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# Revitalisation of Downtown Khedive Cairo: A contested sovereignty

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## ABSTRACT

Debate arose across the Egyptian community concerning controversial efforts in achieving prospective revitalisation for downtown Khedive Cairo. The research resulted in the identification of revitalisation stakeholders, and strategies and policies of revitalisation as well. It highlighted both public and private efforts within physical, social, economic and cultural revitalisation, along with their means and performance assessments. The objective was to evaluate such revitalisation efforts with respect to stakeholders' categories and perspectives. The research has been carried out through practical surveys based on primary data, such as direct observations and 100 semi-structured interviews with primary and secondary stakeholders and community professionals. This information was supplemented by secondary data such as relevant maps, planning documents and reports. On the one hand, semi-structured interviews highlighted the success of the physical and cultural revitalisation aspects. On the other hand, they revealed primary stakeholders and community professionals' apprehension with regard to the possible revitalisation process outputs within both economic and social aspects. These outputs include among others land use change, real estate speculation, the state surveillance over public space and prospect gentrification. This apprehension was on opposition to the positivist perspective toward secondary stakeholders.

## 1. Introduction

Symptoms of downtown decline became notable in many cities toward the end of the 1980s. To help combat downtown decline, local authorities became interested in revitalisation planning strategies (Doratli, 2005; Park, 2004). Thus, this research investigated the pertinent literature understand the focal concepts such as physical, social, economic and cultural revitalisation aspects (Doratli, 2005; Frost-Kumpf, 1998; Hoernig & Seasons, 2004; Shipley, Reeve, Walker, Grover, & Goodey, 2004). Strategies and policies pertaining to downtown revitalisation were also investigated. The practice of downtown revitalisation was explored as it related to positive relationships between various stakeholders and their interests (Chang, 2000; Smith & Defilippis, 1999). Consequently, the research focused on the examination of Egyptian strategies, policies and associated legislation pertaining to the revitalisation of downtown Khedive Cairo. Efforts and activities were investigated in terms of physical, social, economic and cultural revitalisation. A total of 100 semi-structured interviews with relevant primary and secondary stakeholders in addition to community professionals were carried out. Results of semi-structured interviews revealed contradictory perspectives related to revitalisation aspects and processes. Finally, conclusions outlining the controversial nature of the revitalisation efforts and potential impact on stakeholders, such as gentrification, land use change and real estate speculation, are

provided.

## 2. The need for downtown revitalisation

Downtown decline often arises as a result of changes in the requirements of users, the deterioration of the stock of urban buildings and infrastructure, and market failures in the system of land ownership and control (Roberts & Sykes, 2000). It has been argued that in many cases, downtown areas receive disproportionately less infrastructure spending than new suburbs (Gratz & Mintz, 2000; Rypkema, 2005; Tiesdell, Oc, & Heath, 1996; Wang & Lee, 2008). Demographic loss of population is often the first noticeable sign of social problems. Other causes of downtown decline are economic depression and weak commercial competition, which negatively affects urban structures and functions. These can be recognised as the major issues experiences by downtown areas (Park, 2004). Such problems are also relevant to downtown Khedive Cairo. In this sense, addressing such problems results in an improved quality of life.

### 2.1. Stakeholders, policies and strategies

Revitalisation, as a form-function practice, affects intervention decisions undertaken by urban policymakers (Ashworth, 1991; ElSorada, 2012). The importance of communication between stakeholders is

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stressed when framing revitalisation goals (ElSorady, 2012; Hodges & Watson, 2000). Key actors who have a say in revitalisation programs include individuals and associations encompassing a stake in financial benefit (Tiesdell et al., 1996). Broad, long-term conceptual plans to revitalise downtown functions include tangible action plans, such as methods for developing specified areas, allocating urban functions or working out a means for revitalizing the urban economy (Park, 2004).

Downtown stakeholders consist of public and private entities. A partnership functions as an urban planning management guide throughout a systematic relationship between various legislative plans related to urban and regional planning (Park, 2004). Downtown public-private partnerships involve public bodies, local residents, shopkeepers, community organisations and cultural institutions acting as equal partners (Park, 2004). The Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) concept is an internationally successful model of partnerships between public and private stakeholders (Lawrence & Houston, 2003). In this case, it was essential to promote the capacity-building of stakeholders in order to generate a perception of heritage stewardship and to develop a way of life specific to downtown (Pazder, 2015).

### 3. Downtown revitalisation

Downtown areas have traditionally been, and in many cases still are, the main locations of government, business, tourism and arts and entertainment facilities. However, downtown areas have recently lost ground to the suburbs. Despite this fact, traditional downtown areas are, as large parts of a metropolis, are experiencing a comeback (Tiesdell et al., 1996). Revitalisation generally aims to improve cultural conditions as well as historic preservation (Zielenbach, 2000). Doratli (2005) defines revitalisation as a process that addresses historic urban area decline and either terminates or improves it (Doratli, 2005).

#### 3.1. Physical revitalisation

Retaining cultural heritage has allowed communal paybacks for societies. The presence of the elements of a shared heritage generates the distinctive identities of specific places (Tiesdell et al., 1996). Tyler defines physical revitalisation as an operation that involves enhancing the state of a built setting and its associated aspects (Tyler, 2000). In order for or a downtown area to be successful, the appearance and display of the various aspects that constitute the urban environment should be coordinated to generate enjoyable visual images, a feeling of vibration and an appropriate place for people's activities (Park, 2004).

#### 3.2. Social revitalisation versus gentrification

Demographic attraction for populations is often a measure of revitalisation. Areas with mixed primary uses that include shops, offices and residences, attract other secondary uses such as entertainment venues and restaurants (Jacobs, 1961; Tibbalds, 2000). The principle of the government's use of diverse means of safety is to ensure and expand all residents' feelings of security against threats (Awatta, 2015). Such threats are influenced by government's political decisions exert its power on a certain space (Awatta, 2015; Marcuse, 2006). Unfortunately, the effects of globalisation and related urban development activities have been leading to negative socioeconomic impacts, such as class stratification and gentrification (ElShahed, 2015). Smith and Defilippis (1999) present two debates about gentrification.

The first concerns the impacts of gentrification, its positive and negative effects on the landscape of the city and the lives of its residents. The second concerns the reasons for gentrification, paying particular attention to the social and cultural framework via the market, or on structured influxes of capital (Smith & Defilippis, 1999). Moreover, several social forces and potentially harmful issues influence gentrification, such as urban restructuring, socio-cultural alterations

and the activities of large corporations. As a result, gentrification is generally controlled by large investors who compose new institutional relationships with main city players to market downtown revitalisation activities. This promotes land use selectivity (Nasser, 2003). Moreover, if vacant land parcels are handed over to developers, locals lose sovereignty and control in decision-making. This is connected to Chang's (2000) argument that urban areas are realised as sites of conflicts or contests due to divergent stakeholders' claims.

#### 3.3. Economic revitalisation

Three strategic actions were applied to achieve economic revitalisation (Doratli, 2005; Tiesdell et al., 1996). The functional restructuring was considered the first action in which alterations to function and/or use happened. The functional diversification was clarified when current considerable functions were kept unchanged and other innovative ones were initiated. Lastly, functional regeneration marked conditions in which current activities continued while they were supported to function effectively (Doratli, 2005). Tibbalds (2000) referred to the importance of mixed uses for economic revitalisation. Park also pointed out that economic revitalisation can be achieved through improving current land values, and by supplying financial support for investors (Park, 2004). Another aspect of economic revitalisation relates to the expenditure on heritage speculation and its predictable return. This may provide evidence that this is an unappealing opportunity for investors who anticipate a speedy return (Park, 2004). This means that a well-preserved building must remain in use in order to keep its economic viability. Ultimately, employment is at the heart of economic revitalisation, with the prospect of creating more jobs (Hoernig & Seasons, 2004).

#### 3.4. Cultural revitalisation

ElSorady (2012) placed particular emphasis on the significance of the local history and exceptional manifestations of human intellectual achievement in cities. This acts as a draw for tourists and improves the economy (ElSorady, 2012; Wang & Lee, 2008). Cultural districts are mixed use areas, which include a concentration of arts facilities, institutions and other sustaining uses such as museums, libraries, restaurants and retail spaces. Cultural districts are often just one means, alongside other strategies, of revitalizing downtown districts (Houstoun, 2000). These, in many cases, are also integrated into historic preservation. Cultural activities are considered benefits to residents, in terms of both the activities they attract along with the resultant payback of increased retail sales, businesses and jobs (Frost-Kumpf, 1998).

#### 3.5. International revitalisation practices

Because the historic urban quarters in different cities suffer from different problems, the approaches to their resolution vary according to their needs and requirements (Park, 2004). As revitalisation of the downtown area in decline requires not only hard methods to address physical aspects of the area; it also requires approaches oriented to soft methods. These include community participation and supportive financial incentives to magnetise investments (Bloustein, 2015; Park, 2004). Park (2004) also confirmed that the adjustment of planning guidelines, policies and laws are crucial to compose an attractive investment environment and promote public-private partnerships. Further adjustments are needed to face expected gentrification outcomes, as well. Lees, Shin, and López-Morales (2015) have concluded through the examination of several cases of gentrification that the north classic gentrification model does not apply to several southern cities. Recently, gentrification has been criticised for its effect of the different urban processes that cause displacement and eviction (Shin, Lees, & López-Morales, 2016). Additionally, cities have to benefit from others'

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