

The earliest settlements in the history of Egypt developed along the Nile, their economy largely dependent on agriculture, hence water. For centuries, Egypt's urban structure remained firmly based along the river and its branches before other urban communities settled along the trade routes, on both the Mediterranean and Red seas and around the oases in the Western Desert. More urban settlements also sprang up along the coasts of the Mediterranean and Red seas, their economic activities being dependent on fishing and trade. Gradually, however, due to changing forms of government and administration, the activities of these urban communities were di-

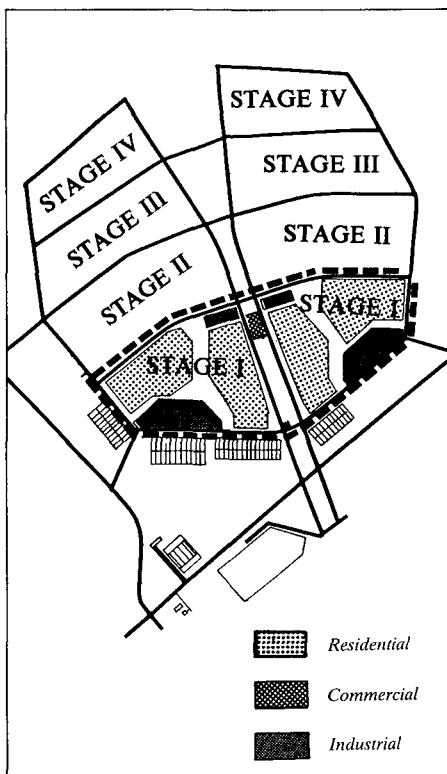
versified, since most of them were not only active trade and services centres, but also seats of government.

In modern times, after the opening of the Suez Canal, the cities of Port Said and Ismailiya were built, and trade through the town of Suez grew as a result of the new waterway. In the 1940s, the government encouraged land reclamation schemes in the lowlands (the north and north-eastern parts of the Delta) where new settlements, mainly agricultural, were established.

At the beginning of the century, in 1906, the Egyptian Government granted a concession to a Belgian company to develop

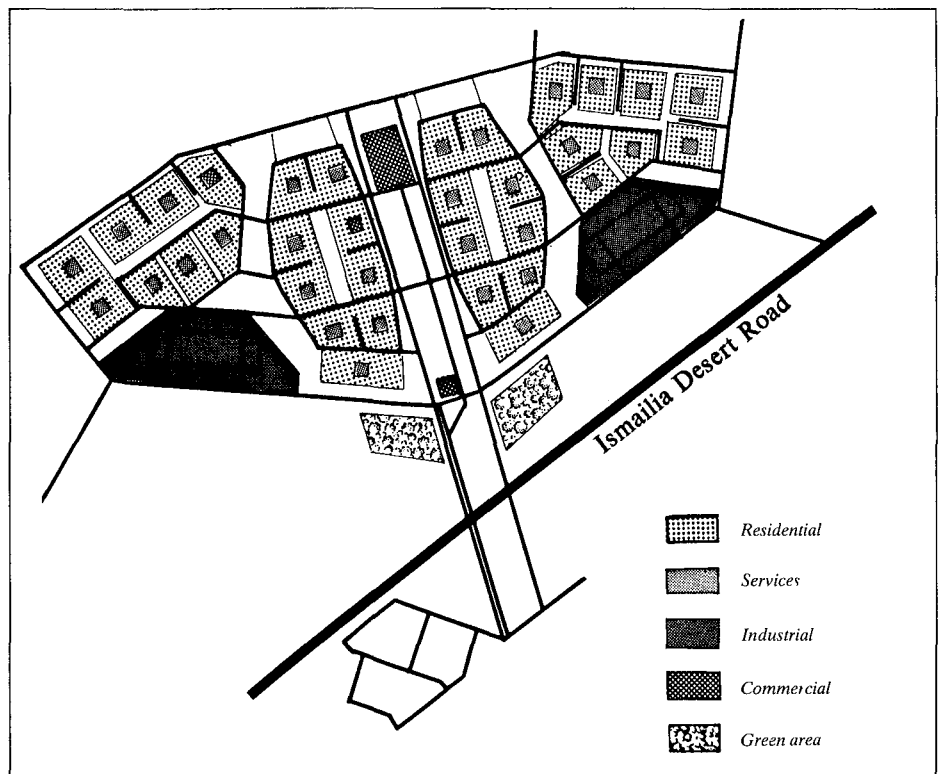
the Ain-Shams oasis into the town of Heliopolis which has now become a suburb of Cairo. Another similar concession was granted to the English to develop the suburb of Maadi. Following the 1952 Revolution, in the early 1960s, the state ordered the development of Nasr City, granting an Italian company the concession to develop the Mokattam Hills area.

Despite the population centres along the Nile River, the Mediterranean and Red Sea coasts, the desert and sea trade routes, and also in the newly established farming communities, the picture portrayed clearly indicates the imbalance between the populated and unpopulated areas: the former



Tenth of Ramadan stage one development

Source: MOHR 10th of Ramadan Master Plan SWECO/SHAWKY-ZEITOUN, Courtesy of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture.



Tenth of Ramadan Land use Plan

Source: MOHR 10th of Ramadan Master Plan SWECO/SHAWKY-ZEITOUN, Courtesy of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture.

representing only 3.84 per cent of Egypt's total land area, where over 45 million inhabitants are crowded together in a density of over 1000 persons per sq. km., one of the highest population densities in the world.

Due to the system of government, and for many other reasons, Cairo and Alexandria have become the largest centres of attraction for the urban population. In 1947, the inhabitants of these two cities alone amounted to 17 per cent of the country's total population, rising to 20 per cent in 1960 and to 25 per cent by 1976. According to recent studies this figure will rise to 31 per cent by the year 2000.

A study on the Strategy of Development for Greater Cairo estimated the city's inhabitants to be 9.9 million in 1982, that is 22 per cent of the over-all population and 43 per cent of all urban dwellers. Such a concentration of population in Greater Cairo, and that of Alexandria and along the river, in conjunction with population growth, has inevitably led to a decline in economic standards (production resources having remained fixed), and also to a drop in service levels — all of which has reflected on the social structure of the Egyptian community.

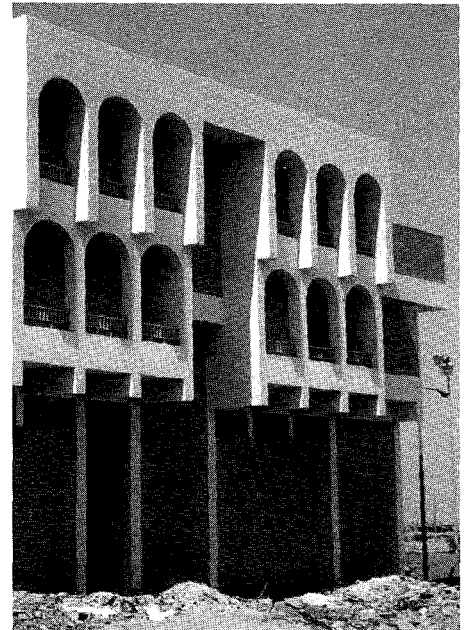
A New Population Map of Egypt

In April 1974, soon after the opening of the Suez Canal (6 October 1973), President Anwar el-Sadat announced the enactment of the "October Working Paper", outlining the basic guide-lines of a national policy committed to urban development. A whole chapter of the Paper was devoted to the need for a new population map of Egypt, reminding Egyptians of the fact that urbanisation covered only about 3 per cent of Egypt's total land area, and that the narrow valley accommodated some 35 million inhabitants (1974). It warned against waiting until the population had grown some 40-50 million before any action was taken.

The "October Paper" stressed the urgent need for an urbanisation strategy to be drawn up within the framework of a new and comprehensive population map of Egypt. Such an objective could never be achieved through separate or isolated projects, but rather through the creation of urban centres with new economic activities and better services so as to attract people to a more active and productive life. In this way, the centres could compete favourably with the capital in attracting inhabitants, especially with regard to better living conditions, job opportunities and services. Another important factor stressed in the Paper was that these new centres should be built away from the narrow green strip which was shrinking annually due to urban expansion in and around existing towns and cities. In Greater Cairo alone some 1500 acres (600 hectares) of the most fertile fields are annually lost because of urban expansion.

Egypt thus embarked on a phase of qualitative urban planning. International and Egyptian expertise collaborated in drawing up a comprehensive plan for the development of the Suez Canal zone which included the cities of Port Said, Ismailiya and Suez. It also began the implementation and development of the initial over-all plan for Greater Cairo, adopted in 1969 and recently updated, which envisaged urban settlements in the new satellite cities around Cairo. Comprehensive plans were drawn up for Ramadan 10th City (on the Cairo-Ismailia desert road); Sadat City (on the Cairo — Alexandria desert road); the 15th of May City (on the southern Cairo — Helwan road); and the 6th of October City (on the Cairo-Fayyum desert road). Comprehensive plans for the new Amriya City near Alexandria were also completed.

In the implementation of these plans the state agreed to provide all the services of infrastructure, and to undertake the construction of housing units and public buildings necessary to establish integrated living conditions. In addition, the implementation of plans were also begun for Al-Obour (on the north-eastern Cairo — Bilbeiss



The Tenth of Ramadan, on-going construction activity

Photo Sharif Lotfi

road); Badr City (on the Cairo-Suez road); Al-Ammal City (on the Cairo-Kattamiya-Ain Sukhna road); and Al-Saleheya City (in the Bilbeiss-Ismailiya zone).

The state called for a comprehensive study of the national policy for urban development which had adopted the following goals:

- new cities on a new development axis;
- satellite cities around Cairo;
- development of existing regional towns and urban centres.

Thus, for the first time, a law and the rules for its enactment, were adopted, establishing the criteria and standards for urban planning.

Over the last two years, the issues of urbanisation were the topic for several seminars and conferences, the most notable being the National Seminar on Housing Problems and the National Congress on Population.



The Tenth of Ramadan, residential area

Photo Sharif Lotfi

Among the recommendations stressed at this seminar were:

- the necessity for creating new urban centres outside the perimeters of existing towns and cities, since such centres, together with the new cities and the satellite cities, constituted the basic long-term means to accommodate the ever-increasing population, and also to create new production centres;
- the necessity for completing general development plans for existing towns and cities in order to identify their needs for urban expansion (away from arable land as much as possible), as well as to identify their maximum population potential, and to expand renovation schemes so that these cities could accommodate adequate population sizes; and
- the necessity for developing rural areas as a means to curb rural migration to urban areas

The National Congress on Population, chaired by the President of the Republic, recommended that the Population Map of Egypt (drawn up by the Congress) be used as a guide-line in planning for:

- population redistribution;
- outward expansion from the narrow valley to the desert;
- establishment of new urban centres;
- maximum population potential of existing urban centres.

The recommendations also included:

- preparation of general plans for existing towns and cities;

- completion of plans already begun;
 - limiting construction and building operations within city perimeters;
 - pursuing efforts to develop urban centres on a nation-wide level, with the purpose of diverting the migration flow from Greater Cairo to these centres; and
 - maintaining the policy of establishing and expanding new urban communities to accommodate the growing population.
- The location and size of these new urban communities should be complementary to the national development plan.

It is evident from the foregoing that the government, with all its institutions, experts and politicians, is convinced that the new urban communities are vital and has even created a Ministry for Reconstruction, New Communities and Land Reclamation. Major efforts and large investments have been devoted to the establishment of these new urban communities.

There are, however, several questions that have arisen concerning these new urban communities:

1) Was it wrong to entrust non-Egyptians with the major role of drawing up plans for some of these cities?

The reason for inviting foreign groups to participate in the planning of new cities and communities was to introduce practical and scientific methods of planning. This general approach did not necessarily have a negative effect on the result; on the contrary, the effect seems to have been positive.

In the early stages, Egypt lacked the infrastructure for integrated scientific planning. Though the country was rich in experts in all fields, their knowledge had not yet been integrated in such a manner as to enable them to undertake urban planning that was comprehensive and which required expertise in all areas pertaining to population and the land. The role of the Egyptians participating in the early plans was by no means negligible. Moreover, the experience they acquired, both administrative and managerial, later enabled them to draw up, without aid, other plans comparable to those

submitted by foreign consultants. Furthermore, the actual drawing-up and implementation of the initial plans were entrusted to Egyptian experts whose responsibility it was to adjust whatever might conflict with local customs; but there was very little adjustment needed, if any at all.

2) Why have the new cities not yet developed or their population structure formed as rapidly as had been envisaged?

Because of the acute housing problem in Egypt, a confusion exists between housing and population. The new cities and communities do not have as their main target the solution of the housing problem, but rather to accommodate the growing population. Such an objective cannot be realised through the construction of housing units alone, but also, and perhaps more importantly, through the creation of attractive economic opportunities which would offer better jobs, better housing and better services.

In the early stages of this planning upsurge, there were several instances of incompatibility between policy decisions and planning goals which disrupted implementation. Later, however, in the case of some of the cities, the implementation plan began with the infrastructure for the industrial zones so as to establish a focus for attracting inhabitants.

The building of new cities from scratch is a totally new experience for the Egyptians, a traditional people who are not easily uprooted or conditioned for change. Earlier experiments carried out in other parts of the world did not establish communities in a vacuum, but began with already existing small settlements and which had some economic potential, as was the case, for example, with the British cities around London and Glasgow.

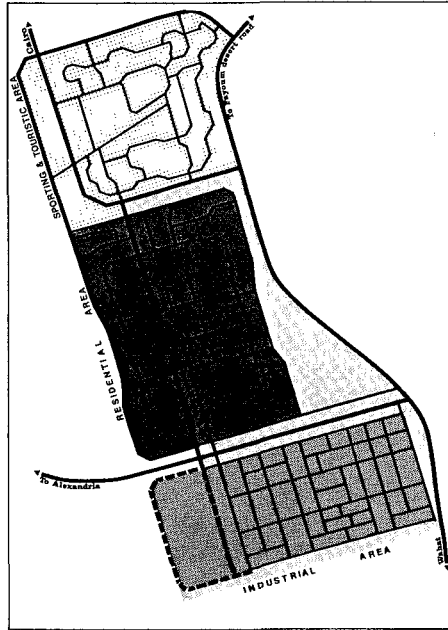
Furthermore, investments are required to establish the infrastructure for these new cities, and which have to be made available during the various stages of development. Admittedly, Egypt was never miserly towards these new cities, and provided much of the required investments. However,

these cities will need time to develop their vitality and vigour. Sadat City, for example, could develop into an important urban centre within the next ten years if the required investments are provided in time to finance the different stages of its development. So far, none of the Egyptian cities has reached the implementation stage as set out in the various steps of their development plans.

3) Have criteria and standards governing the over-all plans been established for the creation of new cities?

Criteria and standards have indeed been established, but the efficacy of these criteria must be ascertained, especially in the implementation stage, since such criteria constitute an attempt to apply universal norms that have been adjusted to conform to a particular time and place. The task of the scientific research agencies is to consolidate these criteria. The Environment Department and the Research Council for New Communities at the Academy of Scientific Research has sponsored a study, undertaken by the Institute for Urban Planning, to assess the experiment of the new communities in order to develop planning parameters and standards.

The Egyptian experiment is unique in many of its aspects. The largest of the new British cities, Milton Keynes, has a target population of 200,000. In ten years, the population rose from 10,000 to 40,000. In Egypt, only one city has been planned for a smaller population: 15th of May City with 150,000 inhabitants. Plans for 6th of October City, for example, were set to accommodate 360,000 inhabitants. However, because of increasing demand owing to its close proximity to Cairo, these plans were modified to allow for over 500,000 inhabitants. Perhaps the actual population situation and allowances for growth are the reasons for planning such large population sizes envisaged for the new cities. There must be, however, an optimum allowance for a new city to ensure its success. This is yet another problem to be solved by the scientific analysts and city planners.



Sixth of October City, Master Plan

Courtesy of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture

priorities must be listed in importance within the context of a comprehensive national plan in which roles are defined and integrated, that is, the role of the state and the roles of the production and investment sectors, be they private or public.

Perhaps the most basic and most important question of all is:

4) Is the establishment of new cities and communities really necessary?

The National Congress on Population urgently recommended a strategy for population distribution along development centres, as well as the completion of plans for existing urban centres and their development for maximum population capacity so as to favourably compete with Cairo and Alexandria in attracting inhabitants.

An exodus from the narrow and shrinking arable land of the valley is a necessity. The creation of new cities and urban communities which would be economically independent yet integrated within the national economy is a necessity. The continuous development of existing urban centres is a necessity; and the socio-economic development of rural Egypt is also a necessity.

All these are incumbent necessities, and