“IMPACT OF PHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS ON THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF RESIDENTS”

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Abstract

The paper is focusing on how physical structure influences the social integration and interaction between residents in informal settlements (IS). The research topic is emerging from the question: why do people choose living in poorly serviced informal areas rather than the planned served new settlements? Here we try to understand the social aspects that can be part of the reply on such question and discovering the relation between urban physical structure and residents’ social aspects. IS emerged in the 60s since then are continuing to grow according to social aspect ‘Proliferation, and Familiarization’. Consequently informal settlements physical space is established by the settler social needs which is characterized by compactly close patterns that is following families’ social correlation and interaction, resulting in the final picture of social pattern. On the other hand we find that the acceptance of those people to the new sprawled formal settlements that was established from 30 years is very low. Consequently the study is seeking to understand the spatial structure of informal settlements by examining the process of development and the physical patterns of its component with focus on space formation and order and streets, plots and buildings patterns. In conclusion, this paper is presenting a keen relation between social relations and physical structure in informal settlements with shedding light on the neglected positive issues of informal neighbourhoods that should be taken in consideration while planning new towns in Egypt.

Keywords

Informal Settlements, Physical Structure, Social Fabric, Street and plot Patterns, New Settlements
Informal Settlements Phenomena Statement

The phenomena of Informal settlement have been a continuous mode of urbanization in Egypt since the 60s. 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 million 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).

This phenomenon began in the period of Gamal Abdel Nasser when he launched a massive industrialization policy that was concentrated in Cairo. This encouraged the immigration from Upper to Lower Egypt that caused housing demand to become problematic. On the other hand the government didn’t produce convenient housing that match with the culture, social and socio-economical aspects of the immigrants which led to the informal urbanization process on the peripheries, with a substantial increase of rural-urban influx on Cairo. Even the cooperative housing policy implemented by Nasser, in Cairo in particular, was also inadequate for creating shelter convenient with low-income families and the large groups of immigrants stepping up to Cairo. Even Sadat’s policy to create New Towns located in the desert areas to absorb those groups, they offered public housing units convenient to upper middle class and not for low income families the real settler Informal settlements are emerging. New settlements created by the government since the 60th didn’t achieve till nowadays 50% of the estimated occupancy rate on the other hand Informal Settlements are growing very fast even the state reinforced legislation forbidding informal construction on agricultural land (Law 59-1966. Nevertheless, these laws and decrees were ineffective, and housing demand in informal settlements was still growing (Abdelhalim 2002).

The earliest of these migrants, mostly were 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 phenomena 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. (Séjourné, 2009). 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-Dakrour, 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).

Consequently the paper declares the process of informal settlement developments and the continuously growing due to social aspects of those citizens. These aspects are carried out from their place of origin where dwellings in are ordered mainly on social structure of residents. Certainly we are not neglecting also the financial influence of this process and the high value of the formal real estate market.

_Urban Socio morphology_

The development of the physical structure of informal settlements took special patterns, movement, and location of activities that is founded mainly on social dimensions. On the other hand when we analyze the physical form including streets, plots and buildings patterns we can extrapolates the direct impact of those elements on social relations.

The Morphology of informal areas is based on three phases: Settlement, Proliferation, and Familiarization. The first phase ‘Settlement’ had been occurred in the 60s as mentioned above from emigrated youth from Upper Egypt. In this phase the physical structure was still not shaped. It was just single contributors dwellings. Later on after the improvement of socio-economic life, they began to adopt their families and invite relatives to join them in the new location moreover they helped them in finding jobs and creating new informal locations. Here begins the phase of ‘Proliferation’. Those new settlers after settling down brought the rest of their families by who the phase of familiarization was created. These processes led to development of physical structure of the place that took its shape according to the type and strength of social relation between the groups. The street width
and plot patterns are defined according to those families’ needs, interactions and correlation. This is reflecting how much the social dimension influenced development of urban fabric on those areas. Consequently, the space order in each neighbourhood was different than the other as it follows how much close families were and how much integration do they react.

For instance, Manshiet Nasser people started to settle there in 50s to work in the stone quarries on the foot of the Moqattam Mountain. Today, it is home to 800 000 people. Most of the families living there have their origins in three distinct areas in Upper Egypt: Qena, Fayyum, and Sohag. Extended families live together, and family ties are very strong. (Gerlach 2009).

In addition to the mentioned facts, residents are stressing on the value of the community and helping themselves. 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. (Shehayeb 2009)

**Socio Economy**

From the economical aspect, how the settlements are established in the two phases of ‘Proliferation and Familiarization’ is depending on social dimensions. To create a bulk of money for constructing new dwellings for the new arriving relatives, a social mechanism that is called ‘Gameaia’ is followed. The mechanism is relying on collecting every month from each member in Gameaia fixed number of money. This lasts for one or two years depending on Gameaia members’ number and ends up every month that one of Gameaia members receives the bulk of money. This mechanism of saving money helped new settlers to build up their houses fast and with neighbour collaboration.

This socio economical mechanism is not only used to construct dwellings but also to cover families’ needs for buying anything over their affordance. This mechanism is reinforcing social integration, spreading out trust between residents additionally is contributing in social cohesion due to several visits for money collection.
Street Pattern

Streets in Informal Settlements are taking many dimensions than just to be a link between two spaces. They work as a social hub. Dwellings orders are emerging as mentioned above consequent to residents’ social needs that is adding value to the efficiency of street function and giving it support to be the core of activities in the district. Widths of streets are created according to residents’ relations and how much residents want to interact and what kind of activity they want to propose in the street. Consequently streets are created in an efficient pattern to fulfil social and economical aspects. By tracing those streets it is obvious that most residential streets have narrow widths restricting the access of strangers in the area and controlling penetration of traffic. Additionally they allow multi activities as follows:

Street as extended HOME

The street in informal settlements is playing a role as an extension of homes. It plays the role of 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 neighbours know each others, social solidarity increases, collective initiatives are easier to realize, and natural surveillance and self-policing occurs (Shehayeb 2009).

Street as extended WORK SPACE

Street activities are not only limited as interaction place between neighbours but further more they play important role as an economical activity space. Those activities are effective potential specifically for women as it is observed. They use part of the street in front of their houses as workshops for doing handmade crafts or market for selling fresh fruits and vegetables or having a portable stand of fast food such as Foul and Falafal or Koshri. This street occupation is giving further potentials. It works as part of safety as it is leading to more eyes on the spaces and opportunity to limit crimes. Furthermore it is providing a good chance for women to work in same time taking care of their household chores. This occupancy moreover helps social network and reinforce social contacts.
Street as extended CAFE

Cafes are part of the streets of informal areas. Chairs are spreading out within a distance that allows only one car to pass by. This is controlling the speed of traffic in the residential districts. Moreover the cafes are located in centralized spots where visually they can be observed from all the surrounded dwellings. The cafe is an observing space besides being an entertainment spot. Furthermore it is referring to another social dimension where husbands can enjoy time with friends after work under the supervision of wives on the other hand this easy accessible location connect husband with house needs while spending time in entertainment. The locations of cafes close to homes offer secure feeling to families.

Street as extended CEREMONY HALL

Ceremonies such as weddings, Ramadan festivals or even passing exams are held in district streets. All families are collaborating in arrangements of the ceremony. The physical elements of the street and the space play role in the ceremony. Balconies of dwellings are simulating theatre balconies where old family members join event from above. Decorations (for example multi coloured hanged lighting strips) on the buildings play a role in formulating the ceremony space. Activities of ceremonies are initiative from all street members. Another feature of collaboration is very obvious in marriage occasions, as all district families are helping in carrying new household elements, arranging missing elements for couples and even they collect money to bring present for married couples according to their priority needs.

Street as extended PLAYGROUND

The street in informal settlements works as children playing space consequent to the secure atmosphere. The width of the street helps the children to deal with the space as playground where they begin to organize it and fix elements reflect certain functions in their games. This integration between the children and the street have influence on the social network in the districts such as creating relation between mothers of the grouped playing children, also it is generating close network between children and surrounding shop owners. Additionally the occupation of the children of the street makes them as observers of events occurring in the district and spread it out in the area by their mothers.
**Plot and Building Pattern**

The informal settlements are created with compact pattern and special order that is respecting the proximity of services, work and home. The distribution of such uses is not chaotic. They are usually situated on location according to aspects such as considering the penetration into the narrower residential streets, which consequently remain protected from strangers. Distances between the three elements: work, services and homes are usually within walking distance. This measure of this is evidence is occurring in many areas, such as Boulaq al-Dakrour, where 60% of residents go to work on foot. 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, is major factors. (Shehayeb 2009). Action of walking everyday has also a social dimension. It creates eye connection between pedestrians and other residents (sellers, cafe visitors...etc). The distribution of shops and markets in informal settlement in proximity with residential plots fulfil the needs of the residents and easily accessible. In addition, another social dimension is obvious in shops owners’ behaviour toward residents by presenting the goods with more affordable prices which reinforce the relation between residents.

On the level of public services, residents’ participation is playing a main role in their features and performance, such as garbage collection, street lighting, street cleaning, and public landscaping. These elements are performed quite successfully in residential streets, where narrow widths restrict the access by strangers and can be controlled by their residents. Shehayeb is mentioning that people clean and maintain what they feel is theirs. The limit of resident participation in what should be governmental responsibilities stops. Main streets is not included in residents concern as 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.

**Informal Settlements and New Towns Fabrics**

From the above mentioned features the Informal Settlements are planned to fulfil social aspects of immigrant residents rather than new towns while new towns residency rate didn’t exceed till now more 50% of the target occupancy rate (GOPP). The above are major social concerns that reply on the question why people prefer living in informal areas even its
poorly conditioned than planned new towns. New Towns that are planned and designed today are not fulfilling all the above mentioned factors. They are based on sprawl design were street, plot and building patterns are far away from social needs of residents. Residential Streets width in 6 October and Sheikh Zayed are up to 45m compared in those in informal areas that don’t exceed 6m; hence one can understand why urban fabric is influencing people social life. Streets in informal settlements are playing major role for a stronger community ties and fewer opportunities for troublemakers to infiltrate the neighbourhood. In addition informal settlements are marked as more safe environments. This is obvious in the free movement of women and children in districts moreover the unlocked doors and windows. Also as mentioned commercial uses, workshops, ceremonies, cafes and children playgrounds are potentials to make places much safer in contrast with new towns where distances are very wide and no eyes are kept on them.

Informal settlements that emerged from community needs should be re-evaluated to understand the priorities upon which residential choices are based, and then reflected in the planning and design in the new settlements. The above potentials in informal settlements can be summarized as a lack of attention of the government toward people social needs and cultural aspects.
References