

Towards Enhancing and Enriching Cairo's Walkable Experience in Downtown Cairo – Case Study: Selected Mixed-Use Service Buildings of Old Cairo

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Abstract – Urban development is always an essential element in any national development strategy that plans or manages to change a present. In Egypt, the government is usually seeking urban development to supply the general demand of citizens, help in redistributing of planned or unplanned overstocked urban settlements and enhancing the visual image. Downtown Cairo is a rich urban area that is full of valuable historical buildings (Beautiful buildings, skyline and tremendous ornaments that all returns to the 19th century) of Egypt, which form its townscape.

This research aims to present an alternative to enhance downtown Cairo's environment through reusing a set of cores that was used to be influencing on its context. In this research, public services projects is highlighted internationally, studying their impacts and outputs that it has made, figuring out the branding it did created in some countries.

Research not only highlights the importance of finding catalytic projects that can develop its context but also approaches its influence as to provide a well walk able healthy environment to pedestrians and to comfort the perception of downtown different perspectives through revitalizing influencing points represented in catalytic projects that can manage to create livable interconnected walk-able areas. The research emphasizes the important role of revitalizing heritage buildings of downtown Cairo with the aim of enhancing the urban environment and developing urban context.

Keywords: Urban Catalyst, Heritage Buildings, Downtown Cairo, Urban Enhancement, Urban Impact, Revitalization

I. Introduction

In spite of Governmental plans to revive downtown Cairo and conserve its heritage buildings, it is still suffers a lack in the enhancement and development plans of its urban environment to be more efficiently serving its people needs, daily life and accordingly developing a livable healthy city, in addition to not using its heritage buildings potentials as a support.

II. Literature Review

Established by khedive Ismail in the 70's to be an iconic town, designed to be as Paris, having the same design theme, roads and planning. Khedive Ismail has established it to approach new era of development with the aim of changing and renewing the cityscape. Downtown Cairo has survived through many historical phases, and it did have different cultures in which they were residents, pedestrians, or foreigners. It was the resident of elite

people (most of them foreigners) when it was firstly established, and then along centuries residents has changed until now having most of it Egyptian residents.^[1] Paris city has changed and transformed yet transformation did not affect its buildings functions as that of downtown Cairo. In which downtown Cairo has been changed and transformed along different years, showing a giant sprawl in the 20th Century by commercial and administrative uses that did replaced residential uses in buildings, moreover hiding out the urban spaces edges and form by unofficial markets that did spread all over different spaces; affecting town image. In addition to affecting the pedestrian's perception experience for spaces that has been occupied or transformed by markets or unofficial street vendors. As a heritage buildings urban area, downtown Cairo has been subjected to many strategies of rehabilitations and renovations for buildings, in addition that government has put laws for conserving those heritage buildings and sites.

Yet, these laws, development and rehabilitation projects still needs to be strengthened a catalyst for attracting tourism and enhancing downtown's image.

Downtown Cairo – problems according to users/organizations

- Residents: High traffic Congestion, No Recreational Spaces, Mixed unhealthy uses, Destroying Facades image.
- Street Vendors & Merchants: Merchants affected by street vendors, Street vendors sprawl and no legal place, street vendors damaging recreational and open spaces
- Pedestrians: Pedestrians perception of the town is affected by vendors, crowded spaces, and losing the visual urban experience

- Tourists: Uncomfortable tourist experience as there is no walk able corridors or recreational spaces that are occupied by street vendors, moreover street congestion and satisfying transportations.

- Governments & Organizations in charge: The reuse of residential buildings as retails, and destroying facades, which nowadays governments is facing with applying regulations, Street vendors occupying spaces illegally and causing congestions, the need of investors and people in participating in development and enhancement projects. Fig. (1) can show the downtown urban context concerning the said problems.



Fig. 1.: Downtown Cairo urban Map, (Source: Illustrated by Researcher)

III. Case-studies

III.1. Mercado de san Miguel, Madrid , (Fig. 2)

Mercado de san Miguel is an old market that was established in 1916 after demolishing San Miguel Church and building the market instead, it was established to be the shelter and the home for goods and daily needs of residents. Having a unique location in Madrid, Mercado de san Miguel is the only medieval market that is still standing until now with its unique steel structure. The market of san Miguel has faced declinations with the rise of new modern supermarkets and was funded to survive in 1999 by the government but it did closed. In 2003, a group of architects created a group (El Gastronomico de san Miguel Group) that aims to revive traditional markets and resets it urbanely to fit through nowadays-daily life. [2]

Mercado de San Miguel was reopened in 2009 with its unique historical form and original architectural style but with modern add on functions to increase its attractions and setting up its role as central collective hub.

Being an old heritage building that was revived to fit in modern era, Mercado de san Miguel has been established to call residents, tourists, pedestrians to visit. It was revived not only to serve as a public service facility only but also as a social connecting hub. Mercado de san Miguel was transformed from being an old market to a multi-use public hub; it was reused to be a catalyst for enhancing its contextual urban environment. The revive for the Mercado de san Miguel was designed to survive the competition with shopping malls and to provide

different service yet various one than that of being just a usual market.¹(Fig,3)



Fig. 2.: Market de San Miguel modern plan, (Source:

<https://www.expansion.com/fueradeserie/gastro/2018/10/15/5bbe1049ca474123598b45fd.html>, (24/05/2020))



Fig. 3.: Mercado de San Miguel is a catalyst for enhancing contextual environment, (Source: Map ((Mercado de San Miguel, Google Earth, 2020) Illustrated by Researcher), Study by Researcher ^[3])

- Cultural Hub: Mercado de san Miguel has enhanced its contextual environment through emphasizing its old rich cultural context by a cultural front outdoor plaza that functionalize as a catalyst for pedestrians and tourists.
- Context: Plaza Mayor huge impact on urban were used in attracting and developing the catalytic impact of Mercado de san Miguel by which each was completing the image yet enhancing a tourist tour through the urban context. emphasizing a happy healthy touristic tour that has a variety of entertainment and comfort ability.
- Tourism: was affected by the revive of Mercado de san Miguel as it became a catalyst for tourist to visit and spend time, also a checkpoint to most of pedestrians in context.
- Branding/Investments: Mercado de san Miguel revive has opened up the idea for investors for markets gentrification and reviving it in old cities to enhance their environment, increase walk ability, connectivity and cause a happy pedestrian experience and visual image.

III.2. Gallerie la Fayette, Paris (Fig.4)

Gallerie la Fayette was established on 1893, with the aim of selling novelty goods, it was located in Lafayette road. Since its first establishment it has showed a great attraction to people, by which it has a good urban setting

through important buildings as opera de Paris, moreover it has a unique design that yet completed image of context. it did extended from being a 70m² to have all the building in 1896 as a result of the great demand and progress the store has made. Gallerie la Fayette proved since its start that it has an influence on people and did grow along different eras until nowadays, along with the store development. As a family business, it survived all the transformations and were always set to a strategic development plan of spreading and gentrification. Their need to enlarge the business formed up the idea of transforming it from just a Gallerie that has a set of brands to sell to a hub that provides and enhance retailing service.^[4] (Fig.5)



Fig. 4.: Gallerie la Fayette in 1900's Vs in 2000's (Source 90's : <https://www.ruemarcellin.com/blogs/news/12472253-paris-iconic-galleries-lafayette-through-vintage-photos-posters-and-ads> , (27/05/2020)) , Source 20's : <https://en.convention.parisinfo.com/shopping-paris/73634/Galleries-Lafayette-Paris-Haussmann> , (27/05/2020)

- Visual Image: In spite of its influence on visual image since its establishment; Gallerie la Fayette provided an updated unique façade that did transform the city scape theme and add a new taste of beauty by which it made a pedestrian experience rich with a dynamic and interactive boards. Moreover, La Fayette Gallerie established a heritage department to preserve and conserve that old heritage building and its history and to keep it as a branding tool for their gallery and for the city.
- City Branding : La Fayette Gallerie has influenced the branding of Paris, and did shared in raising the city brand. As a flagship, building, and popular department store it did played an important role in anchoring people and branding its context locally and internationally.
- Tourism: La Fayette Gallerie of Paris has a 37 million visitor per year by which it did contribute in touristic plans of city, and support it with its influence of tourists that are anchored to visit Paris for fashion stores.
- Investments As a department store that aims to earn profit, its successfulness has pushed its owners to extend and influenced investors to act and establish similar projects, which did, returned positively on city treasury. La Fayette has supported Investments also by

extending in France with a 57 store, creating a set of influence points of branding its flagship projects.

- Walkability: The presence of a department store as La Fayette Gallerie has increased walkability and social interaction between people, that huge flagship project that plays an important role as a vista for all pedestrians passing by , and anchors them to visit, interact and percept its form.
- Gentrifications: Investors approached gentrification projects for old buildings in context; aiming to gain that impact of old design buildings on pedestrians, residents and tourists.
- Supporting Governmental Projects: Not only by supporting labor market by its wide expanding influencing stores through France, and its influence on economic market, but also la Fayette Gallerie has supported the governmental vision of agriculture to enhance its environment by running a long term urban agriculture on its roof. Influencing the urban context as a flagship project, enhancing city's environment and providing a healthy community.



Fig. 5.: Le Urban setting of Gallerie la Fayette (Source: Google Earth, 2020, Illustrated by Researcher)

Gallerie la Fayette has positively affected the environment of Paris, modernly it influenced the walkability and outer space interaction between people, moreover branding the city theme through that popular department store that developed a set of investments and anchored the gentrification approach for old heritage buildings department store to be revived or recall.

its positive influence on people has influenced the governments yet organizations to put Gallerie la Fayette as a paradigm for a successful developing catalyst tool that has influenced not only its store but has caused the enhancement of its entire urban environment as a whole.

III.3. *Le Marche de Bab el Louk, Cairo (Fig.6)*

Bab el louk market, that old historic building that was established on 1912 in a steel and brick structure. It is located on Falaki square, that unusual linear shaped square giving it a wide looking image for an eye to percept it. It has transformed along years till it took is nowadays form which showed a great decay. Bab el louk market used to

be firstly a market to sell goods and daily life needs, changed to occupy vendors who did change it and causes its deterioration.^[5]

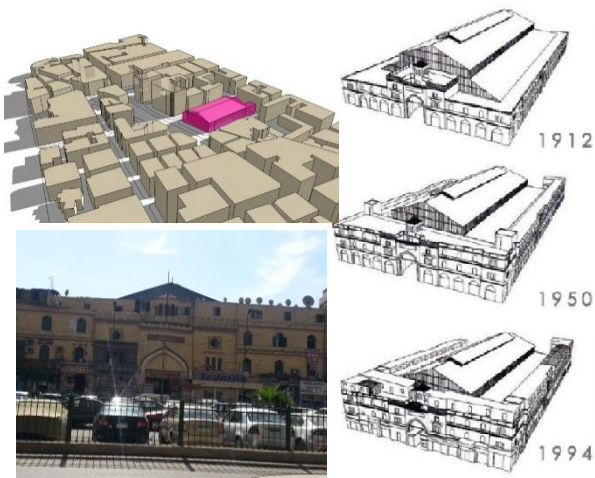


Fig. 6: Le Marche de Bab El Louk growth through years (Source: Lotfy, M., Soliman, A., Mandour, M., 2015, A study of Islamic and arab markets role in revitalizing urban spaces, Journal of Islamic architecture, vol.3, Issue 4, P.P. 193-200)

Bab el louk has changed along years until it reached a dead end, being an unlivable building that contains a set of spaces that is either used to store items or shops that is not working regularly. Lack of development has caused bab el louk market to be a dead building in spite of its importance as an old heritage building that represents a market that is set in an urban full of khedival buildings.

In addition to its plan that suffered a set of transformations that did hide its original plan which was having a good distribution and studied circulation.

Revitalization of Bab el Louk Market to reuse its catalytic impact to enhance context ,as shown in (Fig.7)

- Putting an investment plan to revitalize Bab el Louk Market.
- Redesigning the plans to accommodate social needs of connection.
- The market is a walkthrough, which increases the walkability in and to, creating a pedestrian good visual experience.
- It can help in reducing street vendors.
- Revitalizing will reshape the visual image of the square moreover influencing investors and rebranding the area.
- Market will increase the social interaction between tourists, residents and people yet approaching the idea of mixed-use markets that embeds lecture halls, children areas.

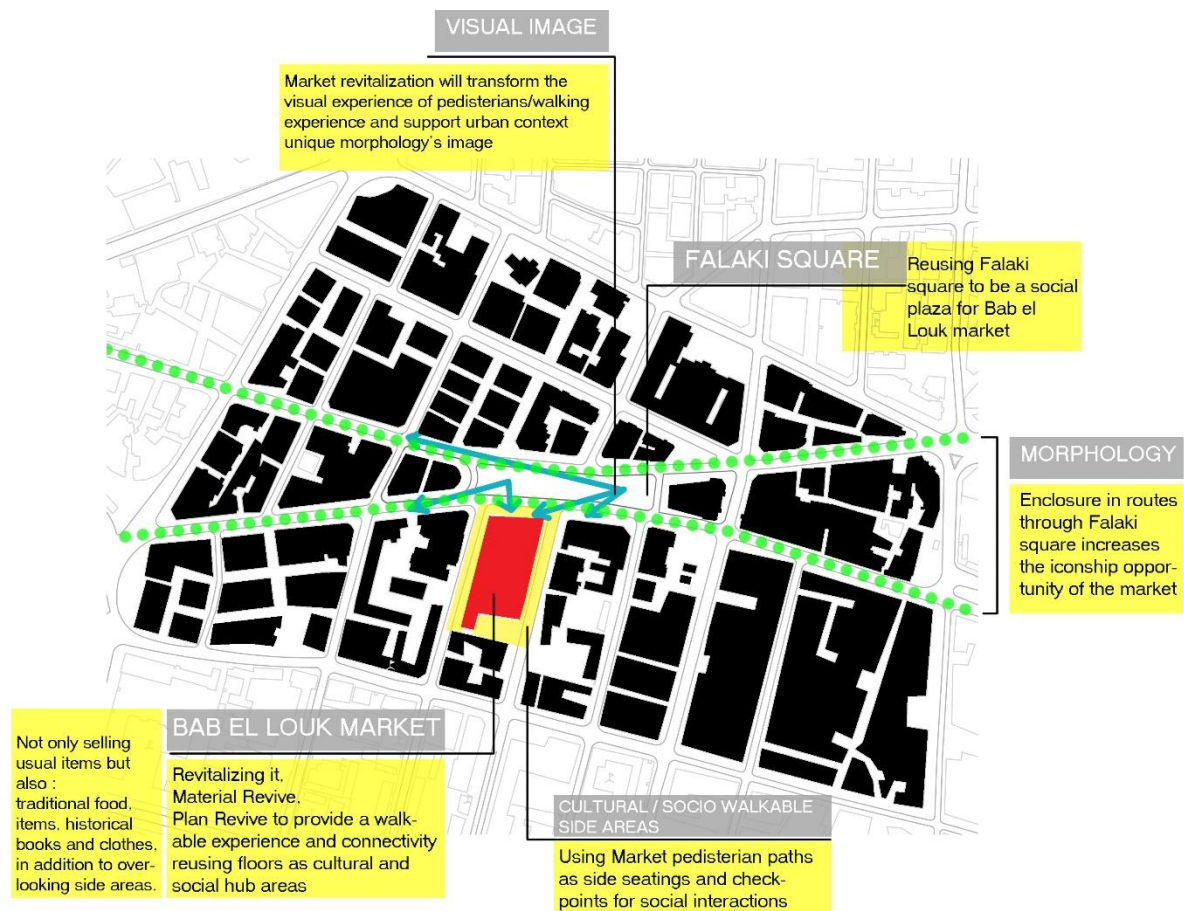


Fig. 7.: Le Marche de Bab El Louk Revival Potentials Map illustrated (Source: by Researcher)

III.4. Tiring Building Department store, Cairo

Established and found by Victor Tiring an Australian merchant specialized in Turkish tailoring, Tiring department store was the first of its kind to be built in Cairo in 1910 and was opened to public in 1912. It represented Cairo's shopping destination at this time, it did provides imported luxury goods. As a city-shopping premiere, the tiring department showed a great influence on public and on enhancing the environment in context. Its unique design five-storey building represents a landmark to people and did worked as a vista that add beauty to visual experience of a pedestrian. The store has shut down in 1920 due to world war one and it did left decayed until nowadays. Tiring department store is now a home for illegal cafeterias, workshops, bars, retailers and residents. [6]

Tiring building is a unique designed building that has the potentials to be a flagship project and home for a catalytic project in which it can re-attracts various people and activities. Having a different skyline, the form of tiring building give it a wide visual image, far away views of perception that makes it distinguishable.

Located in the most crowded area of Attaba square, tiring building is visually observed and memorized in each of a pedestrian visual memory. Tiring building volume and shape in the frame of Attaba square image is unique and attractive to residents, tourists and pedestrians but its

influence is not a complete one, as it does not provide a well secured service that serve people needs, as show in (Fig.8)

- **Healthy/ Livable:** Revitalizing Tiring will influence enhancement of context and also governmental actions towards decayed areas
- **Walk-ability:** Revitalizing Tiring will increase walk-ability and healthy livability of the context by which it will increase connections and social interactions between various attracted people.
- **Perception/ Visual Image:** Tiring is having a unique distinguished visual experience and with its revival and reusing its facades it will provide a more efficient visual image that will add on the livability.
- **Heritage Buildings:** Old buildings will provide a good background for Tiring building to set a cultural areas and develop investing points through different activities.
- **Tourist Attraction:** Being already attractive for tourists and pedestrians, Tiring building revive will serve in shifting the touristic experience by which it will provide areas of connections, healthy and livable walk-able pathways, interconnections to and through the store, selling traditional items, decreasing street vendors problem.

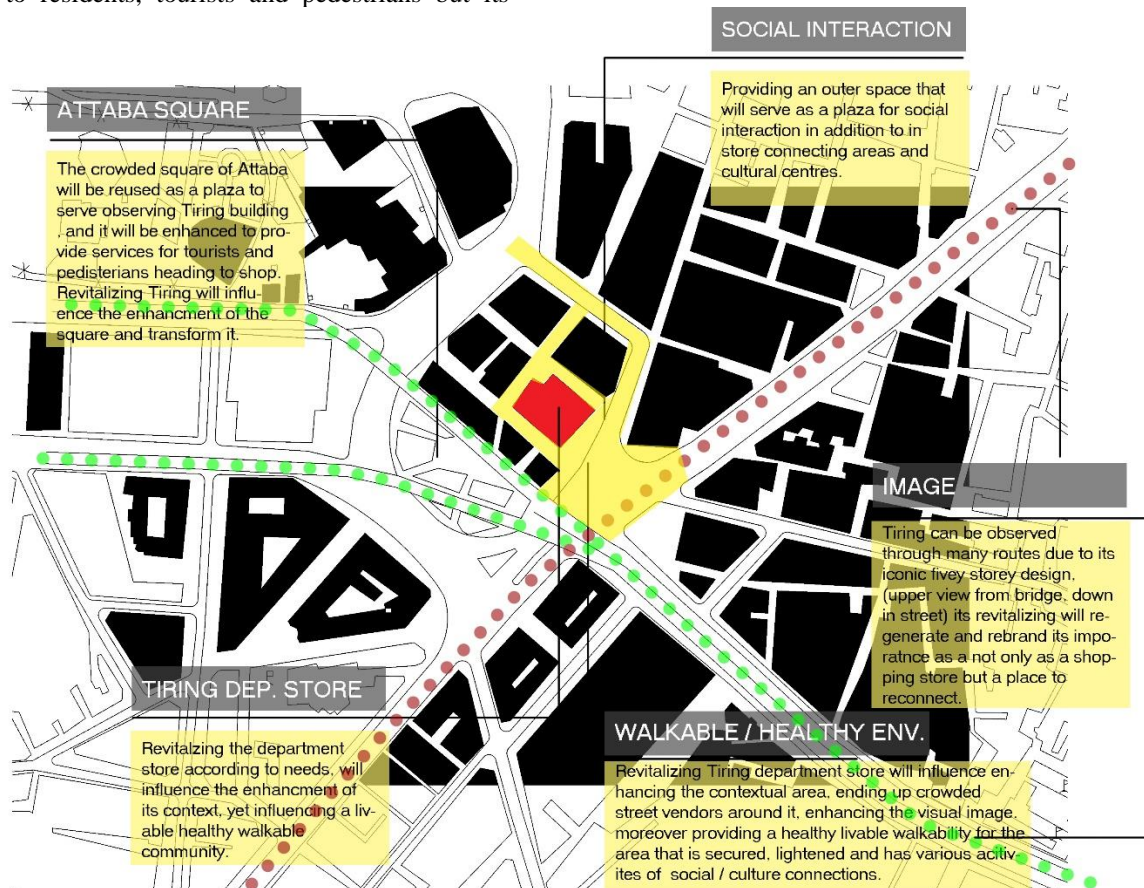


Fig. 8.: Tiring Department Store Revival Potentials Map illustrated (Source: by Researcher)

IV. Comparative Analysis

Table I – Case Studies Comparative Analysis according to Influence and Potential Rates

Means of Comparison	Mercado de san Miguel	Le Marche de Bab El Louk	Gallerie de La Fayette	Tiring Department store
Walk-ability	Inner walkable wide areas that changed the walkable experience to and through the market yet to the alleys.	Revitalizing the market inner plan will increase the walkability experience	it did develop pathways to advertise and enhance a different walkable experience for pedestrians.	Revitalizing Tiring will increase walkability and healthy livability of the context by which it will increase connections and social interactions between various attracted people.
Visual Image	a very rich visual image with a background of the mayor plaza and old narrow alleys	Market revitalization will transform the visual experience of pedestrians/walking experience and support urban context unique morphology's image	updated unique façade that did transform the cityscape theme and add a new taste of beauty	its revitalizing will regenerate and rebrand its importance as a not only as a shopping store but a place to reconnect.
Tourism	Offers a traditional stuff and provide interacting with a heritage old building influenced tourist to interact with and do activities.	Influence tourism by which tourists will seek interacting with that heritage building and checking traditional stuff, it will offer.	it did contribute in touristic plans of city and support it with its influence of tourists that are anchored to visit Paris for fashion stores.	it will provide areas of connections, healthy and livable walkable pathways, interconnections to and through the store, selling traditional items, decreasing street vendors problem.
Healthy Context	Guaranteeing a healthy walkable experience through providing livable well-designed areas	Guaranteeing a healthy walkable experience through providing livable well-designed areas	Working on sustainable projects and supporting governmental strategies to enhance environment	Guaranteeing a healthy walkable experience through providing livable well designed areas
Investments	Mercado de san Miguel revive has opened up the idea for investors for markets gentrification and reviving it in old cities to enhance their environment, increase	shall be held to investors or with sharing with government to support the strategically theme of enhancing environment	has supported Investments also by extending in France with a 57 store, creating a set of influence points of branding its flagship projects.	Revitalization shall be held to investors or with sharing with government to support the strategical theme of enhancing environment
City Branding	wal-ability, connectivity and cause a happy pedestrian experience and visual image.	Bab el Louk Market revitalization and using it in selling goods and traditional stuff in addition to cultural activities will help in branding the project yet the city which already has its heritage influence.	As a flagship, building, and popular department store it did played an important role in anchoring people and branding its context locally and internationally.	It has the potential to brand its context yet the city if it was invested in and revitalized in a way that serves tourist and residents demands.

V. Conclusion

Through research, it has been figured out that public service old buildings can be revitalized with the aim of enhancing their context, and increasing economic, social and touristic rates of growth.

Government strategies have to emphasize the role of investors and provide coordinated projects to revitalize such catalytic public service projects to reach a project that will enhance its contextual environment.

In general, environment can be enhanced as a response to projects that works as a catalytic tool for enhancing its activities and units.

Research recommends applying the revitalization process to old heritage buildings that has an influence on its context

Also, it is recommended in order to reach an enhanced environment to take into consideration the following points

- Residents flexible pathways
- Wide connected corridors and alleys
- Generating various touristic activities
- Designing visual images and upgrading different perspectives with urban units.
- Branding the city through the project
- Supporting governmental strategies

- Applying coordinated plans with private areas and authorities.
- Providing community service
- Supporting culture activities
- Healthy livable routes
- Providing secure connected plazas
- Enhanced visual image full of heritage buildings and historical icons.
- Developing street and landscape in context
- Enhancing areas in context

VI. References

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