PRESERVING THE DISTRICT HISTORICAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, CASE STUDY OF EL-HEJAZ STREET, HELIOPOLIS, CAIRO, EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

As urban centers continue to experience rapid growth and change, urban planning and design scholars have observed a troubling trend: cities worldwide are increasingly resembling one another. This global issue has been identified as a significant problem that adversely affects the form and quality of urban spaces. The root causes of this problem are multifaceted, encompassing geographical, political, and economic factors. Additionally, the implementation of inadequate development plans that fail to respect the unique assets of cities and districts exacerbates the issue. This research endeavors to address this problem with a particular focus on EL-Hejaz Street, Heliopolis, where Heliopolis is one of the districts grappling with ongoing development, particularly in response to congestion issues. To investigate this matter, our research adopts a comprehensive approach. It begins with fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews conducted with Heliopolis residents. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews are conducted with Egyptian academics who have previously studied Heliopolis. The primary objective of this research is to delve into both the tangible and intangible assets that define Heliopolis and require protection and enhancement. The investigation is guided by three core concepts: place identity, place attachment, and place dependence. In conclusion, this study scrutinizes the distinctive characteristics of Heliopolis and evaluates the impact of the 2019 development plan on the district's unique attributes.

KEYWORDS: People, Place, Identity

الحفاظ على الهوية التاريخية للمنطقة من خلال عملية التطوير، دراسة حالة شارع الحجاز، هليوبوليس، القاهرة، مصر

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الملخص

مع استمرار المراكز الحضرية في النمو والتغيير السريع، لاحظ باحثو التخطيط والتصميم الحضري اتجاهًا مقلقًا: المدن في جميع أنحاء العالم بدأت تتشابه بشكل متزايد. تم تحديد هذه المشكلة العالمية كقضية هامة تؤثر سلبًا على شكل وجودة المناطق الحضرية. تعود جذور هذه المشكلة إلى عوامل متعددة، تشمل الجغرافيا والسياسة والاقتصاد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن تنفيذ خطط تطوير غير كافية تتجاهل الأصول الفريدة للمدن والأحياء يفاقم من هذه المشكلة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى طرح هذه المشكلة مع التركيز على منطقة هليوبوليس و بالأخص شارع الحجاز، حيث تعد هليوبوليس واحدة من المناطق التي تواجه تحولات مستمرة استجابة لمشاكل الازدحام. للبحث في هذا الموضوع، يتبنى بحثنا نهجًا. يبدأ بالعمل الميداني، بما في ذلك المقابلات شبه المنظمة التي تُجرى مع سكان هليوبوليس. بعد ذلك، تُجرى مقابلات شبه منظمة مع أكاديميين مصريين سبق لهم دراسة هليوبوليس. الهدف الرئيسي من هذا البحث هو التعمق في الأصول الملموسة وغير الملموسة التي تميز هليوبوليس والتي تحتاج إلى الحماية والتعزيز. يسترشد التحقيق بثلاثة مفاهيم أساسية: هوية المكان، التعلق بالمكان، والاعتماد على المكان. في الختام، تقوم هذه الدراسة بفحص الخصائص المميزة لهليوبوليس وتقييم تأثير خطة التطوير لعام 2019 على السمات الفريدة للمنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنسان، المكان، الهوية.

1. INTRODUCTION

While each city has its own visual identity, they often share visual similarities with one another. The research focuses on urban development's influence on district physical and non- physical assets. As cities evolve and expand, they often undergo transformations driven by a complex interplay of factors. These uncontrolled circumstances have led to a concerning trend wherein cities begin to resemble one another, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This phenomenon presents a pressing global challenge with far-reaching implications for urban planning and design. The progressive convergence of cities brings about a range of issues, impacting not only the visual aesthetics but also the functional aspects of urban spaces. This research seeks to delve into the root causes behind this growing similarity and understand how it affects the form and quality of cities. By examining the contributing factors, such as geographical, political, and economic influences, as well as the implementation of development plans that may neglect the unique attributes of individual cities or districts, we aim to shed light on this complex issue.

In Egypt, cities are suffering from the overcrowded streets that require the transportation planners to solve the problem and design spaces for cars, Since Heliopolis is considered one of the districts that have a historical and a significant value, it was crucial to pay attention to the development plan in a way that respects the quality of the built environment. Heliopolis faces a lot of changes over the past decades with a continuous movement to solve the crowded streets problem, with a continuous construction of mega highways and flyovers; and even though, those changes had facilitated the traffic flow, they had an impact in the urban form and space quality. El-Hejaz Street has undergone significant modifications, including alterations to its width and the removal of the central green median. These changes have made it more challenging for pedestrians to cross the street.

The research works on One main question, what are the consequences of developing Heliopolis? Actions like removing the tram line, cutting down trees and widening the streets .

The first part of the research is a Theoretical approach depends on Literature reviews about the reasons behind the similarity of cities, the second part depends on (field works) through a face-to-face interview with Heliopolis residents to discover their opinion about the latest development plan 2019 effect on EL-Hejaz Street, Heliopolis. Followed by face-to-face semi-structure interview or phone Interviews with Egyptian academics who have researched Heliopolis to discuss their opinion about the latest development of Heliopolis 2019 .

The research depends on analyzing different concepts related to the identity of cities (place identity, place attachment and place dependance) and thus figure out the place and people characteristics. With an aim to investigate the distinctive aspects of El-Hejaz Street and analyze the effect of the latest development plan 2019 on these characteristics.

This work is divided into four sections, the first section starts with this introduction. The second section scans the literature regarding identity concepts and characteristics that should be considered for preserving during the development process. The third section includes the paper methodology, explores the valuable features of Heliopolis with a focus on El-Hejaz .

Physical and non- physical characteristics for region identification

There are different concepts that contribute to the understanding of the concept of place such as place identity, sense of place, place attachment and place dependance. The place identity is recognized through the physical, social, environmental aspects of the place/ city [1- 4] Place attachment is described as a positive bond between groups or individuals and their environment, measured through the degree of rootedness which is considered as a predictor for place attachment [5- 8]. The place dependance rises from comparing one site to another in other words, the focus is on what people do in a certain neighborhood and what is the ability of a certain place is to achieve the important behavioral goals and fulfil the specific needs of its inhabitants.

Place characteristics are the unique and defining features that distinguish one location or space from another [9, 10] They encompass a wide range of physical, cultural, and social attributes that contribute to the identity and character of a specific place. Understanding and appreciating these characteristics is crucial in urban planning, architecture, geography, and various other fields. Here are some key aspects of place characteristics [11- 13].

First, the visual symbols, the tangible elements that give a place its distinctiveness [9, 14]. Physical characteristics include natural features like landscapes, topography, bodies of water, climate, and vegetation. Additionally, man-made features such as architecture, infrastructure, landmarks, and street layouts play a significant role in defining a place [15, 11]. Cultural and historical significance, reflecting the traditions, heritage, and narratives of the people who inhabit or have inhabited them. Historical buildings, monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural practices are integral aspects of a place's identity [3, 13, 4]. Third, Economic Factors: The economic activities and resources associated with a place can also shape its characteristics. This may include industries, businesses, trade routes, and natural resources. Economic factors influence the livelihoods of the people living in the area and can impact the overall character of the place [10, 16, 17].

Social and Demographic Composition

The people who populate a place and their social dynamics are crucial elements of its character. This includes the population size, demographics, social interactions, and community structures [4, 18]. The diversity and cultural mix within a place contribute to its uniqueness.

Recognizing and preserving the unique place characteristics of a community or region is vital for maintaining its cultural heritage, fostering a sense of belonging among residents, and guiding sustainable development. Whether in the context of urban planning, tourism, or historical preservation, understanding and celebrating these characteristics are essential for shaping vibrant and livable places.

The mentioned aspects encompass both the physical and non-physical elements of identity that vary across districts as **Fig. 1**.
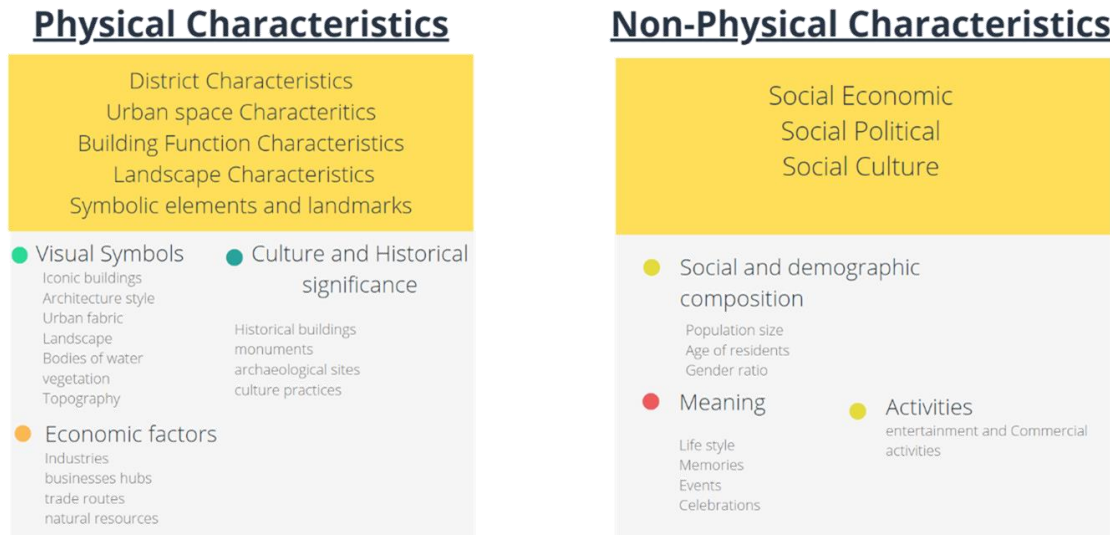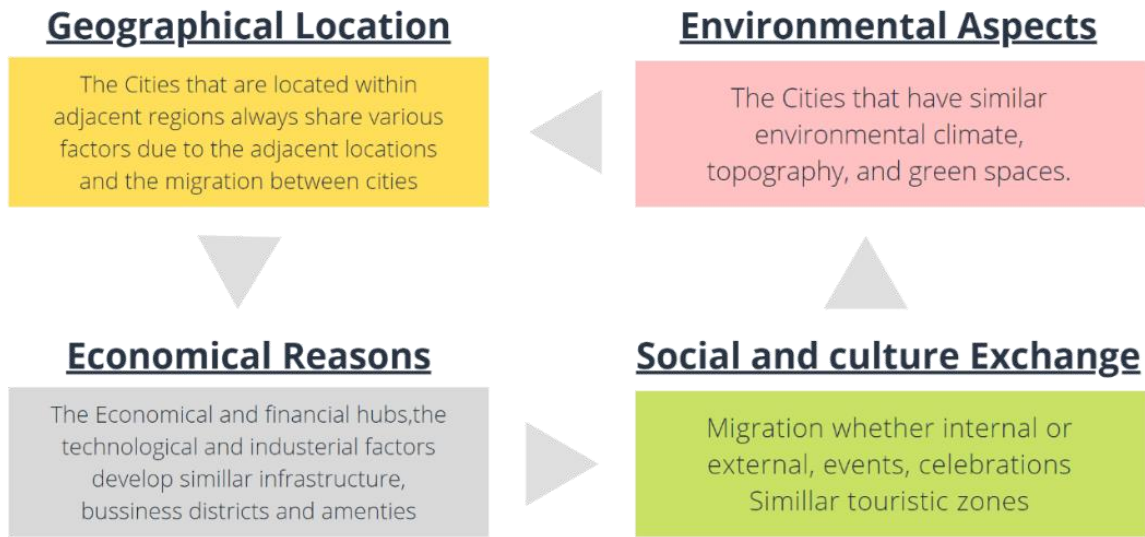

Fig. 1. Physical and non-physical elements of identity

In terms of physical elements, these include urban space, building function, landscape characteristics, and symbolic elements. For instance, the urban fabric can be viewed as a defining characteristic of a district's identity. The visual aspects of urban spaces, such as the distinction between open green spaces and topographic green spaces, also contribute to a city's identity. Regarding non-physical elements, socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and cultural aspects play a role in shaping identity. Examples include lifestyle, types of events and celebrations, and various activities.

In some cases, the characteristics that represent the identity of cities is similar to other cities based on different reasons. This study explores the factors underpinning such similarities in urban environments and introduces concepts aimed at averting the homogenization of cities.

The first factor is the geographic location of cities; those situated in close proximity or within the same region tend to exhibit similarities due to their analogous attributes. The second factor pertains to environmental characteristics, such as shared climatic conditions, natural resources, and topography. These two factors are intrinsic and are determined by the inherent characteristics of the city. The third factor relates to economic aspects, including the availability of resources, job opportunities, the presence of financial hubs, and business districts. The fourth factor involves social and cultural exchange, leading

to the diffusion of ideas, traditions, and lifestyles, which can be mitigated by promoting cultural diversity. The final factor concerns political aspects, such as laws and regulations that influence urban development techniques. Additionally, touristic reasons also contribute to the resemblance between cities as **Fig. 2.**

Geographical Location

The Cities that are located within adjacent regions always share various factors due to the adjacent locations and the migration between cities

Environmental Aspects

The Cities that have similar environmental climate, topography, and green spaces.

Economical Reasons

The Economical and financial hubs,the technological and industerial factors develop similar infrastructure, bussiness districts and amenties

Social and culture Exchange

Migration whether internal or external, events, celebrations Similar touristic zones

Fig. 2. Reasons behind the similarity of cities

2. CASE STUDY: EL-HEJAZ STREET, HELIOPOLIS, CAIRO

The history of Heliopolis returns to the early twentieth century, specifically in 1905 AD, when the Belgian baron, Edward Empain, came up with the idea of establishing a new urban community in the desert about 15 km northeast of Cairo [19]. Heliopolis was one of the districts that have been constructed based on the garden city paradigm. As defined by Haward, a Garden city is a city designed to ensure its population healthy living and allow a sufficient social life [19]. The garden city follows the following principles: compact urban quarter, a soft-edged landscape, construct visual symbols that encourage the presence of various iconic buildings in a specific location, encourage the presence of recreational activities with a positive social interaction, integrate between town and country in the presence of a healthy, clean, safe and peaceful environment.

In the past years, A lot of street modifications takes place in Heliopolis district to solve the crowded streets problem, road width had become around 6 or 7 lanes in one direction, a matter that led to a lot of accidents and it became difficult for residents to walk or cross the street every day [20, 21]. The streets' width debate has been occurring for a long time among urban planners and traffic engineers in different parts of the world. Inside the residential area, the streets are not supposed to have the characteristics of a highway. Those standards put into consideration the safety of the drivers as well as the pedestrians. Increasing the street width tremendously as well as building bridges have led to increasing the accidents rate, decreasing the air quality, affecting the visual urban space and walkability experience [14]. **Fig. 3.** below shows the location of El-Hejaz Street at Heliopolis and thus describes the physical and the non-physical identity characteristics of the mentioned street as **Fig. 4.**
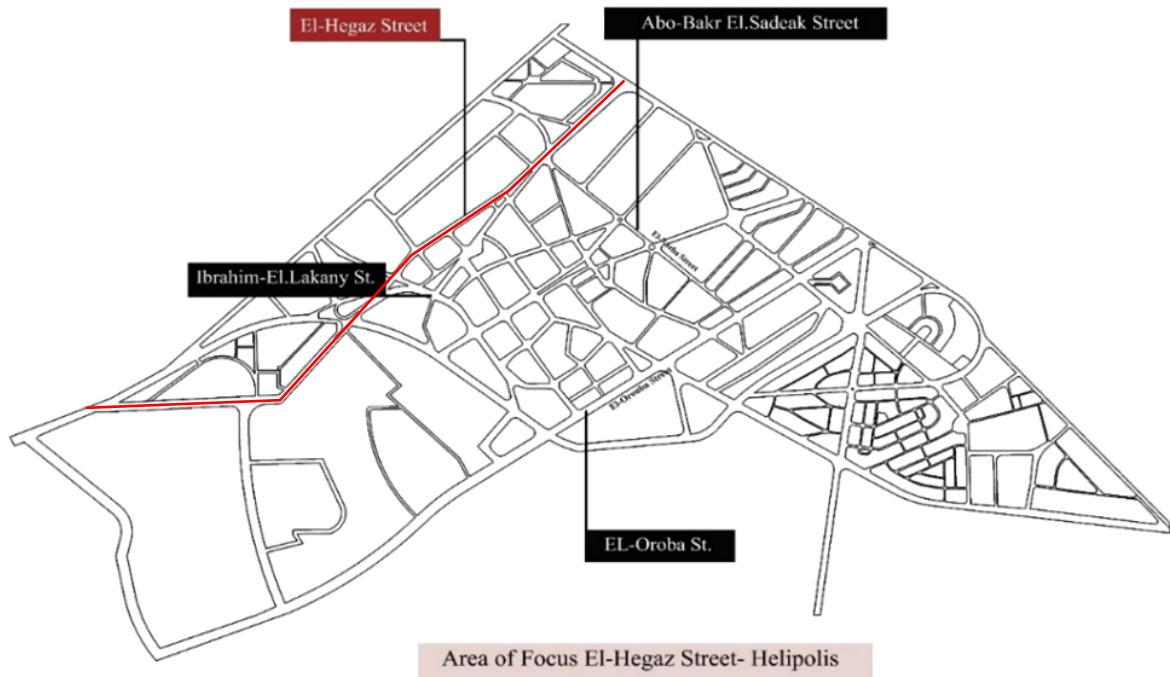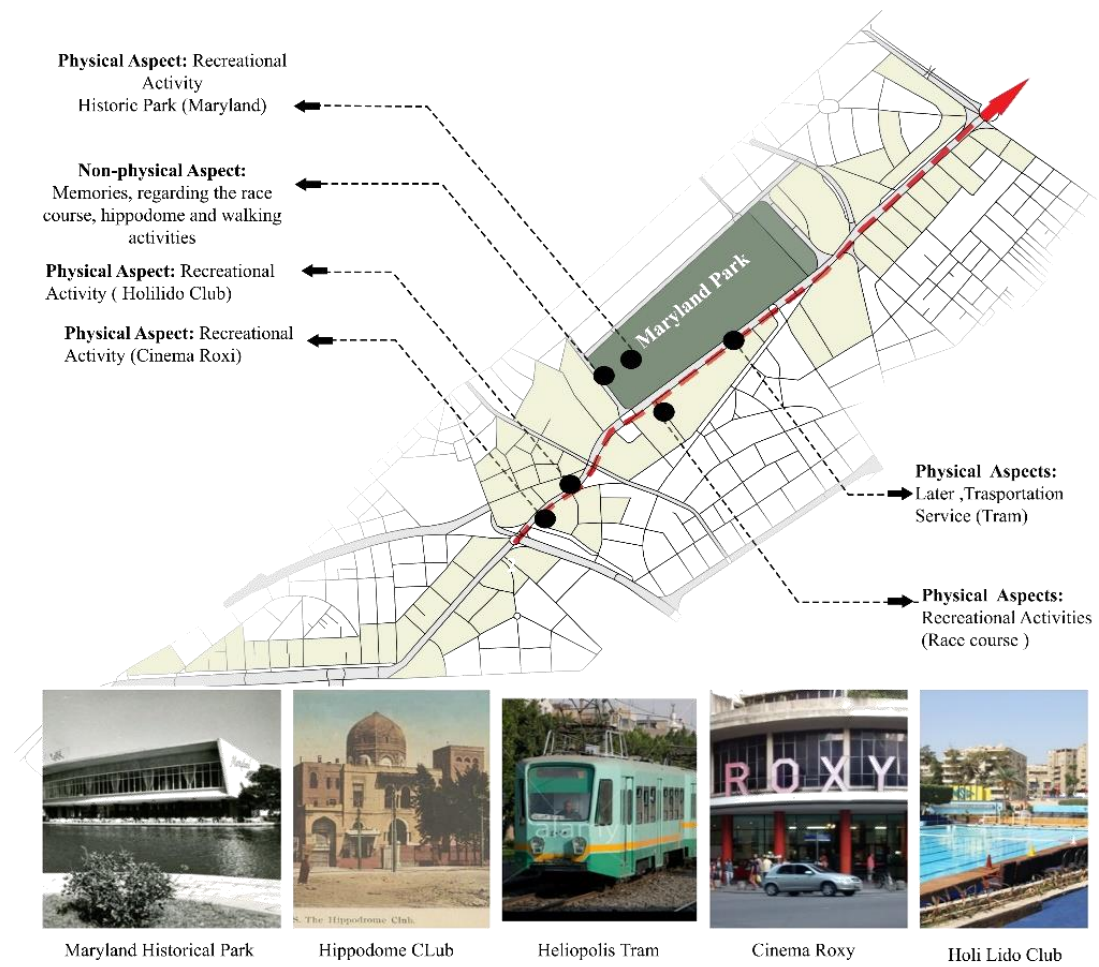
Fig. 3. El-Hejaz Street location at Heliopolis

Fig. 4. Physical and Non-physical aspects at El-Hejaz Street

Heliopolis Latest development plan 2019

In August 2019, bulldozers demolished several of Heliopolis' primary green boulevards and plazas to accommodate the construction of a series of new bridges and the expansion of existing roads. These streets previously featured wide medians adorned with trees, flowers, and grass. The affected thoroughfares included El-Hejaz Street, Abu-Baker El Sediq Street, Marghany Street, Othman Ibn Afan Street, Farid Samika Street, Abdelaziz Fahmy Street, Montazah Street, Mohamed Farid Street, as well as several squares such as Mahkama Square, Hejaz Square, Saint Fatima Square, and Triumph Square [22]. Refer to **Fig. 5.** below for details.
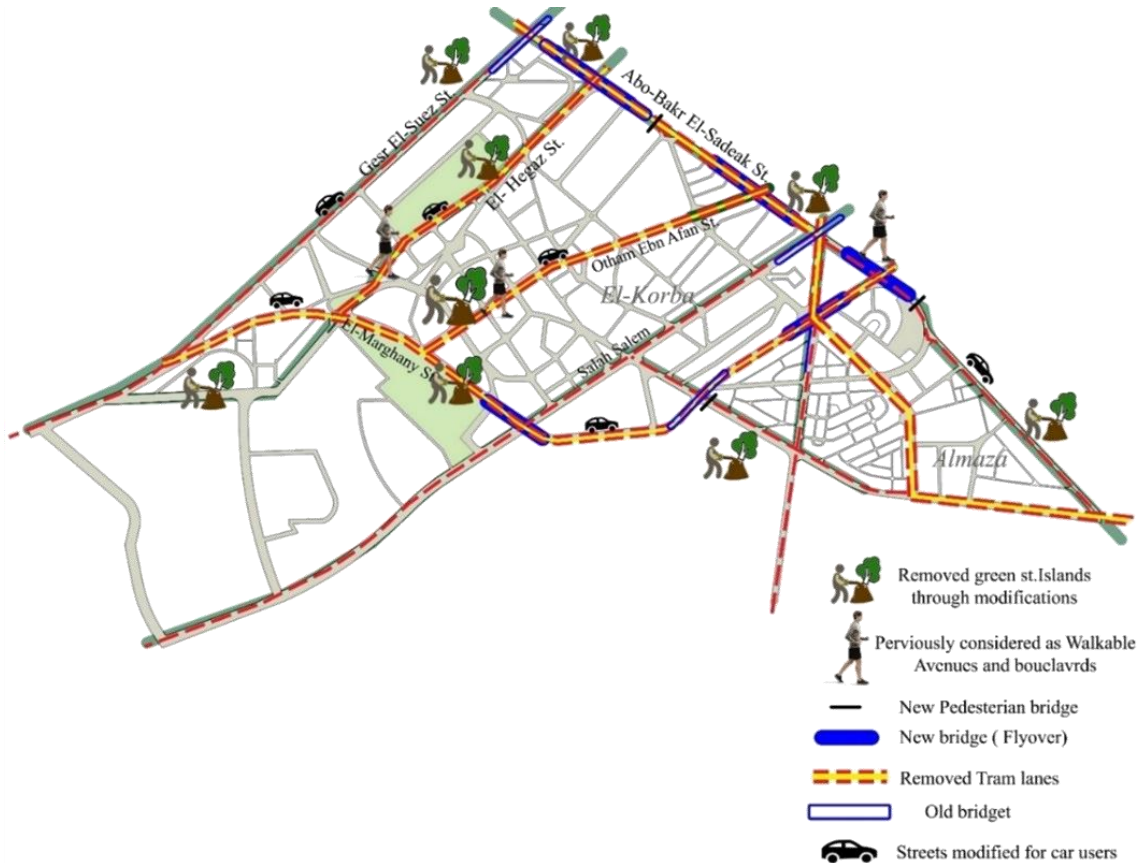
Fig. 5. Schematic representations for the development of Heliopolis 2019

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section explores the methods used to analyze the distinctive aspects in Heliopolis Cairo Region. The study focuses on a qualitative method to collect data through a structured interview with Heliopolis residents to select the significant elements of Heliopolis specifically for EL-Hejaz Street among the mentioned elements in **Fig. 1.** also, residents have been asked about their opinion regarding the latest development. The resident's interview was followed by an academic interview to analyze the impact of the latest development plan on the significant characteristics of Heliopolis with a focus on El-Hejaz Street.

Semi Structured interview with residents

From your point of view, what are the significant aspects that distinguish Heliopsis from the other districts to what extent does the latest development for Heliopolis affect you as a user? what are the factors that have been affected EL-Hejaz Street as one of the historical streets at Heliopolis.

Semi-structured interview with the academics

They have been asked three specific questions as follows: Do you live at Heliopolis or frequently pass by? if yes, the interview is continued, and the interviewer was asked about two main questions.

- First, (From an academic perspective) What are the most significant assets for Heliopolis?
- Second, his/her opinion about the latest development plan at Heliopolis?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Residents' opinion about the latest development plan 2019 effect on EL-Hejaz Street

Residents were asked about their views on how the recent development plan in Heliopolis affects them as users. Through the interview, some of the residents are against what have been done, others agree about these changes, however, both refer to specific zones(streets and squares) that they frequently pass by and find difficulty while walking or crossing especially for Elderly people, in addition to the lack of traffic lights and the ability to use the pedestrian bridges (if exist), they pointed that a lot of accidents have occurred while crossing the streets. These spots differ from main boulevards (streets) or other squares, for example, El-Hejaz Street, Gisr El-Suez, Abu Bakr El- Sadeq and specific squares like El-Mahkama square, Ismailia square, El-Hejaz square at Mari Gerges church. The residents' interviewees showed the following quotations, " I am not able to cross the street, I asked for the traffic man to help me'', other interviewee answered that sometimes I ride a taxi asking him to help me cross the street other times, I cross the streets by waving for the drivers to slow down, a lot of accidents have occurred. 'No one thinks for those pedestrians walking and crossing the streets, they think only for those driving the cars" said one of the interviewees. Another interviewee said "The streets are widened however a lot of accidents have occurred, people die, one day a car has crashed me, and my cousin died from a month ago", another interviewee hang up the interview by asking the government to provide the suburb with traffic lights or pedestrian bridges, most of them answered that the traffic lights are better for use and durable. **Fig. 6.** below shows the streets and squares that have been affected by the latest development plan for 2019 based on the resident's interview.

Academic Interview

The first interview was conducted with an Associate Professor in Cairo who has resided in Heliopolis for nearly 16 years, specifically in the Treinf and EL-Nozha districts. When inquired about the assets of Heliopolis from his perspective, he highlighted the wide streets characterized by avenues and boulevards with ancient trees, some of which are over a hundred years old.

Regarding the recent infrastructural changes in Heliopolis, particularly the construction of bridges and the expansion of road widths, he expressed strong opposition. He stated, "I am against what has happened, and I reject the neglect of urban planners' input in the development of a valuable city like Heliopolis." He emphasized that the modifications aimed at addressing traffic problems have overlooked the visual characteristics and urban fabric of the area. Heliopolis was renowned for its wide medians with large central trees, and replacing these with bridges adversely affects the city's image and building value.

From a transportation planning perspective, the project is viewed as an effective development that reduces traffic congestion. However, he noted that in certain locations, the necessity of such measures is questionable and alternatives to bridges might have sufficed.

He suggested that other solutions could be considered, citing the example of Boston's "Big Dig" project in the United States, initiated in the 20th century. Boston's downtown, previously congested with bridges and traffic, was transformed into a pedestrian-friendly environment that respects the city's natural and social aspects.

He further added that if Egypt's current economic situation cannot support such extensive projects, other solutions should be considered. For instance, identifying alternative routes for traffic could be effective. Analyzing the types of users might reveal that some pass-through Heliopolis without it being their destination. Redirecting such traffic could solve the congestion problem without compromising the visual and structural integrity of the area.

The second interview was conducted with a professor at Ain Shams. The professor, commutes daily to Heliopolis for work, frequently walked through its streets and Maryland with his family, enjoying the tram and the surrounding architectural beauty.

When asked about the assets of Heliopolis, he highlighted its architectural style, visual characteristics, social aspects, memories, and activities. Regarding the latest development plan, he stated, "I agree with what has happened in Heliopolis to some extent, but the visual characteristics of the place should have been respected." He acknowledged that while the development plan aimed to alleviate street congestion and reduce automobile exhaust, it failed to consider the aesthetic and urban fabric of the area. He noted that the green leaves have turned black from exhaust fumes.

He also criticized the design plan for neglecting pedestrian needs, making it difficult for older residents to navigate the streets they have walked for years. The absence of pedestrian bridges or traffic lights endangers lives, and pedestrian bridges with elevators are not viable due to maintenance issues. He emphasized that the bridges should have been designed aesthetically to blend with the architectural style of the district.

In summary, while he supported the development plan for improving traffic flow and increasing street width, he expressed concerns about the visual and urban aspects. He suggested that a competition for the best bridge design could have preserved the architectural style and addressed traffic issues simultaneously.

The third interview was with a professor at Cairo University, who emphasized the architectural style, social activities, and environmental characteristics as Heliopolis's physical assets. She opposed the latest development plan, stating, "The target was those passing through the suburb, neglecting the residents and their social life." She argued that urban planning should consider both residents and non-residents. She described the plan as unfair, benefiting only pass-through traffic and neglecting long-term residents.

The development plan negatively impacted the quality of life, sense of place, architectural style, visual identity, green spaces, and environmental aspects. She suggested finding alternative routes instead of constructing numerous bridges, arguing that bridge design could never fully respect the area's identity. She referenced the Boston "Big Dig" project, which preserved the lifestyle of its residents by promoting a walkable community.

The fourth interview was with an associate professor who frequently visits Heliopolis for various activities, including shopping and dining on Ibrahim El-Lakany Street. She identified the architectural style and natural features, such as large trees and green spaces, as distinguishing factors of Heliopolis.

Regarding the 2019 development plan, she acknowledged that it improved traffic flow on El Hejaz Street, Abu-Bakr El Sadiq Street, and Elkhalifa El-Maamoun Street, making it easier to reach destinations quickly. However, she noted that the urban fabric and visual continuity of the suburb have been compromised by the bridges. The increased number of lanes and frequent accidents have made the area less walkable and disrupted the lifestyle of residents. She stressed that the heritage of Heliopolis should have been considered in the development of such a distinctive suburb.
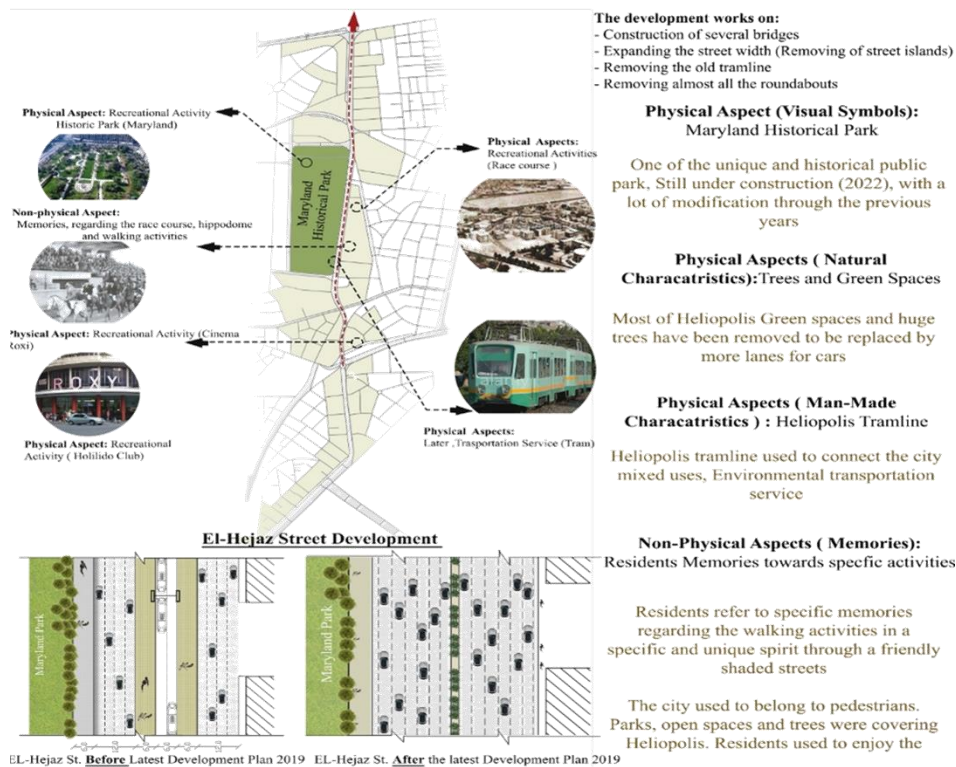
Fig. 6. El-Hejaz Street before and after the latest development plan 2019

Through the resident's interview specific assets of Heliopolis have been highlighted, some of them are physical while others are non-physical, the physical assets of Heliopolis based on the residents interview are represented by the visual symbols such as the Maryland and the Basilica, iconic buildings such as the Baron palace, man- made characteristics represents by the architecture style of the suburb as well as the boulevards and avenues, natural characteristics represented by the green spaces and aligned trees other singularity assets are non-physical assets such as the memories, spirt and the social economic value of the suburb. The resident's interview has been followed by an academic interview to discuss the effect of the latest development plan of the singularity assets of Heliopolis (Physical and non- physical) , the research concluded that some of the physical assets that have been affected such as the man-made characteristics and the natural aspects while other non-physical assets have been affected such as the residents' memories and lifestyle as **Fig. 7.**
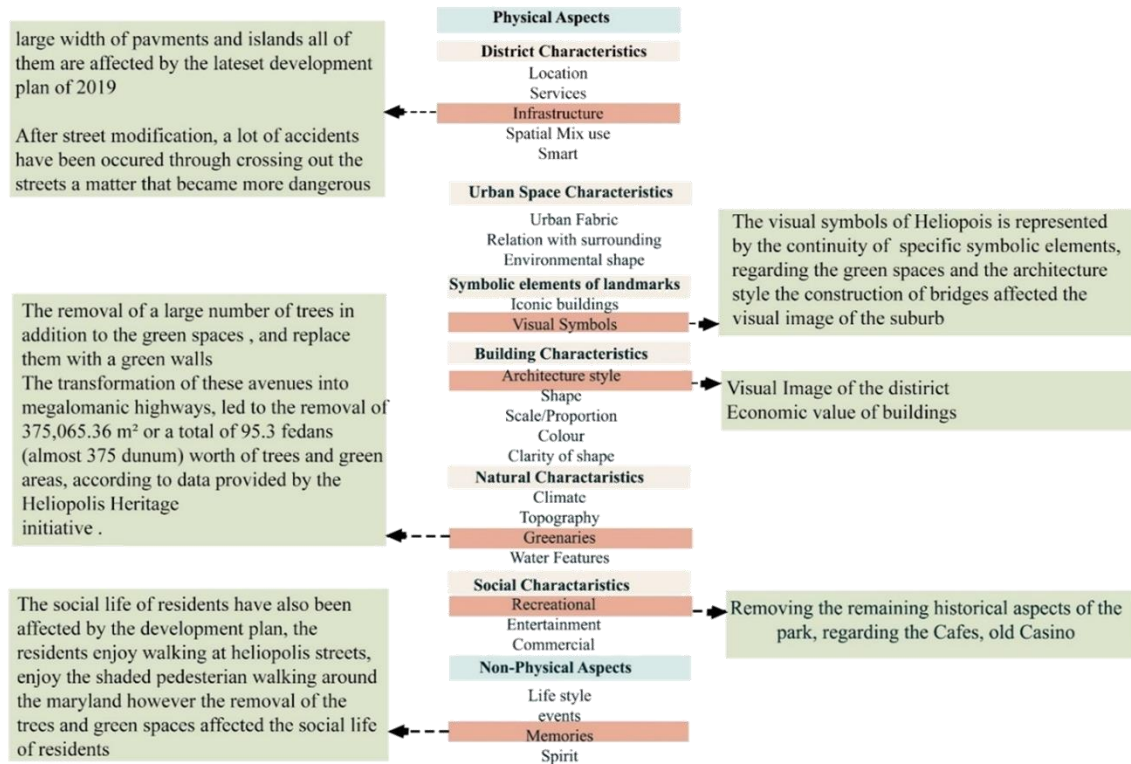
Fig. 7. El Hejaz Street Physical and non-physical characteristics that was affected by the development plan of 2019

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The development policy of planning the cities have a great rule in protecting the identity of cities, once the government policy works with every city in the country with the same law and legislation, the result is a developing city in very similar ways, which makes it very difficult to differentiate themselves with others. Thus, urban planners and designers should focus on elements that are related to the identity and character of the city, and thus it supports the concepts of 'singular urbanism'.

This work emphasizes three points first, the reasons behind the similarity of cities, second, the physical and non-physical elements of singularity based on the identity schemes (place identity, place attachment and place dependence), third, Field work for an Egyptian case study (Heliopolis), the case of Heliopolis emphasizes the presence of physical and non-physical characteristics which represents the singularity and supports the city paradigm (garden city)

The physical features at Heliopolis based on the empirical study are the architectural style that was obvious while walking along Heliopolis streets like Ibrahim EL Lakany, EL Ahram as well as the Korba district that displays a gallery with colonnades, large terraces, and balconies. Those distinctive features distinguish the suburb from the other suburbs. These physical characteristics also match the garden city characteristics through the construction of avenues and boulevards. Through the resident's

interviews, some of them refer to other non-physical aspects such as; spirit, memories, lifestyle and the familiarity between Heliopolis residents, those elements also are considered as unique non- physical characteristics of the suburb.

The authors recommend several key strategies for the development of historical districts. Firstly, community engagement is essential; urban planners and development authorities should actively involve local residents in the planning and development process. This could be achieved through cultural events and educational programs that foster a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community. Additionally, the authors emphasize the importance of collaborative approaches, where government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities work together to create a well-integrated development plan that respects the district's heritage.

The authors also advocate for the regular assessment of the district's conditions through periodic surveys. These assessments are crucial for monitoring the current state of the district and informing future development strategies. Finally, the authors stress the necessity of implementing strict conservation policies. These policies should not only protect the architectural heritage of the districts but also preserve their cultural heritage, ensuring that any development projects align with the historical and cultural significance of the area.

The authors recommend developing a pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in Heliopolis by constructing pedestrian bridges and widening sidewalks. These measures are intended to create a safer environment and enhance the efficiency of pedestrian movement. Additionally, the authors suggest organizing cultural events that encourage residents to share their memories and experiences, thereby fostering a sense of community and preserving the district's cultural heritage.

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