

# **BEHAVIORAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ARGUMENTS CONCERNING THE NILE WATER EDGE (THE CASE STUDY OF C. CAIRO W. BANK)**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The Nile's west edge in Zamalik is considered one of the very few attempts that took and are taking place to develop the Nile edge. With the benefit of public users in mind, the authority focused on developing this side. Much to the delight of both; the public<sup>1</sup> and the NRI and the dismay of both; the EEAA and residents of Zamalik, a relatively new promenade now extends on the Nile's west edge of Zamalik.

The conflict between both arguments raised a number of questions concerning use as well as design of water edges. Such questions focus on Cairenes' environmental awareness<sup>2</sup>, to what extent should design discourage or encourage the negative or positive behavior of outdoor participants and to what extent did the Nile's west edge in Zamalik succeeded in hindering the negative behavior.

Accordingly, this paper reviews arguments regarding the characteristics of spaces of the Nile's west-edge of Zamalik and the main concepts used to upgrade the area. Moreover the reflected behavior of participants at this setting will be addressed.

## **KEYWORDS:**

**Water edge, Nile quay, governmental policies, environmental, behavioral and attitudinal information.**

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<sup>1</sup>Public users represent frequent users of the area

<sup>2</sup>The Andalusia Garden located directly adjacent to the new area has remained closed to the public for the past ten years

## **INTRODUCTION:**

There is undeniable magic in water. Water as a natural resource holds various meanings especially within the Egyptian context. The River Nile is the main natural resource in Egypt and because of it, Egypt owes its civilization. On the riverbank grew one of the early civilizations in the whole world. Moreover, religiously rivers are generally mentioned as an important feature of heaven. Accordingly, the Nile is one of the most preferable natural resources that attract Egyptians to participate outdoor recreation.

The River Nile as one of many other rivers has gone through a cycle of changes. Nowadays, the use of the River Nile is unlimited covering various needs most of all the recreational. Accordingly, the Nile edge is considered a public property and hence should be designed to fulfil public needs. Despite its being a public property it is noticed that in Cairo, as in other towns, there is a remarkable tendency to block off the access to water edges with various assets<sup>1</sup>. Although this attitude has slightly changed lately and in very few cases, still many water edges are either blocked or out of the reach of public free use.

## **PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE:**

The quay by the west edge of the Nile at Zamalik is the subject of this paper. The west Nile bank of Zamalik is considered one of the most attracting places in Cairo because of its location and centrality. Moreover, the existence of some important public buildings as Elborg, the Opera House, Andalusia Garden in addition to its wide quay, all and others attract participants to this valuable place. Both the bank and the quay of this area are subject to passive and active recreation participation. Because of its importance and influence, care is required in the designation of this Niles related area. An upgrading attitude took place by the quay. For fear of careless behavior of participants the quay is shut down. The locking of open spaces turned to be a governmental policy and solution as a reflection to users' lack of environmental awareness. The question that poses itself is, could this be the right and only solution?

## **THE METHOD**

As the paper aims to tackle a number of issues concerning the use of the water related area and Cairenes environmental awareness, three kinds of information were collected in the study area. The three kinds are summarized as; environmental information (formal and visual characteristics of the area), behavioral information (what users do), and attitudinal information; (what users, residents and authority say and think). The information will be collected through; observation and open ended interviews.

Observation is to cover behavioral and environmental aspects, while attitudinal information is to be gathered through interviews with both users and residents. Interviews are to focus on; users choice for choosing the study area, is it their familiarity and knowledge of the place, previous experience, space related activities, accessibility, lack of similar home related spaces or is other factors they would specify? Observation is more oriented to type of activities whether they are water and site related recreations or not in addition to the quay's environmental facilities.

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<sup>1</sup>Green houses, casinos and military properties are examples of blocking off constructions and uses.

## **LOOKING BACKWORDS**

More than ten years ago Andalusia Garden was, and still is, one of the most preferable open spaces for Cairenes. It is considered one of the rich horticultural gardens in Cairo. Due to its misuse, Cairo government decided to close the garden to the public as a means of preserving what considered a precious public area<sup>1</sup>. Despite the preservation of the garden, the adjacent promenade by the Nile and the quay, both were subject to intensive use.

Observation of the area at that time revealed that both passive and active recreation used to take place there, especially at vacations and weekends. Facilities by the quay were no more than, peddlers and some motor boats, while the landscape features were summarized in some scattered messy canopy and intermediate trees, in addition to lush plant nurseries and kiosks. A number of randomly accumulated buildings and casinos were occupying the promenade between the quay and the main street obstructing the Nile view. Despite the previous poor facilities, the area attracted Cairenes from various parts and districts of Cairo.

Interviews at the same period showed that Cairenes were attracted to the west edge, in spite of its poor condition and the prevention of public use of the garden for their need of open spaces related to the Nile and the lack of such spaces.

## **PRESENTLY**

For the benefit of public use, the area has gone under a number of changes, in order to be upgraded. The recent upgrading of this valuable open space has started nearly four years ago<sup>2</sup> by a landscaped garden stretching from Quasr El Nil Bridge to 15 May Bridge, known as El Riada project<sup>3</sup>. The project is to be constructed in two phases; phase one stretch from Quasr El Nil Bridge to the Andalusia Garden for about 300m. Phase two extends the promenade another 1.2 km. towards 15 May Bridge. The first phase was officially opened to public for few days in the summer of 1997, and then it was closed till nowadays except for some occasions as the Feast in May 1999. The project with its two phases was expected to be officially opened by the summer of 1999.

Observation and open-ended interviews took place with participants at the quay at two main periods:

- 1) Before the project was closed; participants were interviewed and the area's environmental facilities were observed.
- 2) After the project was closed, additional observations and interviews took place to obtain information about participants' attitude and behavior.

### Before the Project was Closed

Observations that took place during the periods when the quay was opened to the public focused on the physical environmental features, Cairenes environmental awareness and activities participated. The new project's design objectives are to provide more and better designed space for the public to fulfil outdoor water related recreation in addition to reduce the incidents of vandalism and littering in the quay.

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<sup>1</sup>The Andalusia Garden has remained closed by authority since 1987.

<sup>2</sup>Sponsored and implemented by ministry of public works and water resources.

<sup>3</sup> The name of El Riada project expresses an attitude for a pilot project that reflects a beginning for the upgrading of the Nile edge.

#### Environmental information:

The new quay is much wider than the old one because stones have been placed 20 m. into the Nile and filled with sand to accommodate the new quay. The quay together with the promenade form an area with three levels for outdoor activities, **Fig (1)**, except for the second phase which is only two levels, **Fig. (2)**. The ground is constructed of tiles and strips of grass, selected and managed trees are planted. Stones are used in slopes and vertical walls. Other landscape elements are arranged, as unsheltered benches, bins and lights to illuminate the area for night use.

Public toilets are constructed by the promenade detached to the second phase, although a small fee is required for use.<sup>1</sup> A number of floating restaurants are landed and pedestrian bridges for entrance are constructed above the lower quay, so that restaurant's visitors can enter without being interrupted by the crowds occupying the lower quay. Motor boats are landed to the south beside Quasar El Nile Bridge, and considered a source of water pollution. No spaces for picnicking or proper designed areas for selling foods and drinks were perceived. The quay as a whole is better landscaped than before.

Although it was noticed that there is a lack of shaded areas, proper docks, bins and benches. The latter are arranged in a very limited area in the middle, although edges are more preferable to use, (Jel1987) and (Marcus 1990).

#### Behavioral information:

Participants were engaged in a variety of outdoor activities. Water related activities as fishing and boating were more participated specially at evenings. Due to the noticed shortage of benches participants were sitting on the ground engaged in passive recreation, **Fig. (3)**.

Fig. (1), the first phase of the project.

Fig. (2), the second phase of the project

Fig. (3), participants sitting on the ground

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<sup>1</sup> A fee of 25 PT is charged for the use of public toilets.

Cairenes unawareness of the environment was remarkably noticed although it was relatively lesser than before. The project is polluted by users through sound (playing records, noise and shouting were heard), visual (peddlers and the abundance of litter left by participants) vandalism (visual trampled grass, uprooted plants) and other negative behavior were perceived (swimming in the Nile without proper swimming customs). However, despite the previous negative behavior users seem to be fully and contently involved in their activities.

#### Attitudinal information:

Interviews showed users general satisfaction and delight towards the project. Few complained from vandalism, poor quality of both entrance and stairs<sup>1</sup>, lack of facilities, in addition to contaminated food from peddlers and both visual and sound pollution, **Fig. (4)**. On the other hand, Zamalik residents were noticeably disappointment. Their frustration is not only based on environmental aspects but also on their rejection of bringing non-residents to the heart of Zamalik. Residents of the study area were extremely concerned about their personal safety. They seem to feel that the quay is their territorial right. However, ministry of public works and water resources was also disappointed for the misuse of the project.

Fig. (4), peddlers on the quay.

In sum the project represents a delight to users and specially the frequent ones, although few expressed their disapproval of some negative behavior. Both residents of Zamalik and ministry of public works and water resources were disappointed for the mess, pollution and remaining liter after the use of the quay. As a result of such disappointment, the authority followed the governmental policy commonly used and closed the project.

#### After the Project was Closed:

As a result of locking and preserving the project, users occupied the adjacent promenade to the north. Moreover, in order to reduce the density of use, motor boats were moved to the opposite side of the Nile to minimize attracting people to the quay.

#### Environmental information:

The lower quay is closed for public and gates were locked. More floating restaurants and high pedestrian bridges are constructed. As a result, the project is well managed and officially under control but deserted, while the promenade is densely used, despite its lack of landscape elements as benches. The promenade is no more than a narrow asphalt road with two side pavements. The fence of the project is used in the promenade as benches. Very few peddlers were observed. A teaching driving authorized office is noticed. Security officers are observing the promenade for prohibited behavior.

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<sup>1</sup>When the project was opened no proper stairs were constructed to transmit people to the lower quay. The main entrance was locked and users were directed to use an improper entrance.

**Behavioral information:**

Due to the closing of the project and the quay, the only recreation behavior use was observed on the higher promenade. Accordingly, water related activities vanished. Passive recreation, specially sitting, was dominant and rejected behavior was noticed although lesser. Still, visual and sound pollution resulted from users exists.

**Attitudinal information:**

Users were disappointed for closing the quay. The relocation of motor boats to the other side of the Nile was considered one of the most reasons of disappointment. Wonders about the opening of the quay and doubts were striking their thoughts. Some argue that there is no use in preserving the quay if no Cairenes were allowed to use it. To whom such place was upgraded was one of the major questions which were asked. On the other side residents of Zamalik, represented by the association for promotion of services in Zamalik, expressed their gratitude for closing the quay. Residents suggested using the project to introduce participants to short lectures on environmental awareness. The authority, represented by ministry of public works and water resources, was relieved for the closing of the project, instead of trying to educate the public about using it properly.

**ANALYSIS:**

The collected information from both the interview and observation is summarized and annualized through the following tables:

The environmental information

Table (1), modifying the project

In addition to the environmental information from the observation, participants commented on the project’s elements through the interview. **Table (1)**, summarizes their opinion modifying the project. It is noticed that subjects of modification are related to the negative behavior. For example nearly thirds of the interviewers asked for more seats and sitting on the ground was intensively observed. Moreover, visual pollution was a result of the existence of peddlers due to the lack of kiosks and places for selling drinks.

Subject of modification	%
More seats	32
Place to buy soft drinks	24
Kiosks for food	18
Picnic spots	3
Fishing tools	8
Proper dock	12
Places for children to play	3
	100

Although peddlers were spread on the quay it was observed that buying foods and drinks was one of the most participated activities. Respondents also voiced a concern over dirtiness. From the table above nearly thirds of the respondents asked for friendly environmental kiosks. In identifying the observed behavior and environment by the needed subjects for modification according to participants’ point of view, environmental facilities are to be more studied.

The behavioral information

Table (2), reasons for selecting the quay

**Table (2)** shows that the reason of selecting the quay was devoted to the participated activities and the reason of selecting the area of study. Water related activities were by far the common reason for visiting the quay. This suggests paying attention to other areas of the Nile. The access to the area through public transportation is preferred followed by both being it a special area, adjacent to important public buildings, and used to the area for frequent visitors.

Reasons of participation	%
A very special location	12
Safe from traffic	8
Don't know	4
An open space by the Nile	10
Used to it	12
Transportation	14
Water related activities	40
	100

The attitudinal information:

Table (3), reasons of satisfaction and dissatisfaction

	participants	residents	authority
satisfaction	water related activities wide quay easy access	a designed organized area	1. upgrading the area
dissatisfaction	lack of seats and bins moving the m. boats lack of security peddlers	vandalism non residents environmental misuse	pollution environmental misuse

**Table (3)** deals with aspects of satisfaction and dissatisfaction from the opinion of participants, residents of Zamalik and the authority. The attitudinal information lead to the following:

From the participants' point of view the type of available activities, the wide quay and the easy access to the site through public transportation are the main reasons of satisfaction. Other reasons as safety and location were not mentioned. On the other hand, complains from deficiency of seats in terms of location, material and quality were expressed. A very remarkable dissatisfaction was caused from the re-location of motor boats to the opposite side. Lack of security and dirtiness of peddlers was also revealed.

According to residents of Zamalik, the project changed the area to be more organized but they expressed their strong dissatisfaction as a result to, bringing other types of people, referring to non-residents and their lack of environmental awareness.

Ministry of public works and water resources was dissatisfied for the vandalism of some landscape elements and the existence of broken glass and liter trash after using the project. Despite the lack of liter bins, suitable benches and proper kiosks noticed through observation and interview, the authority was disappointed for the misuse of the project.

## **EXPLORING THE FUTURE**

The EEAA is still searching for the proper way to run and maintain the project specially after penetrating participants' behavior towards the project when it was opened. Till such decision takes place, it seems that keeping the quay closed and off limits is much easier than educating participants their awareness of the environment.

The close of such place and the postponement of the official opening for public raised a number of statements concerning Cairenes awareness of the environment and whether the place should be closed for the lack of awareness or should the design change participants' behavior towards the environment to the positive. Whether this part of the Nile owned by the residents of the area or is it a public owned space. The need to encourage Cairenes to recreate in other open spaces by the Nile through improving such areas and create attracting facilities as spreading motor boats and building some docks with fishing facilities. The demand of designing other spaces and quays with attracting facilities.

Hopefully the previous information and arguments have suggested many questions that need exploring:

What are the limits for publics' right to enjoy the Nile?

Should the open spaces influence the environmental education of users?

Who are we allocating and preserving open spaces for?

Should open spaces be designed to be closed and not used? Or are these spaces designed for the sake of the coming generation?

Should we hope that as children grow older they might gradually learn to cope with the environmental circumferences surrounding them?

The answer of the above questions lies in considering two study approaches; the environmental education of users and the design capabilities of the space. Both should be simultaneously regarded aiming for their integration. The first approach would improve users behavior, while the second will promote development of design that aims to facilitate a better use and organization of space. Unless both approaches are considered, more open spaces would be preserved.

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NRI: Nile Research Institute

EEAA: Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency