The Prospects of the ‘European Quarter’ in Cairo

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Abstract
This study elaborates on the historical ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 of Cairo’s European Quarter in comparison to its present situation in 2002. The objective is to point out the future strategy of conservation. The comparison is conducted according to the criteria of: 1) urban structure, 2) building ownership and function, and 3) insurance and taxation policies. The essence of the ‘Ezbekieh Plaza’ in 1905 synthesized the physical with the socio-economic structuring between the existing Native Town and the new European Quarter. The Municipal regulations in 1905 created a unified proportions designed for each zone of the European Quarter with characteristic European landscapes. Meanwhile, the real-estate taxation imposed on the free market, and the covered maintenance of building items by the ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 worked effectively to sustain the functioning of the European colony. The nationalization policies since 1952, however, have forced the quarter to deteriorate through the ‘Rent Control’ policy and the lack of enforcing the function of historical buildings and open spaces. The conservation in 2002 has no socio-economic insurance or taxation, and buildings are redeveloped into different heights and façade characteristics due to the change of building regulations. The present changes are facilitated in the light of the overshadowed ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1952.

Keywords: Cairo; European Quarter; insurance plan; Ezbekieh Plaza

Introduction
The westernization policy by the Egyptian ruler, Ismail (1863-79), transformed Cairo from traditional Islamic to modern European urbanism. The French engineer, Haussmann, planned the new European Quarter in the outskirts of Islamic Cairo. The plan was characterized by the gardened plaza of ‘Ezbekieh,’ and surrounded by massive buildings of public/commercial function. Later, in 1882 the British military intervention signaled the political colonization of Egypt, and the foreign properties became vulnerable to the rising national movement. Under this political circumstance, Cairo’s European Municipality in 1905 formulated the ‘Insurance Plan’ of the European Quarter. The plan’s objective was not only to develop the urban structure, but also insuring the building items as a precaution measure against the destruction by native rioters. However, in 1952 there was a mass exodus of foreigners from Egypt due to the revolution for nationalization, and followed to the present time by urban decline in the European Quarter. Meanwhile, in 1982 Cairo Governorate addressed the conservation of the historical architecture in the

European Quarter. The conservation policy relied on the physical criteria to select buildings and areas for conservation, but undermined the socio-economic one. The result is negative as seen at present due to the unsolved problems of building deterioration, redevelopment of different character and proportions, speculative functioning and the lack of pedestrian amenities.

The rich monuments found in Cairo, such as the Pyramids Plateau, outweight the 19th and early 20th centuries’ urban heritage, especially in raising funds to conserve. The special characteristics of the European Quarter, however, were described in previous studies to point out its worthy conservation. Authors tend to conclude: ‘regular maintenance works are necessary,’ ‘enforcement of special bylaws is required,’ ‘the starve from capital constrains the conservation act,’ and ‘programs of citizen awareness are encouraged.’ All these are true, but lack a sustainable socio-economic system as aimed by the still unrevealed 1905 ‘Insurance Plan.’ In this paper, field investigation in 2002 by the author on the building condition of the European Quarter, is compared with the 1905 ‘Insurance Plan’ that was expired in 1952 by the nationalization. The objective is to specify the driving forces of urban change during these hundred years of Cairo’s European Quarter. The quarter is analyzed in terms of: 1) urban structure, 2) building ownership and function, and 3) insurance and taxation.
policies. These issues, when discussed together, clarify the correlation between physical and socio-economic policies of conservation, thus approaching the possible strategy for the future of the European Quarter in Cairo.

1. The ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905

The Haussmannization plan of Cairo in 1867 by the same French engineer, Haussmann, structured the alluvial topography along the Nile into a new European Quarter. The core plaza named ‘Ezbekieh’ clustered sub-plazas with a curious pedestrian network between them to border the Islamic town. The plaza functioned as a public garden, designed in 1870 by the French engineer, J. P. De Schamps, and inspired by his concept for previous gardens in Paris. Despite the segregated European Quarter, ‘Rue Neuve’ was superimposed on the Islamic urban tissue to access the Ezbekieh Plaza from Cairo’s eastern town-wall gate. In addition, in 1872 a 12m wide boulevard named ‘Mohamed Ali’ linked the railway station in ‘Manshieyah Plaza’ with the Ezbekieh one, and extended through ‘Rue Claude Bey’ up to the Central Station. These regular streets that cracked irregular Cairo, paved the way for their meeting place in Ezbekieh to become the commercial center of the town. Meanwhile, in 1872 the Nile course was shifted to edge the European Quarter in a typical French landscape of shaping the natural environment. The green land bound between Old Cairo and the Nile course gained potential for development that formed the European Quarter on a Garden City concept. From the Nile stream projected a grid of crossing streets, however, overlaid by radial street network to link the round-points scattered all over the European Quarter. The major round-point of ‘Ismailia’ looked the Nile and radiated major boulevards such as ‘Kasr El-Nile’ stretching towards the Ezbekieh Plaza that kept the pole of attraction on the city level. Since 1865 gas and water companies, respectively, had developed by the French engineers, P. Cordieh, and, Chari Lepon, and constructed their networks following the streets of the European Quarter.

The foundation of the Municipality in 1905 regulated the width of main streets by a minimum 12m, 9m for the secondary ones, and 6m in the narrow passages. These dimensions are supposed to be based on an indigenous unit of measurement called ‘Dirah’ of approximately 0.6m. The building-height surrounding the ‘Ezbekieh Plaza’ was regulated a maximum 27m with a characteristic Neo-Renaissance façades of beige and brown tones, and functioned for European grand hotels, cafés, furnishing houses, theatres, in addition to the landmark of The Opera. Meanwhile, an interesting commercial type of building developed in ‘Rue Neuve’ in the form of a mixture between the Italian ‘Galleria’ and the Arabic ‘Wekala,’ thus named ‘Okele.’ This building was characterized by uniform interior and exterior façades of Neo-Renaissance style, with glazed skylights. Continuous arcades, however, developed in Boulevards Mohamed Ali and Claude Bey of building façades influenced by buildings in the French countryside, and regulated maximum 15m height. Westwards of Ezbekieh, the regulation specified a maximum 36m height on main streets for residential apartments with ground floor shops. These developed Neo-Gothic style of redbrick loggias with ornaments of glazed mosaic patterns, gypsum and iron works, and Venetian timber shutters. Prismatic blocks characterized the round-points with extensive ornaments of Victorian façades. The Moorish style, nevertheless, made its appearance in an eclectic impression for the European Quarter. On both banks of the Nile developed prestigious villas and palaces on the Baroque style with large gardens, which together with the public gardens planned since 1874 by the French engineer, N. Brocard, formed a continuous promenade.

The law since 1831 of real-estate ownership in Cairo had given the government the right of reclaiming private lands and buildings, which stated: ‘The Royal Decree approves the agent of engineers and supervisors to investigate the condition of lands and buildings in town, where any is below standard the owner must redevelop the property or evacuate to be redeveloped as a governmental property.’ Based on this law, the lands filled with wastes transformed into hygienic gardens and streets of upgraded buildings. Meanwhile, the royalty protected the Europeans settling in Egypt through the privilege of: ‘freedom in acquiring properties and immunity from taxation, arrest and the local judicial system.’ Furthermore, in 1869 the Egyptian ruler, Ismail, granted the lands of the European Quarter to Europeans on condition of developing prestigious European style buildings to integrate with the existing garden. The ratio of built-up area in the European Quarter in 1872 reached 13% representing 1, 071 permissions issued for construction, and later in 1905 increased to 29% of 2, 714 total permissions for construction and reconstruction. The streets, however, occupied 30% of the European Quarter’s total area, and the left 41% was preserved as gardens.

During the early 19th century the European traders introduced the practice of insurance in Egypt according to the policy of free market. The risk of damage for the European properties by the national movement and riots, especially after the British occupation in 1882, set in the Municipal policy of ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905, which turned the European Quarter into an insured settlement (Figs. 1-4). In the ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905, the building items were categorized into: (1) Colors (finishing materials of brick, stone or concrete), (2) Walls (party wall, entire wall, defective wall and others), (3) Openings (including gates and passages), (4) Windows (unprotected, protected by wired glass, or protected by shutters), (5) Floors (number of stories, basements and attics), (6) Skylights (glazed with or without holes), (7)
Fig. 2. List of Building Items in Cairo’s ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905
Hoists and Lifts (enclosed or open to street), (8) Roofs (material and profiles), and (9) Sundries (steam boilers, steam engines, auto fire alarm, water hydrants, chimneys, stand pipes, and others). Meanwhile, the rise in Cairo’s European population that reached 55,987 in 1905 compared to 35,385 in 1895 and 22,422 in 1882, was due to the increase of trade with Europe, and correlated with the building boom of the European Quarter. This had been met since 1905 by a Municipal real-estate tax imposed on Europeans through the bylaw reading: ‘The tax is at the rate of 1/12 of the rentable value exceeding 5 L.E. a year, excluding foreign consulates or buildings owned either by the state or by religious foundations.’ The Municipality appointed a commission every two years to access the rentable value of any new buildings. The tax rate increased in 1905 to 1/10 of the rentable value with revenues invested in new infrastructures and beautification programs of the European Quarter.

2. The Present Situation in 2002

The revolution in 1952 marked the major transformations of the European Quarter as seen at present. The major public squares and round-points of the European Quarter changed into dense vehicular circulation and public bus terminals, while the Nile promenade became a mere vehicular street without green areas (Fig. 5 & Photos 1-3). Since 1952 the Central Government in Cairo has replaced the original regulations of the European Quarter by the present regulations of urbanism, which specifies: ‘a minimum setback ratios of one-third the street width up to 12m, and a one-fourth the street width up to 15m,’ and ‘a maximum building-height of one and a half times the widest street of the building’s site.’ This resulted in a chaotic skyline of reconstructed buildings beside the old ones, while the historical building façades are dilapidated without planning their conservation (Fig. 6). In order to investigate the building condition in 2002, first the building items listed in the ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 are evaluated. Second, the present building condition is classified into three degrees of ‘most deteriorated,’ ‘less deteriorated,’ and ‘least deteriorated,’ which is defined by the present building law as: 1) Most deterioration for more than 2/3 of decayed items observed in a building, 2) Less deterioration for more than 1/3 items, and 3) Least deterioration for a 1/3 or less items. Although the degrees of deterioration defined by the present building law are of numerous building items, the building items listed in the ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 are here taken because they are included in the items of the present building law. This makes the possibility of comparing the building conditions of 1905 and 2002 with each other.

The most deteriorated buildings are concentrated in certain zones of the European Quarter, such as the regular streets planned inside the old Islamic Town, westwards of the “Ezbekiah Plaza,” buildings surrounding the round-points, south of ‘Boulevard Kasr El-Nile,’ and north-east of the round-point ‘Ismailia,’ while the least deteriorated buildings are concentrated in the south-west zone of the European Quarter (Fig. 7). The comparison between the building condition of 2002 and the pattern of building ownership (Fig. 8) reveals the close relationship between the most deteriorated zones and the buildings of governmental ownership. The European exodus in 1952 left their buildings without ownership, and the National Government became the new owner, except the buildings that were sold to natives before the Europeans leave the country. The National Government established the ‘Rent Control’ for their property ownership in the European Quarter to accommodate the low-income native population. This policy continued to the present time and its law states: ‘The monthly rents in Egyptian Pound 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 1987 after.’ The amounts of collected rents could not afford the maintenance for buildings and correlated with the most deteriorated buildings in the European Quarter. Meanwhile, the concentration of private building ownership in the south-west zone is not affected by the rent control and characterized by a majority of least deteriorated buildings. Another comparison is between the building condition in 2002 and the building function. The law of urbanism designates the buildings of the European Quarter to function for: ‘commercial, residential, recreational and cultural facilities,’ but in reality the buildings in the quarter function for a mixture of private medical clinics, workshops, governmental offices, and others in a laissez-faire manner (Fig. 9), which obviously cause the most deteriorated building condition. It suggests that the law is too general to control the function of the European Quarter’s building-stock. In contrast, the south-west zone that accommodates housing, foreign consulates and cultural centers consists of the least building deterioration.

Insurance of the European Quarter’s buildings in 2002 is ‘zero’ in number. Meanwhile, the real-estate taxation is regulated by the law which states: ‘luxury buildings are subject to a monthly real-estate tax of 7% of what is equal to the building’s rental value.’ It is, however, ambiguous because the term ‘luxury’ is not clearly defined to leave the decision by the local authorities, while the land itself has no taxation. The term ‘rental value’ does not specify the process of evaluating this rental value. The European Quarter has no governmental grants to renovate the properties of the most deterioration, and the law of urban renewal specifies: A) Total redevelopment for areas that suffer from over-population and the majority of deteriorated buildings. B) Partial redevelopment for areas that have some deteriorated buildings and a lack of basic...
The criteria of this law, however, do not specify the funding policies for the redeveloping processes, and the process of redevelopment itself is not defined such as the places of relocating the overpopulated areas.

3. Conclusion
The ‘Insurance Plan’ in 1905 and the present situation in 2002 of Cairo’s European Quarter can be compared as follows:
1. The unique structure of the ‘Ezbekieh Plaza’ tolerated the Islamic Town, while segregated the European colony along the Nile. The figure-ground relationship developed uniform depth/height ratios for major open spaces linked by boulevards and superimposed on traditional Cairo. The present regulations, however, specify different heights of new buildings and ignored historical façades, in addition to the dissolution of European landscapes.
2. The royal grant of land parcels to any national who can stylize
European buildings with free market of real-estate, caused a mixed pattern of ownership. Meanwhile, the backing in 1905 by the 'Insurance Plan' sustained the function of the European building-stock. Later, the National Government enforced a low-income 'Rent Control' policy, which together with the lack of regulating the function, forced the European Quarter to deteriorate.

3. The profitable policy in 1905 of insured building items and the enforced Municipal taxes on the real-estate businesses appropriated the funds to preserve buildings and develop infrastructures of the colony. In 2002 both policies of insurance and taxation are absent, without specifying the process of upgrading the deteriorated urban areas.
Notes

1 The author obtained the 1905 ‘Insurance Plan’ of Cairo from the French Embassy in Cairo.

2 The policy since 1982 of conserving Cairo’s European Quarter has been formalized in: The Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction, The Law No.3 in 1982: The Law of Urban Design, Sixth Edition, Cairo, Amyrieh Press, 1995, p. 66-67.

3 Detailed description is provided in: M. Scharabi, Kairo: Stadt und Architektur im Zeitalter des Europäischen Kolonialismus, Germany, Ernst Wasmuth Verlag Tubingen, 1989.

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8 The method of this paper is based on: El-Shazly, A., “On the Deterioration of the Historical ‘European Quarter’ in Alexandria, Egypt,” Journal of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Engineering, The Architectural Institute of Japan, Tokyo, Japan, Vol. 534, August 2000, pp.171-179.

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10 Observed through overlaying chronological maps of Cairo between the years of 1868 and 1874.

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ali, A., op. cit., p. 40.

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28 Owen, R., op. cit., p. 339.

29 Ibid.

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31 The Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction, op. cit., pp. 47-59.

32 One Egyptian Pound is approximately 29 Japanese Yen in July 2002.

33 Presidential Decree in 1981, The Law No.136 of Owning and Renting Building Spaces and Organizing the Relationship Between the Owner and the Tenant, Thirteenth Edition, Cairo, Amyrieh Press, 1994, p.58.

34 The Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction (The Law No.3 in 1982,) op. cit., 1995, p.16.

35 Investigated by the author in 2002.

36 The Law No. 136, op. cit., p.66.

37 The Law No. 3, op. cit., p.19.

Figures

Fig. 1: Insurance Plan, op. cit., Sheets 2-13.

Fig. 2: Insurance Plan, op. cit.

Fig. 3: Prepared by the author, based on: Insurance Plan, op. cit.

Fig. 4: Insurance Plan, op. cit.

Fig. 5: The Egyptian Department of Survey, Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction, Cairo, Map of Cairo City in 2002.

Figs. 6-9: Surveys by the author in 2002 (March - October).

Photos

All photos are taken by the author in 2002.