Chapter 15
Rethinking Cairo's Informal Settlement in the Light of Hardships

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at understanding and interpreting the informal urban growth in Cairo as a physical objection act against the failing radical ways in managing the city. Accordingly, this chapter tries to analyze both informal physical actions and the formal policies and approaches adopted, and reach reasons for the successes and failures. The chapter first investigates briefly the evolution of Cairo's informal settlements and the hardship conditions behind. Then it examines these settlements through analyzing their two main types. Afterward, it discusses the reasons behind the success of these informal actions. Then it reviews policies and approaches. Consequently, it tries to discover the reasons behind the failure of formal policies and approaches. Thereafter, it discusses briefly using geospatial digital research methods in Cairo's informal settlements. Finally, the chapter ends with a concluded discussion tries to figure out how to reach the right path in dealing with Cairo's informal settlements.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant challenges during the last decades is the rapid urbanization which caused the emergence of new kind of informal settlements scattering in and around the growing cities in the developing world (UN-Habitat, 2003). This makes informality the often-primary mode of the production of 21st-century metropolitan space in the Global South cities (Roy, 2009). Cairo, as most of the Global South cities, suffers from the same phenomenon. Around 40% of the population in Cairo lives in informal settlements as estimated by the Ministry of Housing (Tadamun, 2014). This chapter argues that this phenomenon could be understood and interpreted as a physical objection act against the failing radical ways of managing the city and the futile urban context which made Cairo at the end, according to Sims (2010), a city out of control.

Ross (2011) argues that government policies are no longer reliable for solving society's most deep-rooted and hard problems. Instead of that, necessary actions should be taken by people themselves through a wholly new method of doing things. Informal urban growth performed by poor people is a real representation of such actions. Since the start of the literature on informal settlements around the 1960s, these settlements are seen as an unhealthy phenomenon which should be eradicated. Torres (2007) as cited in Hernández (2013) argues that the government should provide housing and facilities for all citizens not to leave them in the people's hands. By the time, new literature emerges as informality become more accepted as another way of doing things. This new literature argues that informality can be an opportunity, and it is not necessarily a problem as it can be considered as an alternative way of producing space (Roy, 2009). AlSayyad (1993) sees informal settlements as a creative and innovative way of taking the advantages of available resources and opportunities to enhance the daily life of the poor. This leads him to perceive informality as 'a way of life.' Some of the literature within this point of view sees that informal settlements are similar to old traditional cities which used to grow by people's hands without any intervention of architects (Egyptian Urban Action, 2012).

Accordingly, this chapter aims to reread the informal growth phenomenon in Cairo as a physical action responding to the inability of the policies and approaches adopted by the successive governments to provide shelters for the urban poor. This different point of view would lead to developing new policies, strategies, and plans when dealing with such settlements. Also, this kind of physical actions represented in the informal urban expansion could be seen as a practical response to a multi-layered complex failing context. This context should be discussed through understanding the reasons and conditions behind the emergence of Cairo's informal settlements.

THE EVOLUTION OF CAIRO INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

There are some complex conditions behind the emergence of informal urban growth in Cairo. These conditions, in most cases, could not be interpreted apart from each other. They always interfere with mutual impacts. These conditions are investigated, within this chapter, through splitting them into three groups of conditions which are: the political-economic conditions, those related to laws and regulation, and the socio-cultural ones.

The Political-Economic Conditions

According to the 2016 census, around 10% of the Egyptian's population lives in Cairo (about a quarter of Egypt's urban population) (CAPMS, 2017). Cairo gains its importance as it is the center of the country's political and economic life as well as most of the industrial activities. This leads to the centralization of jobs which attract rural populations to work in Cairo and enhance their living situation. This was one of the main reasons for Cairo's Informality evolution. The informal growth phenomena in Cairo began after the Second World War, due to the housing pressure caused by the migration from Upper Egypt and the Delta. The Economic development took place in Cairo plus the massive industrialization policy launched by President Nasser[1] afterward attracted the internal migrants to Cairo (Séjourné, 2009). The first newcomer migrants, mostly young men, stayed in rented and shared rooms and flats in central and historic districts. Later, after collecting some savings, some of them were able to buy and build on land on the fringes of the villages attached to the city where the land prices were lower than in the central

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