University College London (UCL), London, UK

^b Center for Technology and Society, Technische Universität Berlin, Berlin, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Neighborhood characteristics
Walkability
Urban measures of the MENA region
Residential location choice
Neighborhoods of alexandria
Egypt
Jobs-housing balance
Transport catchment areas

ABSTRACT

There are different urban qualities that can define the traditional cities in the MENA region, such as high densities, walkability, and mixed use-residential led development. However, in the last decades when old cities merged with newer developments, under planning codes or informally, different urban qualities can be observed. Indeed, within the rapid urbanization and the limited budgets of less developed countries, the supply of utopian neighborhoods becomes an obsolete solution. Thus, it equivocates which basic urban qualities are imperative to be ensured in the land use policies that can make new cities more inhabitable. Hence, this paper attempts to empirically identify the essential urban measures in the case of Alexandria in Egypt. Descriptive and numerical analyses, using *T*-test method, were conducted to analyze the urban fabric of eight selected neighborhoods that belong to two different spatial groups; old districts group and new urban development group. The outcomes reveal that, with limited urban planning and development budget, the most influential concepts that may be set as priorities are walkability, neighborhood job opportunities, and availability of public transport infrastructures related to different modes. Also, the research recommends a new housing-transport policy for new cities. This may be significant for policy making by municipalities and other bodies related to planning and implementation in Egypt or the neighboring countries.

1. Introduction

Neighborhood design has gained a particular interest since the beginning of the 20th century, from being a basic planning unit in the fabric of a city to become a prototype where sustainability can be measured and achieved (Gouda and Masoumi, 2017; Rohe, 2009; Sharifi, 2016). Moreover, ensuring the right to the city in neighborhoods development has become an approach for different scholars in the past years (Jabareen, 2014). Different theories and models have been conducted to provide a livable neighborhood that can provide adequate living conditions and social justice for locals (Sharifi, 2016). Moving from Howard's idea and the garden city movement to Clarence Perry's idea, enhancing the physical characteristics of the neighborhood was the rife scheme. Pedestrianization was intensely addressed in their design proposals. Amenities and commercial activities were accessible by walking trips that are less than 400 m (Banister, 2012; Perry, 1929; Sharifi, 2016). Within urbanization process and the exponential urban growth, developing lands for housing with adequate services and good planning measures is still limited. Nevertheless, understanding the complexity of cities to guide development through effective planning

remains ambivalent. On the contrary, the new housing developments under burgeoning demand are built in the high-speed record in the fringes of large cities where open spaces and common areas are either undermined or neglected in quality (Gehl, 2010). These add more challenges for governments to plan, develop and monitor urban development at the national and local levels (Chua and Deguchi, 2008; Yakob et al., 2012).

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it is imperative to differentiate between the trends of development in oil producing countries and those still struggling with their economic development. Countries that are affiliated with Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) tends to invest more in urban infrastructure to extend and upgrade their cities, whereas the remaining countries lack the ability to influence and monitor the urbanization process (Pahl-Weber et al., 2013a, 2013b). However, what remains unequivocal is that urban development still an ambiguous process in most of the Middle Eastern countries (Plumb et al., 2011; Rizzo, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2011, 2012). Arab countries are characterized by rapidly urbanized growth in core cities with a traditional lifestyle for city dwellers whereas a noticeable gap between 'urbanization' and 'urbanism' is observed. Subjectively,

* Corresponding author at: Chadwick Building, Dept Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT, UK.
E-mail addresses: mibrahim2006@me.com, mohamed.ibrahim.17@ucl.ac.uk (M.R. Ibrahim).

The architecture of Arab cities has severely declined since the 18th century as a result of three different processes; an urban development based on 'copy and paste' from western societies, development based on technology, or due to the rapid urbanization with the absence of regulations (Abdelsalam and Rihan, 2013).

Egypt in comparison to other Arab countries reserves a larger portion of the informal development, in which it is exponentially expanding. In contrast, the informal development in urban areas of Yemen is very limited. Thus, it is simply due to the absence of many laws that regulate urban developments such as lot subdivision. Nevertheless, building licenses are obligatory, however, it can be compensated after the development with a few fees. Furthermore, 23% of the development in Morocco is based on informal development. While in cases of Tunisia and Jordan, informal development is less severe than the cases of Egypt and Syria. Nevertheless, the government has applied strategies to alleviate the causes of the problem and provide habitable areas for the local inhabitants (Sims, 2013). Not only the cities in Arab countries of the MENA region are defined by confined urban characteristics and challenges, but also, the non-Arabic-speaking countries share similar conditions. In fact, the urban integration was the seminal characteristic of the post-Islamic Iranian cities so-called traditional cities (Sharifi and Murayama, 2013). They were distinguished from the contemporary ones by being compact and mixed-use urban patterns. Nonetheless, a well-defined structure of pedestrianized paths along with safety measures, and local architecture characteristics were other elements considered during the design process. Consequently, the various urban components have functioned side to side to achieve patterns of high accessibility, housing development, employment opportunities, privacy and equal right access to services and amenities within the neighborhood (Sharifi and Murayama, 2013).

The majority of the urban population in Egypt is inclined to select between three residential locations; either in the inner districts of old cities that are intensively populated, social housing in new cities that are limited, or flexibly expand in the informal settlements. Subsequently, different lifestyles are provided based on the type of the choice made for housing locations (Ibrahim, 2017b; Shehayeb, 2009). The Egyptian new cities were a solution, which attempted to mobilize a legion of the population out of the existing old cities and respond to the gross housing demand (Sims, 2015). However, housing prices reached a level that limited the access of the middle and low income. As a result, informal settlements become an alternative for housing that dramatically exploited a larger portion of agricultural land around large urban agglomeration in Egypt (El Kafrawy, 2012; El-Batran and Arandel, 1998; Taher, 1997). On the contrary, "*Luxurious desert cities have been built to house Cairo's elite, with villas fetching millions of pounds in gated compounds*" (CAHF, 2014, p. 77), giving no choice to urban poor except living informally and built their houses based on their assets. In fact, 40% of those new cities are still waiting for dwellers, thus, it represents a higher vacancy rate than the national average (Ibrahim and Masoumi, 2016; World Bank, 2008). Even for the social housing units, vacancies were high (Sims, 2015). In contrast, the informal settlement or Ash-wai'at –literally random or unplanned- has dominated the housing market in Egypt (Ibrahim, 2017b).

Measuring the success of the urban form has been studied among different scholars with a wide spectrum of spatial and socioeconomic attributes (Echenique et al., 2012; Hansen, 1959; Hipp et al., 2017; Song and Knaap, 2004). The main focus of this study is on a number of the physical characteristics of neighborhoods that may influence the livability and quality of life of residents in the Egyptian context. These attributes include walkability, housing and employment (jobs-housing-balance and housing typology), and accessibility to public transportation and neighborhood facilities.

Walkability is like many other terms that differ according to the different perceptions and viewpoints. It can be linked with the terms; accessibility, suitability, or proximity (Gilderbloom et al., 2015). However, Ewing and Cervero (2010) strengthened the definition of

walkability with the indicators and factors of accessibility that include; land uses, population characteristics and travel destinations. Thus, it affects the decision of people to walk or not to walk in a certain neighborhood. There are few studies that show the influence of walkability in buying a house in certain location. However, a wide range of real estate professional indicated walkability as a main pleasant factor (Gilderbloom et al., 2015). Also, Manaugh and El-Geneidy (2010) studied the walking behavior of different households according to different independent factors such as their needs and desires, their willingness to walk a certain distance, type of destination, and the quality of the walking path. They have explained how the walking behaviors, to places of daily needs within the neighborhood, differ from one social class to another, i.e. low-income families tend to walk more than middle or higher-class families to meet their daily needs. Moreover, young families tend to walk less than larger families (Manaugh and El-Geneidy, 2010). However, it remains ambiguous whether walkability is a must, or a choice, in designing neighborhoods.

People are more likely to reside in different neighborhood characteristics that match their needs. In simple words, those who like walking are more likely to select neighborhoods of high pedestrian freedom while those who prefer to commute via public transportation would likely choose areas that are transit-oriented (Boarnet and Crane, 2001). However, it is still debatable which type of urban measures should be ensured in the housing policies when supplying new neighborhoods. Within the limited economic development in most countries of the MENA region along with the indigence to rapid housing solutions, providing an ideal neighborhood became an obsolete solution. Understanding the basic urban measures that can reflect the needs of the majority of people living in a certain context could be a precedent for providing better neighborhoods that can attract more inhabitants to live within their boundaries. In relation with such inability of the countries of the region to analyze the urban growth trends to fulfill good planning practice, this paper attempts to provide a synthesis of priorities for neighborhood development based on the physical characteristics of the existing neighborhoods. In contrast, this study assumes that the built environment has a crucial role in the promotion of sustainable mobility and in general livability. The quality of the existing built environments in Egypt is very much based on the type of neighborhoods and urban fabrics. Whether they are informal or formal, or they are planned or non-planned, they can produce different qualities. Hence, this paper aims to identify the desirable urban measures that reflect the basic need of the local inhabitants in the case of Alexandria, Egypt. It attempts to explain the significant differences between the supplied urban fabric in the old and new fabric of Alexandria. Last, it aims to assist planners and policy-makers with recommendations that can be considered when supplying new neighborhoods in Egypt.

2. Methodology

Hypothetically, the physical characteristics of the neighborhoods in new cities to a higher degree do not match with the needs of households in Egypt in term of the provided services, and mobility aspects are related to the availability of public transportation and the walking conditions. As a result, it affects the decision of the inhabitants to live in neighborhoods supplied in new cities, instead, they prefer to live in the older districts of the old cities. The paper attempts to respond to the hypothesis by comparing the characteristics of the urban fabric of old and new urban areas in Egypt, in order to affirm the significant urban measures that are either provided or undermined in one of the two groups.

The research methodology relied on descriptive and numerical analysis. It has amassed comparative analysis of eight selected neighborhoods in Alexandria, Egypt, categorized into two different spatial groups. The first group comprises four neighborhoods located in the old districts of Alexandria, whereas the second group represents four neighborhoods located in a new city so-called New Borg El-Arab (See

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6546548>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6546548>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)