

## Introduction. Cairo and sustainability: a provocative issue?

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## INTRODUCTION

### CAIRO AND SUSTAINABILITY: A PROVOCATIVE ISSUE?

**W**hy was the choice for a topic about sustainable development in Cairo for this new special issue of “Egypte / Monde arabe”, despite all the questions raised by adopting such notion, and the risk of labeling this notion built in the Western countries on a social, economic, political and cultural reality which appears to be radically different? Indeed sustainability challenges researchers working in such a metropolitan context where the Western approach of the notion may be abusive and inappropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that sustainable development was shaped by the global North, it is however a topic of choice for research about Cairo. The idea of adopting this development pattern for Egypt remains to be sensitive and questionable for many people. This is because it is an ideology that has been founded on western grounds and norms of combined social, economic, political and cultural development which delivered a demand on this theme in this part of the world. In this special issue of “Egypte/ Monde Arabe” we aim to reflect on this particular point: as researchers, how to apprehend sustainability in this world city of the South? As professionals and other decision-makers, how to shape its own sustainable policies, tools, models, etc for a metropolis like Cairo which is in such a critical development stage?

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1. We wish to thank Eric Verdeil and Waleed Mansour for their advice. Pierre-Arnaud Barthel wrote here the first four points and Safaa Monqid held the presentation of the material in the fifth and final point. Thanks also to Florence Curet.

## AND IF CAIRO WAS MORE SUSTAINABLE THAN ONE THINKS?

Reviewing the path of Cairo regarding sustainable development (notion defined further) is quite challenging. Typically, the Arab world is not the most advanced region regarding this matter. As for the country, it is under a multifaceted crisis giving cause for concern. The current climate change indicates sea level rise that is threatening the Nile Delta, a vital region for the country. In addition, there are political pressures concerning the Nile water, the agreements of 1959 giving Egypt privileged access to the Nile, are currently questioned from the States of Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. In the course for a fast urbanization, Egypt is subject to agricultural land decay (12,000 hectares in less each year), as well as the loss in biodiversity due to tourism development on the shores. Moreover pressure on resources is increasing due to the continuous country population increase of nearly 1.3 million capita per year, that will reach at the latest 100 million at year 2025 for an “arable” area limited to the valley and the Nile Delta (10% of the territory), bordered by the desert. And conversely, non renewable energy reserves are dwindling. Egypt will have consumed all its oil by 2030 and there will not be a lot of gas left (JCEE, 2009). Given the low per capita carbon footprint of the developing countries, Egypt remains to rank as one of the highest polluters in Africa after Tunisia and South Africa, producing in 2010 2.3 Giga tons of Carbon dioxide per capita while 10 years before the value was 1.3 Giga tons (United Nations, 2010).

For Cairo, expert and academic literature is abundant on the risks associated to continued strong population pressure<sup>2</sup> and excessive concentration of population in the central area bordered by the ring road in the absence of an efficient national development strategy aiming to strengthen regional secondary urban centers. The capital in 2006 was about 17 million people, and is probably close to 20 million in 2011. Projections of experts confirm Cairo in the category of “XXL cities” that are found mostly in emerging countries (Lorrain, 2010): there will be 25 million in 2020 and 35 million in 2050, based on current rates of urban growth.<sup>3</sup> In some areas, levels of residential densities are among the highest in the world and generate traffic congestion, structural air pollution and conflicts of multiple uses. These negative externalities and highly supported population growth in the late 1970’s prompted

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2. Fertility declined from 4.1 to 3.1 between 1991 and 2005, it has since plateaued with serious implications in terms of growing imbalances between land, water, and population.

3. Greater Cairo counts an increase of 500 000 inhabitants per year.

the Egyptian authorities to launch the first new towns in the desert surrounding the capital. This resulted in a misappropriation of public land sold to the highest bidder and the creation of unfinished areas, highly segregated between gated communities and social housing units built by the state until the 1980s. Much has been said about the consecration of a double reverse in the desert from the city center. Social and environmental inequalities increased: while poor communities are increasingly exposed to multifaceted health risks, well-off households start to the shelter, stay between each other and in their homes, and invent strategies for circumventing against negative externalities. The country is far from being destitute reflected in the annual figures of economic growth. However, this growth has done little to solve environmental problems head on. On the contrary, industrialization, mass consumption and progressive motorization of the households have increased the pressure on resources and increased tenfold health problems. These trends are read by investors (including foreigners), and represent a portfolio labeling Egypt as an unattractive site for development.

This literature is prolific in explaining Cairo development failures. Foremost, issues about urban governance are not easy: state authoritarianism, extreme centralization of the technical and political power in the hands of successive governments and ministries, lack of mid-level metropolitan authority between the local and national levels. The corollary is twofold: an "urban silence" (in the words of Myllyla, 2001), and often a denial of urban problems. Among many other things, silence can be about the worsening of urban air pollution. A denial of the resources scarcity is also usual, as well as the denial of the increasing differentiation between social classes in the access of urban residents to basic services (water, sanitation, electricity). The land and property speculation is the first engine of growth in the capital, and the annuity constitutes a collusion of interests between economic elites and political elites around the sale of the desert and some other well-located land reserves (Denis, 2006). Bureaucracy and corruption accompany this urban production which is the subject of an over-technical and financial investment. Conversely, under-investment by public authorities in the slums is the other side of their choice forcing residents (assisted by some NGOs) to self-sufficiency in an advanced decaying environment at the metropolitan level. Worse, the policy discourse consisted (and still consists) in demolishing and relocating, even if the task is so immense that it is unrealistic. Finally, the legislative context is itself conducive to waste and deterioration of urban fabric: an energy (electricity and oil in the first place) still heavily subsidized, which suggests to Egyptians that it will be endless, locked rents in central areas that inhibit any enhancement dynamics, an inadequate law on construction, a culture of zoning in planning which is just beginning to evolve.

The recent book written by David Sims, entitled *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control* (2010) is going against the current of the rich corpus of issues and challenges facing the Egyptian capital. It dares to revisit the path of Cairo and able to put into perspective some qualities of the development of the capital. The expert in housing and urban strategy, established in Cairo since 1974, readily acknowledges that the Egyptian capital is completely out of control with regard to Western modes of urban management. But he wants precisely to go against the Western discourse on chaotic mega-cities of the Third World in order to realize in the example of Cairo the success of a city that has rightly avoided the chaos, result of the “ironic” combination of an authoritarian state offering nothing to poor households, but letting it roll, despite laws to ban, effective mechanisms for building neighborhoods, qualified by the decision makers as “informal”, thanks to the tenacity and the ingenuity of small family entrepreneurs. It is true that a good majority of these areas counting for more than 60% of the urban task was achieved at the expense of agricultural land, but David Sims shows that urban sprawl generated by these spontaneous urban neighborhoods planning proved somewhat consumer of little space unlike the new towns of the desert: essentially being a continuation of the urban agglomeration and filling in the gaps between the village centers surrounding the central area of Cairo. The original compactness of the historic areas has been maintained in these neighborhoods built since the 1970s to 1980s: scalable residential density, mixed functions, pedestrian and motorized (motor tricycles called tuk-tuk and micro-bus) movement within the area. Using the ability of Cairenes to live in densely built and vertical environments and to rely on highly developed local social networks and skills borrowing from tradition to modernity, the urban matrix created by and for the families living there is called resilient and sustainable by David Sims and a handful of Egyptian experts (as Dina Shehayeb<sup>4</sup>, 2009).

The context of Cairo offers a case study for a stimulating research. How can we think about sustainable development in such framework, culturally non-Western, marked by extremely serious failures of urban governance? How sustainable development is being implemented in a megalopolis subject to the challenge of population size inducing immediately a complexity, but also having advantages and potential related to its “DNA” itself (compactness and resilience)?

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4. Dina Shehayeb presents in this issue her experience on Islamic Cairo. She also worked in informal settlements upgrading projects in Cairo.



Figure 1– Street of Imbaba neighbourhood: informal compact housing, pedestrians and tuk-tuk (Barthel, 2010).

## FROM NORTH TO SOUTH: HOW TO THINK SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT?

It has been shown how sustainable development is a rather new concept referred to universal, which has first received extensive care and support from the global North, related thus to countries located at an advanced level of their economy (Aknin et al. 2002; Boidin and Djeflat, 2009). The origin of the word within the Brundtland report in 1987 marked the beginning of a conquest of the world that has reached the developing countries quickly in 1990 with the first report on Human Development by the United Nations Development Programme for the Development and the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and then the Habitat II Summit held in Istanbul in 1996 which clearly states the priority to improve the living conditions of the city dwellers - a goal set in the heart of the global environmental agenda. These new guidelines for action have been spread in Cairo and Egypt in general for the last twenty years, as elsewhere in the region, through the multilateral and bilateral aid for development and the construction of a global environmental governance involving Arab countries on emerging and world-wide issues like global warming, biodiversity, desertification or deforestation.

Going back to the genealogy of the concept can reiterate how its definition is controversial. The original definition included in the Brundtland Report has five major components: the construction of comprehensive and long-term development strategies, the priority given to future generations, the articulation between local and global, the need to give a specific place to basic needs of the poor and the integration between the economic, social and environmental (Theys 2010). And the concept of sustainable city<sup>5</sup> can be considered loosely as “an urban entity that produces ecologically sustainable processes without endangering national, regional or global natural resources and ecosystems” (Myllyla and Kuvaja, 2005). Behind this universalism, the concept is still geographically new, since it comes from a direct criticism of Western development itself and its adverse effects on the environment in rich countries but also world-wide. Theories of the sustainable city aim to build alternatives, and even a reversal of Western urban culture at two closely interrelated levels: the urban planning and management, and the sphere of social change including lifestyles and consumption.

To develop this point in city planning, the sustainable urban development is characterized by an inversion of the principles of the Athens Charter adopted in 1933. In Europe<sup>6</sup>, the adoption of the Aalborg Charter in 1994 which launched a rallying movement by the local authorities to the “European Campaign for Sustainable Cities” marks the break (Emelianoff, 2007). Instead of *zoning*, a principle of strict separation of flows, and the model of *tabula rasa*, a new attention is paid to the social and functional mix, to the reduction of car travel by road sharing, to the contextualization with the existing. An attempt to release of the hygienic approach has been complementing this evolution for twenty years: new primacy of the density, rehabilitation of the role of water, new green network policy. It reflects ultimately the evolution of the Western societies in relation to the resources and a growing concern of their economies. And decisively in the North, it is generally accepted that the city is part of a natural multi-dimensional and theorized environment through the concept of “urban ecosystem” (e.g. Coutard and Levy, 2010<sup>7</sup>).

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5. We do not go here into the debate on the definition of the concepts of eco-city, ecological city and sustainable city that are not strictly equivalent.

6. There are these provisions in the smart growth initiatives in North America.

7. And in particular the Chapter 4 written by Sabine Barles entitled : « Écologies urbaine, industrielle et territoriale ».

Closely with the social changes that have taken place in recent decades in the North, sustainable development is also generating new collective values: social equity and generational equity, sobriety of resources consumption patterns, sense of community and local roots, sense of belonging to a common planet. And an ecological-social morality is constructed by policy makers rallying voluntary residents and businesses, although each retains its interest in perspective and although conflicts of interest are still very vivid. The experiences of European pioneer cities in sustainability suggest that sustainable development cannot be a completely controlled process as it requires flexibility among various stakeholders (Myllyla and Kuvaja, 2005, 228). Thus it cannot be fully administrated from top to down.

It is common to reiterate that the concept of sustainable development was first implemented in countries with democratic culture, decentralized and accountable urban powers, an active civil society and capacity for action in the field of public policies. This favorable environment, which has still few equivalent in the South<sup>8</sup>, can trigger new urban policies more cross-sector including sectoral issues linking the levels of action, although controversies remain vivid. Now as a dominant collective issue, sustainable development is operationalized through new challenges for the economies and societies in the North including dematerialization (less consumption) and decarbonization (preparing for the post -oil). Recipients of sustainable development are at the same time full participants whether residents, businesses, governments and civil society. Finally, the level of development of the economies of the North also allows the deployment of a technology and business approach of sustainable development, particularly in the field of energy, which is experienced through pilot projects.

Sustainable development, although shaped in the North, is an issue as just as in the South, at all territorial levels, but also considering the globalism of many issues. It is even more important in the case of mega-cities of the South in which their rapid development creates impacts that became uncontrolled, affecting their attractiveness (and investment) on the international stage<sup>9</sup>. However, many authors (e.g. Pugh, 2000) suggest, against the current of the supposed global “convergence”, that the countries must create their own sustainable

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8. We use the terms “the South” as synonyms for the terms “developing countries”.

9. Increasing pollution of water and air, uncontrolled management of waste, traffic congestion, all have economic costs.



development policies based on choices and priorities and using *ad hoc* tools, institutions and pilot operations. Indeed, some suspicion is identifiable from the policy makers of the South on sustainable development coming from the North. On the one hand, sustainable development comes to them through the channel of international donors and “cooperation”, delivering toolkits and best practices and aiming to assist (not always without ambiguities) the authorities of the countries concerned. In addition, with a strong presence especially in the megacities of the South, donors and international agencies carry a globalized *doxa* of the sustainable city that cannot fuel alone the debate on strategies to be developed in order to suit the current environment, to mitigate and to address the impacts<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, as the structural adjustment and the concept of good governance, sustainable development is interpreted by decision makers in the South as a response to immediate concerns of the North and transnational corporations: debt repayment through mechanisms such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), creation of enabling environment for foreign direct investments, sale of environmental technologies and other “green” products (Boidin and Djeflat, 2009).

A distance is thus detectable in the South contrasting with the growing enthusiasm of urban actors in the North in favor of sustainable development. In particular, the sustainable eco-technological city, generating virtuous city blocks that only wealthy households can afford, is perceived by the experts themselves with reserves. However, policy based on low-tech through the reinvestment of local knowledge (related to waste recycling or construction and architecture) provides interesting feedbacks. When asked this necessary “endogenization” of sustainable development, the purpose is not to say that any experience of the North is not *a priori* relevant or wanted in developing countries such as Egypt. The circulation of tools is also already at work (creation of sustainable neighborhood, construction of wind farm, urban regeneration etc.). However, and hence the need for greater sustainability of development, the central question is whether the South actually capable of producing its own models and alternatives for development instead of directly copying the technocratic practices and the overall ‘environmental epistemology’ of the northern societies and cities (Myllyla et Kuvaja, 2005, 229; see also Carley, 2001). And therein lies the difficulty both theoretical and operational. Southern cities are still few to have opened channels. Curitiba in Brazil is an example often cited. China, Singapore and South Africa, already powerful emerging

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10. See UN-Habitat, 2010, *Planning Sustainable Cities: UN-Habitat Practices and Perspectives*, 127 p.

countries, also engaged some experiments. In the Arab world, no city has yet clearly distinguished itself although first innovations are at work in Amman, Rabat, or Abu Dhabi (Barthel and Zaki, 2011).

## THE SUSTAINABLE AGENDA IN CAIRO: AN ALIBI OR A NEW CYCLE OF DEVELOPMENT?

The urban agenda in Cairo in the 1990's and the 2000's reflects an undeniable spread of sustainable development adopted in a multiplicity of definitions and recipients<sup>11</sup>. In this, the evolution of urban action in connection with this standard justifies this issue of "*Egypte / Monde arabe*". However, how to measure the change from the neoliberal forces since Sadat structuring the development of the Egyptian capital, and in particular the significance of a *laissez-faire* policy of the authorities to the benefit of a private sector that supports the areas of urban action the most profitable? Can we also say that urban actors are all engaged deeply in the dynamics of sustainable development beyond the increasing official speeches? Indeed, we believe like Myllyla and Kuvaja that sustainable development "may not be successful if genuine political commitment for change does not exist and if the activities are not based on strategies that strengthen the capacity of public administration, support cooperation between civil society and authorities as well as enhance more equal resource allocation amongst city residents" (2005, 235-236).

It is conventional to distinguish at least two urban agendas on strong issues of sustainable development: the green agenda and the brown agenda (Satterthwaite, 2001). The green agenda focuses on reducing the societal impacts on natural resources and ecosystems and in particular on the impact of production, consumption and waste generation. Meanwhile the brown agenda includes health issues related to the degradation of the living environment. According to Leitmann (1999), the dichotomy is not relevant in the case of mega-cities of the South where both agendas are extremely mixed on the issues of resource depletion, poverty and pollution. Without identifying the processes linking the two agendas, we prefer to point out the past or on-going actions in Cairo that show coalitions between public actors (ministries and governorates in the lead), foreign donors, international agencies, private sector and civil society.

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11. We refer to our book published in French, which includes 22 interviews with "pioneers" of sustainable development in Cairo (Barthel and Monqid, 2011).

BOX: ACTIONS OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN CAIRO (2000-2011)

- \* reducing industrial pollution in Helwan, in the south suburb, or in Six of October involving the Ministry of Environment, the national federation of industrial enterprises, the Egypt National Cleaner Production Center established in 2005 and UNIDO through programs funded by donors;
- \* improving waste management through the development of a strategy across the Greater Cairo led by the Ministry of Environment in 2010 and aiming to integrate all the stakeholders in the sector (including the rag-pickers community well-known for its performance in recycling and a number of NGOs), combined with source segregation programmes in pilot districts (with the Italian Cooperation Cospe);
- \* improving the conditions of production and consumption patterns: the “Sustainable Consumption and Production Programme for Cairo City” coordinated by the Egypt National Cleaner Production Center, Cairo Governorate, the Ministry of Environment and with the support of UNEP;
- \* developing renewable energy which resulted in the creation of a Joint Committee on Energy Efficiency in 2007, based on a cooperation between the Egyptian Agency for Renewable Energy created in 1985 and the German cooperation GIZ;
- \* improving the supply of public transportation through the construction of a strategy to 2027 (prepared with the support of the Japanese cooperation, JICA), the project of an unified regulatory authority for public transportation across the Greater Cairo (with the support of the UNDP and the French cooperation AFD) and a program to improve air quality;
- \* improving the living conditions of the informal settlements with the urban development program co-managed by the Ministry of Economic Development and GIZ (German Technical Cooperation);
- \* the launch of a new strategy since 2009 on the management of drinking water and sanitation in the Greater Cairo (EU Water Initiative, OECD).

Pluralization of sustainable urban action is yet identifiable through these coalitions of actors. It was also accompanied by the institutionalization of sustainable development at the national level: law of environmental protection in 1994 updated in 2009 (and other laws relating to the industry, energy, development and irrigation – see

Wahaab, 2003<sup>12</sup>), creation of the Ministry for Environmental Affairs in 1997 (and new public agencies responsible for waste and beautification, protection of historic districts or clean production), launching of a National Environmental Action Plan (2002-2017) prepared through the capacity-21 unit in the Ministry of Environment and with the support of the UNDP and, finally, preparing a National Sustainable Development Strategy Framework since 2008. Public actors are thus caught in a time of preparation or revision of laws (for heritage, energy, urban planning), codes (for the green building, for energy efficiency in construction), guides of recommendations (for open spaces, materials, green space management) and standards (the “Green Pyramids” label created in 2010 to certify the performance of new buildings). Their application (or non-application) should be studied in the near future. Sustainable development is spreading as much with this institutional policy-making as by market forces. To give one example, Egyptian companies are forced by the European Union (EU) to comply with its regulations (including high standards of quality and industrial processes) if they want to export agricultural and industrial production on the EU market. This economical approach to sustainable development should not be underestimated in Egypt. The recycling economy is another example. If recycling in Europe is a business and also an “eco-gesture” revealing a voluntary practice from consumers to self-segregate their waste, the waste in Cairo is primarily only a source of income for the entire community of garbage collectors. No deep awareness in Cairo so far to segregate garbage at home.

In this evolving context, without ever having links and mutual knowledge, NGOs, international and private actors also participate in the renewal of the action and policies. For example, the Egyptian developer Sodic, in partnership with the Lebanese Solidere, challenged the Egyptian New Urban Communities Authority to get the “right to density” to test eco-neighborhoods projects. The trans-national Aga Khan Foundation came to Egypt to make a park instead of a historical dumb, and furthermore has exposed to the Egyptian authorities in the 2000s that a sustainable model of Islamic Cairo revitalization was possible<sup>13</sup>. Last example, the Solar Cities NGO has set up solar water heaters and biogas units in poor neighborhoods and demonstrated the viability of the economic model to the Egyptian authorities.

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12. R. Wahaab made an interesting history of environmental protection laws which date back to early 1947 (Wahaab, 2003) and exposed the problem of their enforcement.

13. We refer to the texts of Dina Shehayeb and Anna Madoeuf in this volume.

Once outlined and described the start of sustainable urban programmes and policies in Cairo through both the procedures and the results, assess the change is difficult especially given the importance of market-based regulation that governs the Cairo urban development. Even before the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the place of sustainable development was already uncertain and shifting; uncertain because the decision makers, primarily politicians, did not firmly grasp the repository, and because the sustainability is still not in line with the interests, values and lifestyles of both economic and political elites. It is again uncertain because we can observe a telescoping of sustainable development with other “meta-narratives” mobilizing the concepts of progress and modernization that are measured in car ownership and household air conditioning equipment. And the legacy is there with its inertia. The exploitation of land assets will justify still in advance, job creation linked to the real estate industry and infrastructure works, even if the vacancy or unfinished housing continues. The challenges are indeed likely to be met to change the course taken, to truly enter in a new development cycle. In this case, sustainable development is challenged by Cairo and not vice versa.

## THE EMERGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM CHALLENGED BY CAIRO

If you come back to the issue of urban governance, it is clear that the prerequisites for sustainable development are far from being established in Cairo as mentioned earlier. From this point of view, the effectiveness of sustainable development should begin in the first place, with improvements of political issues, and thus addressing the issue of corruption, the excessive centralization of political and technical power and routines of government. It's a prerequisite for the making of sustainable policies aiming a better distribution of resources and to minimize the vulnerabilities of the poorest households. The challenge is that of decentralization and greater interaction between urban actors (from public authorities to civil society) in order to work on shared values. In a “revolution” context, it is difficult to say whether Cairo will empower real break with authoritarian political legacy. A Franco-Egyptian re-launched the project of decentralization in May 2011<sup>14</sup> and the

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14. The seminar, entitled “Towards a new local government system in Egypt. The French experience” was organized by the Ministry for Local Development (Egypt) and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (Embassy of France in Arab Republic of Egypt) on 24-26 May 2011.

election of representatives of local councils could become a reality in the near future.

Improving dialogue with civil society is another challenge. Just on environmental issues, we have identified on one hand an entrenched network of NGOs that have proven a track record on issues of training, local entrepreneurship to solve local problems and daily environment. And on the other hand, a new generation of activists is mobilizing for the last four years on new and fashionable themes as climate change, solar energy, carpooling or city-biking (Monqid and Barthel, 2011). Braving the oil and electricity subsidized by the authorities, valuing local knowledge, these groups, still a small minority, believe that policies must change now.



Figure 2– Carpooling in Cairo  
(drawing from the Website  
[www.egyptcarpoolers.com](http://www.egyptcarpoolers.com)).

For the moment, this “street environmentalism” (Myllyla, 2001) faces a problem of visibility across a city as big as Cairo and the low culture of collaborative work with decision makers who relay very little their actions. This is confirmed by many Egyptian experts on the ground. “This is greatly evident as the distance between the environmental decision-maker and the local citizen remains to be as big as it is after the “revolution” with any other government establishment. Yet the case has to be different when it comes to environmental issues since they touch the citizen on daily basis, for example air quality, water and level of noise are the externalities that citizens have no control on and should be careful monitored by the government” (interview with Waleed Mansour, Program Specialist at Regional Centre for Disaster Risk Reduction in Cairo done in June 2011)<sup>15</sup>.

15. See the paper entitled “An apathetic minister” written by Waleed Mansour in *Al masry al youm* in July 2011 about the challenges that the Ministry of Environmental Affairs should face from his point of view in the Egyptian “transition”. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/478644>

Cairo policy makers' representations open the question of urban culture that must change. When you come to this issue which is a prerequisite of the invention of a Cairo model of sustainable development, the gap is evident between the cultures of Egyptian policy makers themselves (representing the elite) and those of their Northern counterparts. For the latter, as we have seen above, sustainable development has been accompanied by a questioning of Western urban model inherited from the post World War II and, from there, a statement of a new relation with natural resources, the importance of the nature in the city and values such as sharing of public spaces of the city, social functional and technological diversity and fairness in the access to networks, housing and services. The need for change is not as ingrained in the minds in Egypt. Two examples of this shift in culture can be developed quickly. At CEDEJ, the realization of a feasibility study in 2009 on making Gezirat el Dahab (located in the south of central Cairo) an eco-island was for us an opportunity to understand how the issues of "nature in the city", "biodiversity" and even of "urban agriculture" currently highly valued by politicians in the North weren't central issues for decision-makers in Cairo. The island is a little gem of self-development, car-free, dedicated to agriculture, accessible only by boat. Under pressure from property and tourism developers, the decision-makers are trying to find a different future for it, proof that this island is not clearly seen by them as an asset in itself on which lessons can be drawn for the development of Cairo. Another example of the shift of urban culture, a seminar on the issue of hyper-density and strategic planning was held in late 2010

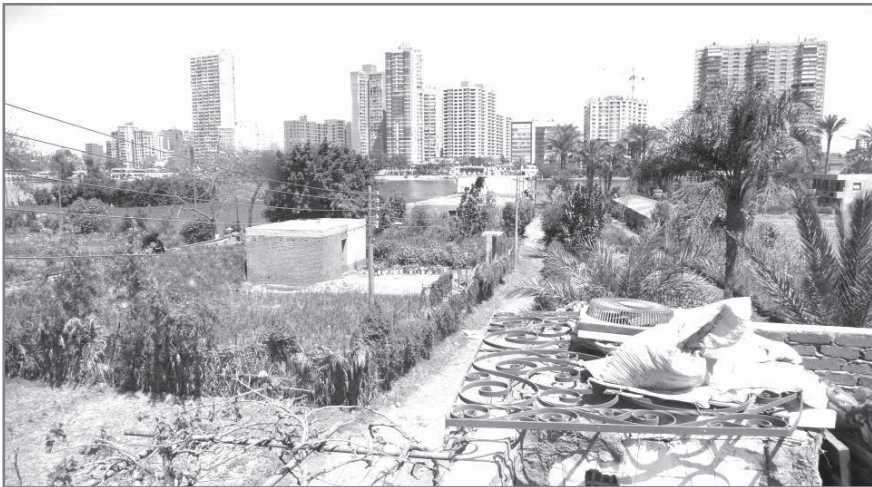


Figure 3– Dahab nilotic island, a car-free and agricultural land in the Southern suburb of Cairo

at CEDEJ with a panel of experts presenting experiences of Cairo, Paris, Shanghai and Mumbai. During this meeting, the presentation of the strategy “Greater Cairo 2050”, in preparation since 2008, has revealed the persistence of an extremely negative vision from the decision makers on hyper-density, as the main response of Egyptian authorities is to continue as a top priority the loosening of activities and populations of the central area towards the new towns and to demolish a large number of informal settlements to “regenerate” them.

Changing urban cultures by the elites is, in our view, a challenge. It seems closely related to the challenge of sharing power and shifting from a market-driven and top-down vision for the city prevailing currently in Cairo to a more sustainable model based on the potentials and strengths of the capital - the very ones that David Sims identifies in his book and that we have briefly summarized above. However, the vision about informal settlements from a part of the technical staff appears to be changing in recent years. And the redesign of the development of “new towns” is another encouraging sign. But again: does the adherence count a majority? And what about for example the speeches that appear in the construction of the strategy “Greater Cairo 2050” on the priority to be given to nature, on the intensification of projects in collective transportation, on the need for a unified regulatory “Greater Cairo” authority? Are they indicating at most a willingness from the Egyptian policymakers to resume the international agencies expectations? Proclaiming that you will make sustainable development will not be enough, especially if the metropolitan governance does not change in depth.

### THREE SEQUENCES: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE TEXTS

The choice was made to give voice to researchers, but also to the Egyptians who are stakeholders for action aiming to improve living conditions in Cairo and more generally sustainable development. Thus this special issue consists in six scientific papers and four interviews with two professionals from the world of urban planning and architecture (Dina Shehayeb and Omar Elhitamy), an actor from the world of culture (Moataz Nasr) and a resident manager of a mobilization (Dana Moussa). A trilingual lexicon completes this set of texts by offering words of sustainable development and their translations. This multilingual issue is divided into three sequences addressing the issue of waste management, the first experiences of inner city revitalization, and finally the issue of social cohesion through culture and planning. These ‘entries’ in the making of sustainable development in Cairo are



# Green Arm Retreat of Nahdet El Mahrousa

www.nahdetmasr.org/GreenArm  
RSVP at: greenarm@nahdetmasr.org





**Saturday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011**

Venue: El-khan Green Building, Oasis Ecological Initiative, Gate-2 El-Wahaat Road

"I build Egypt". A common statement we've seen recently on hundreds of signs hovering over the millions gathered in celebration of new hope and the revival of our national identity and pride.

Is this a promise from us youth? Will we surprise the world with ingenious social and environmental ventures that will pave our way to sustainability, the Egyptian way?

This mission requires what the Green Arm of Nahdet El-Mahrousa was made for, to provide a platform for collaboration and to seed and support youth-led environmental ventures that will plan and build the Egypt we dream of and the quality of life we deserve.



## Map to venue

Logistics: Optional bus shuttles will be arranged and announced a week in advance.




Figure 4– Poster of the Green Arm Retreat, 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2011 (Ecological NGOs meeting)

a reflection of our CEDEJ activities conducted between 2008 and 2011 in the urban studies department. They are far from exhausting the subject, but nevertheless offer “windows” either by sector (waste, culture, housing) or more cross-sector (the urban regeneration of historic areas or the re-planning of so-called “new” cities in Cairo) to analyze the evolution of urban action in connection with political reforms, market developments, actions of foreign donors and civil society in the very course of urban action. What are the main contributions of the texts?

## Waste at the time of the privatization of a service

In the first part, the texts are dealing with waste management and urban sanitation, which are at the heart of many questions in Egypt. They represent significant challenges for the future; involve public health and their social, political, environmental and economic implications are crucial. This section was prepared with a view to provide a triple light on the political choice by the central government to privatize the management and its effects (Bénédicte Florin et Lise Debout) on the community of rag-pickers who undergo this reform aiming to marginalize and remove them when they inhabit a well located land (Wael Fahmi); on the role of citizens and civil society who manage to build up social mobilizations to compensate the lack of efficiency of urban service of waste collection (Dana Moussa ).

Bénédicte Florin and Lise Debout address a fundamental aspect of the problem of waste, the privatization of the service in Egypt and its impact on the informal sector. They clarify the context by showing how the arrival, in the 2000s, of European companies in the waste management system has profoundly altered the earlier modes of organization and questioned the place and role of the informal sector, yet very active in the field. They analyze in great detail the various coping strategies implemented by the informal and formal sector in order to stabilize the service and sustain their activities. The text of Wael Fahmi illustrates the relationship between the state and the informal sector and highlights the strategies of predation by the state of workers in this sector, such as expulsion, under “improving the environment”. The findings highlight the negative effects of privatization of waste management systems on the rag-pickers and converge with the analysis of the previous text. Also, the text provides an analysis of game players, while advocating a radical political action and a concerted planning for the consolidation of urban governance. Finally, Safaa Monqid focuses her remarks on the links of residents with their waste in Cairo. She analyzes the constraints of public education and awareness, but also emphasizes the failure of the State in the matter, being responsible for mobilizing people for

the cleanliness of their neighborhood, as illustrated by the Facebook campaign “Clean up Giza”, initiated by Dana Moussa, *passionaria* of a clean Cairo who is interviewed in this issue.

## The discovery of the value of historic spaces: between globalized paradigms and local context

The second part of this issue focuses on the urban regeneration of the core neighborhoods of Cairo. This process is in itself new and positive in Egypt and has herald a new understanding of the potential value of historic districts on the part of the policy makers and technical staff after decades of denigration of the center and desert conquest for new cities. “Regenerate the city”, “renew”, “upgrade”, “revitalize” so many words that flow and trigger or accompany the early dynamics of heritage value of buildings, public spaces pedestrianization, valuation of leisure and tourism, revaluation of land and property markets by ending the vacation of a housing. This idea of “regeneration” acts as a globalized paradigm in terms of achievements in the major capitals whether Arab or not. And this paradigm constitutes in the academic and technical literature of “sustainable development” itself, aiming for a multifaceted action based on laws, institutions, funding and an integrated intervention strategy.

The interview with Dina Shehayeb, a consultant for the Aga Khan Foundation in the 2000's, driver of the regeneration of a small part of Islamic Cairo, reveals an experience motivated by an international donor and is experimenting with an approach built with the community resident, and therefore the implementation of participatory techniques. Dina Shehayeb presents her experience, the success of some actions, but indicated that this long term project is not sufficiently taken over and “carried” by local Cairenes. There is an inconvenience here as the insufficiency supported by Cairo Governorate to sustain the institutional framework established by Aga Khan asks the question of the adhesion to the action itself to technical and political plans by the same authority. The sustainability of the project is thus not guaranteed. In her article, Anna Madoeuf completes the analysis of the recent transformations of Islamic Cairo. The development of a former landfill into a prestigious park, al-Azhar Park, overlooking the monuments of the Fatimid Cairo is presented in the context of references to globalization and heritage value. Anna Madoeuf shares with us her views on the importance of this “green gazebo” which has contributed since its opening in 2005 to enhance the image of the old city. A final text covers Khedivial Cairo, the one built to the West of Islamic Cairo at the time when Cairo dreamed of “Paris on the Nile” for plagiarizing the title of

the book written by Cynthia Myntti (1999). Galila El Kadi looks at the start of a multifaceted action taken by new public and private developers. Without stable overall strategy or consensus on a shared vision of regeneration and its objectives, the author sheds light on the lack of ready-made sustainable development implementation. Urban regeneration, a concept invented in and for northern cities, according to the author must mature even in the case of Cairo.

### **Towards a more inclusive city? The development and culture to the test of social cohesion**

In the third part, two texts seek to open up avenues for reflection from the ways imagined by the actors of the city to rethink the social bond in Cairo. With this overused expression, we mean to talk about the social dimension of sustainable development and to see how the urban actors in a capital city work the cohesion issues marked by an increasing socio-spatial fragmentation since the last thirty years.

Cultural places in the city are able to reinforce the social bond. A recent dynamic that goes back to the late 1990s appeared in Cairo with the birth of new places, mostly private, investing all types of neighborhoods: Central Sawy in Zamalek, Townhouse in downtown, Darb 17/18 in Old Cairo or Artellewa in the informal settlement Ard El-Lewa. Every place has specific relationships with its area of implementation, the capital and even the regional and international environment. Thus, the interview with Moataz Nasr, director of the cultural center Darb17/18 , realized by Safaa Monqid, shows the movement that articulates the factory of premises to an integration action in an area (by the potters) and the course of a cultural program that create social links between artisans, artists and attendees. The final text looks on the other hand the question of the future of “new towns” launched in the late 1970s. Pierre-Arnaud Barthel returns to their underdevelopment and analyses two innovations. First, the launch by the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and New Towns of diagnostics and strategies for rethinking the future of these large-scale spaces. Secondly, the text evokes the real estate market change, its saturation on the niche of luxury and high standards, and the beginning of a diversification of operations targeting the lower middle classes and a greater consideration of their inclusion in the desert and the resources available. Will these trends initiated before the “revolution” be consolidated in the coming times?

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