

01

ABOUT CAIRO AND ITS INFORMAL AREAS

Previous photo
A glance on informal housing
in the greenery.

Given the spatial and demographic size of informal areas, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that they represent the *normal* situation in Egyptian cities.

Cairo is a chaotic megalopolis where life is characterized by extremes, both of tradition and of modernity. When people are asked what the city means to them, individual answers vary tremendously, depending on a person's relationship to the place. Tourists, for example, or those who have not been there, may think of the pyramids, the pharaohs, the Nile, Islamic Cairo, or perhaps a generalized image of 'the Orient.' The responses of Cairenes, however, tend to describe aspects of their everyday lives, problems such as "traffic jams," "pollution," "noise," or "crowdedness." Today's Cairo, like any city of comparable size, can be a frustrating place for both residents and visitors alike. But Cairo is also a place where people find many occasions to celebrate together, and where visitors are welcomed with sincere openness. In short, Cairo is a diverse city of stark contrasts.

The importance of Cairo, the capital of Egypt, is highlighted by the city's several names—*al-Qahirah* ('the Victorious'), *Umm al-Dunia* ('Mother of the World'), or simply *Masr* (the Arabic name for the nation as a whole). Cairo is by far the largest city in the country, and its dominance is underlined by the fact that Alexandria, the second most populous city, is only one-third of the capital's size.

According to the 2006 census, around a quarter of Egypt's approximately 73 million inhabitants live in Cairo, amounting to nearly half the country's urban population. Egypt's other cities seem almost provincial by comparison.

It is not simply its physical size or the number of its inhabitants that account for Cairo's status as Egypt's principal city. The country's economic and political life is also concentrated there. Most of Egyptian industry, as well as many jobs in the secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (services) sectors, are located in the capital. In the past, this centralization of jobs has led to a massive migration of rural populations to Cairo in search of jobs and

Cairo: A Broader View

by REGINA KIPPER

an improved living situation. In terms of investment and development, Egypt can be seen as a country of two speeds, with a huge gap between the fast-paced city and the much slower rural and peri-urban areas. Everything in Cairo is faster than in other parts of Egypt: the growth rate of the city, the traffic, and the pace of life in general.

Cairo is also a historic city. Among the earliest settlements along the Nile was Memphis, capital of the ancient, united pharaonic kingdom, southwest of the future location of Cairo. Although little remains of this site, much of its stone was reused to build what is today known as Islamic Cairo. Because of the vast urban sprawl of Greater Cairo, the city now reaches to the very feet of the pyramids. Egypt's ancient heritage can be seen in various locations throughout the city, but air pollution frequently obscures the view of these large and most famous monuments.

Islamic settlement in the area of Cairo can be dated to 643 AD and the foundation of Fustat. The city known as Cairo was founded in the 10th century, and the monuments of the Fatimid and Mameluk dynasties can be found in the area that once comprised this medieval quarter. In fact, Islamic Cairo is said to have the highest concentration of



Map of Egypt.

historical sites per square kilometer in the world: in an area of three square kilometers there are 500 registered historic monuments. Although some of these are in very poor condition, there are initiatives aiming at the restoration of historical areas and buildings. These areas—with their numerous mosques, minarets, and mausoleums—are surpassingly beautiful.

Cairo is a tourist city, as well. Because of its many monuments and sites, it is among the most popular destinations in Egypt. The most frequently visited are the ancient pharaonic monuments, as well as the Egyptian Museum. The Khan al-Khalili *souq* (bazaar) is also very entertaining for tourists. Often, tourists combine a visit to Cairo with a vacation on the Red Sea, perhaps only staying in Cairo for a couple of days. As the trip may be fully organized, they rarely have free time to discover Cairo on their own and so leave the city with a very limited impression of it. Cairo, however, has far more to offer than the official tourist highlights.

When living in Cairo, it is not necessary to leave the city to notice the surrounding desert. Many apartments have no air conditioner and windows are often left open to help circulate air. As a result, the floors, furniture, and other items in the apartment are quickly covered with a thin layer of sand and dust. Unfortunately, the sand is not only the fine yellow-whitish sand to be found in the desert, but is intermingled with exhaust fumes and other forms of pollution. In the spring, sandstorms known as *khamseen* blast the city with hot, dry winds, bringing great quantities of sand into the city. Furthermore, the city gets very little rain and so is not well prepared for it. Roads after a rain shower can resemble mud holes and are often impassable. However, the air is nice and fresh after one of these rare rainfalls.

Cairo is arguably the largest city on the African continent. Arriving by plane offers the observer a striking sense of the city's size and density. The vast dimensions of the urban agglomeration reach to the horizons. Although the size of the actual population is disputed, the official 2006 census puts the number at more than 16 million inhabitants. Local experts, however, believe that 20 million is a more accurate figure. The view of the city from outer space using Google Earth reveals a variety of settlement patterns, indicating the diverse eras of its development: the Islamic quarter with its narrow and angled streets, for example, or the Downtown area patterned after Haussmann's plan for Paris.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Cairo's urban settlement pattern is its alignment to the river Nile. Satellite pictures show the city sprawling out in every direction, expanding in the north toward the Nile Delta and encroaching upon its scarce arable land. Since ancient times, the river has been the lifeline of Egyptian society. This is still true, particularly with respect to agriculture and water supply. Since the completion of the Aswan High Dam in 1976, the annual flood cycle can be controlled. By reinforcing

the Nile's banks, construction along the river became possible, thereby increasing urban sprawl. As a result, this expansion has taken place on formerly rich agricultural land.

A closer look at a satellite picture also shows substantial development on desert land. Due to massive population pressure, city officials in the 1950s began developing land further outside Cairo in areas such as Nasr City. Beginning in the 1980s, so-called New Towns began to be planned. A number of these satellite cities have been built, but despite many incentives encouraging Cairenes to relocate, they have not prospered as they were intended to. Housing in the New Towns was and still is unaffordable for the majority of Egyptians. In recent years, urban development in desert areas has increased and much construction is currently taking place. These areas often feature decentralized housing and shopping facilities, and many businesses have relocated there. Universities such as the American University of Cairo are being shifted out of the city center to less expensive and more automobile-accessible desert locations. Some consequences of these developments are already obvious: the immense volume of traffic along the city's peripheral roads, and the impact on the environment.

The failure of the Egyptian government's housing policy to provide affordable, viable housing for a significant number of Cairenes has led many to build homes—either semi-legally or illegally—on privately-owned or public lands. These so-called informal settlements are where approximately 70% of the inhabitants of Greater Cairo are now living, and provide the subject of the articles included in this volume. They are probably not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Cairo. The present book, however, aims to broaden the picture of a diverse city, rich in contrasts, and to highlight the realities of the majority of Cairo's growing population.

Historical development of informal areas in Greater Cairo since 1950.

The History of Informal Settlements

by MARION SÉJOURNÉ

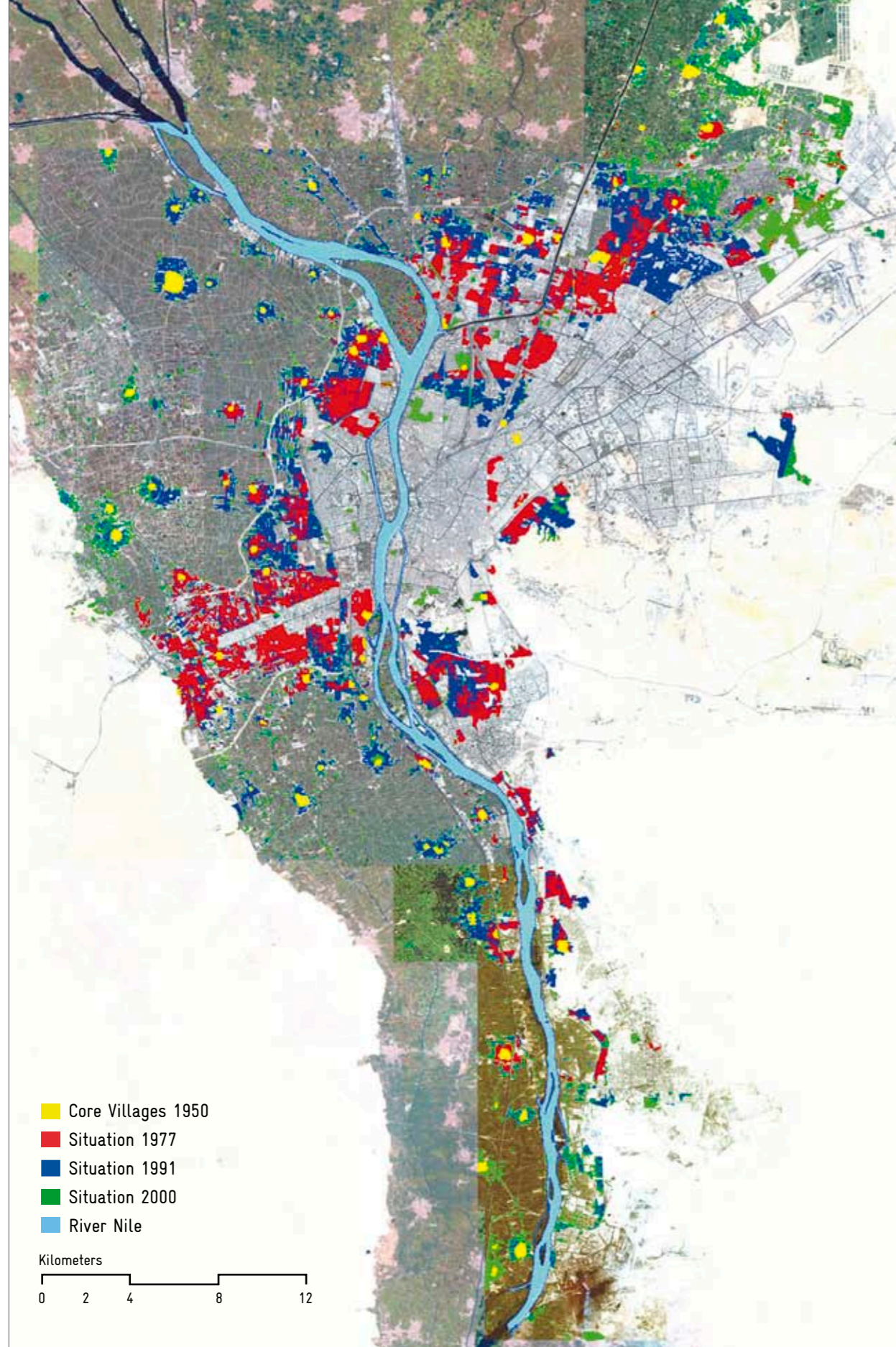
Informal development has been, and continues to be, the dominant mode of urbanization in many developing countries, including Egypt. It occurs especially on the urban fringes, on privately-owned agricultural land, rather than in desert areas, which would be considered squatting on state-owned land. Despite 30 years of attempts by the government to limit unplanned growth and urban expansion on agricultural land around Cairo, as it has in most Egyptian cities and villages, informal settlements around Cairo sheltered more than 7 million inhabitants in 1998 (Séjourné, 2006). As of 2006, they are estimated to contain more than 65% of the population of the metropolis (10.5 out of 16.2 millions inhabitants), and the rate of population growth in these areas is higher than other city averages, increasing 2% between 1996 and 2006. (Sims & Séjourné, 2008).

In Greater Cairo, these phenomena began just after the Second World War (and later in the following decade for the rest of the country), when migration from Upper Egypt and the Delta caused housing pressures to become critical (Sims & Séjourné, 2000). Migrants, attracted by economic development then occurring in Cairo, coincided with the massive industrialization policy launched by the president, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

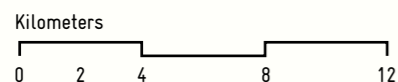
The earliest of these migrants, mostly young men, settled in central or historical districts, where they rented and shared flats or rooms. Later, after amassing some savings, some were able to buy and build upon land on the fringes of the villages located in the peripheral part of the city—such as Kit Kat in Imbaba or Mit Okba in Agouza, both of which are in Giza Governorate—where the land market was cheaper than in the central districts. This period also saw the beginning of the phenomenon of squatting on state-owned land, mostly in the eastern part of the capital, in places such as Manshiet Nasser and Kum Ghurab in Cairo Governorate.

During the 1960s, the informal urbanization process on the peripheries sped up, with a substantial increase of rural-urban influx to Cairo. The annual growth rate of Greater Cairo attained 4.4% between 1960-1966. This period marks the first expansion phase of informal settlements, mostly on agricultural land in the western (Boulaq al-Dakrouf, Waraq al-Hadr, Waraq al-Arab, Munira) and northern (Shubra al-Kheima, Matariya) parts of the city. In spite of the good productivity of agricultural land, their sale for building was more remunerative than the revenues from farming, a fact that encouraged farmers to sell their parcels (Al-Kadi, 1987). Urbanization of agricultural land was the result of a horizontal extension of villages surrounding the capital, combined with a form of urbanization from the city of Cairo itself.

From that period on, the state reinforced legislation forbidding informal construction on agricultural land (Law 59-1966, subsequently amended many times). Nevertheless, these laws and decrees were ineffective, and housing demand was still growing because of migration and high demographic growth in the capital. The populist housing policy implemented by Nasser, in Cairo



- Core Villages 1950
- Situation 1977
- Situation 1991
- Situation 2000
- River Nile



in particular (with public housing called *masakin sha'biyya* and cooperatives), was also inadequate for creating shelter for low-income families and the cohort of migrants rushing to Cairo. Some new informal districts appeared, while others (like Dar al-Salaam, Imbaba, Zawyat al-Harma, Baragil, Saft al-Laban) continued to grow rapidly. Families who could not afford an agricultural plot built a house on land belonging to the state (*wada' al-yed*, or 'putting their hand on it'), almost all of which was desert land, or bought a parcel from local brokers. Thus, informal areas on desert land like Manshiat Nasser and Ezbat al-Haggana continued to grow heavily.

Starting in the 1970's, a new phase of informal urbanization began, larger than that of the preceding decade. In Greater Cairo, 84% of new units built during the 1970s were considered illegal (ABT et al., 1982). As a result of savings generated from work in the neighboring oil-producing countries such as Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, which had been suddenly enriched during the oil booms in 1973 and 1979, people invested in informal land and constructions. Emigration was made possible by Sadat's policy of economic liberalization (*infitah*), launched in 1974, which opened the economy to private investments and permitted Egyptians to travel more freely. Thereafter, many Egyptians emigrated to countries in need of manpower, and where salaries were higher than in Egypt. If people invested in the informal sector, it was because the supply proposed by the public sector was neither sufficient nor affordable. As a matter of fact, public housing units in the New Towns located in the desert areas surrounding Cairo were built for the upper middle class and not for low income and poor families.

Changes in urban social conditions and in residential migrations should also be taken into consideration when trying to understand the informal urbanization process. Young people intending to start a family, who until then had

generally lived with their families, were now looking for their own houses. Because of the high value of the formal real estate market and the scarce opportunities for renting due to rent control laws, which left many flats empty and out of the market, these young people often had no choice but to seek housing in the informal market.

In addition, the 1967 and 1973 wars blocked all state investments in public housing construction. Most public funds were allocated to the war effort against Israel and so public units were massively lacking. The private sector stock, even if redundant due to speculation and accumulation of capital strategies, didn't meet the popular demand. Most of the units built were luxurious housing for sale, rather than for rent. On the other hand, the informal land and real estate sector answered the demand of both poor and middle class families who could not afford shelter in the legal city. Since then, the number of informal districts has mushroomed, growing rapidly on private agricultural land.

In 1977, Sadat introduced the New Towns policy. The goal was to solve urban problems that had become acute, particularly in Cairo, and to address the housing crisis and the urbanization of agricultural land. The challenge was to relocate the demographic growth that was occurring on agricultural land into public housing on the desert fringes of the city.

Beginning in the 1980s, the growth of informal areas in Greater Cairo slowed down to some extent (even if it remained very dynamic compared to the rest of the city). However, the New Towns policy had no effect at all on the slowing of their growth. The main reason can be found in the decreased emigration of Egyptian workers to oil countries due to oil prices tumbling in 1983-1984, and in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 (Sims & Séjourné, 2000). On the other hand, starting in the mid-1980s the national demographic growth rates and those of big

cities began to diminish (the annual demographic growth rate of Cairo went from 2.8% per year between 1976 and 1986, to 1.9% per year between 1986 and 1996), and rural migration almost stopped (Denis & Bayat, 2000). This had a significant impact on demographic pressure in urban informal districts.

However, during the 1990s, although no new informal districts appeared as they had in the 1970s, the development of informal areas did not really slow down, in spite of coercive measures taken by the government against illegal urbanization such as the very strict Military Decrees (1 and 7), which forbid encroachment on agricultural land.¹ In Cairo, for example, informal areas extended considerably,² becoming very dense³ and continuing to grow significantly. Between 1986 and 1996, the demographic growth rate of informal settlements reached 3.4% per year compared to 0.3% for legal areas, and informal construction growth was estimated to be 3.2% per year, compared to 1.1% in formal districts (Denis & Séjourné, 2002).

As during the preceding decades, one of the main reasons explaining the growth of informal areas is the inadequate public housing policy implemented by successive governments. Most of the units produced by the state in the New Towns are still unaffordable for poor and low-income families. They also face a problem of accessibility: they are too far from job opportunities located in Cairo's center, especially for people who do not own a private vehicle. Overall, the informal sector has "greatly benefited the urban poor, both in producing a massive amount of housing which offered a range of choices affordable to most if not all, and in allowing those of the poor with at least some equity to participate in the process and enjoy its rewards" (Sims, 2002, p. 99).

Given the spatial and demographic size of informal areas, however, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that they represent the 'normal' situation in Egyptian cities.

¹ Those decrees imposed much higher penalties and even imprisonment for people building on agricultural land. However, they were repealed in 2003 by the former Prime Minister Atef Ebeid (Séjourné, 2006).

² Between 1991 and 1998, 2.6 hectares were urbanized illegally all around Cairo. The share of informal build-up was then estimated to be 13 000 ha or 43.5% of the agglomeration (Denis & Sims, 2002).

³ In 1998, the average informal area density in Cairo reached 528 Inh/ha, compared to 300 Inh/ha for formal areas. Some informal districts such as Manshiat Nasser have even higher densities of more than 1 500 Inh/ha. They therefore make Cairo one of the densest cities in the world (Séjourné, 2006).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABT Associates Inc., Dames and Moore Inc., & General Organization for Housing, Building, and Planning Research (1982). *Informal housing in Egypt*. Report submitted to US Agency for International Development (US-AID). Cairo, Egypt.
- Bayat, A., & Denis, E. (2000). Who is afraid of ashwaïyyat? Urban change and politics in Egypt. *Environment and Urbanization*, 12(2), 185-199.
- Denis, E., & Sejourne, M. (2002). *ISIS : Information system for informal settlements*. Cairo: Ministry of Planning, GTZ, CEDEJ.
- EL-Kadi, G. (1987). *L'urbanisation spontanée au Caire*. Tours: Urbama, Orstom.
- Séjourné, M. (2006). *Les politiques récentes de 'traitement' des quartiers illégaux au Caire : nouveaux enjeux et configuration du système d'acteurs?* Ph.D. Thesis, University F. Rabelais.
- Sims, D., & Séjourné, M. (2008). *The dynamics of peri-urban areas around greater Cairo: A preliminary reconnaissance*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Sims, D., & Séjourné, M. (2000). *Residential informality in greater Cairo: Typologies, representative areas, quantification, valuation and causal factors*. Cairo: ECES, ILD.
- Sims, D. (2002). What is secure tenure in urban Egypt? In G.K. Payne (Ed.), *Land, rights and innovation: Improving tenure security for the urban poor*. (pp. 79-99). London: ITDG Publishing.

Satellite image of informal settlements on agricultural land.

Beyond Rules and Regulations: The Growth of Informal Cairo

by ELENA PIFFERO

According to estimates by the United Nations and the World Bank, the world is becoming increasingly urban. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision* records, in parallel with the growth of world population overall, show a marked increase of the percentage of people living in urban and peri-urban areas (United Nations, 2001). In many cases, the consequences of this rapid urbanization have been particularly difficult to manage, especially in developing countries. In a context of structural adjustment, monetary devaluation, and cuts in public expenditures, rapid urban growth has become synonymous with 'favelization,' or, in the best of cases, with 'informalization.'

Cairo has been deeply transformed by the global dynamics of urbanization, which have increased the city's population by more than six times in the past 60 years. While the migration of rural populations has in the past represented one of the major factors fuelling this urban expansion, recent studies show that this is no longer the case. In 1960, an estimated 35% of Cairo's inhabitants were not born in the city. In 1996, only 12% were born elsewhere (Vignal & Denis, 2006). The capital's growth is now due mainly to natural increase and to the incorporation of surrounding villages and rural populations (Development Planning Unit & Urban Training College, 1999), while its growth rate of around 2% is not dissimilar to the one reported for the whole of Egypt.

A first glance at Cairo, whose built surface extends to the limits of the horizon, communicates to the observer a powerful impression of density, crowdedness, and constant activity. The view from any of the city's many minarets reveals a metropolis seething with life at every hour of the day or night. As the demographic, economic, political, cultural, and symbolic capital of a country that numbers between 70 and 80 million inhabitants, Cairo has been tellingly described as "an essay in entropy"

(Golia, 2004). This phrase seems to epitomize the quintessential problems of the city's "urban excess" (Denis, 1996), which includes traffic, pollution, infrastructure that is obsolete and inadequate to the needs of its nearly 20 million inhabitants, and the increasing dominance of informal over formal residential patterns.

The origin of this process of urban informalization is to be found in the 1960s and 1970s when Cairo, as well as other major Arab capitals, witnessed the emergence of a peripheral form of urbanization. This was led by private actors and developed outside of, and without regard for, state building laws and regulations, particularly those prohibiting the conversion of agricultural land into housing plots. Informality became the solution to the housing needs of the city's lower and middle classes. It is estimated that between the 1970s and the 1990s approximately 80% of the new housing units in Greater Cairo were built informally. According to a more recent study published in 2000, at the end of the 1990s informal areas represented approximately 53% of the built residential surface of Greater Cairo and hosted 62% of its inhabitants (Sims, 2000; Séjourné, 2006).



The area Kafr al-Turmus from above. Boulaq al-Dakrou.

educated families, university students, and public sector employees in search of accommodation at a reasonable price. In fact, the expansion of Cairo's informal areas is due not only, nor even mainly, to rising poverty levels, but has been fostered by the combination of a series of deliberate policy choices, as well as by market dynamics which were not properly dealt with. Public housing projects have been insufficient to satisfy the increasing demand, and since the 1970s housing production has been concentrated in the so-called New Towns, satellite settlements on desert land intended to divert urban growth away from rich and scarce agricultural land. These New Towns were expected to absorb half the projected population growth between 1998 and 2017 (General Organization for Physical Planning, 1998; Ministry of Housing Utilities and Urban Communities, 2000), but their distance from the core town, as well as their lack of services and of economic opportunities, made them unattractive to low-income families. According to the census, the residents of all New Towns in 1996 amounted to 149 000, and reached approximately 600 000 in 2006, an increase of 14.9%. This figure, about 3.7% of the population of Greater Cairo Region, is well below the government's expectations.

Since Sadat's *infitah* ('open door') policy, access to the formal rental housing market has been made extremely difficult because of the government's decision to opt for the provision of public housing mainly for sale. By contrast, a rental control law inaugurated in the 1940s and removed only in 1996 discouraged legal private investment in housing for rent. At the same time, legal facilitations for construction and land reclamation after 1974 made the real estate sector attractive to private companies, with the consequent development of a semi-luxury housing market targeting the upper middle classes and fuelled by the remittances of Egyptian workers in the Gulf (El Batran & Arandel, 1998). In addition,

the high requirements of Egypt's restrictive building codes (concerning the minimum areas of plots, the height, architectural characteristics, and density of the buildings, etc.), and the long, cumbersome procedures required to obtain an official building permit contribute to the exclusion of most members of the urban lower middle classes from formal housing circuits. All these factors have resulted in a paradoxical situation where nearly two million of the Greater Cairo Region's housing units are vacant, while its informal areas keep expanding and becoming more dense. According to the 2006 census, in the last decade informal areas have absorbed nearly 79% of the city's population growth.¹

Although informal housing now represents the dominant residential mode, there are very few shantytowns and proper 'slums' in Cairo. Apart from some inner pockets and some of the more remote, recently urbanized fringes, the overall quality of construction in informal areas is reasonably good, especially where it has been consolidated. Nevertheless, because of their unplanned and 'random' construction—from which they derive their name in Egyptian Arabic, *'ashwa'iyyat*, meaning 'disordered' or 'haphazard'—these informal areas

In the majority of cases, this irregular urbanization has not meant land occupation or squatting on public land, but has developed around a non-official land market starting from private landholders. Previously cultivated areas are subdivided into smaller plots of 60 to 100 m² by farmers and middlemen, or by companies in possession of large agricultural fields, and sold to private owners and builders. The construction work starts with the employment of local labor and with the typical red bricks and cement structure (Sims, 2003; Abdelhalim, 2002). Buildings may be four or five stories high, and are normally devised for future incremental construction. The owner/builder might decide to keep one of the housing units for himself and/or his family, while the rest is sold or rented out. In these cases, the 'illegality' does not stem from ownership rights, but from the illegal conversion of previous agricultural land into building plots, as well as from the disregard of existing regulations concerning the sizes of the allotments and the standards of construction (El Kadi, 1987a, 1987b).

Aside from this first typology of residential informality—which is by and large predominant in Cairo—the city also hosts informal areas built on former state land, which spreads out from an initial 'authorized' nucleus. Manshiet Nasser, for example, developed around a core of garbage collectors relocated to the area by the government in the 1960s, and Ezbet al-Haggana was initially established as a settlement for the families of soldiers based in the vicinity. These neighborhoods subsequently expanded due to illegal squatting and the occupation of the surrounding vacant land. In general, due to a more elevated risk of eviction, housing conditions are poorer in these types of settlements. However, the building quality tends to improve in the older and more consolidated areas, where the higher level of perceived tenure security allows the residents to invest more in housing improvements and ameliorations.

Informal areas in Egypt host not only the urban poor, but also the young, the middle class,

Satellite image of informal settlements on desert land.



suffer from problems of accessibility, narrow streets, the absence of vacant land and open spaces, very high residential densities, and insufficient infrastructure and services (World Bank, 2008).

Informal urbanization, although contravening the standards established by the state, cannot be regarded as totally clandestine. Urban authorities, aware of what was happening outside official regulations, have for decades adopted a *laissez-faire* policy, supported by a well-consolidated system of clientelism and corruption that has ensured the *de facto* tolerance of the administration, while official speeches aimed at ‘pathologizing’ the phenomenon and at presenting it as social threat and a disease which should be removed from the city (Bayat & Denis, 2000). Undoubtedly, considering the nature of the phenomenon, the adoption of policies of brutal eradication (applied only in rare cases, as in the Cairo district of Tourgoman after the popular uprising of 1977) has not been a realistic option, at least in earlier periods when the attention of the Egyptian government was concentrated on the conflict with Israel (1967-1973).

Interestingly enough, in the transfer of the responsibility for the production of lower middle class housing to ‘irregular’ constructors, public authorities found a way to exempt themselves from one of their socio-economic obligations (Signoles, 1999). This disengagement of the authorities is indeed only too apparent, as is their “policy of negligence” (Harders, 2003; Dorman, 2007) towards informal neighborhoods, which actually reinforces the political dependence of the population. The inhabitants, knowing the impossibility of relying upon legal housing rights (since informality is by definition outside the laws), depend on the

‘concessions’ and the ‘benevolence’ of public authorities. Consequently, clientelism and patronage networks become the only system through which local communities can negotiate the tolerance of the government and/or the (partial) provision of the necessary infrastructure—a (partial) provision which, in fact, often coincides with the pre-electoral period (Haenni, 2005).

Rather than capitalizing on the investment capacities of low- and middle-income families, and on the added value to the newly urbanized land, the government has been reluctant in guiding this rapid informal building process through the provision of serviced sites. Instead, it has issued a series of decrees aimed at increasing the fines and penalties for illegal construction on agricultural land.

In order to address these pressures, as well as the security threat posed by the propagation of radical Islamist activism in some of these informal areas,² in 1993 the Egyptian government created a National Fund for Urban Upgrading. This fund, however, focused mainly on big infrastructural projects such as roads and bridges, which often bypassed informal areas to the advantage of richer neighborhoods (Madbouly, 1998). Moreover, the government, in an attempt to attract new financing for urban development, has tried to involve other international cooperation actors in the upgrading effort.

¹ David Sims, data presented during a Bi-weekly GTZ Expert Meeting, 3 December 2007, Hotel Longchamps, Cairo.

² In the early 90s, 31% of militant terrorist groups came from Imbaba and 24.2% from the PDP project area Boulaq al-Dakrou. www.echr.org/en/ws/02/Informal.htm.



View from above
on Manshiet Nasser.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdelhalim, K. (2002). *An alternative approach for housing the urban poor in Egypt: Prospects and constraints*. PhD Thesis, University of Central England in Birmingham.
- Bayat, A., & Denis, E. (2000). *Who is afraid of 'ashwa'iyat?*: Urban change and politics in Egypt. In *Environment and Urbanization*, 12(2), 185-199.
- Denis, E. (1996). Urban planning and growth in Cairo. *Middle East Report*, 202, 7-12.
- Development Planning Unit (University College London), and Urban Training Institute (1999). *An overview of the water supply and sanitation system at metropolitan and peri-urban level: The case of greater Cairo region*. Service Provision Governance in the Peri-Urban Interface of Metropolitan Areas Research Project, Executive Summary, London.
- Dorman, J. W. (2007). *The politics of neglect: The Egyptian state in Cairo, 1974-98*. PhD Thesis. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- The Egyptian Center for Housing Rights (n.d.). Round table discussion on: Social violence and informal areas. Available at www.echr.org/en/ws/02/Informal.htm
- El Batran, M., & Arandel, C. (1998). A shelter of their own: Informal settlement expansion in greater Cairo and government responses. In *Environment and Urbanization*, 10(1), 217-232.
- El Kadi, G. (1987a). L'Articulation de deux circuits de gestion foncière au Caire. In *Peuples Méditerranéens*, 41/42, 167-179.
- El Kadi, G. (1987b). L'Urbanisation spontanée au Caire. *Fascicule de Recherche*, 18, 376.
- General Organisation for Physical Planning (GOPP), Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (1998). *Egypt's development and urbanisation map to the year 2017*. Cairo, Egypt.
- Golia, M. (2004). *Cairo: City of sand*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Haenni, P. (2005). *L'Ordre des caïds: Conjurer la dissidence urbaine au Caire*. IRD Khartala. Paris. CEDEJ, Le Caire; Ben Nefissa, S. (2005). *Vote et Démocratie dans l'Égypte Contemporaine*. IRD Khartala. Paris. CEDEJ, Le Caire.
- Harders, C. (2003). *The informal social pact: The state and the urban poor in Cairo*. In E. Kienle (Ed.), *Politics from above, politics from below: The middle east in the age of economic reform*. Saqi. London.
- Madbouly, M. (1998). *Urban poverty and informal settlements upgrading: A missing dimension in Egypt*. Paper presented at the Association of Graduates and Trainees from Britain in Egypt's Seminar on Cities, Capacities and Development, 23 November, 1998.
- Ministry of Housing Utilities and Urban Communities (2000). *Mubarak and urbanisation: achievements of the present and dreams for the future*. Cairo, Egypt.
- Séjourné, M. (2006). *Les politiques récentes de "traitement" des quartiers illégaux au Caire*. PhD Thesis, Université de Tours, France.
- Signoles, P. (1999). Acteurs publics et acteurs privés dans le développement des villes du monde arabe. In P. Signoles, G. El Kadi, & S. R. Boumedine (Eds.), *L'Urbaine dans le monde arabe: Politiques, instruments et acteurs* (pp. 19-53). Paris: CNRS.
- Sims, D. (2000). *Residential informality in greater Cairo: Typologies, representative areas, quantification, valuation and causal factors*. Cairo: ECES, ILD.
- Sims, D. (2003). The case of Egypt. In UN-HABITAT: *Understanding slums: Case studies for the global report on human settlements*. Nairobi, Kenya. Available at <http://web.mit.edu/sigus/www/NEW/challengecourse/pdfs/pdfs/cities/Cairo.pdf>.
- United Nations Secretariat (2002). *World urbanization prospects: The 2001 revisions. Data tables and highlights*. New York: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- Vignal, L., & Denis E. (2006). Cairo as regional-global economic capital? In D. Singerman & P. Amar (Eds.), *Cairo cosmopolitan: Politics, culture and urban space in the new globalised middle east* (pp. 99-151). Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- World Bank - Sustainable Development Department, Middle East and North Africa Region (2008). *Arab Republic of Egypt: Urban sector update, vol. 1*. Available at http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDS/IB/2008/07/03/000334955_20080703075959/Rendered/PDF/E14370v30REPLA105BoReportsJune2007.pdf.

Governorates of Greater Cairo including formal and informal settlements.

Egypt's Informal Areas: Inaccurate and Contradictory Data¹

by SARAH SABRY

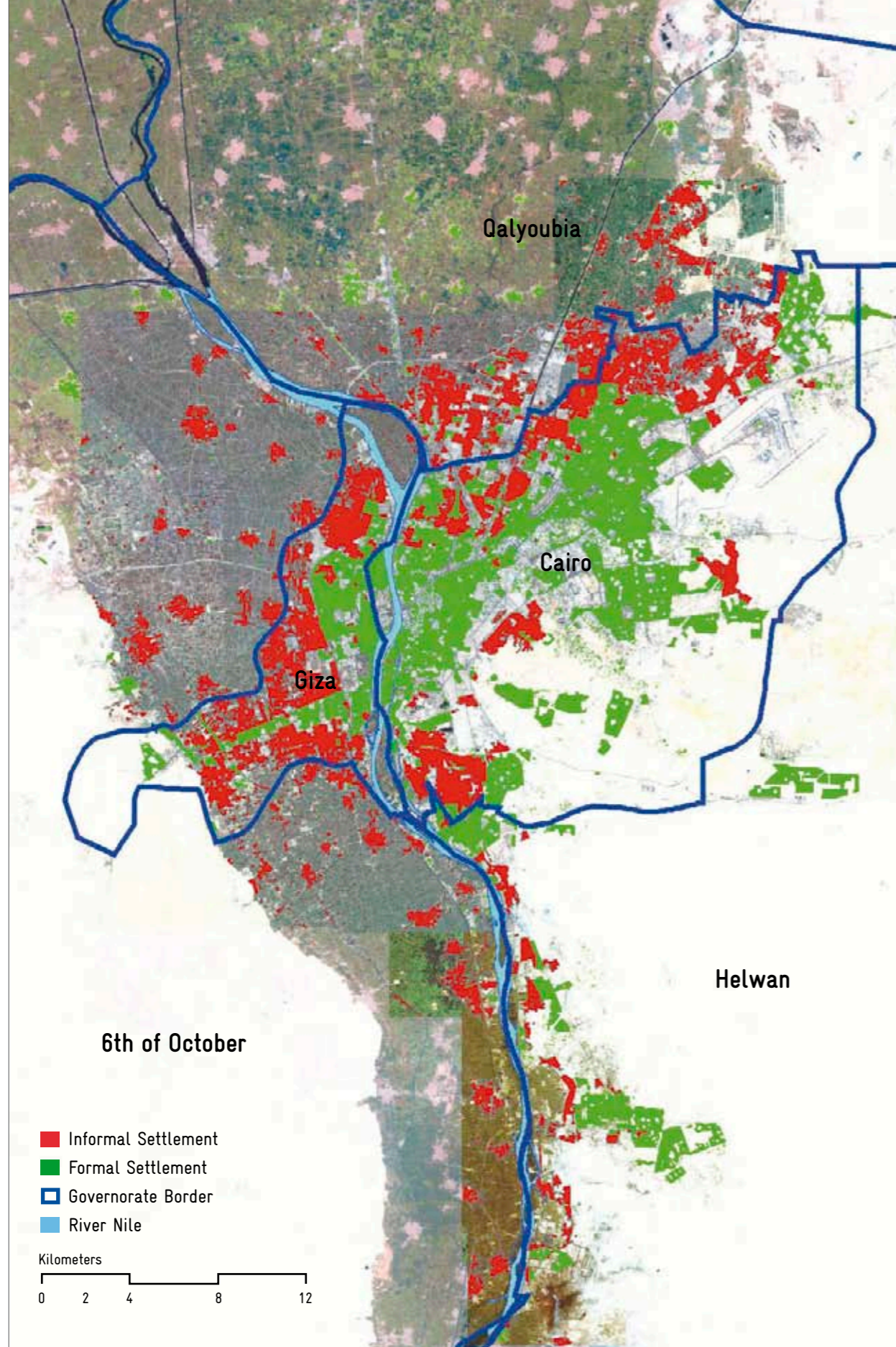
This paper attempts to answer two questions. First, how many *ashwa'iyyat* are there in Egypt and in Greater Cairo (GC hereafter) and, second, how many people live in these areas? The short answer to both questions is that we do not know. Figures about the number of *ashwa'iyyat* in Egypt and their populations differ significantly among different government authorities, as well as within the individual offices and ministries. Accurate and consistent data and information about informal areas in Egypt does not exist. Having accurate data is a necessary prerequisite to formulating realistic, meaningful, and effective plans, budgets, and policies aimed at improving the lives of millions of residents in these areas. If, for example, an area is believed to have 10 000 people when in reality it has half a million, then the public services and infrastructure required will be completely different in scale. In such cases, planning and budgeting for 10 000 will result in areas which are perpetually under-served.

The table summarizes some of the different figures for all of Egypt. The latest figures include 1 171 areas with 15 million people in 2007 by the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC); 16-21 million people in 2008 by the World Bank; and 1 210 areas in 2006, up from 1 174 areas in 2004, by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ministry of Economic Development. These considerable figures seem to finally acknowledge the large-scale of informal areas. Earlier figures, especially those of the Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), severely under-estimated the populations of informal areas. In 2001, CAPMAS estimated that there were 909 slums with 5.7 million people *in all of Egypt*, although in 2000 GTZ estimated their population to be 8.3 million *just in GC*. Figures for *ashwa'iyyat* differ not

only among government authorities, but also within them. Different levels of government, such as that of the governorate as well as locally, mostly have contradictory figures. In Dakahleyya for example, the local government says there are 121 slums, while the governorate claims they are only 27 (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006).

In GC, the problem of data about informal areas is further complicated by the fact that the city is divided over five governorates. Until May 2008, GC was awkwardly divided among three governorates: Cairo, Giza, and Qalyoubia. It included the Cairo Governorate as a whole, Giza City in the Governorate of Giza, and Shubra al-Kheima City in Qalyoubia Governorate (Sims, 2003; Soliman, 2004). As of 2008, this has become even more complicated. In May 2008, Helwan and Sixth of October City (both suburbs of GC) became part of two new, independent governorates. This complicates the task of getting precise information about GC, because the city is not handled as one but rather is managed by five different governorate administrative structures.

¹This paper draws from a more detailed working paper: Sabry, Sarah (2009). *Poverty Lines in Greater Cairo: Underestimating and misrepresenting poverty* (London: IIED).



AUTHORITY	NUMBER OF AREAS	POPULATION	PUBLICATION DETAILS
IDSC	In 2007: 1 171	In 2007: 15 million	(Nawar and Al-Qitqat, 2008)
UNDP Egypt and Ministry of Economic Development	In 2006: 1 210 In 2004: 1 174		(UNDP Egypt and Ministry of State for Economic Development, 2008)
The World Bank		In 2008: 16-21 million (depending on the definition of informal areas)	(World Bank, 2008)
Ministry of Housing		In 2005: 6.2 million	(Ministry of Housing—GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006)
Ministry of Planning (now Ministry of Economic Development)	In 2003: 1 133		(Ministry of Planning, 2003, Appendix 34)
Ministry of Local Development	In 2002: 1 221		(Ministry of Local Development, 2002)
CAPMAS	In 2001: 909	In 2001: 5.7 million (CAPMAS, 2001)	(CAPMAS, 2001; CAPMAS, 2008)

Moreover, the boundaries of the city are unclear and constantly changing. Current boundaries do not include many areas on the periphery, which are essentially a part of the GC agglomeration but are still considered rural areas due to unrealistic administrative definitions of what constitutes an urban area (Bayat & Denis, 2000; World Bank, 2008). With a majority of informal areas located in the periphery of the city, many of their populations are not included in figures for GC, even though in reality they are part of the agglomeration.

The available figures for GC are as follows: CAPMAS claims 174 slums (CAPMAS, 2001), the Ministry of Planning claims 171 (Ministry of Planning, 2003), the Ministry of Local Development claims 184 (Ministry of Local Development, 2002). As for their total population in GC, the following figures are from a review done by the Ministry of Housing (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP

Egypt 2006, p. 34). In 1996, CAPMAS claims 3.2 million, while IDSC claims 4.1 million, and the Ministry of Planning claims 4.5 million. In 2000, the population was either 2.8 million (Ministry of Local Development), or 7.1 million (Egyptian Center for Economic Studies), or 8.3 million (GTZ) (Ibid). According to the 2004 Egyptian Human Development Report, there were 7 million inhabitants of informal settlements in GC (figures supplied by the Ministry of Planning in cooperation with the GTZ) (UNDP Egypt and INP 2004, p. 106). A recent study estimated that 10.7 million people lived in *ashwa'iyyat* in GC in 2006, which is 65.6% of the city's population (Séjourné & Sims, as cited in World Bank, 2008). This basically means that today 'formal' areas in GC are the exception.

A closer look at one area, Ezbet al-Haggana, will further clarify the data problem, especially within CAPMAS, the single most important source of

population data in Egypt. The 1996 census states that 32 652 people lived there. Preliminary results from the 2006 census found that its population had increased to 39 433. In the CAPMAS master list of slums in Egypt, which lists the names and population figures for all slum areas in all Egyptian governorates, the population figure for Ezbet al-Haggana was 412 people in 2000 (CAPMAS, 2001). Other estimates are 400 000 (Soliman, 2004) and one million² inhabitants, which makes it the 14th largest slum in the world, a mega-slum according to Davis (2006). No sensible average can be concluded from the 412 to one million range. A visit to the area confirms that CAPMAS figures are a severe underestimation. To arrive at a population estimate, GTZ counts the number of buildings in the area using satellite maps from 2007 and GIS techniques. It is then assumed that each of the 8 503 buildings counted has five households with an average size of five people.³ This provides a population figure of 212 575, and is probably the most realistic estimate. These undercounted figures by CAPMAS are not unique to Ezbet al-Haggana. Massive areas such as Boulaq al-Dakrou⁴ and Manshiet Nasser are also given very small population figures in the CAPMAS master list of 2001, whereas independent figures estimate their population figures to be close to one million residents. Some areas such as Arab Ghoneim in Helwan, which houses tens of thousands of people, do not even exist in the CAPMAS master list of 2001.

CAPMAS's inaccurate and contradictory data is particularly important as it has significant consequences. All household surveys, which attempt to report about the well being of Egypt's population, depend on CAPMAS data for sampling purposes.

The data of surveys such as the Household Income Expenditure and Consumption Survey (HIECS), which use CAPMAS census data, then provide the 'knowledge' about poverty in Egypt. The probability of an area being part of these 'nationally representative' household surveys is proportional to its size in the latest census (World Bank and Ministry of Planning, 2002). The only GC slum survey which exists also uses CAPMAS data for sampling (El Zanaty & Way, 2004). It selects the areas from the CAPMAS master list of GC slums and their probability of being sampled is relative to their size. This is the list which severely undercounts their populations and misses entire areas. If the population of these predominantly poorer areas of Egypt are undercounted, or are missed entirely, by CAPMAS, then these areas are under-sampled in household surveys, which in turn underestimates the scale of urban poverty. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the GC slums survey, the only large-scale survey about slum areas in Egypt, has produced such implausible results. The report basically concludes, using a number of indicators, that there is not much difference between living standards in GC slums in relation to the rest of the city. Anyone who has done field research in informal areas will testify to the implausibility of these results.

So what are the conclusions reachable from such contradictory figures about millions of Egyptian citizens? Firstly, the actual size of informal areas, as well as their respective population figures, is unknown. Secondly, they are enormous, especially in GC, and they probably house the majority of the city's residents. Thirdly, GC houses the majority of Egypt's slum dwellers: 59% of the total Egyptian slum populations

¹ The original source of these two figures is not known.

² This is a very rough average. The area has extremes in types of housing. The main streets have buildings that go up to ten floors and more. Many of these flats are empty. In many other parts, there are plots of land subdivided into small rooms rented out to a family each.

⁴ The master list divides Boulaq al-Dakrou into ten *ashwa'iyyat*: Sidi Ammar (population: 8 778), al-Zohoor (14 349), al-Shorbagy (2 030), Zenein (6 300), Kafr Tohormos (7 000), and 5 other areas. The total population of the 10 areas is 58 150.

Rising housing pressure.
Boulaq al-Dakrou.



according to the Ministry of Housing (2006, p. 40). Fourthly, in GC informal areas are growing faster than the city's population as a whole. In 2006, a study estimated that they were growing at 2.57% per annum compared to less than 0.4% for 'formal' Cairo (Séjourné & Sims, cited in World Bank, 2008).

There are many reasons behind these different figures. Different authorities have different definitions for *ashwa'iyyat*. Even different data gatherers within the same authority were found to have different definitions of what constitutes an informal area (Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP Egypt, 2006). Their figures are frequently underreported because their size can be considered representative of the government's failure in creating inclusive policies that factor in all citizens. They can also be a result of the government's ambiguous relationship with *ashwa'iyyat*, some being officially recognized while others are not. Perhaps they also reflect the limited

capabilities and skills of the bloated, underpaid, under-skilled, and unmotivated government bureaucracy.

Beyond a simple count of area numbers and populations, much more accurate information is needed about these areas. How many schools and health centers does each area have and how many are needed? Which ones are missing basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation? What are the characteristics of their populations? We generally know that these areas house middle class professionals as well as the urban poor, but in what proportion? Census information is available for the areas that are administratively separate, for example a *hayy* (district) like Manshiet Nasser or a *shiakha* (a part of a district) like Ezbet el-Haggana, but this is the same data that underestimates these areas' populations. For areas whose boundaries are different from the administrative boundaries of the census, even the inaccurate data of CAPMAS is not available.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bayat, A. and Denis, E. (2000). Who is afraid of ashwa'iyyat? Urban change and politics in Egypt. *Environment and Urbanization*, 12(2), 185-199.
- CAPMAS. (2001). al-Manatiq al-'Ashwa'iyya fi mohafazaat al-gomhoreyya: 'Asmaa' al-Manatiq wa taqdeer 'adad al-Sukkan biha 'aam 2000 (in Arabic) [Ashwa'iyyat in Egyptian governorates: Their names and population estimates in the year 2000] Cairo: CAPMAS.
- CAPMAS. (2008). al-Manatiq al-'Ashwa'iyya fi mohafazaat gomhoreyyet Misr al-'Arabeyya 2005 (in Arabic) [Ashwa'iyyat in Egyptian Governorates in 2005] - a print-out from the CAPMAS computer system obtained May 2008 Cairo: CAPMAS.
- Davis, M. (2006). *Planet of slums*. London: Verso.
- El Zanaty, F. & Way, A. (2004). Greater Cairo slums: A profile based on the 2003 Egypt demographic and health survey. Cairo: Ministry of Health and Population [Egypt], National Population Council, El-Zanaty and Associates, ORC Macro and Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina.
- Ministry of Housing - GOPP and UNDP Egypt. (2006). Improving living conditions within informal settlements through adopting participatory upgrading planning. General framework for informal areas upgrading strategy and elaborating preventive measures for further informal growth. Second Phase Report 2005-2006 (in Arabic). Cairo, Ministry of Housing, Utilities, and Urban Development - General Organization for Physical Planning and UNDP Egypt.
- Ministry of Local Development. (2002). Bayan Igmali: 'adad al-Manatiq al-'Ashwa'iyya 'ala Mustawa al-Mohafazat (in Arabic) [The number of Ashwa'iyyat on the Governorate Level] Cairo: Ministry of Local Development.
- Ministry of Planning. (2003). The economic and social development plan for 2003-2004, second year of the five-year plan for 2002-2007. Cairo: Government of Egypt.
- Nawar, L. & Al-Qitqat, H. (2008). al-'Ashwa'iyyat Dakhel Mohafazaat Gomhoreyyet Misr al-'Arabeyya: Dirasa tahleleyya lel-wad' al-Qa'im wal-osloub al-Amthal lel-ta'amol (in Arabic) [Ashwa'iyyat in the Governorates of the Arab Republic of Egypt: An Analytical Study about their Current State and the Best Approaches to Deal with them]. Cairo: IDSC.
- Sims, D. (2003). The case of Cairo, Egypt. *Understanding slums: Case studies for the global report on human settlements*. London: University College London/ DPU.
- Soliman, A. (2004). *A possible way out: Formalizing housing informality in Egyptian cities*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America. UNDP Egypt and INP. (2004). Egypt human development report 2004: Choosing decentralization for good governance. Cairo: UNDP and Institute of National Planning.
- UNDP Egypt and Ministry of State for Economic Development. (2008). Achieving the millennium development goals - A midpoint assessment. Cairo: UNDP Egypt and Ministry of State for Economic Development.
- World Bank. (2008). Egypt: Urban sector update (Vol. 1 of 2). Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- World Bank and Ministry of Planning. (2002). Arab Republic of Egypt: Poverty reduction in Egypt: Diagnosis and strategy. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

Narrow street in
Boulaq al-Dakrou.

Advantages of Living in Informal Areas

by DINA K. SHEHAYEB

A large portion of Egypt's urban population is faced with only three residential options: physically deteriorating 'popular' districts (*hany sha'by*); mass housing in New Towns; and informal areas. Each one of these residential choices offers a different set of living conditions. The figures show that informal areas are the fastest growing alternative, while New Towns are suffering reverse migration. Why do people choose to live in poorly serviced informal areas, rather than inhabit the planned, 'modern' New Towns? To answer such a question we must look deeper and understand the economic, social, and psychological needs that people seek to fulfil in their residential environment, and thereby unravel the hidden attraction of informal areas.

INFORMAL AREAS: WHAT THEY ARE NOT

Informal areas are *not* unstructured and unorganized; they are not chaotic. Unfortunately, however, such misconceptions are shared by many who do not know informal areas, including high-level decision makers and planners. As emphasized in a recent UN report, informal mechanisms, like formal ones, comply with rules. Social networks and cultural norms are the organizational bases that dictate those rules and the means through which they are enforced. Informal activity is not really 'outside' the formal sphere of the state, and should be recognized as intertwined with the state in complex ways. The persistent misconceptions of informal areas as being 'chaotic,' and their residents 'uncivilized' and ultimately a 'dangerous threat' and 'undesirable,' reflect ideas about the government as *controller* rather than as *guide* or *facilitator*.

Informal areas are not a burden. How could this be the case when, in 1997, informal housing was valued at 73 billion dollars? When state resources are limited or poorly managed, when the understanding of people's priorities and of urban development processes on which laws, policies,

and regulations are based is inadequate, and when government capacity to regulate is undermined by widespread non-compliance and disrespect for government institutions—under such conditions, informal areas develop to give rise to 'popular' urban districts that answer the needs of people under the local circumstances and constraints. They are the consolidation of ongoing 'private' investment and the effort of millions of fellow Egyptians to provide a liveable, appropriate, affordable living environment for themselves and their children, within the constraints of the available choices.

Last but not least, informal areas are not inhabited only by the poor. Authorities declare that almost 17 million Egyptians live in informal areas around cities. That figure includes many more than just the very poor. Studies reveal the profile of informal areas to include a wide spectrum of socio-economic groups; its resident could include street vendors as well as judges. Residents of informal areas include government employees, workshop owners, and artisans, as well as professionals such as doctors and lawyers. A common pattern is the family-owned apartment building, with maybe one or two poorer tenants renting on the ground floor. Who else lives

in informal areas? Those with low car ownership (in many areas only 10% of residents own a private car); those who use mass transportation for their main means of transport; people many Egyptians meet on the street; the waiter, the taxi driver, a colleague at work or the fellow next to you at university. In short, almost any Egyptian may live in an informal area.

INFORMAL AREAS: WHAT THEY ARE

The growth of informal areas is the result of several conditions that have coincided to create demand on housing in certain locations. In Egypt, one driving force was the shift from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial- and service-based economy, which created more jobs in and around large cities and detracted from development in rural regions. An influx of rural migrants to Cairo and to other large cities started in the 1950s. At the same time, rent control laws were passed to grant tenants security of tenure. As a result, property owners stopped investing any money in maintenance, thereby accelerating the deterioration of existing housing stock in all cities. Also, tenants who moved out of their rental units kept them vacant for possible future use because the rent was ridiculously low. Recent studies have identified around 6 million vacant housing units in Egypt, many of which belong to that category. As a consequence, newly-formed households resulting from natural population increase could not find housing units in neighborhoods where they had grown up, married, and worked. In order not to be too far from their parents, property, and work locations, informal settlement began in the nearest available location; 65% of Manshiet Nasser residents, for example, are from the nearby Darb al-Ahmar and Khalifa districts. Thus, informal areas also received the 'spill-over' populations of the older districts of the existing city.

Informal areas are different from one another. Fourteen different types of informal areas have been identified. The most widespread type is made up of

medium height, high density, brick and reinforced concrete buildings. In some informal areas, average building height is six to eight floors, with some structures rising to a height of more than 12 floors. On main streets in informal areas, one can hardly distinguish the difference between the urban scene there and in other parts of the city. In fact, recent conceptions regard them as an integral part of the city, and increasingly as the future of Cairo.

Informal areas are similar in form and process of development to the natural growth of cities prevalent in the pre-World War II era, before the introduction of industrial utopianism and social engineering into city planning. They are similar in a number of ways to many parts of the existing 'legitimate' city. The most striking visual differences in form and density are the result of constraints imposed on the informal area as a result of their unsanctioned locations, and the absence of the state's support.

Informal areas are a 100% self-financed, self-help housing mechanism. They are demand-driven, incremental in growth, yield a built form that is compact, low-energy-consuming, 'walkable,' with an efficient mixture of uses allowing work-home proximity and district self-sufficiency in terms of daily and seasonal needs. These are exactly what city planners, neighborhood designers, sustainability policies, and international environmental agendas are calling for.

THE TRADE-OFF:

ADVANTAGES OF LIVING IN INFORMAL AREAS

Housing research since the 1980s in Egypt has focused on the problems of informal areas, hardly attempting to explicitly address the advantages that have made this sector grow faster than any other housing sector in the country. Recent research on what makes the appropriate 'home' environment has brought together pieces of the puzzle and, adopting an experiential approach to the study

of people's daily life, has highlighted a few spatial characteristics of informal areas that support positive aspects of the residential environment, such as "walkability," "self-sufficiency" in terms of daily needs, "convenience" and "home-work proximity", safety in residential streets, and resident participation in the provision of public amenities and regular upkeep. The following are a few highlights:

Self-Sufficiency:

All Needs Can Be Satisfied in the Area

Informal areas have shops and markets that fulfil all the needs of their residents. Residents also appreciate the fact that goods in those shops and markets are affordable, and perceive them positively as a source of income for area residents. The same can be said about the presence of workshops in such areas. Although residents also perceive these services and shops to cause nuisances such as noise or pollution, the positive value of their being in close proximity outweighs their negative effects. It should also be clarified that the geographic distribution of such uses is not chaotic. They are usually situated on commercial vehicular and commercial pedestrian streets, and hardly ever penetrate into the narrower residential streets, which consequently remain protected from strangers and allow them to function as extensions of the home.

Work-Home Proximity

Another advantage found in informal areas is the proximity of work and home locations. This measure of 'convenience' is evident in many areas, such as Boulaq al-Dakrou, where 60% of residents go to work on foot. The advantages of walking to work are numerous. Besides environmental gains from reducing energy consumption and pollution produced from vehicular means of transportation, walking to work saves money at the individual level and offers the opportunity to fulfil other needs and

errands on the way. It is an activity pattern that saves time and effort, as well as money. Key characteristics in the urban pattern of informal areas that afford this measure of convenience include the distribution of non-residential uses, as well as the comprehensive diversity of those uses.

'Walkability': Saving Money, Saving Energy, and Community Building

Walking is the most often utilized means of transportation in informal areas. The compactness of the built forms, and the presence of commercial pedestrian streets tied to residential streets without interruptions by wide, vehicular traffic routes, are major factors. The restricted access, residential streets allow cars in at slow speeds, is reminiscent of the pedestrian areas in Europe. The second most used means of transportation is the microbus. There have been complaints from residents concerning the quality of the microbuses—that they are crowded, unclean, and sometimes unsafe—and therefore this could be an area of improvement where intervention would help regulate the system of transportation.

Participation

Services such as garbage collection, street lighting, street cleaning, and public landscaping are performed quite successfully in residential streets, where narrow widths restrict the access by strangers, and through-traffic allows those streets to be appropriated and controlled by their residents. People clean and maintain what they feel is theirs. The limit of resident participation in what should be governmental responsibilities stops at the main streets. Those streets are more public, shared by many, open to outsiders, and hard for residents to control. As a result, there are piles of garbage, inadequate street lighting, and poor pavement conditions. This is the territorial domain where the government should perform its public responsibility.



Fruit shop in Ard al-Lewa.

neighborly relations, and the attachment and solidarity enjoyed within the neighborhood. These same people often describe informal areas as being a “popular district” in its positive sense: “lively, friendly, and alive around the clock.” The density of inhabitants was recognized as one of the leading factors behind this “liveliness.” The above advantages are the main ingredients of community building, and the physical environment either helps or deters this process based on the extent to which it allows residents to meet and to get to know each other. Informal areas, in contrast to modern, planned neighborhoods, increase these opportunities.

The above are some reasons why people live in informal areas. Professionals and policy makers should first admit that New Towns, in the way they are planned and designed today, are not as liveable for many people as informal areas are. They should then critically evaluate those areas, draw lessons from what works well, understand the needs and priorities upon which residential choices are based, and then revise the planning and design approaches they have been unsuccessfully pursuing for the past 50 years.

WHAT IS TRULY WRONG WITH INFORMAL AREAS?

The constraints within which informal areas grow, their location on agricultural land or in unsafe geographical areas, the entrepreneurial initial subdivision, and the ex post facto introduction of infrastructure have all led to several major shortcomings in the quality of life for those living there. Also important in this regard are the poor quality of roads and of means of transportation, the poorly ventilated dwellings, and the unregulated construction, which may vary in terms of safety depending on the know-how of local contractors. These problems arise as a result of the absence of regulations.

In addition to the above, another set of problems arises in domains where the residents of informal areas

cannot fill the government’s role and help themselves. Such problems include inadequate garbage collection. Similarly, the domain of infrastructure networks is one where residents cannot do much to help themselves, and the attempt to do so often leads to major health hazards. Another inadequately addressed domain is public transportation, which, as mentioned above, can complement the privately-owned means of transport, as well as compel them to improve their quality. Vehicle-associated accident rates are higher in informal areas than in other districts, partly because of the unregulated microbus services whose drivers are often minors.

The above problems can be summarized as a lack of support on the part of the government toward its people, and a failure in its honoring their rights as citizens. The marginalization of residents of informal areas, the stigmatization of its youth, and the failure to protect its young people from drugs and hustling has caused these places to attract more illegal activity than other, better-protected districts. This contributes further to the marginalization of these areas and their residents.

The problems with informal areas should be more carefully articulated so that intervention efforts do not squander valuable resources on replacing what is already working relatively well; rather, intervention should be targeted at improving what works poorly, including filling gaps in infrastructure where services are completely lacking. While many problems in informal areas could be solved by informed intervention and political will, the challenge still remains of stopping such settlements from growing up in other, inappropriate locations, without the necessary guidance and regulation.

HOUSING PROGRAMS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN EGYPT

As has been repeatedly acknowledged, the phenomenon of informal areas is closely tied

“My Street - My Home”

The same stranger-free residential streets mentioned above allow these same streets to be an extension of the home: a private, protected place where children can play and women can sit in the afternoon and exchange news and knowledge. This appropriation of ‘near home environment’ serves several functions at the same time. It compensates for limited private space inside the apartments, for example. More importantly, it helps build community ties. When neighbors know each other, social solidarity increases, collective initiatives are easier to realize, and natural surveillance and self-policing occurs. All these factors together decrease the dependence on local authorities, which as a result saves the government money.

Sense of Safety

When a community’s sense of safety is high, the opportunity to commit crimes decreases because people are out on the streets, leading to “more eyes

on the street,” stronger community ties, and fewer opportunities for troublemakers to infiltrate the neighborhood. It is therefore fortunate that most residents perceive informal areas as relatively safe environments, with occasional nuisances such as traffic accidents, hustling, or harassment. This is evident in the freedom of mobility for women and children, the unlocked doors and windows, and the types of accidents reported. An informal area is always less safe at the beginning of its development; with time, however, when commercial uses and the number of workshops increase, and when residents appropriate their residential streets, it can become much safer.

Social Solidarity and Community Building

A “sense of community,” “cooperation,” the “presence of family and kin,” and “social interaction, companionship, and liveliness” are all advantages expressed by residents of informal areas. Residents stress the value of the community, the good

to the lack of an effective housing and urban development policy in Egypt. Although centralized decision-making and the imbalanced distribution of resources across regions are improving, a housing and urban development strategy for Egypt still takes the form of a series of projects, implemented but not monitored and evaluated so as to provide a strong basis for successful policies. Numerous New Towns in the desert were planned and implemented during the 1970s to accommodate the increasing urban population and to protect the Nile Valley from overcrowding to prevent loss of fertile agriculture land. These cities did not attain their target population despite the continuous efforts of the government to create job opportunities and healthy 'modern' housing. The problem is multi-faceted. First, there is the tendency of the government to tie the success of the New Towns to political agendas, which leads to a repeated denial of their failure. Another mistake has been to insist on following divisive master planning principles which have been shown to be unsustainable and do not yield liveable places in aspects such as safety, convenience, and community building. Very little time has been spent understanding how urban life and urban systems work, and the focus has been solely on speedy implementation and the meeting of political agendas.

Instead of providing land for people to build on under zoning regulations that ensure sustainable and adequately serviced extensions of cities and new communities, the government has taken it upon itself to provide a fully developed 'product' that residents should not change or develop further. The idea of government as provider of housing came after World War II to solve certain pressing problems, but has been challenged over the decades, being substituted since the 1980s with the government in the role of enabler or facilitator.

Another problem is the mismatch between housing demand and the housing that is supplied

by the government. The norm is that the demand directs the characteristics of the supply. In housing, this means that the location, dwelling size, and neighborhood design are shaped by what people need most, accommodating variety in household size, priorities, and lifestyles. Research shows that in existing city districts, and surprisingly enough in informal areas, the housing supply does reflect this variety in the demand. Informal areas have dwellings that vary from one to five rooms, sometimes even more, and vary in size from 41 m² to 180 m². One problem is that when the government supplies the housing (whether directly by building it, or indirectly through private sector developers), the mass housing projects follow an industrial approach, with standardization as the main objective. For example, the latest target of 85 000 dwelling units annually are all 63m² two bedroom apartments. Filling entire neighborhoods and districts with thousands of apartments, all of which have the same design, is not realistic. Even if it suits some, it will not suit all, especially given that the largest portion of the demand (56%) is for three enclosed rooms.

The focus on initial cost reduction is another factor that compromises the quality of the neighborhoods provided by governmental programs. They build housing clusters around undefined spaces that are too expensive to landscape or maintain. They do not realize that alternative layouts would create open spaces and streets about which residents would feel a sense of ownership and where they would invest time and money maintaining, cleaning, beautifying, and protecting it. Instead of depending on local authorities to provide street lighting, garbage collection, planting trees, the maintenance of open space and protection from strangers, design and planning can encourage residents to appropriate space for themselves and do much of it at their own expense.

This long-term economic view would not only save on the operational, maintenance, and policing

costs of the built environment; it would also contribute to increasing the future value of the neighborhood in question, as well as the properties within it. Raising the initial costs, by spending more on creative, participatory, and well thought-out design and planning solutions, would raise the quality of life in the area, making it more attractive to live in. Consequently, this increase in demand would reflect on property values positively, and the increase in initial cost would soon be recovered with a profit. Governments often cannot afford this increase in initial cost. However, they should realize that property owners, whose property value would increase over time, could contribute, even if those property owners were from the lower income groups. Applied research has shown that when the poor realize that investments in the built environment benefits them directly, they are willing to pay. The more value-for-cost, the more they pay. Once again, the informal areas hold lessons for policy makers in this regard. Unfortunately, the huge investments that residents are making is not recognized as a potential source of income by the government, and there is still a lack of interest in understanding when and why residents of informal areas are willing to invest in their residential environments.

Why does the government still insist on building neighborhoods that are inconvenient, wasteful, and unsustainable? One reason is that they look good on paper, with neatly-delineated shapes and separated color codes, and a neighborhood plan that looks like a Mondrian painting of the 1950s. They are easy for politicians to understand, and easy for contractors to implement. Such recipes, easy for consulting firms to produce and reproduce, save time and money, since more complex designs would require more than newly graduated youths with good graphic design skills; they would require multi-disciplinary teams and a participatory process with local authorities and user-representative groups.

They would also require considering change over a longer timeframe, and maintenance-specific zoning regulations and guidelines. It is easier and much less expensive simply to do what the government asks for, whether it yields liveable places or not. From such a perspective, it does not seem to matter whether these districts increase in value because of increasing demand on them (like many informal areas), or stagnate and remain deserted (like most New Towns). They only attract those who want to benefit from government grants and 'freebies,' or those who are relocated (against their will) to these areas as a result of natural disasters and urban renewal projects.

In any part of the city, old or new, we want to avoid neglect: heaps of garbage, dried up planting, broken sidewalks, and run down buildings. We want to avoid unsafe paths and deserted spaces, unwatched roads and no-man's lands. We want to avoid encroachments that serve one purpose but spoil another. Change is good, and people adding sheds and drinking fountains, benches, and landscaping in collective residential spaces is a positive thing and saves the government money, but it should be predicted and accounted for in the initial planning of the neighborhood. This adaptable planning of neighborhood is based on an understanding of human nature, and of the cultural norms of a society. Europe is investing major resources and effort in fixing large post-war housing estates that suffered dilapidation due to the inappropriate design and planning of standardized units around left-over, meaningless spaces: the kind we have built for the last 40 years and are still building today.

IN CONCLUSION

People choose where they live for multiple reasons. It is simplistic to say it is just the cost of rent, or just the proximity to work, or the cost of transportation; otherwise, how could one explain

Renovated houses
in Boulaq al-Dakroun.

the reverse-migration of industrial workers and their family from Tenth of Ramadan City? Those who were given modern apartments in Salaam City would not have returned to what professionals call 'slums,' and pay LE 25 000 as key money and LE 300 monthly rents. There are other important measures of liveability, also related to economics, which are non-monetary. These are about value-for-cost. For example, they concern safety for women who walk their neighborhood streets, or the chance for girls to continue their education, or access to better nutrition with the presence of walkable, fresh produce markets. They include people to watch out for you, who offer assistance in case of emergency. All of these are found in informal areas, but planning professionals and policy-makers refuse to learn them or take them into consideration.

Also, these advantages of living in informal areas are not always readily perceived by the residents themselves, who suffer the stigma of the negative image of their neighborhoods, an image that is emphasized by the government and promoted by the media. Instead of asking about media-influence preferences and real estate trends, planners should adapt a more experiential approach through a study of the activities and choices of daily life. This knowledge will serve to externalize what is truly valued in the neighborhood, and what is resented.

It is important to identify the trade-off between problems and gains that residents of informal areas experience in their daily lives. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a guide for intervention strategies. It develops understanding of what is working well but needs improvement, as well as what is ineffective and needs to be changed. If intervention is implemented without such knowledge, it might negatively impact certain advantages enjoyed by residents. The second reason is that it allows planners and policy makers to learn lessons in urban planning and development, in that

informal areas seem to be the preferred residential choice for many low- and middle-income families.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

There are lessons to be learned by professionals, and by their partners and stakeholders, regarding the planning, design, and operation of both formal and informal neighborhoods, whether for new design purposes or for rehabilitation and upgrade. The first lesson is to recognize people as potential: to invest money, to manage and maintain the physical environment, and to participate in service provision. The second lesson is the need for the government to adopt an enabling approach that supports what people do, and to regulate to the benefit of the collective good. One priority should be the development of enabling/affordable housing standards, rather than standards so unfeasible that they leave most of the housing stock unregulated. The third lesson to be learned from informal areas is the importance of appropriate neighborhood planning: where street layout and distribution of commercial activities promotes sustainability, where value-for-cost is maximized, thereby allowing residents the opportunity to control and appropriate public space, and where people are encouraged to invest in the shared amenities and maintenance of their neighborhood.



A Newcomer's Impressions: Interview with Dr. Roland F. Steurer

by JÜRGEN STRYJAK

Dr. Roland F. Steurer has been the Country Director of GTZ Egypt since September 2008. He has almost 30 years of experience in development cooperation from working in various countries.

What was your initial impression of Cairo?

Dr. Roland F. Steurer: I visited Cairo for the first time in 1983, together with my wife. We traveled independently as backpackers throughout Egypt. We hitchhiked through the desert to the Farafra, Dakhla, and Kharga oases. There was no public transportation to those areas at that time, not even an asphalt road. We spent some days in Cairo, too, but the city did not feel welcoming to us and we had little contact with the locals. An Arab megacity was a completely new and strange experience for us. Seven years ago, we traveled to Cairo once again. This time we were able to acclimatise ourselves and find our way around. The city seemed to be more open and easier to get around. But once again, we were put off, mainly because of the traffic and the pollution. We thought that this overcrowded, chaotic city was not a suitable place for us to live in, that it would be far too wearisome of an experience.

Has living in Cairo changed your mind about the city?

My feelings have changed. Now, I see Cairo as an attractive city, undoubtedly because I have come to know it better. I have learned that Cairo, amidst all the chaos, has a lot of nice places, too: beautiful old buildings, beautiful parks, everything laden with history. There are so many aspects of Cairo to enjoy and to discover, such as strolling along the Nile.

Recently, an Egyptian newspaper wrote that Cairo is careering towards an urban apocalypse. The newspaper also suggested that Cairo's inhabitants, as well as the city's government, seem to have lost the

will to prevent this apocalypse. Do you agree with this assessment?

No, not at all. Quite the contrary. They are trying hard to change things for the better. The current problems of Cairo have to do with the unrestricted growth of the city during the last few decades. But the population growth will slow down, and the rural migration to the capital has slowed down already. I don't agree with this newspaper's assessment. My wife and I feel very comfortable in Cairo. This may have to do with the fact that we have lived under much more difficult conditions, such as in Bangladesh. Beside this, we spent some years in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, during the civil war and when the tsunami hit the region in 2006. It was hard to adapt to the circumstances there, while Cairo seems to be easy for us. Compared to other places, Cairo is an attractive location. The only thing we suffer from is the air pollution. But other amazing things compensate us for this.

Given your earlier mixed feelings about Cairo, was the decision to move to the city a difficult one to make?

No, I decided it quickly, because I immediately talked to Germans who have lived here for years. And I heard a lot of positive things from different people. They all told us that after having settled in, we would either love or hate the city. And all the people close to us had a completely positive experience. If they like it, we thought, then we should give it a try.

Development work in some of Cairo's informal areas is a main part of GTZ's activity. How does it

affect you personally to witness the often severe living conditions of the residents of these areas?

It is important to realize that many of these informal areas aren't exactly what we call slums. Compared to international standards, compared to slums in other countries, on other continents, a number of Cairo's urban neighborhoods score well. The people live in these overcrowded areas in simple buildings along narrow alleys, but in many other countries such quarters are already considered to be regular neighborhoods. Many buildings are connected to the drinking water supply; some have sewage disposal and other services.

At the same time, many other of these urban settlements are actually underserved. I feel saddened when I enter these quarters and see the living conditions there. It is deeply worrying to see how at risk people are in terms of health care and education, as well as socially and financially. The migration from the countryside to Cairo has strained the responsiveness of the authorities for decades.

Which positive conditions support GTZ's work in Cairo's informal areas?

Our work here is a very special challenge to us. We are pleased to have the possibility of working in these areas. We have a big responsibility, and we want our program to develop a successful and sustainable model for participatory urban development. We cooperate with highly qualified and motivated high-level partners like governors and several government ministries. And the inhabitants of the informal areas are willing to spend energy and creativity to change their living conditions. But apart from these two levels, the situation is characterized by a lack of knowledgeable administrative staff, many of whom need to be trained for the new challenges.

An advantage of these areas is the relative proximity of the neighborhoods to more developed parts of the city, and therefore to employment,

markets, and important administrative offices. These informal areas are already part of the city, and nobody needs to integrate them into the municipal fabric of Cairo, as they already belong to the city. But they need more and better services.

At the governorate level, especially with the governors themselves and their closest staff, we see a strong desire to change the situation for the better. Our concepts and consulting efforts are welcome. But we are confronted with a number of shortcomings on certain administrative levels. We find welcoming conditions and understanding in the highest levels of government, as well as with the residents in the informal areas, but to connect these two levels to each other still requires a lot of effort from all involved. For example, ministries may decide to build new quarters for the poorest, but these new apartments don't always go to those who really need them.

Years of development activities in Cairo's informal settlements have produced a wealth of experience. Does GTZ utilize this experience for its work in other parts of the world?

GTZ runs for a similar project in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, for example. Our participatory approach in Cairo provided us with important experiences for the project there. When I was working in Colombo, we transferred concepts and strategies from Cairo to our work there. We at GTZ always exchange experiences in an effort to get the best possible results.

In your opinion, what is the most important step for improving the lives of people in informal areas?

My greatest desire is to see that the inhabitants of the informal areas enjoy having a land title for the places where they live, and having formalized workshops. Only a clear legal situation minimizes risks for them. It will give them more security and the possibility of making serious plans for the future.



02

DAILY LIFE IN INFORMAL AREAS