RECREATIONAL SPACES IN CAIRO THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

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ABSTRACT:

The research focuses on two main aspects of recreation within Cairo, the physical and behavioral. Both will be explored through time and space within the arche, cine and tele-world. Moreover, the study pinpoints the impact of rapid industrial and technical changes on the recreational attitude of Cairenes. This will be achieved through a physical analysis and an administered questionnaire.

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INTRODUCTION:

No doubt that the nature and style of life have changed remarkably in the last two decades. As a result of the industrial and information revolution changes are rapidly taking place at a very enormous speed. What is the role of architects and planners on facing such changes? What is the impact of these revolutions on human life? How have spaces been affected by the industrial and technical influence? What is now people's attitude towards these changes? Are a number of raised questions that demand exploration and investigation.

FOCUS OF STUDY:

Recreation as an important aspect of life underwent an enormous change due to the impact of both revolutions.   Such change affected space and time of recreation.   The paper is directed to the Cairenes' society and its primary purpose is investigating the impact of both revolutions on Cairenes' recreational spaces, their behaviour and attitude. This will be identified in the Cairenes context, through the three phases of the worlds, the arche, the cine and the tele. The old city was selected to represent the arche-citta, while its southwest extension stands for the cine-citta where the modernization of Cairo took place. In addition, the area as a whole contains shrunk and scattered recreation places representing the tele-citta. The study focuses on recreation within Cairo, no out-trips and long vacations are mentioned.

METHOD:

Investigating the industrial and informational impact on recreation within the Cairenes' context will be achieved through a physical analysis. Apart from such analysis, data will be collected using a self-

administered questionnaire focusing on the three forms of worlds, which aids in answering the main question of which is the preferable choice of Cairenes? (behaviorally) To answer such question a survey will take place through asking college students with ages ranging from 16 to 27 years old as they symbolize the main sector who represent the present and who will shape the future. Moreover, Cairenes at such age have the freedom to select the place of recreation and the type of activities they like to participate independently.   Moreover, they are grouped into three age groups; 16-19 as they represent the teens, 20-24 representing the start of maturity and finally 24-27 whom represent the final stages of high education. A questionnaire focusing on two main points was administered to 196 undergraduate student. The first point is devoted to the recreational space, while the second is more directed to the activity itself. Each space or activity reflects a type of citta and students were accordingly directed to rank the alternatives they prefer to engage to through their leisure time.

Following is the outcome of the questionnaire and the physical analysis of the three worlds. The analysis will focus on two main aspects; the location and description of the three phases in addition to the recreational characteristics of each period. On the other hand, the questionnaire is to deduce Cairenes' behavioral attitude towards the three phases in terms of recreation.

1. Arche-Citta; Recreation in Cairo: "OLD IS GOLD"

No separation between recreation and other aspects of life all are interlocked. Recreation is part of the daily life and Cairenes aim was to live a contented life.
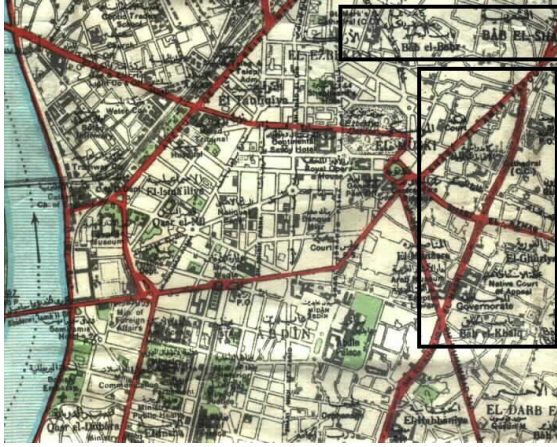
Fig. (1), part of the location of the old Cairo (the arche)

1.1. Location and description:

The foundation of Cairo is dated to AD969, when Ikhshid city of Fustat was conquered by the Fatimid general Jawhar on behalf of the then Caliph al Mu'ezz ledin Allah. Hardly had Jawhar captured Fustat than he set about constructing a brand new city in the north, which in due course he named 'Al Qaherah' (Cairo), which means in Arabic the conqueror or the city victorious.

The old city of Cairo was selected to present the arche-citta as it fulfills most symptoms. As any traditional Muslim city it was built on a pedestrian scale and provided an extremely dense townscape, showing a high degree of complexity. The old city was conceived as a closed universe. Cairenes were surrounded by multiple architectural shells, which embody and reflect their cultural values. Architecture was mostly directed inwards as a main symptom of that time reflecting Cairenes beliefs and privacy with respect to the climatic aspects, figure (1). Recreation was part of the daily life of Cairenes with no noticed spatial segregation. It was practiced every where, at the religious buildings, house courtyards, the market or "suq", coffeehouses, and street fronts or "hara'. Moreover some recreation activities took place at the outskirts of Cairo, as in Azbakiya and el-fil pond.

1.2. Main recreational characteristics:

Key-terms: the inward, family bonds, neighbors, and private nuclear open spaces

Types of activities: socialization, walking, strolling, polo, swimming, boating, performance at street fronts (hara) as sleight-of-hand tricks, puppet show and mobile primitive fun fair, in addition to playing board games as backgammon, chess and draughts.

Form of activities: the "with-others" more than the "without", and priority was for the human relation and groups as family, neighbors, or friends.

Recreation places: the house courtyard, the market "suq", religious buildings as mosques, the Nile, coffeehouses, the street "hara", and the city outskirts as Azbakiya and El-fil pond.

<u>Mobility</u>: walking, where the human head was the major delivering van.

<u>Time and physical control</u>: time was the present. Duration of use was limited by boundaries especially in public spaces. Gates controlled by residents and owners represented the physical boundaries of streets.

Arche-speed: slow

Fig. (2), the dominant use in old Cairo (the arche)

Having a look at the area now, it is surviving although poor, traditional but also undeniably urban. It is a vital complex of work and residence, sales and consumption, but its industry and commerce are molded on some pre-industrial pattern of small scale, low mechanization. Still at the heart of this sub-city is the original walled nucleus, bisected longitudinally by the ancient "quasabah" the street of al Mu'ezz ledin Allah. Recreationally the concept changed and the main function is lost and tourism is the dominant, figure (2) which accordingly confirm that "The historic fabric is carefully preserved and left to retail and tourism" (Friedrich).

1.3. Reflection on attitude:

In the questionnaire, the recreational places of the arche-citta were represented by coffeehouses, historical places while playing board games as backgammon symbolized the participated activities.

It was found that the highest percentage of all three groups who selected the arche-citta was for the third group of age as their first choice of spaces (coffeehouses in particular). While in terms of activities, the highest percentage was the second and third choice, which was also selected by the third group of age (specially backgammon), table (1). Accordingly, the age group 24-27 is the one who preferred the arche-citta in terms of both places and activities.

Choice / Age	Space %			Activities %		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
16-19	20	24	20	20	22	30
20-23	10	31	28	21	24	35
24-27	45*	35	18	18	45*	46*

Table (1), the outcome of the Arche-citta * above 40%

2. Cine-Citta; Recreation in Cairo: "LOSING THE IDENTITY"

The word recreation is identified as phenomena and separation and segregation were noticed. Cairenes participated in recreation activities seeking enjoyment.
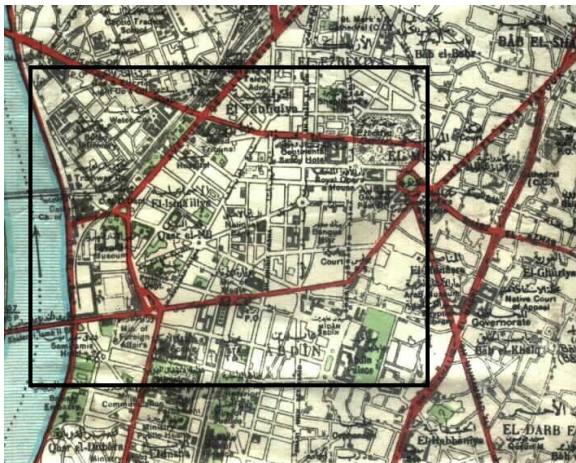

Fig. (3), the modernization of Cairo (the cine)

2.1 Location and description:

"The nineteenth century and with the industrial revolution man no longer saw himself as part of a meaningful creation but declared himself independent on it." (Bianca)

The transformation of Cairo started by losing her identity when Muhammad Ali and his successors, the Khedives, began what's known as the modernization of Egypt. On the occasion of the preparation of the World fair in 1867, Khedive Ismail visited Paris and became acquainted with Haussmann's new schemes for the French capital. The khedive was greatly impressed so that he decided to transform Cairo to a new westernized capital. The origin of the European part of Cairo was to be built southwest of the old city on vacant land that has been gained by the progressive move of the Nile riverbank to the west, away from the existing old city, figure (3). From that time the dangers of a technocratic instant modernization, which does not consider the physical, social and economic impacts of its schemes, was applied to Cairo, (Bianca)

A slight attempt to regain Egypt's identity at this period was related to the revolution and the aftermath of Suez Canal when some aspects of life, including recreation, underwent a noticed change. Movie houses and the opera house slightly directed their focus from the foreign movies and singers to local, Arabic and popular art. (Is that what Barber refers to as Jihad vs. Mc world?) Such attempt was not extended further to deeper aspects of recreation as Cairenes' attitude has already changed and they believed that foreign culture represents modernization so they became thirsty to westernize, (Abu-Lughod and Amin)

2.2 Main recreational characteristics:

Key-terms: parks, entertainment buildings and the industrial, (electrical).

Types of activities: the two recreational phenomena:

1) passive: talking, reading, sitting, watching and playing cards.

2) active: walking, jogging and playing video-electrical games

Form of activities: the "with" and the "without", individual, group, family and friends

Surviving recreational spaces: the Nile quay and gardens as El Andalous and El Azbakiya, figure (4).

Newborn recreational aspects: "parks", private clubs, theatres, cinemas and fun fairs.

Vanished recreational aspects: house courtyards and ponds.

Mobility: the advantage of increased mobility and great flexibility in leisure time due to the invention of cars. Movement was through delivering to place of recreation then walking or strolling where the result could be enjoyment

<u>Time and the physical control</u>: controlled by authority through limited duration of time. Time for playing some games as billiards was controlled in public spaces by the government.

<u>Cine-speed</u>: fast

Fig. (4), gardens in modern Cairo (the cine)

Modern concepts and theories of planning lead to the birth of new communities within Cairo as Heliopolis, and Nasr-City. By the end of this period Egyptians, and particularly who belonged to the more privileged segment of the society, were suddenly exposed to a cultural onslaught that seemed to becoming from a number of directions but all of which originated in the US. Various forms of recreation were applied as foreign films, the birth of some new words as "parks", fast-food shops and fizz drinks in addition to wearing western clothes as the Ajax T-shirts and Nike outfits.

2.3. Reflection on attitude:

Through the questionnaire cinemas and gardens represented places of the cine-citta, while playing billiard and video games represented the activities.

The cine-citta was mostly selected as a third choice of spaces for the three groups nearly equal (above 40%). On the other hand, the activities were hardly chosen by the three groups of age as a first choice. Less than 27% chose the activities except for the third group, as 37% chose the cine-activities table (2).

Choice / Age	Space %			Activities %		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
16-19	30	48*	52*	23	27	25
20-23	34	44*	47*	26	23	17
24-27	10	40*	54*	37	20	18

Table (2), the outcome of the Cine-citta * above 40%

3. Tele-Citta; Recreation in Cairo: "**GLOBALISATION"**

All in one and one in all, Cairenes are forced to enjoy the "moment" or the "sec.", "the loss of the city

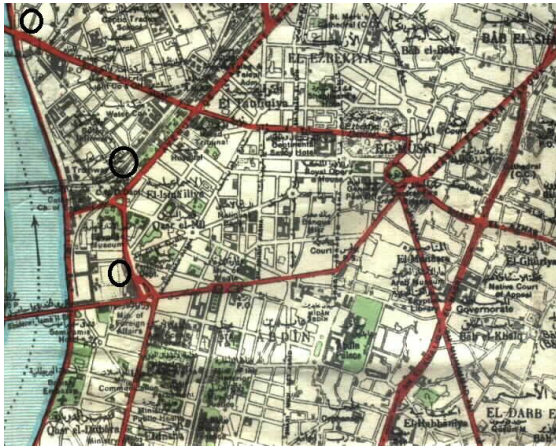and the loss of the urban" (Boelens)

Fig. (5), location of some shrunk scattered recreation spots

3.1. Location and description:

The wide spreading of various recreational aspects all shrunk in one place is clearly shown in

commercial malls, fig (5). The birth of air conditioned indoor buildings emerged embodying various

recreational activities as, movies, coffeehouses, fast food shops, cafeterias, restaurants, hyper-markets,

cyber-cafés, fun fairs, electronic and virtual reality games, bowling, billiard and snooker games and

ice-skating! Anyone can enter the mall, the rich and the poor, the affording and not affording, but the

question is who can really afford to "use" it. Movement is through escalators and elevators to the spot.

3.2. Main recreational characteristics:

Key-terms: cyber, hyper and wireless.

Types of activities:

1) passive: talking, reading, sitting and watching.

2) active: walking, jogging and playing games.

3) "hyper-active": the mental as cyber-café and virtual games beside the physical as laser games .

<u>Form of activities</u>: the term "with" and "without" changes according to the change in human relations. It appeals as the "with" although it is the "without". The with- "human" is partly replaced by the with- "tele" relation through; games, Internet, virtual-reality, and wireless activities.

<u>Surviving recreational spaces:</u> the Nile, "parks", cinemas, coffeehouses, and gardens i.e. international garden.

<u>Newborn recreational spaces</u>: cyber-café, amusement parks i.e. dream park, multipurpose malls, i.e. arcadia mall and amusement parks, i.e. wonderland, figure (6).

<u>Mobility</u>: vehicles, delivering to "spot" through escalators, elevators, then forced to enjoy?

<u>Time and physical control</u>: 24 hours a day on-line duration where time is not the master any more it skipped, and is skipping, demolishing regulations and physical boundaries. The timeless time (Castells)

<u>Tele-speed</u>: enormous "time keeps on skipping, skipping into the future" (post-future?) approaching the "femto-second"

Fig. (6), amusement parks in the tele-world of Cairo

Huge changes were and are still taking place due to the rapid changes in recreation interests and implications. The major changes are caused by the tele-revolution of recreational tools, which accordingly lead to spectacular changes in most aspects of recreation.

3.3. Reflection on attitude:

Finally, the tele-citta was symbolized in the questionnaire by places as huge malls, amusement parks and cyber-cafés, while tele-activities were represented by using the Internet, playing laser and virtual reality games. The three groups chose the tele-citta, as their first selection of spaces, significantly. In terms of activities the results were not that significant. Nearly 50% of each age group preferred to

participate in tele-activities, which shows the high preference of activities as ranked first, second and

third preference, (specially selecting to use the Internet), table (3).

Choice Age	Space %			Activities %		
	1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
16-19	50*	29	28	57*	51*	45*
20-23	56*	25	25	53*	53*	48*
24-27	45*	25	28	45*	35	36

Table (3), the outcome of the tele-citta   * above 40%

CONCLUSIONS and RAISED QUESTIONS: "IS THE FUTURE PREDICTABLE?"

The demand of modern living with the industrial and informational revolutions has created a society

characterized by change. In summary and from the physical point of view, recreation represents a very

strong reflection of both the industrial and informational revolutions through; types of open spaces,

forms of games, entertainment…etc. The more time passes by the more forms and types of recreation

changes. Some vanishes and demolishes others are born. It is chaotic where every new extension is

losing a part of the old and gaining parts of the new. Table (4) sums up such changes taking in

consideration that most of the characteristics and forms of recreation within the three worlds still exist

in Cairo.

The situation in Cairo is chaotic and the above analysis identified the three phases of the world. The

old city, through its location and urban form, symbolizes the homogeneity of life in the Arche-world,

where every thing had a meaning including recreation. The modernization of Cairo was reflected in the

southwest extension of the old city, which accordingly added another meaning to recreation, where

segregation as an indication of the cine-world took place. Now with the telematic influence, shrunk

condensed places are scattered every where. The growing use of telecommunication systems is greatly

influencing Cairenes' recreation characteristics through activities, space and time.

Aspects of recreation		The pre…..	Industrial revolution	Technological revolution
Activities	places	coffeehouses house courts primitive funfair	Cafeterias Gardens fun fair	cyber café parks amusement parks
	games	manual i.e. backgammon	electrical i.e. video games	cyber & laser i.e. virtual reality and online games
	types	life itself	passive/ active	hyper active
	Location	streets or hara i.e. puppet show	entertainment buildings i.e. theatres and cinemas	multipurpose malls i.e. ice rings, restaurants, ..
	Forms	with humans	with/without humans	with-tele
communications		visits	telephones	cellular/Internet
mobility		walking	vehicles	delivering…..?

Table (4) some changes of the recreational characteristics through both revolutions

On the other hand, the field study reflected the behavioral part revealing a number of findings. Despite of the limited sample size the result of this study cannot be assumed to generalize to all Cairenes but still it gives a clear indication to the effect of both revolutions on their recreational behavior. Summing up, in terms of recreational spaces, the first choice was highly directed to the tele-citta, and both the second and third choice to the cine-citta. While in terms of activities, most students selected the tele-related activities through the three choices. Moreover, and in terms of the three age groups, data collected from the questionnaire showed that in terms of first preference, most ages preferred the tele citta as spaces they choose although the third group preferred both the tele and arche equally. While in terms of activities the preference was more directed to the tele citta in the three levels of choice, which could mean that the new generation is addictive to recreation via Internet. Does this mean that as years go by and new generations are born, Cairenes will be totally directed to the tele-recreation?

 The outcomes confirm that recreation at present is mostly directed towards the tele-related and slightly to the human related. Will it keep on changing till it is purely tele? Will it freeze without considering any further development? Will Cairenes become off line and back for the sake of purely human recreation? And above all, is progress a blessing?
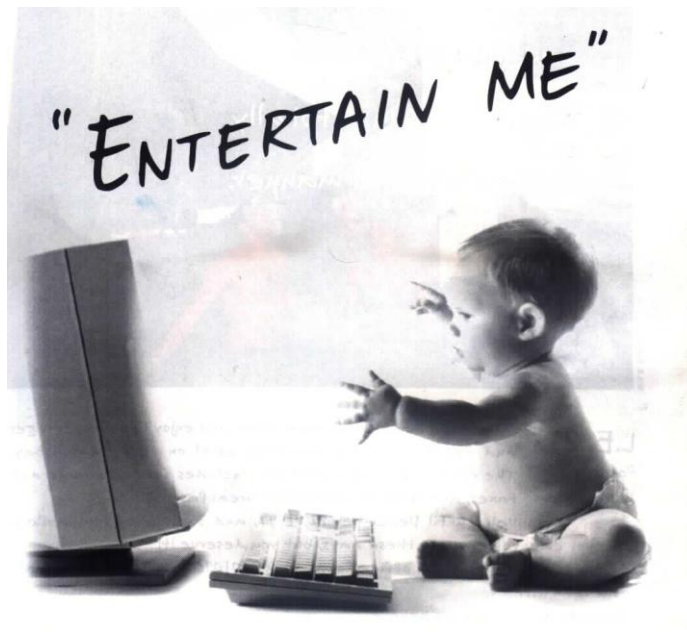
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