

VISUAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

FOR MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES THE CASE OF EL-MINYA CITY-EGYPT

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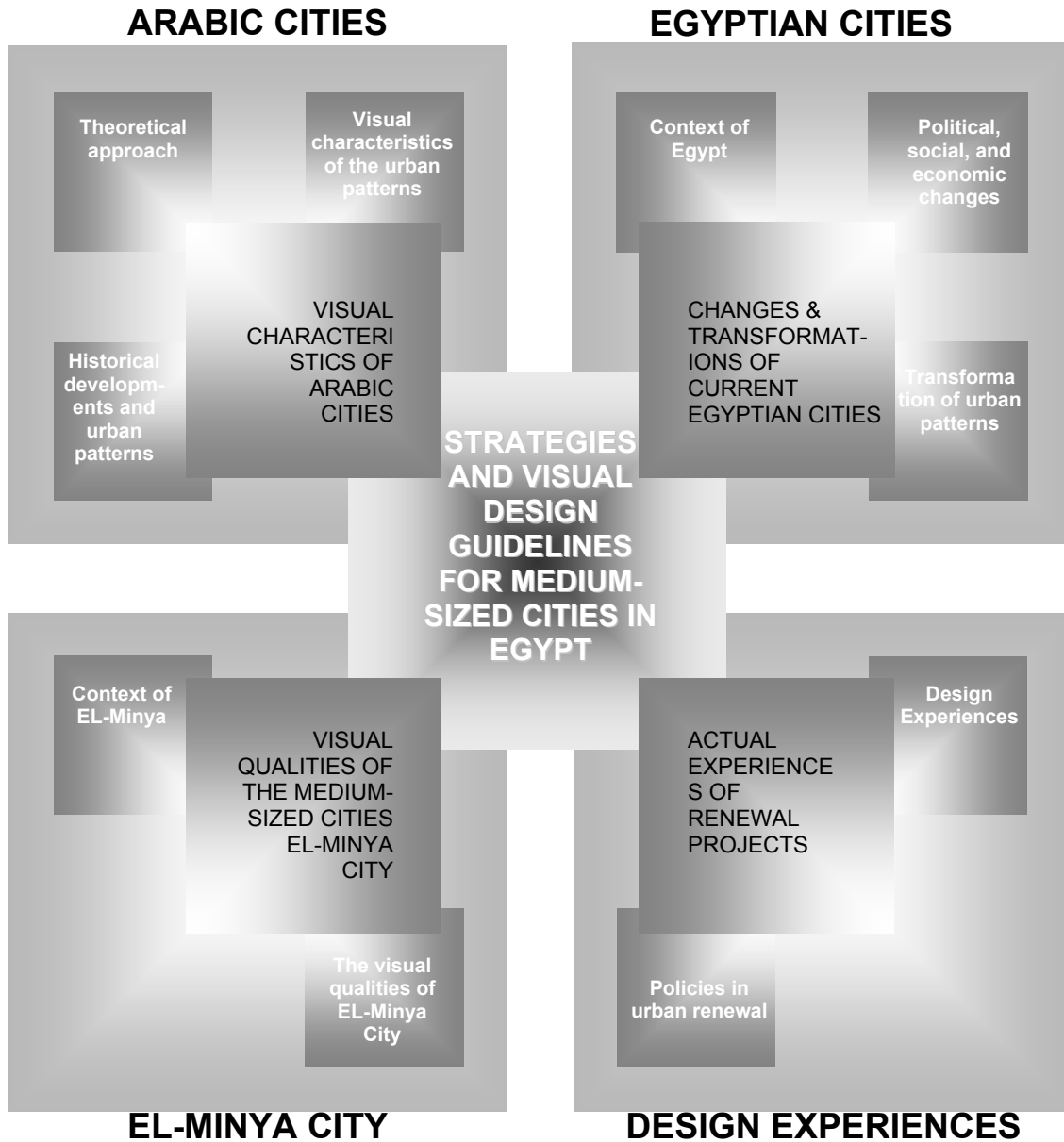
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VISUAL DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

THE CASE OF EL-MINYA CITY-EGYPT



INTRODUCTION

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this thesis is to explore the appropriate visual design guidelines, which can enhance the visual qualities and improve the urban environment of Egyptian cities. The research has attempted to focus on the visual qualities of EL-Minya City, as one of the Egyptian medium-sized cities, which was left on the fringes for a long time.

Research often deals with cities of attraction “such as the metropolises” in particular, whereas medium-sized cities do not enjoy much attention. However, since the end of the 1980s, researchers have been interested in small and medium-sized cities. National and international programs promote medium-sized cities in order to encourage decentralization. The medium-sized cities are attractive to investors because of abundant labour force, low wages, and a practically non-existent environmental policy. On the other hand, investment is increasingly unattractive in the metropolis because of changing politics, traffic chaos, high prices of land, and environmental control.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Egyptian cities have seen many changes under different socio-economic and political forces, especially over the last 150 years: by the end of the 19th century, the setting up of colonial cities beside traditional ones; by mid-1960, is the establishment of public housing estates; after 1970, the development of modern districts; and finally, the emergence and growth of informal settlements. The city offers, thus, a subsequent development at different times, with each pattern having a different character.

Over the past three decades, Egyptian cities have undergone fundamental changes and rapid urbanization. The changes caused environmental problems and degradation. The change and transformation of the cities led to a disrupted the townscape, fragmentation and contradiction between new and old, degradation of historic districts and significant architecture, unplanned developments, in addition to unattractive visual appearances.

The problem of the transform of Egyptian cities stems from a variety of well known reasons: a rapid increase in population not matched by new housing; an internal migration from rural to urban centres; a deterioration of old parts of the city without upgrading or equivalent replacement; an accumulation of housing shortages over the years, and finally, the neglect of visual design aspects in current development planning in Egypt.

The examining of the Egyptian city is indicating that each part contains a specific physical problem. In the traditional district, poor accessibility coupled with other factors, such as a lack services, badly maintained facilities and the district's backward image, was the reason, which provoked the progressive exodus of the local bourgeoisie from the old city centre into the residential suburbs of new towns. The places they vacated were filled by the growing number of the working-class and lower-income residents. Poor economic conditions of new occupants, lack of commitment and maintenance of buildings lead to a rapid dilapidation of the housing stock. Collapsed buildings were replaced by new structures of different characters and qualities.

In the colonial districts, old villas and historic buildings were destroyed and replaced with new high-rise apartment buildings. Because of a lack of tight municipal control, owners were able to add more floors than building regulations permitted. Hence, Egypt lost great architectural wealth that could never be replaced, and green areas gradually disappeared. The new buildings were not strictly used for housing as some of them were adapted for commercial activities and office space for new business firms. Generally, they were put up for fast profit with little attention to the urban context. The development of colonial districts was accompanied by a scarification of the historic architecture, which finally lead to destruction of the districts by fragmentation and distortion of the streetscape.

Much of modern districts in Egypt are problematic to insiders and outsiders alike. Their development during the second half of the 20th century is considered by many critics as inappropriate to the environment and culture of the region. There was a sudden break from the traditional to the modern built environment. Weakness and ignorance of building regulations lead to an absence of coherence in many modern districts, which lowered the visual qualities of these districts. Once the coherence was eroded each building could speak, or rather shout, for itself.

More than any other city parts, the public housing estates in Egypt are marked by the environmental problems and degradation. As a result of the inappropriateness of public housing and its failure to respond to users' needs, many families decided to engage in informal building activities inside the formal sector. For instance, a variety of modifications and extensions were carried out in public houses without formal permissions.

On the other hand, the informal settlements represent a low-quality development and a constant transformation. The informal settlements generally are characterized by the poverty of the inhabitants, social marginalization, makeshift characteristics of the houses, unplanned development, deviation from planning and building laws. These settlements also lack basic services and community facilities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study is to determine the necessary precautions, which are required to improve the visual qualities of the city districts and to establish compatibility between them, in order to improve the city image as a whole. Therefore, in the following chapters, urban environmental problems, required strategies and design guidelines for EL-Minya City, will be discussed.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The enhancement of the visual qualities of the Egyptian medium-sized city does not aim at replicating the historic cities, but rather, creating favourable conditions, which would revitalize the city and create a coherent urban form without destroying the character of its components. On the other hand, the preservation of these old cities is important for the retention of the urban heritage and identity.

A successful design could improve the visual quality, ensure that a development respects the surroundings, considers the dimensions of individual buildings, and reinforces of the visual relationships between buildings, streets and public spaces.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The research is divided into five chapters. **In chapter one**, the visual characteristics of Arabic cities will be examined in order to define their key features. The chapter includes three main sections. Section one argues the historical development of Arabic cities in order to explore the urban patterns which shaped the contemporary cities. In section two, a theoretical approach is formulated, which relates to the research objectives and explores possible design criteria. In section three, the research moves towards the explanation of the visual characteristics of the urban patterns.

Chapter two identifies the main forces and factors of the current urban development in Egypt. In order to define the problem in a broader perspective, the chapter is organized in three sections. The first section focuses on the context and deals with the geographical and

physical aspects, the historical developments from 1800 to 2000 and finally the urban development strategies. The second section examines the cause of urban changes from political, social, and economic perspectives. In section three, the transformation of urban patterns will be explained.

Chapter three analyses the visual qualities of EL-Minya City as one of the medium-sized cities in Egypt. The chapter is organized in two sections. The first section deals with the geographical and physical aspects and the historical developments during the period from 1800 to 2000. The second section examines five different patterns of the urban environment: traditional, colonial, modern, public housing, and informal settlement. The visual qualities are analyzed in terms of townscape, urban form, public realm, and architecture. The chapter evaluates each pattern according to the design criteria and identifies the positive qualities, which should be enhanced and emphasized, and the problematic aspects, which should be eliminated. As a result, it will be possible to assess what improvements are needed in order to enhance the visual environment and the identity of the city as whole.

Chapter four introduces actual experiences of renewal projects in Arabic cities. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes the policies in urban renewal. It is followed by section two, which discusses the design experiences in renewal of Arabic cities. Examples from various regions of the Arab world, including the cities of Medina Al-Munawara, Cairo, Baghdad, Aleppo, and Ismailiyya provide an idea of a resolution of respective conflicts. They all contain a general outline of the context in which they were developed, the objectives adopted, the specific proposals, design decisions, and means of implementation used.

Chapter five presents the recommendations of the research. It is divided into two sections. The first section formulates the strategies and design guidelines for EL-Minya City. It is followed by section two, which explores some general recommendations for visual design in Egypt.

