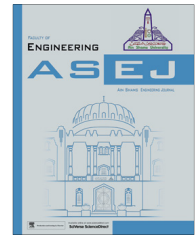




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ARCHITECTURAL ENGINEERING

The post-revolutionary effect on the urban harmony of Cairo's built environment in relation to the collective memory of the population: Urban context of the “after revolution” between contravention and elaboration

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Received 16 December 2014; revised 24 August 2015; accepted 27 October 2015

KEYWORDS

Collective;
Harmony;
Memory;
Metamorphosis;
Urban space

Abstract The Egyptian urban space is in continuous metamorphoses since the Revolution of January 2011. This transformation is being manifested by various phenomena. On the one hand, the feeling of patriotism arose from Al Tahrir square to change the Egyptian's soul. People start to express their feeling by methods, considered as new to the Egyptian community. On the other hand, another part of the society started to make profit from this revolution and the non-application of the laws.

This complex impact of Egyptian Revolution of 2011 on the Cairene urban space – with all its manifestation – has been preoccupying us; especially when it comes to its effect on the urban harmony of the built environment of the city and its relation to the urban collective memory of the population.

This research will focus on the analysis of various phenomena appeared after the Egyptian Revolution.

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1. Introduction

The Egyptian Revolution was a catalyst for bringing on surface the best and the worst reactions of the Egyptian People. On the one hand, the sleeping artist inside each Egyptian is awakened to register and reflect the political situation on the walls of the city of Cairo. Graffiti has appeared through all districts of the capital to express feeling of sorrow, joy, disappointment, solidarity or even to send messages to the ruler.

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Peer review under responsibility of Ain Shams University.



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2015.10.007>

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Please cite this article in press as: Abd Elrahman AS, Mahmoud RA, The post-revolutionary effect on the urban harmony of Cairo's built environment in relation to the collective memory of the population: Urban context of the “after revolution” between contravention and elaboration, Ain Shams Eng J (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.asej.2015.10.007>

On the other hand, since the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, Cairo's urban space is subjected to an ongoing process of spatial transformation. This dynamic state of the streets left citizens with an experience of an urban amnesia. The urban space is not recognizable anymore. These phenomena are manifested by different multiple actions: eradication of different buildings in most districts, adding fences to guarantee a minimal level of security, transforming certain streets into a location for commercial installations and street vendors and changing the activity of many buildings.

Many districts of the Egyptian capital showed same symptoms: Nasr City, Heliopolis, Downtown and even New Cairo. We believe that this post-revolutionary impact deeply affects both the harmony of the Cairene urban space and the urban collective memory of the population. "Urban changes – the demolition of a home, for example – inevitably affect the habits of a few people, perplexing and troubling them." [1].

The objective of this paper was to trace and scrutinize the changes that took place between the two events (11th of Jan and 30th of June) in different areas of Cairo. It is an attempt in order to understand the effect of these changes on both the harmony of the urban space and the collective memory of the inhabitants of these areas. In our research we depended mainly on the observation of the transformed spaces as well as in-depth surveys with some users to see whether they are approving these changes or rejecting them.

2. Literature review

The term of "collective memory" appeared in different context in the second half of the nineteen century. It refers to shared information in the memory of a group of people using the same space. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945), philosophers and sociologists, were the most famous persons who analyzed and developed this concept. The latter believed that every phase lived by a group of people in a certain space is usually translated by spatial images, recalled only by this group. And this is why "*Spatial Images play so important a role in the collective memory.*" [2].

According to Maurice Halbwachs in his book the collective memory, "*La Mémoire Collective*, 1950, 2nd edition in 1997", the change of our physical surrounding highly affects the image of our permanence and stability, thus our mental equilibrium [3]. It is exactly what is happening in Cairo's post-revolutionary urban space. What Cairo's urban space experiences nowadays is like giving up its character or forcing its users to leave their urban personality behind. People are very susceptible to suffer from the metamorphoses of their living space more than any other serious event. The user of a certain space feels secured and stable as long as buildings and street remain the same. "*As long as the locations of a building within a district and the district within a city haven't changed as any tree, rock or hill, any urban group wouldn't feel the change in their city. Paris and Rome, for example, [...] the great majority may well be more sensitive to a certain street being torn up, or a certain building or home being razed, than to the gravest national, political or religious events.*" [2].

Halbwachs also stresses on the importance of the stability of the spatial surrounding, during a period of time, for a group of people to remain united even after spreading in different places. "*Although one may think otherwise, the reason members*

of a group remain united, even after scattering and finding nothing in their new physical surroundings to recall the home they have left, is that they think of the old home and its layout." [3].

If we move to Aldo Rossi, the great architect in his book "The Architecture of a City, 1981" [4], he also recognizes that amid the process of urban evolution, monuments and landmarks are the fixed points that help citizens to be familiar with their city. These monuments are the points of reference in the inhabitants' collective memory. Rossi means by monuments not only urban or architectural heritage from ancient eras, but also every building that people use to take as a landmark or a reference in their urban space. For example: we believe that the massive demolition of old buildings that took place in Heliopolis after the revolution, for example, will put the Heliopolitains to the risk of being psychologically lost in their living space. We think that this kind of transformation is the most dangerous one amid the rest of metamorphosis process, which occurred through different actions in the Cairene urban space, after the Revolution of 2011.

3. Research methodology

The research methods, employed in this document, consist of literature review concerning the topic of collective memory, urban character and street arts like graffiti. The literature review in this research is combined with in-depth interviews (around 300) with both Cairenes who suffer from the metamorphoses of their living space and those who appreciate the appearance of street art (because it really expresses their feeling toward what happens in the country). However, our observation and photography of the transformation of the Cairene urban space after the Egyptian revolution of 2011 – and comparing our findings to what we have in our collective memory or some old photos – remain our main source of documents. During our research process, we observed and documented all kind of transformation – regardless of whether we consider it negative or positive – that took place in the Cairene urban space in different districts.

Concerning the phenomena of "demolition and reconstruction", Interviews were mainly held with shop owners in Heliopolis, some of the old residents that use to live there before the revolution and some of the newcomers in the new towers. We also depended on some interviews already done in the literature concerning the street art (Graffiti) [5]. Moreover, concerning the phenomena of "installation of fences for security", some of the inhabitants of New Cairo – those who felt anxious because of theft actions and thugs and the sense of insecurity during and after the revolution – provided us with some information that was very useful to us. We also interviewed some of the "street vendors" in down town Cairo and People who live in the surrounding areas where these vendors were multiplied.

4. Urban memory, urban harmony

Let aside any considerations for comfort or aesthetics, we believe that each individual cumulates an urban memory that belongs to a certain place during an era of his life. This urban memory – depending mainly on a mixture of spatial images – allows this individual to live and react with certain stability in this space. These spatial images – regardless how beautiful, luxurious or in real harmony, from a professional point of

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