On the Maintenance Policy of a Historical ‘Galleria’ Building in Alexandria

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Abstract
This paper compares the insurance in 1905 of a ‘Galleria’ type of building in Alexandria, Egypt, with its present situation in 2001. The building is analyzed in terms of: 1) façade and space alteration, 2) function and rents, and 3) insurance and administrative system. The correlation in 1905 between the municipal regulations and building insurance sustained the essence of an open gallery, which itself (gallery) distributed the insured building items for maintenance. The maintenance policy was not limited to insurance, but to the wider context of the municipal system. The system specified the function of building spaces and left the rents to market forces, while the profitable insurance was activated to adjust the running cost of building items with the functional and rental policies. Since nationalization in 1952, the ‘Rent Control’ and change of building regulations have caused the galleria to deteriorate. The administration of the galleria is separated between the physical and socio-economic aspects, which reflects on the weakened relationship between the owner and the tenants. The life-span of the galleria became totally dependent on its physical condition without functional or financial strategies. The study points out the socio-economic requirement of insurance for ‘Galleria Menasce’ as it was.

Keywords: Alexandria; galleria; maintenance; insurance

Introduction
The first plan in 1855 of the European colony of Alexandria in Egypt was a plaza designed by an Italian engineer, F. Mancini, and named ‘Place des Consuls.’ The plaza developed several ‘galleria’ type buildings for commercial/residential functions, and was characterized by ‘gallery’ open spaces of a Neo-Renaissance style of Milanian origin. These interior galleries transformed chronologically from oblong to cross shapes in correlation with the plaza itself, which indicates the analogy of Place des Consuls as one large gallery composed of smaller ones. Accordingly, each galleria building in Place des Consuls is important for the conservation of the whole plaza. In this study, however, priority is given to the largest and most historical galleria that survives to the present. Meanwhile, the selected galleria was land-marked by important functions of major European shipping lines in Alexandria and the residences of the elite European merchants, in addition to one of the most prestigious shops and cafés found in town.

The galleria was designed in 1883 by an Italian engineer, A. Lasciac, and owned by a Greek national, S. Menasce, thus named ‘Galleria Menasce.’ Later, in 1905 the galleria became ‘insured’ according to a policy of ‘Insurance Plan’ by the European Municipality of Alexandria. The objective of insurance was to maintain the items of buildings in the colony against destruction by the native rioters due to political reasons at that time. This building insurance, however, expired in 1952 as a result of nationalization. Meanwhile, in 1984 the Alexandria Governorate selected ‘Galleria Menasce’ among the list of buildings in Alexandria to be maintained for conservation. In the same year the building’s condition was surveyed, but without specifying the maintenance policy, and still today the galleria is neglected without maintenance.

So far the studies that are concerned with the building maintenance discuss separate issues. To mention some, M. Weaver studied the building techniques of maintaining structures and materials from the physical standpoint. The socio-economic issue by J. Harvey defines the critical point of building redevelopment to occur when the cost of maintenance works exceeds the building income due to function. C. Couch approached the upkeep of buildings from the administrative point of view, which discusses building enforcement and taxation policies. In this paper a detailed survey in 2001 by the researcher of Galleria...
Menasce is compared to the original plan in 1905 of the galleria that documents its insured situation. The purpose is to clarify the changes during almost a hundred years which have affected the maintenance of the galleria. The galleria is analyzed in terms of: 1) façade and space alteration, 2) function and rents, and 3) insurance and administrative system. The correlation between these issues may define a future policy of maintaining ‘Galleria Menasce’ in Alexandria.

1. The Insurance of ‘Galleria Menasce’ in 1905

The measurement of Galleria Menasce is supposed to be of an indigenous unit (Dhira) of approximately 0.6m. The crossing gallery measured 7.2m in width, and opened to the plaza and streets that surround the galleria (Fig. 1.) This interior gallery was characterized by flooring of marble and a glazed skylight, in addition to classical motifs on façades of the light brown color and pink Venetian shutters. The same façade characteristics continued all around the galleria, and were kept uniform by the municipal regulation that rejected any repairs different from the original. The ground floor spaces were accessed from the building exterior and the gallery space as well. A grid of 4.8m laid out the limestone walls of the galleria with timber joist floor construction of approximately 5.25m clear height. The process of altering the building spaces required municipal consent and supervision regarding implementation. This enforced the skilful alteration in 1905 of Galleria Menasce to merge shops on the ground floor and rearrange the spaces of flats in the upper floors.

The Municipality designated Galleria Menasce to function for ground floor shops, with the upper floors as office and residential flats. The gallery was regulated as a public open space, but during the evenings it was possible to shut the entrance doors and function as a private space for the residents of the galleria. The contract of tenancy specified the function, with the details of floor area and the nationality of tenants. The total foreign tenancy in 1905 of Galleria Menasce suggests that natives were excluded or the cultural difference peaked here. The rent was based on the free business of real estate, and a municipal tax of 16% was levied from the income of rents. The monthly rent in 1905 of flats in Galleria Menasce ranged from 210 to 325 Francs according to the floor area, with higher rents for floor areas looking over the plaza, and from 65 to 125 Francs for shops based on a similar criteria as for flats. The cost of maintenance was raised by one third of the rents, and deposited in the ‘insurance’ of building items.

In 1905 the insurance of Galleria Menasce classified the items of building according to the ‘Insurance Plan’ of the colony in 1905. The galleria increased its insurance on the ground and first floors as well as the northern plaza-side (A1–H30 of Figs. 2b, 2c & 2d) while limiting it on the southern street-side (K1–O30 of Figs. 2b, 2c & 2d) through the filtration by the gallery space (Table 1.) The crossing gallery itself concentrated on the insurance of façades, window shutters, the central fountain, flooring and the skylight. Also, sundry building equipment of the galleria were commonly insured. In 1905 the contract of the insurance company ‘North British & Mercantile’ lists for Galleria Menasce the three months insurance costs of 2.75 Francs per window shutter and 1.25 Francs per square meter of the stone façade, with 20% extra cost for the façades of the gallery. In case of damage the insurance company shares with the owner the cost of repair by a ratio of 2:1 respectively. In addition, some tenants of the galleria, such as a jewellery shop on the ground floor, insured their private possessions, and various items of the residential flats.

The insurance of Galleria Menasce in 1905 reflects the scope of the municipal system in Alexandria. In this system, the building life-span was defined by the socio-economic policies of rents, taxation and insurance rather than the physical condition. The free business of real-estate was taxed to invest in public facilities, while the insured building items were tuned according to the physical characteristics of individual buildings. The outcome is manifested in Galleria Menasce through a varied rent and insurance to suit the qualitative variations of the building zones. Meanwhile, the increased insurance of the first two floors of the galleria considers the higher visibility of the bottom part of the façades or the easy targeting by rioters.

![Table 1. The Insurance of Galleria Menasce in 1905](xx Insured ☐ Not Insured ☐ Not Existing)
Fig. 1. The Location of ‘Galleria Menasce’ in Alexandria

Fig. 2a. The Ground Floor Plan of Galleria Menasce

- The Plan in 1905
- The Addition of Partition Walls in 2001
- The Removed Walls in 2001
from the outside. The plaza-side, however, provides a wide vertical angle that perceives the façade up to the top floor as found insured. The role of the Municipality was to supervise the contact of insurance between the owner and the private insurance companies, but without placing financial burdens on the Municipality itself.

The interpretation of insurance policy in 1905 goes beyond the objective of building maintenance through a wider spectrum of municipal intentions. Parallel to the municipal regulations for building enforcement, the insurance policy was adopted to control building works. As long as a building item was insured it required consent and supervision from the insurance company before being altered. This adds another precautionary measure besides the municipal consent and supervision to implement building changes. Furthermore, the insurance contract included information about the tenant and the function of the rented space that prevented any misconduct related to the building.

2. The Present Situation of Galleria Menasce in 2001

The Egyptian revolution in 1952 caused radical changes between foreigners and natives, and as a result, the survey in 2001 of Galleria Menasce compares a different situation from that in 1905 (Figs. 2a~2d.) The squatting of gallery space by shops destroyed public access to this open space, and forced the dissolution of its special characteristics such as the uniform width (Photo 1) and façades that lack the unity of character throughout the galleria (Photo 2.) Another is the squatter built speculative rooms on the roof by low-income residents (Photo 3) Meanwhile, the alteration of building spaces was implemented without consent or supervision of the authorities, which led to structural cracks by the removal of wall masonry for a shop extension (Photo 4 and wall 8-B of Fig. 2a.) The dense subdivision, however, of flats in the upper floors were carried out without consideration for fire escape or natural light and ventilation (Figs. 2b~2d.) These negative characteristics of the galleria are ignored without regulation.

The ownership of Galleria Menasce was transferred to the Ministry of Housing immediately after the nationalization policy in 1952. The National Government in 1952 specified a ‘Rent Control’ policy of real estate that continues today and states: The monthly rents in Egyptian pounds for building spaces of governmental ownership are fixed according to their year built as follows: A) 0.035/m² before 1890, B) 0.06/m² from 1890 to 1952, C) 0.18/m² from 1953 to 1977, and D) 0.5/m² from 1978 after. This negligible amount of rent is not considered by another formula to cover the running cost of buildings. The contract of tenure in 2001 of Galleria Menasce does not specify the function resulting in a mixed function, in a laissez-faire manner, which, together with the low-rent caused the galleria to deteriorate. Meanwhile, the colony ‘Insurance Plan’ of 1905 is not recognized by the National Government.

The survey by the researcher in 2001 of deteriorated building items of Galleria Menasce includes the same items that were specified in the ‘Insurance

| Floor    | Tenure       | Function                                                                 | Deterioration |
|----------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| GF (A-1) | Residential  | Studios, shops of low-quality café and fashion                          | xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx |
| GF (B-1) | Residential  | Medical clinics, noted offices, residential flats, textile factories and warehouses | xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx |
| GF (C-1) | Residential  | Squat by shops                                                           | xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx |

Photo 1. The Gallery in 2001

Photo 3. The Roof in 2001

Photo 4. A Crack in 2001

Photo 2. The Northern Façade in 2001

Table 2. The Deterioration of Galleria Menasce in 2001
Plan’ in 1905. Meanwhile, the degree of deterioration is classified by the present building law as: ‘1) Major deterioration of a building item of a maintenance cost higher than its replacement by a similar one, 2) Intermediate deterioration of a maintenance cost ranging from half to equal the cost of its replacement, and 3) Minor deterioration of a maintenance cost less than half its replacement.’

By using this law Galleria Menasce can compare the items of insurance in 1905 with their condition in 2001 (Table 2.)

The major deterioration is clustered in the various zones of the gallery such as the gallery, façades and the flats of mixed function on the plaza-side (A1–H30 of Figs. 2b, 2c & 2d) while the minor deterioration is concentrated in the residential flats on the street-side (K1–O30 of Figs. 2b, 2c & 2d.) This reveals the close relationship between the degree of deterioration and the function of the gallery. The biggest contrast occurred in the open gallery of total insurance in 1905, however, of major deterioration today. Similar contrast is noticed for all the sundries of the gallery such as burst water pipes, broken boilers, stopped fire alarm and lifts without maintenance. Besides, the insurance sector of Egypt is dominated by the National Government, and the private insurance companies are restricted regarding foreigners.

The result of interviews in 2001 with the tenants and the owner (Ministry of Housing) of the galleria indicates a controversy of opinions between them.

On the one hand, tenants ask for regular maintenance from the owner and, when asked about the low rents that are not sufficient to cover maintenance, reply that the rent is increased annually by 10% without having any effect on building improvement. On the other hand, the owner argues that the imposed increase in rents is far form breaking even with the maintenance required. The Government, nevertheless, provides an annual grant (10,000 Egyptian pounds) for maintenance work. This amount is distributed according to the needs of many buildings owned by the ministry. Meanwhile, when bidding for maintenance work the choice is based on the lowest bid regardless of the quality. The owner stresses that the tenants should collaborate more regarding maintenance work. This conflict of raising the maintenance funds between the owner and the tenants is left without socio-economic policies by the administration.

The Ministry of Housing administers its buildings (including the gallery) through the legal, financial and technical departments. Interviews in 2001 with employees in the three departments revealed a breach of contract by some tenants who re-rent building spaces by subcontracts. The penalty of eviction, however, passes through a complicated procedure by the law courts. This problem affects the function and alteration of building spaces without reporting to the owner. Although the Technical Department is responsible for intervening and to save the buildings from technical hazards, the decision making requires legal and financial approvals before action can be taken. Meanwhile, the Financial Department is isolated without a strategy to link with the legal and technical departments. This implies an incoherent system of administration.

3. Conclusion

The insurance in 1905 of Galleria Menasce and its present situation in 2001 can be compared as follows:

1. The process of building enforcement in 1905 passed through municipal supervision together with the monitoring by insurance. This preserved the special gallery with the characteristic façades of the galleria, and ensured the skillful alteration of building spaces. Later in 2001, the lack of building enforcement spoiled the galleria through the squatting of the gallery space and altering the façade characteristics, in addition to hazards of unskillful space alterations.

2. The function in 1905 was constant for shops, offices and residential flats, with variable rents based on the orientation of the rented spaces within the galleria. Meanwhile, the investment in building insurance was made flexible to cover the maintenance of important building items. On the contrary in 2001, both policies by the National Government of low-income ‘Rent Control’ and speculative functioning without regulation caused the galleria to deteriorate.

3. The gallery was not only maintained by its total insurance, but also played a filtration role to accumulate the insured building items facing the plaza. Meanwhile, the insurance was dense in concerning the first two floors and the building equipment. After the termination of the building insurance by nationalization in 1952 the major deterioration was concentrated in the same gallery space and other building items that in 1905 were insured.

4. The municipal system in 1905 launched a catalyst-like policy of insurance in reaction to the physical development and socio-economic structuring of the function and rents. The life-span of buildings became determined by the abiding maintenance of profitable insurance. The administration of Galleria Menasce in 2001, however, is divided between the financial and technical abilities with a repulsive relationship between the owner and the tenants, which certainly affects the life-span of the galleria.

Notes:

1. El-Shazly, A., “On the Chronological transformation of ‘Place des Consuls’ in Alexandria,” Journal of architecture, planning and Environmental
2. "On the Deterioration of the Historical 'European Quarter' in Alexandria, Egypt," Journal of architecture, planning and Environmental engineering, The Architectural Institute of Japan, Vol.534, August 2000, pp.171-179.

3. The Future of the European Quarter in Alexandria, Egypt, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK, 1995, pp.71-80. (Master thesis)

4. Weaver, M., Conserving Buildings, New York, USA, Preservation Press, 1997.

5. Harvey, J., The Economics of Real Property, London, UK, Macmillan, 1981.

6. Couch, C., Urban Renewal, London, UK, Macmillan, 1990.

7. The original plan in 1905 was prepared by the ‘Societe Anonyme des Immeubles D’Egypte,’ which was authorized by the Municipality of Alexandria to carry out the management of buildings in the colony. At present the plan is kept by the Ministry of Housing, and was copied by the author in 1995 for the purpose of this study.

8. Breccia, E., Alexandria ad Aegyptum, bergamo, Instituto Italiano D’Arte Grafiche, 1922, p.7.

9. Ibid.

10. Archives of the Societe Anonyme des Immeubles D’Egypte, 1995.

11. Data obtained from the Alexandria Preservation Trust, Alexandria 1997.

12. Original contracts are preserved by the Ministry of Housing, The United Association for Housing and Reconstruction, Alexandria, 1997.

13. Archives of the Municipality of Alexandria, 1995.

14. Ministry of Housing, op. cit., 1997.

15. Ibid.

16. The ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 of the colony is discussed in: El-Shazly, A., Colonial District of the Port City in the East and its Conservation Policy: Comparative Analysis of the European Quarter in Alexandria, Egypt, and the Waitan District in Shanghai, China, Department of Architecture, Graduate School of Engineering, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan, 2000. PP. 63-86 (Doctor thesis)

17. Archives of the Association of British Insurers, London, UK, File No.349, 2001 pp.3-5 (for reading only)

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ministry of Housing, op. cit., 1997.

22. The law No.106, The Law of Owning and Renting Building Spaces, Thirteenth Edition, Cairo, El-Amirieh Printing Affairs, 1994. P.58.

23. Ministry of Housing, op. cit., 1997.

24. The Law No.106, The Law of Building Works Issued by the Decision No.237 of the Minister of Housing and Reconstruction in 1977, Tenth Edition, Cairo, E-Amirieh Printing Affairs, 1995, p.121.

25. The cost of maintenance compared to the cost of similar replacement for each deteriorated item of the galleria was identified in 2001 by the researcher through consulting with the Technical Department of the Ministry of Housing that itself represents the owner of the galleria.

26. Sherwood, E., ‘Insurance Liberalisation: Prospects for Reform of the Egyptian Insurance Sector,’ Oxford Analytical, Oxford, UK, 2000, pp.1-3.

27. The author conducted interviews with 16 tenants of the galleria (four from each floor,) and two employees from each of the legal, technical and financial departments of the Ministry of Housing in the Alexandria branch that represents the owner.

28. The conflict between the owner and the tenants showed signs of softening when the author proposed to them the same socio-economic policies of 1905.

Figures:
Fig. 1: Insurance Plan, Alexandria (Volume II,) London, UK. E. Goad Press, 1905, sheets 31 &32.
Fig. 2: Surveyed and drawn by the researcher in 1995.
Figs. 3a~3d: Surveys by the researcher in 2001 are overlaid on the original plan of 1905 by the Societe Anonyme des Immeubles D’Egypte.

Photographs: All photographs were taken by the researcher in 2001.

Tables:
Table 1: Insurance Plan, op. cit., Volume II, and original plans of the galleria in 1905.
Table 2: Surveys by the author in 2001.