

## The Mosque as a public space in the Islamic City - An Analytical study of Architectural & Urban design of contemporary examples

Associ. Prof. Dr. Ahmed Hosney Radwan

Associate Professor of Architecture & Urban Design,

Department of Architecture, Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt.

[ahosney@f-arts.helwan.edu.eg](mailto:ahosney@f-arts.helwan.edu.eg)

### Abstract

Muslim communities have always been connected, to the Mosque- masjid as called in Arabic- The masjid wasn't limited to being a place of worship, or performing rituals, or as just a social and political aspect of the Muslim community, but instead acted as a sign of belonging and identity. Along the history of Islam, Mosque has been the most essential building within any Muslim community / state that started or settled within any part of the world.

Mosque continued to be a center of many Muslims' activities in addition to being the house of God and the most sacred place for Allah worship that incorporated many functions in addition to worship, as well as exceptionally hosting social events: funerals, condolences or marriages and some other political events like revolutions, & wars.

This study analyses the role that Mosque plays - contemporarily - as a public space at the city level, and how it had a significant role in the lives of Muslims nowadays, not only as a religious building for performing worship but also as a building that serves many other functions related to people lives.

Theoretical concepts and examination of some selected case studies regionally and locally have been analyzed and discussed, dealing with mosques as public spaces that play a fundamental role in the lives of Muslims.

The study concludes and recommends some issues that should be considered by different means while dealing with new mosques design, or by developing some cases of current mosques.

### Keywords:

Mosque, Islamic City, Public Spaces, Mosque Plaza, Urban Center.

### ملخص البحث

ارتبط المسلمون على مر التاريخ بالمسجد، ولم يقتصر المسجد على كونه فقط مكاناً للعبادة، أو مكاناً لاداء الصلاة، بل شكل بعداً اجتماعياً وسياسياً للمجتمع المسلم. كما كان بمثابة رمزا للانتماء والهوية، وعلى مر التاريخ الإسلامى، كان المسجد أهم مبنى داخل أى مجتمع أو دولة من دول الاسلام . وحيث بدأت اى دولة إسلامية أو استقرت فى أى جزء من العالم، كانت الخطوة الاولى هى إنشاء مسجد يرمز لأهمية الإسلام كدين وكدولة، بدءاً من النبى محمد (ص)، والمسجد الأول فى المدينة المنورة أثناء الهجرة إلى مجتمع جديد يؤسس فيه اللبنة الاولى للدين والدولة المسلمة الجديدة.

تناقش هذه الورقة وتتناول بالرصد والتحليل الدور الذى يلعبه المسجد - بشكل معاصر - كفراغ عام على مستوى المدينة، وكيف كان له دورا محوريا وهاما فى حياة المسلمين فى الماضى والحاضر، وكيف اختلفت بعض الوظائف، ليس فقط كمجرد مبنى دينى تمارس فيه العبادات، ولكن أيضا كمبنى يخدم العديد من الوظائف الأخرى التى تتعلق بحياة المجتمع المسلم. وترتكز الدراسة على رصد وتحليل لبعض المفاهيم النظرية ثم تتناول نماذج من بعض الحالات الدراسية المختارة إقليمياً ومحلياً، التى تتعامل مع المساجد كفراغات عامة تلعب دوراً هاماً ومحوريا فى حياة المجتمع المسلم، ليس فقط

لدورها كمباني دينية مخصصة لعبادة الله عز وجل، بل يمتد دورها ليشمل نواح اجتماعية، تعليمية، تجارية، ترفيهية وسياسية، مما يؤثر بشكل عميق على حياة المسلمين اليومية على وجه الخصوص وعلى حياتهم على وجه العموم. ويتم تناول المعلومات بالتحليل من منظور معماري وعمراني، ما يؤدي إلى مجموعة من الاستنتاجات التي تتم مناقشتها من أجل الوقوف على مزيد من التأكيد على أهمية المسجد لكونه فراغا عاما هاما على مستوى المدينة.

### **الكلمات الدالة:**

المسجد، الجامع، الفراغات العامة، الساحات، المسجد الجامع.

### **Research problem**

Dealing with Architecture of the Mosque in some cases in isolation from the urban fabric of the city and the surroundings, limits the role of the mosque to worship only.

The contemporary mosque design is becoming more as closed building rather than an urban center and a public space serving people in many aspects of their life.

### **Research Hypothesis**

Weaving the Mosque in the urban fabric of the city, as a significant public space on the city level, would reveal the critical role of the Mosque rather than only a worship building.

While considering this aspect, an integrated approach should be followed while planning for or designing a collective mosque.

### **Research Aim**

The main aim of this research is to shed light on the idea that the Mosque cannot be considered as a separate building only, but should be thought about as an urban center of various functions that extend beyond the worship of Muslims maintaining many other functions, on social, commercial , educational and political levels.

The primary purpose is to give more attention to the importance of developing the mosque surroundings, either from the beginning during the design stage(s), or for the current situation(s), as an integral part of the Mosque Design and planning Process(es).

### **Research Methodology:**

#### **Theoretical Approach:**

Reviewing theoretical backgrounds, concerning the mosque role in Islamic city, then identifying the impact of the Mosque on city planning, and its importance, and discuss the Mosque as an urban space on the city level.

#### **Analytical Approach:**

Analyzing Case studies of mosques as public spaces, and some other design projects that approached the mosque design as urban centers, rather than religious buildings.

**Research importance**

Developing the Mosque's current design pedagogies towards being a public space, recalling back its role as a community center by providing suitable spaces to get these functions performed.

**Introduction**

Contemporary urbanism in Arab cities - Over the past decades-has witnessed a significant transformation(s) being influenced by many factors, globalization, ideologies, people, an influx of money, ideas, and western developmental models. Based on that, most of the developmental visions of Arabic cities have shifted from local to imported international models, in what can be called westernization, thus generating new paradigms of contemporary Arab urbanism, strongly impacting on public places in particular, among them was the Mosque, which acted for a very long time as the core public space of the Islamic city.

**The Mosque**

Mosque, named in Arabic masjid or jāmi, any house or open area of worship in Islam. The Arabic word masjid means "place of prostration" to God (Medina et al. n.d). Basically, there are two types of mosques: the masjid jāmi, in Arabic, or the "collective mosque," a large state-controlled Mosque that is the center of community worship and the site of Friday and feast prayers, besides the main religious occasions, and the smaller mosques called the masjid in Arabic, which is usually built and operated by the community, and used for five daily Prayers-Excluding Friday Prayer. Our study will focus on the first type, Al Jami' or collective Mosque. (Mosque, 2019). The word Mosque will be used through the research.

**Historical overview****First model as a reference**

The first mosques were based on the very first place of worship of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)—the courtyard of his house in Medina—and were merely plots of land designated as holy, later called the Nabawi Mosque. Although the Mosque, as such, has undergone many architectural changes, the building remains essentially an open space, usually roofed, containing mi-harab and minbar. (Medina et al., n.d.) (PBUH) as soon as he arrived on his emigration from the city of Mecca to Medina, and his companions completed the Mosque.

**The importance of the Mosque in Islam**

Sir William Muir wrote in his book "The Life of Muhammad": "Though coarse in content and negligible in scale, the Mosque of Muhammad (Al-Nabawi Mosque) is glorified in the history of Islam. Here the Prophet and his Companions spent most of their time; here, the regular service, with its often-recurring prayers, was first made public, and here the great congregation gathered every one of them. (Muir, 1894).

Here the Prophet prepared his victories; here, he received ambassadors from the defeated and contrite tribes, and from there, he issued edicts which struck fear among the rebellious in the very outskirts of the peninsula. Hard by, in the apartment of Aisha (one of the Prophet's wives), he breathed his last, and there, beside his first two successors, he lies buried.

" A mosque, therefore, not only serves the purpose of offering prayers (Salawat) and remembrance of God (Zikr), but also many other purposes.

As to preserve its Essential entity contexts that the article sought to approach can be summarized in the following: formative context, recreational context, domestic context, security context, ritual context, and directional context, as these contexts are complementary and related with each other, and that what makes it worthy of being called an organization (مهندسيس ٢٠١٦).

**The Mosque in Islam beyond spirituality.**

Moving from the spiritual/religious values of The Mosque to its functional value, it is a building in which Muslims worship God. Throughout Islamic history, the Mosque was the center of the community and towns ( <https://newmuslimtube.com/i-went-to-a-mosque-look-what-i-saw/>) cities and villages, formed around this pivotal building. Nowadays, especially in Muslim countries mosques(not all are collective) are found on nearly every street corner, making it a simple matter for Muslims to attend the five daily prayers, (<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/2748/what-is-mosque/>) in some cases, while in other cases Mosques are located in specific parts of the city that acts as an urban/service spot that provides religious, commercial and social services, but sometimes providing further medical centers even for non-Muslims, in addition to educational & learning services.

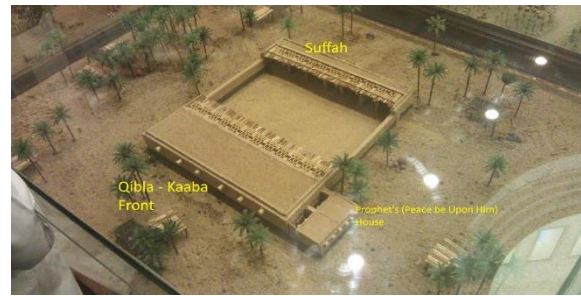


Figure 1 a model showing how the very early Al Nabawi Mosque, attached to the house of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). [Source: madainproject.com](http://madainproject.com)



Figure 2 Al Nabawi Mosque size now is almost the same area of Medina on the early arrival of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to it. [Source: madainproject.com](http://madainproject.com)

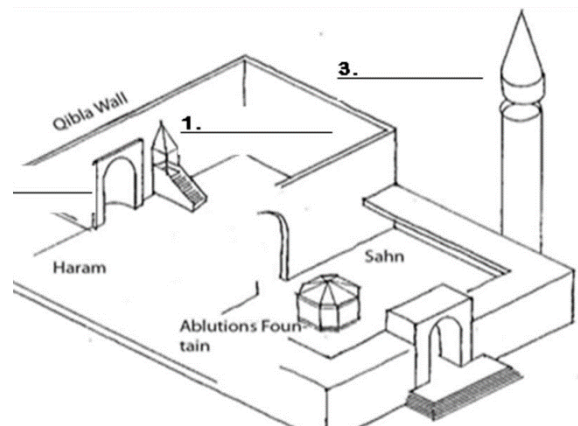


FIGURE 3 THE BASIC DESIGN OF THE MOSQUE, WHERE THE OPEN PUBLIC SPACE CALLED THE SAHN IS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF ITS DESIGN. [SOURCE: WWW.FACTSANDDETAILS.COM](http://WWW.FACTSANDDETAILS.COM)

### The Mosque as a model of early mixed-use buildings

Beginning with Prophet Muhammad's own house, mosques were used for many public functions— military, political, social, and educational. Schools and libraries were often linked to medieval mosques (e.g., al - Azhar Mosque in Cairo <sup>1</sup>, followed by many similar cases). Until the introduction of secular law in many Islamic countries in modern times, the Mosque also functioned as a court of justice. While many of the social, educational, and political functions of the Mosque have been taken over by other institutions in modern times, it remains a center of considerable influence. In some cases, the Kottab (elementary school) is attached to a mosque, mainly for teaching the Qur'an, and the informal classes in law and doctrine are given to the people of the surrounding neighborhood.



FIGURE 4 CHARLES NICOLAS AND JOSEPH VARIN'S 1791 ENGRAVING, KA'BAT ALLAH ALEULIYA 'THE SUPREME KA'ABA OF ALLAH. NOT ONLY FUNCTIONS AS A PRAYER SPACE BUT ALSO SERVES AS AN EXTENSION TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF THE CITY' SOURCE: [WWW.ARCHITECTURAL-REVIEW.COM](http://WWW.ARCHITECTURAL-REVIEW.COM).

### The Mosque as a meeting place

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) considered frequent visits to the Mosque stressful. Abu Hurairah, a companion of the Prophet, reports that the Prophet said: "For those who go to the Mosque morning or evening, Allah prepares entertainment in Paradise every time they go, morning or evening." (Bukhari & Muslim) "Whoever makes his ablutions at home and then goes to one of the houses of Allah to fulfill the duty imposed upon him by Allah, is one step of his stepping away from sin. According to another saying, the Prophet said, "The best part of the city in the eyes of God is its mosques. "Thus, a mosque becomes a meeting place for Muslims five times a day. Consider each other and may discuss any matter that may affect or interest them, before or after the services. All the Islamic services, the five daily prayers, the Friday noon service, the festivals, and the pilgrimage to the house of Allah are organized in such a way as to ensure the cooperation of all sections of the Muslim society. (The Mosque, being the focal point of all this, plays a large part in the general life of the city as the main meeting point or, in other words, the most important" Public Space.



### The Mosque as a place for rest

The Mosque is used as a resting place. The worshipers come to the Mosque, conduct ablution, and rest during the noon heat in hot countries (most of the Arab Islamic countries), before or after the prayers. Often, they spend the night if they happen to be strangers in the city and they do not have any other lodging. Those who pass through the villages usually return to the village mosque for their night stay on the road. The mosques have a bathroom and toilet facilities. When the time comes for a meal, one of the locals (Importance of a Mosque | Baitun Nur Mosque, 2014), takes the stranger home for a meal, as hospitality is always considered necessary in the Muslim world.



FIGURE 5 AL-AZHAR MOSQUE IN CAIRO, AN EXAMPLE OF MIXED-USE PUBLIC SPACE, THAT INCORPORATED MANY FUNCTIONS BESIDE WORSHIP. SOURCE: WWW.WORLDSHERITAGESITE.ORG

### The Mosque as a source of water supply

After reaching a mosque, the worshipers purify themselves with water, i.e., they perform ablution. Therefore, some sort of water supply is essential in every Mosque. For centuries the mosque wells were the only source of water supply for the towns. Even today, in villages where there is no other water supply system(s), people converge to the Mosque with their earthenware to draw water from the Mosque well, dug either in the courtyard of the Mosque or near its entrance.

### The Mosque as a place of learning

Today mosques continue to be used as schools where Muslim children are taught reading, writing, and the recitation of the Holy Quran. In large towns, however, separate school buildings are found either attached to the Mosque or near the Mosque. For older students, colleges for the particular study of religion, called Madrassas, are built alongside the Mosque, where the imam and other religious teachers impart religious instructions for full-time students. These institutions often contain an extensive collection of religious books, for the use of students and the public. Al Azhar University, which is a famous educational institution in the middle east even today, is attached to Al Azhar mosque in Cairo, Egypt, where students from far and wide follow the course in religion, Shariah (Islamic Law)

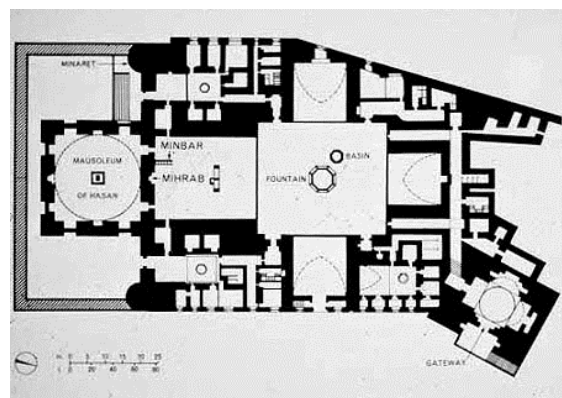


Figure 6 Sultan Hassan Madrasa (and Mosque) in Cairo, Egypt, is an example of the Mosque as a place basically Built for learning in addition to being a worship place. [Source:2010, Abdel Salam.](#)

and Fiqh (Jurisprudence), and highly qualified teachers and scribes are appointed for the purpose.

### **The Mosque as a place for social gatherings**

Mosques were and still used for social gatherings, like courts of law, funeral prayers, wedding ceremonies, and other religious ceremonies and gatherings. That prolonged from the early models of mosques till the current contemporary models, considering that some functions moved to separate buildings like the courts of law, for example, yet still, mosques are acting as gathering places for Muslims, before and after prayers, and even happened during some political movements.

### **The Mosque as a Public Space in the City and the Community**

In a well-established scholarship, Islam has long been a predominantly urban phenomenon. Given this, and under the assumption of significant recent/contemporary developments such as the Iranian revolution or, more broadly, the emergence of political Islam, there is now growing concern about understanding the Mosque, a crucial Islamic religious institution, both in its overall historical setting and its contemporary place and positioning in urban landscapes.

### **The Mosque in Life**

In theory, the characteristics of public space— and occasionally of contestation, sometimes tense, public space – appear to have been features of the Mosque in both 'modern' and 'medieval' times. Examples of this can be found in many of the existing documents relating to the different parts of the Islamic world, both in historical periods and in the present. EOLBREAK Emerging trends in modern scholarships propose a comprehensive reassessment of the Mosque along the following lines. (Ahmed, 2018):

#### **The Mosque – Transformations.**

It could be noticed that after Prophet Muhammad(PBUH), major transformations happened, where elements like the domes and minarets were added to the architecture of the Mosque, The Mosque's peaceful horizontal form transformed into a vertical shape as a symbol of authority, (Alsammarae, 2019), the simplicity of the mosque design was changed to a great extent.



**Figure 7 the sacred Mosque (Haram) of Mecca is the most important public space for Muslims hosting thousands/millions of people, especially during the Haj Time. source:[www.architectural-review.com](http://www.architectural-review.com).**



Figure 1 The picture shows the size of Al Nabawy mosque in Medina in the beginning of hijra, and how its size expanded to be almost 40% of the Medina area, although this is not the case in all Islamic cities, yet this Mosque is one of the most essential three mosques of Islam. Sources: madainproject.com.-Ali Tufail,2018.

### The Mosque now

The Islamic city planning was based on the Mosque as the core of the city, and this concept was currently changed. Many functions and with the complexity of modern life, and an increase of populations have been performed in their buildings rather than the Mosque, like the house of court, the schools, etc. Although the Mosque currently is not the core of the modern Islamic city planning, it is still a significant area of the Islamic city, including many functions that are related to the public.

### Contemporary Mosques

It is noticed clearly that there is a considerable limitation in the role and function(s) of mosques nowadays, comparing that to the remarkable role(s) that mosques have played throughout history, the Majority of mosques of today( Mosque & Collective Mosque), are primarily functioning as places of worship, with some occasional educational activities that take place. Comparing that to the past, the social and administrative roles of the mosques have been clearly limited(Abdel-Hady, 2010).

### Case studies from some Islamic countries

The following are some case studies of mosques from some Islamic countries, that experienced the Mosque as a public space and an urban center, acting and adding to the community various functions in addition to its basic religious one as a worship place, in a way that is recalling the Mosque as a public space or an urban center, with its architecture and urban design that weaves the Mosque in the urban fabric.

### New Abu Dhabi mosque

Location: in Al Dana North, within the Al Raha beach development in the UAE emirate of Abu Dhabi.

Size: built up area of 2,200m<sup>2</sup>.

Al Dana mosque is meant to serve both as a (Friday) mosque and an urban public space at the same time in addition to being a landmark mosque for the surrounding community.



The Main objectives was to create an uplifting, spiritual space that caters to the practical needs of the worshippers, as well as addressing the character of the district.



Figure 1 The proposed design for Al Dana Mosque  
Sources: www.middleeastarchitect.com - www.gulfconstructiononline.com.

### Urban Analogy

The Mosque's plot is placed on a public seaside promenade facing the marina, [allowing for a context-inspired design that maintains harmony with its immediate surrounding.](#)

Al Dana Mosque is meant to serve as both a religious space as well as a public space, with the plaza, inspired by a traditional sahan, serving as the urban connector.,

The project is read as a landscape intervention that connects the two levels of the site and "eases people's movement, connecting them to the promenade and sea.

The leaning domes of the structure are meant to evoke shifting sand dunes.

The Mosque transforms into a lantern at night, as the light from the interior emits outward, and during the day, the high oculus brings daylight into the space, which are spotlighted across the interior's floor depending on the time of the day, forming a spiritual connection between the "earthy interior and the heavenly skies".

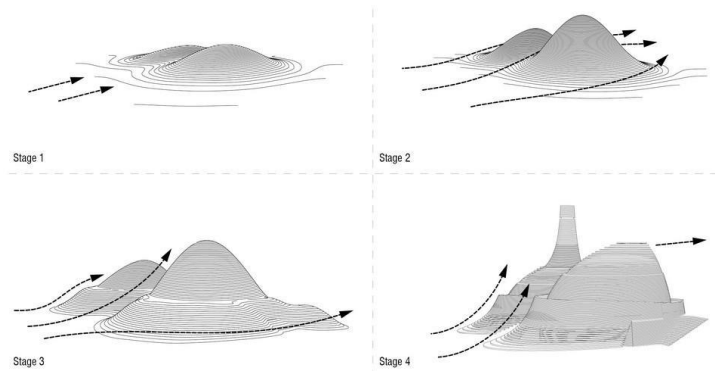


FIGURE 8 THE LEANING DOMES OF THE STRUCTURE ARE MEANT TO EVOKE SHIFTING SAND DUNES..SOURCE X-ARCHITECTS



FIGURE 9 SITE PLAN OF AL DANA MOSQUE.SOURCE: WWW.MIDDLEEASTARCHITECT.COM

## Architecture Analogy

Reimagined traditional mosque components and investigated geometry and architectural language from a new perspective that reflects the intellect, aspiration and vision of the UAE.

Designed to emphasize energy-saving, elements like oculi, wall perforations and natural light filtration assure the building aligns with sustainability measures.

Multi-faceted in nature and corresponds to numerous factors and considerations – all of which interact to create a mosque that is rooted in its culture and context.”

## The Nora Mosque and Community Center

Location: Ajman, UAE.

Size: The project spans an area of 10,000 m2.

it captures both the spiritual and environmental context of Ajman's principal site. It is located north of Dubai, near a massive high rise residence block. However, it creates its unique ambiance and spatial setting with a composition of shell-like platforms that spring from the earth. ( <https://www.middleeastarchitect.com/insight/emre-arolat-architecture-unveils-the-concept-for-nora-mosque-and-community-centre-in-ajman>)

## Urban Analogy

In the project site, which is surrounded by roads on all sides, an internal street was formed to connect the north-south roads, which also enables the prevailing wind from the same direction to permeate the complex and can be read as the central vertebra of access.

A significant requirement was that this street help alleviate the effects of the burning sun and form a calm canyon environment, presenting an extensive spatial experience to the user with its dramatic and alternate perspectives while connecting the various functions contained within the building complex.



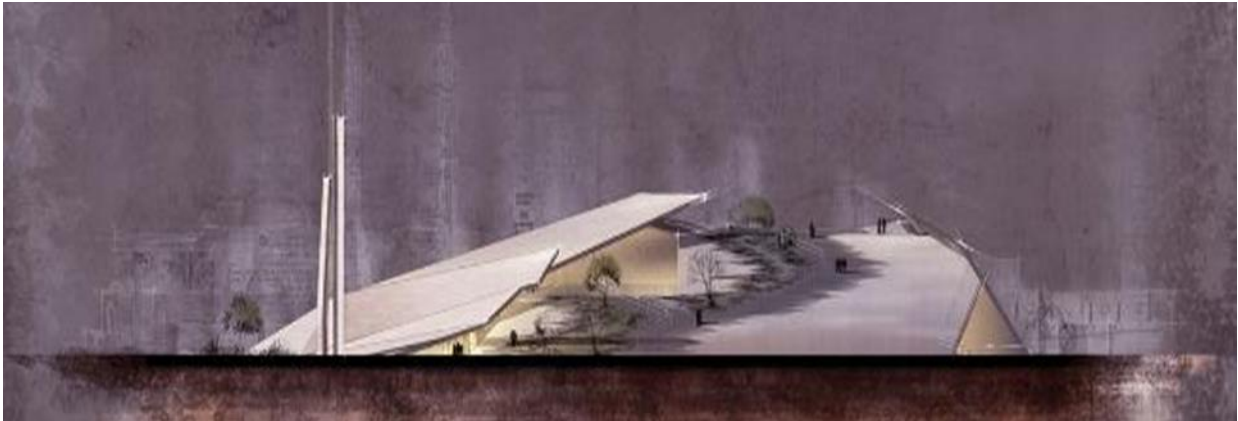
FIGURE 11 LAYOUT OF NORA MOSQUE.SOURCE:[WWW.ARCHDAILY.COM](http://WWW.ARCHDAILY.COM)



Figure 10 Nora mosque accessible to the community. source:[WWW.ARCHDAILY.COM](http://WWW.ARCHDAILY.COM)

The mass composition transforms the shell-like platforms into walkable surfaces, by merging the conventional roles of the essential structural elements with one another, turning the walls to a roof, and the roofs into pedestrian pathways. Raising slowly from Sheikh Rashid Bin Humeed Road on the north, one of the main arteries of the city, the sloped surface is partially landscaped

to provide shaded areas leading the user to the highest level of the building. The top-level is planned as a meditation terrace with its sea view to the north.



**Figure 14 Nora mosque roof acting as a public plaza. Integrated with the surroundings.**  
source:www.archdaily.com

### **The Nora Mosque architecture**

The multi-use complex, serving 2,500 people, several halls for various social and educational activities, recreational and service areas, and a semi-closed parking area, was designed to form a significant public space for the city's residents.

This focused on creating a place of honor and remembrance through the creation of not only a respectful house of worship but also a place where reflective reflection could be felt, both inside and outside the newly created structure. Instead of competing with the heterogeneous building stock in the vicinity or with the severe impact of the gigantic wall created by the high - rise residential blocks in the north, the complex was built with an approach that generates its unique environment, a structure of shell-like platforms derived from the earth below.

### **Khartoum Grand Mosque**

Location: Khartoum, Sudan.

In the very crowded capital of Sudan, Khartoum, stands its grand mosque, the Khartoum Grand mosque is one of the cery clear examples of the mosques that acts as a public space, due to its location, in addition to the facilities and services been provided in its surroundings.





Figure 15 The Grand Mosque of Khartoum. Source: Www.Dabangasudan. Org

### Khartoum Grand Mosque Plaza Competition

In 2007, an architectural competition was launched to develop the Khartoum Grand Mosque surroundings, to be more friendly, add landscape, and public plazas, the author in collaboration with a local consultant from Sudan, participated in the competition, and suggested an urban development plan, that joins all the surrounding areas, and add some services, in addition to provision of parking areas all around the suggested plaza, after defining some entry points that are capable of hosting the big number of users, in addition to adding many green areas, and creating many recreational spaces that have their own access points, in addition to the provision of many shaded areas, and a walking track that is surrounding the suggested plaza, with no intersection with any traffic circulations.







FIGURE 12 KHARTOUM GRAND MOSQUE PLAZA COMPETITION – AUTHOR PROPOSAL. SOURCE:AUTHOR.

## Contemporary Mosques in Egypt

As previously mentioned, Islamic city planning was based on the Mosque as the core of the city, and this happened in Egypt as well as many other places around the world, this concept was changed in the current situation in many Islamic countries and states. In Egypt, and with the founding of Ismaili Cairo in the 18th century, this concept was no more applied, the Planning of Paris influenced the planners more, the following developments were more of eastern features like Heliopolis, Maadi, garden city, and even in the new developments in Mohandesin and Nasr city, the Mosque wasn't the core. It was an important building but wasn't the base of the city development plan, the same continued in the cities of the modern generations till the new Cairo, 6th of October, etc.

## Case studies of some contemporary Mosques in Egypt acting as Public spaces

Some case studies were selected in Egypt that represent the Mosque as a significant public space, not only a worship building, size, and location were considered, also having some urban-architectural problems that were explored, with some introduced suggestions that can make them better serving as community centers and public spaces.

### Mostafa Mahmoud Mosque, Mohandesin, Giza

Built in 1979 by Dr Mostafa Mahmoud (1921-2009),

Location: Mohandesin, Giza, Egypt.

The Plot area is About 3000 m<sup>2</sup>.

### Urban analogy

- Located on a very vibrant avenue – Gameat El Dewal Al Arabia. In the crowded district of Mohandesin.
- The Mosque is the most famous in its surroundings, surrounded by Residential Buildings, Embassies, Banks, Commercial Buildings.
- There is an open area in front of it, but not acting as a plaza, but more of a parking area been penetrated by a service road, and sometimes street vendors, after Fridays Prayers.

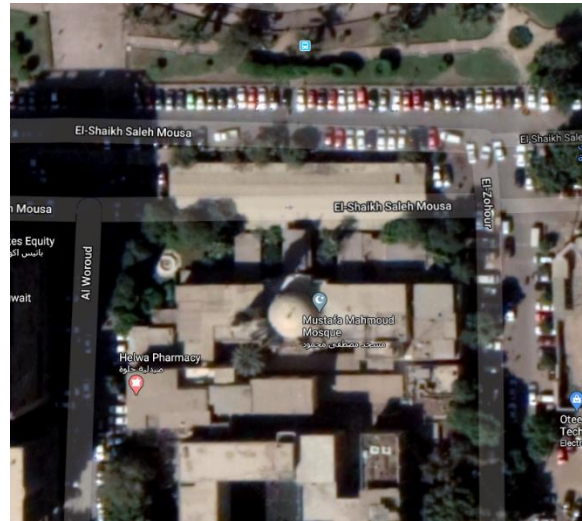


FIGURE 13 LAYOUT OF MOSTAFA MAHMOUD MOSQUE.SOURCE:GOOGLE MAPS,2020.

### Architecture analogy

- The Mosque is hosting many community services besides worship, including social, medical functions, considering its central location.
- The Mosque Administration Built a Covered Area of Light Steel Structure, acting as an extended shaded area for Prayers Especially for Fridays, and Other Social or Religious Events.

### Current problems facing the Mosque as a public space:



FIGURE 18 AREA FACING MOSTAFA MAHMMOUD MOSQUE MOSQUE. SOURCE: [HTTPS://AR.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/](https://ar.wikipedia.org/).

- Traffic congestions along the day, and more condensed when funerals are taking place, and on Fridays where volatile markets are existing.
- Steel constructions used as shaded areas, which are distracting the image of the Mosque.

### Suggestion to make it a better public space:

- Re-planning, the area around the Mosque, would make it a friendlier, traffic-free, and safer public space that could serve its community in a better way, putting in consideration also that an underground metro station will be shortly opened closer to it.
- Depending on green elements in creating shadows, instead of the current shading structures.
- Managing the street vendors and maintaining a system of waste collection.
- Maintaining a suitable parking area, whether during the prayer times or during any social events like funerals or similar occasions.



FIGURE 14 MANY DISTRACTIONS AROUND THE MOSQUE.SOURCE:AUTHOR.

### Alsedik Mosque

Location: Heliopolis Sheraton, Cairo, Egypt.

Size: The Plot area is About 5000 m<sup>2</sup>.

### Urban analogy

- It is located on the main Avenue of Heliopolis Sheraton District.
- Residential blocks surround it from three directions.
- Overlooking a vast green area from its main entrance, the Mosque is accessible from all its sides – except the qibla wall - which makes it easily accessible by the community, where these entrances are leading to the worship hall, in addition to the medical, social and educational facilities included in the mosque premises,
- The Mosque is a landmark in its area.

### Current problems facing the Mosque as a public space:

- One of the main problems of the Mosque is traffic jams, especially on Fridays or during any funerals, condolences, etc.
- No parking areas and the Mosque is not connected to the green area facing its main entrance been penetrated by a street.
- In addition to random street vendors during Fridays and sometimes during weekdays.



FIGURE 15 LAYOUT OF AL SEDIK MOSQUE, HELIOPOLIS SHERATON. SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS,2020.



### Suggestion to make it a better public space:

- The street passing in front of the main entrance could be quickly closed, thus creating a pleasant plaza in front of the Mosque that could host temporary commercial activities, in addition to religious events like Eid prayers, in a more friendly and safer way.
- Underground parking could be constructed, under the green area facing the main entrance, that can generate income to the Mosque, and absorbs a good number of cars that must park while using the Mosque.



FIGURE 16 AL SEDIK MOSQUE, HELIOPOLIS SHERATON.  
SOURCE: WWW.MOBTADA.COM.



FIGURE 17 THE PLAZA FACING AL SEDIK MOSQUE, HELIOPOLIS SHERATON.  
SOURCE: WWW.MOBTADA.COM.

### Hassan Sharbatly Mosque – New Cairo

Location: New Cairo, Cairo, Egypt.

Size: The Plot area is About 12000 m<sup>2</sup>.

Hassan Abbas Sharbatly Charity foundation for social services (Hasfound) built the mosque . The mosque was built on an area of around 18000 m<sup>2</sup>, the area of the built-up is 5700 m<sup>2</sup>. It can take more than 5000 worshippers. The mosque is surrounded by number of arenas that can be used on formal Eids prayers. These arenas can take more than 3000 worshippers.

### Urban analogy

- Located on the main street dividing residential blocks.
- the Mosque is sitting on a plot with different levels allowing for multiple entrances for functions been hosted in the mosque building.
- An excellent example of being an urban center for the community.

### Architecture analogy

The mosque architecture is characterized by being simple, modern, with abstracted Islamic elements and Holy Quraan verses engraved on walls, with stone cladding walls, with a central dome surrounded by four minarets.



Figure 18 Hassan Sharbatly Mosque new Cairo as an example of an urban center in its location.  
Source: [www.hasfound.org](http://www.hasfound.org)



The Mosque is mainly characterized by:

- Public plaza on different levels.
- Commercial services (temporary market and Street Vendors) during Friday Prayers, and this happens outside the Mosque's premises, with no control from the mosque management.
- Social services provided, represented in 3 halls, offering Funerals and Condolences occasions, in addition to marriage occasions.
- Educational services provided, represented in offering Quraan classes for children and adults, besides basic computer skills classes.
- Commercial
- A landmark for the surrounding area, due to its location, and variety of functions, besides worship.



Figure 19 Hassan Sharbatly Mosque- New Cairo.  
source:google maps 2020.

### Current problems facing the Mosque as a public space:

- No parking areas and cars are parked in the surrounding streets and the adjacent vacant plot of land.
- Traffic congestions along the day (before-during-after prayers) and more condensed when funerals, condolences, marriages are taking place.
- Very congested during Fridays, where volatile markets and street vendors are existing, in a non-organized way.
- The Aarea surrounding the Mosque inside its premises is large yet being on different levels is making it sometimes non-accessible, especially for the older people, not quipped for handicapped at all.
- The social (Condolences and marriage) services halls are located in the basement, with no accessibility to serve people with special needs.
- Steel Fencing is making a psychological barrier between the Mosque and the Users, yet it is understood to have security measures and precautions. However, making the open areas around the Mosque accessible would lead to a better role for the Mosque as a public space, considering the point that Mosque already has a security system that can prevent any unwanted practices that might occur.

### Suggested solutions to make it a better public space:

- The area in front of the Mosque- shown in fig- could be used as a plaza hosting various activities after planting some trees to act as a naturally shaded area, where a simple rerouting of the street from the southeast direction.
- The mosque premises should be opened more, to make use of the open areas around it as a community gathering place, especially in the southwestern part of it that is a bit on the other side of the main entrance.
- The vacant plot located to the north of the Mosque and owned by the municipality should be hosting parking facilities in addition to coordinating the temporary commercial services that occasionally happen, thus solving the traffic and congestion problems.
- Special needs should be considered.



FIGURE 20 HASSAN SHARBATLY MOSQUE, A COMMUNITY CENTER. [WWW.HASFOUND.ORG](http://WWW.HASFOUND.ORG).

### Discussion and conclusions

- The design of spiritual spaces is among the most difficult for architects. While presenting the usual restraints, like tight budgets, short time frames, and client demands, such projects, when approached in unconventional ways, can be inundated with religious opposition and public disagreement. Moreover, in countries where religious conservatism overpowers creative solutions, designing a spiritual space can often fall short of being an exploratory opportunity for architects.
- Along with the Islamic history, the Mosque has been not only a part but also an essential part of the urban fabric of the city, easily accessed, and visually appreciated, physically and psychologically connected to its community.
- On the General level, the role of mosques in countries with Muslims majority is getting more limited regarding its function(s), since these functions are performed in separate locations/buildings, that are taking the responsibilities of making tasks that used to be performed within the mosque premises in the past, like education and house of court for example as mentioned previously. Also, Mosques now have fewer social and welfare roles – especially in the cities - since there are other bodies responsible for social welfare and other community organizations that deal with community welfare and social aspects. The same separation of functions is happening for ministries of health, administration, and so on.
- On the other hand, in non - Muslim countries or Muslim minorities, mosques have specific and more detailed functions. In some countries, for example, the Mosque plays the role of a community center and public space where recent research in some non - Muslim countries has shown that mosques are an essential and necessary component of the Muslim social network.
- The study examined some case studies from some Islamic world, where the Mosque acts as a public plaza, or a community center, some of the case studies, the mosque role as a public space was fulfilled, others are partially fulfilled.

- While analyzing some case studies, in some contemporary attempts, changing the architectural language of mosques have been reflected, simultaneously happening in different Muslim countries, illustrating their horizontal expansion rather than vertical, as reflected in their incorporation of plazas and landscaped areas. Rather than keeping engagement with visitors of the indoor activity, mosques are beginning to offer a hospitable non-denominational space for respite to local community members.
- In many ways, mosques are now expanding horizontally, providing restored public spaces to their neighborhoods.
- In his Design of Al Riyadh Great Mosque, Rasem Badran said that dealing with the Mosque as a part of the fabric was his drive while developing the central concept, the Mosque is on the way of the people to their work, and is attached to their daily life, and what makes them addresses the Mosque five time a day is to make it in their daily way(y).
- Adding social, educational, and sometimes medical and commercial services to the mosque space program gave a high value to the Mosque, moving it from a worship hall to an integral community center and public space that is serving its community on a broader scale and a higher level.
- Undoubtedly, Dealing with the Mosque as a building with defined limits is isolating it from being an integral part of its community, which is unfortunately, happening in many recent attempts, especially when walls or fences surround the Mosque, and when the Mosque is closing its premises. We are not talking here of course about the prayer halls, that should be closed for maintenance and security reasons, yet we are talking about the psychological aspect of making a barrier between the people and the Mosque as Gods Home as per Islam religion, where that idea is highly contradicting with the previously mentioned concept of having the Mosque in the Peoples' way(s).
- Moreover, with the necessary support and infrastructure, they have a positive impact on the socialization and integration of Muslims into Western secularized societies. In the context of immigration, European mosques have more impetus than those in Muslim countries to act as multifunctional meeting places. In other words, in addition to being places for religious activities, mosques have developed into centers offering a wide range of cultural and social activities.
- It was evident in Egypt that mosques design emphasizes more on the building rather than the surrounding(s), or in other words, it's more clearer that investing more in the mosque building and architecture rather than dealing with the surrounding areas and open spaces, which are actually of importance not less than the mosque building in itself and should be integrated with it, also putting in consideration that these open areas if adequately designed. Climate conditions were considered will host all the activities accompanying the worship, in addition to playing the very first role of the Mosque as a vital meeting area of Muslims and a social hub as well.
- Open areas surrounding the Mosque when considered can host the other activities rather than worship, like social and commercial activities that happen periodically or temporarily, thus avoiding any problems that occur on Fridays or some weekdays like random street vendors and traffic contestations.
- On the governmental level, municipalities must specify a reasonable area close to the Mosque that could be of multiple use, either as a parking area, or a place for street vendors. It is

preferred to have this area located directly and connected to the Mosque with no isolating streets, as this will prevent some problems that are sometimes happenings like traffic jams, or extensive parking, thus blocking the whole area around the Mosque during an event like Friday prayer, or during some funerals.

- Environmental treatments and green areas are an essential aspect that should be considered, red whether when creating shaded areas or dealing with the different climate issues.
- Connecting the Mosque with the community is a core value that should be brought back, as this would increase the social cohesion, which is happening in any public space, so what if this public space is the home of God, or connected to it.
- Further working on the urban level of the areas and activities surrounding the Mosque will require a higher level of Architecture design, as the Mosque will be visually perceived from all directions, not only by considering the functional values supporting the spaces program, but also esthetic values of a famous building that represents many core values of the Islamic religion.

### **Recommendations:**

The study suggests a group of recommendations that can contribute to developing and improving the mosque design, expanding it to deal more with it on urban design level rather than architectural or building level.

#### **General recommendations:**

It is necessary to act with the urban fabric of any site of a mosque in a more integrated way.

Producing a quality design for the Mosque is a crucial issue considering it as a center that compassionately serves its community.

Horizontal expansion, whenever possible, increases the opportunities of the Mosque to serve as a community center and public plaza that is easily accessed and representing a part of the urban context of the city.

#### **Recommendations for governments:**

Governments should take into account that a mosque is not just a building with defined plot borders, it is an urban center that have an impact on its surrounding, environment, and community dealing with it in that way will lead to a better performance of the Mosque as a public space that represents an essential component of the city, especially in the Islamic world.

### **References:**

- Abdel-Hady, Zakaryya Mohamed. “The Masjid, Yesterday and Today,” 2010, 18.
- Ahmed, Iftikhar. “Mosque as Public Space in City and Community,” April 30, 2018. <https://www.alterinter.org/?Mosque-as-Public-Space-in-City-and-Community>.
- AL Mahmoud, Mohamed. “Isolation Of The Mosque And Humanization Of The Urban Space In The Residential Neighborhood.” Abdullatif Al Fozan Award for Mosque Architecture, June 14, 2018. <https://alfozanaward.org/isolation-of-the-mosque/>.
- Al Rehawey, Abdel Kader. Al Emara Fel Hadara Al Islamiya. Jeddah, 1990.
- “Al Sharbatly Mosque in Cairo, The Arab Republic of Egypt In The Fifth Assembly | Sharbatly Foundation.” Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.hasfound.org/en/programs/building-mosques-program/mosque19>.



- Algaderjy, Refaat. Dor Al Meamar Fe Hadaret Al Insan,. Baghdad: Markaz Derasat Al Wehda Al Arabia, 2014.
- Alsammarae, Rima. “Comment: Mosques Are Now Expanding Horizontally, Offering Renewed Public Spaces for Their Communities.” Middle East Architect, 2019. <https://www.middleeastarchitect.com/42125-comment-mosques-are-now-expanding-horizontally-offering-renewed-public-spaces-for-their-communities>.
- Hays, Jeffrey. “MOSQUES: THEIR FEATURES, ARCHITECTURE AND CUSTOMS | Facts and Details.” Accessed August 11, 2020. <http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub358/item1447.html>.
- “Importance of a Mosque | Baitun Nur Mosque,” 2014. <https://baitunnur.org/?p=42>.
- Markaz Al Takhteet Al Derasat Al Meamaria, Markaz Eheyaa Al Torath Al Islamy Le Monazamet Al Awasem Wal Modon Al Islamia. Osos Al Tasmeem Al Meamary Wal Takhteet Al Hadary Fel Osoor Al Islamiya Al Mokhtalefa, Derasa Tahliliya Ala Al Asema Al Kahera,. Jeddah: Monazamet Al Awasem Wal Modon Al Islameya, 1990.
- Moenis, Hussein. AL Masajid. Kuwait: Alam Al Mareafa, 1982.
- Mohandees, Adnan. Mafhoom Al Masjid Fel Quraan Al Kareem, Derasat Seyakia. Al Jazaer: Abaad, 2016.
- Encyclopædia Britannica. “Mosque,” October 18, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mosque>.
- Muir, William. The Life of Muhammad, 1894. <https://baitunnur.org/?p=42>.
- Noisar, Hosney Mohamed. Al Emara Al Islamiya Fe Misr Fe Asr Al Ayobiyeen Wal Mamaleek. Cairo,Egypt: Etihad Maktabat AL Gameat Al Masria, 1998.
- Osman, Mohamed Abd El Sattar. AL Madina Al Islamiya. Cairo,Egypt: Kotob Arabia, 1998.
- ———. Nazareyet Al Wazifiya Bel Amaer Al Diniya Al Mamlukiya Be Madinat AL Kahira. Alexadria, 2000.
- Shafeay, Farid. Al Emara Al Arabia Al Islamia Fe Misr. Vol. 1. Cairo,Egypt: Al Hayea Al Masriya Al Aama Lel Taalif Wal Nashr, 1970.
- ———. Al Emara Al Arabia Al Islamiya, Madiha,Haderha Wa Mostakbaleha. Al Riyadh: Gameat AL Malek Seoud, 1982.
- ResearchGate. “(3) (PDF) Pilgrim Tracking and Location Based Services Using RFID and Wireless Sensor Networks.” Accessed August 11, 2020. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326463086\\_Pilgrim\\_Tracking\\_and\\_Location\\_Based\\_Services\\_Using\\_RFID\\_and\\_Wireless\\_Sensor\\_Networks/figures?lo=1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326463086_Pilgrim_Tracking_and_Location_Based_Services_Using_RFID_and_Wireless_Sensor_Networks/figures?lo=1).
- Radio Dabanga. “Sudan’s Imams Shorten Friday Prayers as ‘historic’ Coronavirus Precaution.” Accessed August 11, 2020. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-s-imams-shorten-friday-prayers-as-historic-coronavirus-precaution>.
- “The Baitulfutuh Mosque in London. Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.” Accessed June 29, 2020. <http://baitulfutuh.org/worship/imosque.shtml>.
- “Women May Participate in the Prayers but in Most Cases They Must Occupy a | Course Hero.” Accessed June 29, 2020. <https://www.coursehero.com/file/pjf2s/Women-may-participate-in-the-prayers-but-in-most-cases-they-must-occupy-a/>.

---

Established in 972 (361 H) in a porticoed style shortly after the founding of Cairo itself, was originally designed by the ` Fatimid general Jawhar El-Sequili (Gawhara Qunqubay, Gawhar al-Sakkaly) and built on the orders of Caliph Muezz Li-Din Allah.