

DETERIORATION OF ARCHITECTURE IN NEW URBAN DISTRICTS IN ALEXANDRIA CITY SMOUHA DISTRICT: CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The first part of the study shows the huge development of the city during the last twenty years and how such development has encroached on the surrounding agricultural areas nearby Alexandria, due to population growth and migration to the city from the adjacent rural areas. The second part of this study presents the old Smouha district which is distinguished by its architectural disposition. Additionally, the study covers the new Smouha district, that was constructed as an extension to the old one, with a review and analysis for the current architecture, as well as the urban form. The third part of this study deals with the predisposing factors of the architectural slumping in the new Smouha district; the causes that lead to such slumping in Alexandria city; in addition to the parties concerned with the building process. Finally recommendations are proposed for improving and revitalizing the district as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the city of Alexandria shows continual expansion, thus, swallowing the surrounding agricultural land, as a result of increase of its population which is estimated to become four million seven hundred and fifty thousand persons by the year 2005 AD.

As a natural expansion, the eastern sector of the city represents several residential districts; whereas its western sector represents many areas for touristic villages.

As a result of the ever growing residential problem, in all the Egyptian cities, including Alexandria; because of the increased number of population, besides perpetual migration of the people to the city from the nearby villages and domiciliary areas and the ever rising costs of the land specified for buildings as well as that of the basic building material, there is more request for housing at a higher percentage than that of the residential buildings available on the market. In addition, the government does not fully fulfill its share in building the residential units for middle income groups. In fact the residential market has become dependent on the private sector whether, persons, firms, or cooperative societies working in the field of housing, and furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the city is architecturally and continuously developing without implementing of previous planning. All such

mentioned facts was reflected upon the architecture in the new residential districts, where heavily populated areas were constructed at a high density, in order to satisfy the great need for housing; thus the architectural disposition of the area began to disappear, which in turn affected its distinguished characteristics.

SMOUHA OLD DISTRICT

The old district of Smouha is situated among the southern area of the city of Alexandria, adjacent to the gardens of El-Nozha and Antoniadés. It was constructed in 1925 on an area of the land that was originally swamps.

The area is distinguished with its characteristics; single family houses with spacious green areas and surrounding gardens, Figures (1),(2),(3).

Also a club was built as a recreational center as well as an attracting focus for the area.

SMOUHA NEW EXPANSION AREA:

As a natural development for Smouha area, plans were made for dividing the zone of old north Smouha which is situated to the south of Sidi Gaber railway station. An

administrative body (Smouha Development body) was established with the objective of supervising the works of subdividing and developing of the new area. Figure (4).

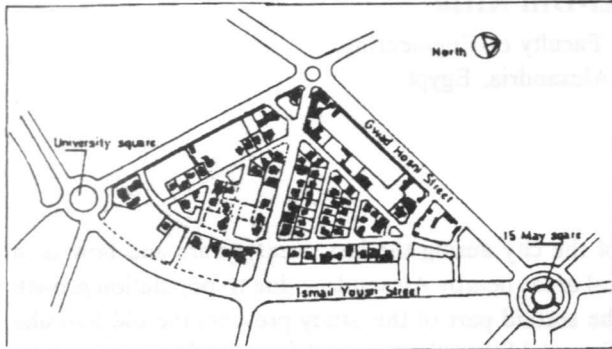


Figure 1. Layout of old smouha district.



Figure 2. Architectural style of villas in old smouha district.

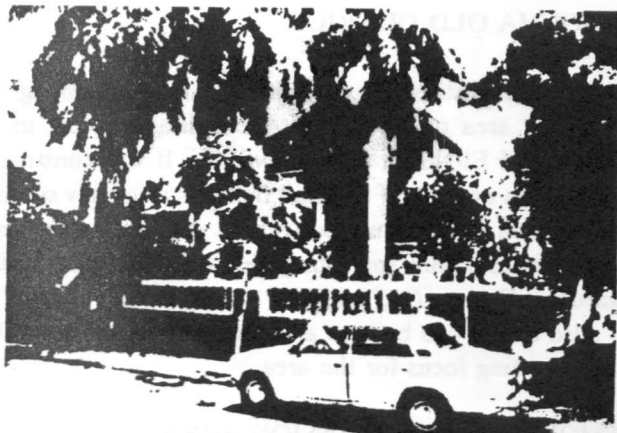


Figure 3. Architectural style of villas in old smouha district.

In the beginning of the seventies, construction works began and immensely increased during the economic

openhanded era. Lack of building regulations for construction except for bearing narrow area between the neighbours that did not exceed four to eight meters (two or four meters for each owner), lead to the hustling of the architectural characteristics as it exists now.

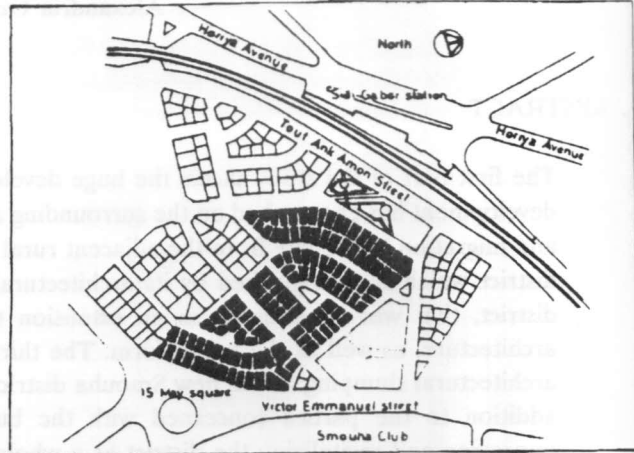


Figure 4. Layout of new smouha district the judges' local partition.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Urban Form:

The urban Form is composed of rectilinear lots. Its width is very narrow as compared with depth thus showing an absurd feature for the architectural blocks that are excessively elongated. Most of these buildings give a bizarre shape for a building block.

This is emphasized by the difference in shape pertaining to the blocks and the facades. Generally speaking, the blocks of the buildings with its sizable volume, as its heights, approximately, reaches fourteen floors or about forty meters high, appear to be inhuman because the elevations of the buildings do not comply with the street width on which they overlook.

Although vacant spaces are left between each two buildings (four to eight meters) yet they are not enough to provide privacy, ventilation and natural light, Figure (5).

2. Architectural style:

The original distinguished architectural disposition of the area is completely destroyed as the buildings now are concrete blocks rising without any signs of elegance whether externally or internally with very narrow areas

between the buildings. There are some trials for designing a variety of architectural forms that has no architectural fundamentals and with no harmony regarding the treatment of the facades of the building as each owner of an apartment treats the external facade of his property the way he likes with no consideration for harmony or uniformity, Figures (6),(7).

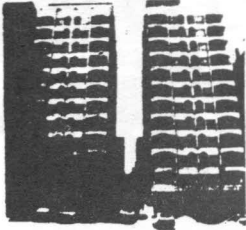


Figure 5. Building form -a rectilinear shape with a very narrow space left between every two buildings.

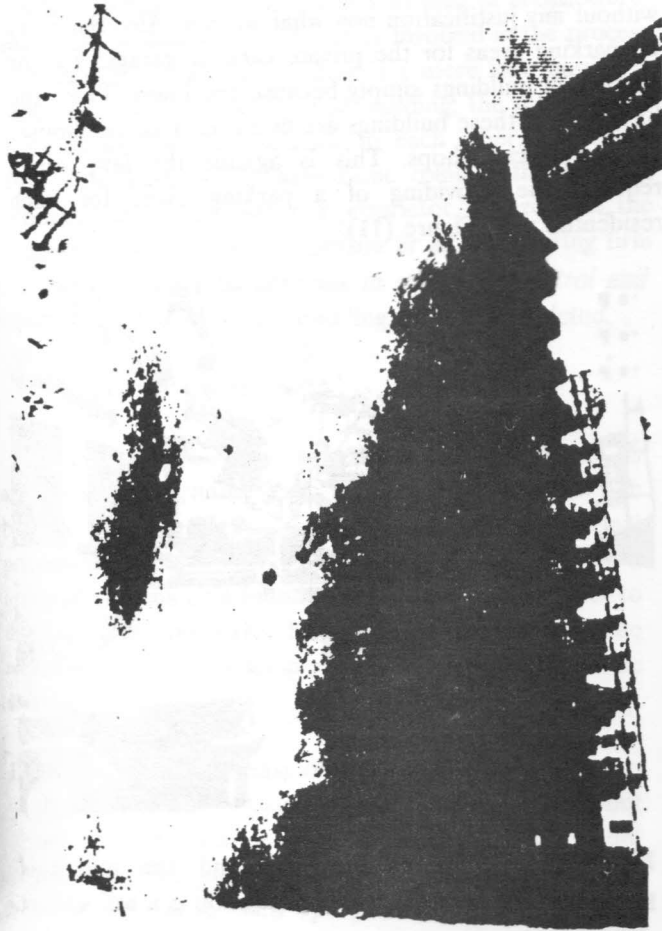


Figure 6. Treatment of facades with strange and ugly architectural components.



Figure 7. Treatment of facades with strange and ugly architectural components.

Building Heights and Skyline: Buildings are erected in compliance with the building regulations, which allow the height of the building to reach one and half times the width of the street over which they look. Additionally, violation of the allowable height and the skyline dominant among, such buildings lack the uniformity in its urban form, Figure (8).

Building Colours: The colours of the building's facades lack harmony whether single or a group of buildings, Figure (9).

3. Landscaping

Open Spaces: There are no spacious vacancies or green areas or playgrounds for children inspite that the area has among its inhabitants a majority of newly wedded couples.



Figure 8. Skyline of buildings.



Figure 10. Bad vistas in the area.



Figure 9. Use of strange colours in building facades.

Vistas: There are no beautiful scenery in the area neither in the streets nor in the buildings as each building is treated differently which makes the area very ugly, Figure (10).

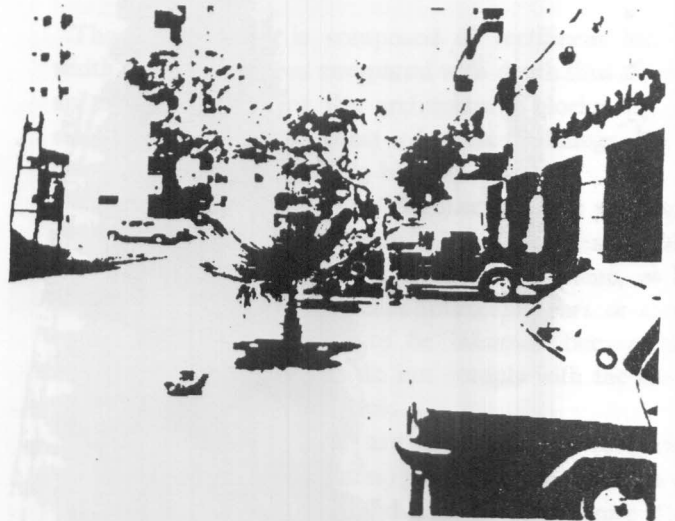


Figure 11. Streets of the area and the misuse of pavements for business trade, plantation is a self attempt.

Street Furniture and Landscaping: The street furniture is very poor in respect to the indicating signboards, the enumeration plates of the buildings and light poles. Also

the paving of the streets and roads is very poor with variable pits and no traffic signs or seats on the pavements for rest especially for the aged people. The area in general misses the green life as it needs planting, trees and ever-green plants in order to shed some beauty, except for some personal efforts of the inhabitants who love mother nature.

lighting: Street lighting is insufficient at night with the low lighting level. The electric signboards of the stores as wells as the electric advertisements annoy the eyesight of anyone exposed to it with its gleam thus causing glare to the eyes.

CAUSES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL SLUMPING OF NEW SMOUHA DISTRICT

When discussing the causes of slumping of architecture, anywhere, it must cover all parties involved in the process of buildings, i.e. as the building is a mere idea until it is executed to become an erected building; the role of each party as well as their relation to each other. There are four main parties that have basic roles in the building process, namely, the owner or proprietor, the architect, the contractor whether he is a person or an engineering firm and the governmental agencies in charge of control and supervision of work in the building till it is completed.

I- The owner or proprietor:

The owner plays a basic role in the building process, as any construction must begin through the owner of the building to be erected, and will become the personal possession of that owner whether he is a single person, a group of persons or a foundation. Failure of the owner to do his role properly has been reflected on the consequence of the building process. Such effects could be summarized as follows:

1. The rise of a new class of a proprietors who own the necessary funds for financing the building process, but lack of the cultural or architectural background, would influence their judgement on good and poor designs.
2. Some of those new proprietors, proved to be opportunists whose main objective is to achieve the utmost profit possible, through the housing crisis; saving in the costs by hiring untrained workers, using poor and unsuitable building materials, fructifying

the building reducing the areas of the residential units beyond acceptable criteria.

3. The negative role of the media, whether the radio, the television, or the press in simulating the cultural and architectural knowledge among the citizens would affect the ability to differentiate between good and bad architecture.

II - The Architect:

Unfortunately there are many intruders on the architectural profession, such as, civil engineer, electrical engineer etc. as the building regulations require the signature of an engineer without considering his specialization.

In addition, the inexperience of some newly graduate architects who has no probation in practice.

Furthermore, some architects obliged by owner's to fulfill their requests without abiding the honor of practicing their profession ethics.

III - the contractor and the construction companies:

The housing crisis and the great demand of residential units lead to the appearance of several contractors or construction firms who lack specialization and skill in the market despite of their inability to meet the sound engineering requirements and techniques.

IV - The Governmental Agencies and Executive Authorities:

The current local building codes allowed very high building density and very narrow spaces between buildings, whereas applied everywhere referring to building's height, light, ventilation wells and some safety requests with neglect of all the aesthetical aspect.

Smouha local building codes were rather unfortunate, allowing very high building density and very narrow spaces between the buildings.

Governmental authorities agree with such codes and in short hand with their codes at the end resulted in the present bad general appearance of the buildings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Architectural general knowledge for the public should be considered by the media.

2. The governmental agencies and housing authorities should stress on the aesthetical values.
3. The percentage of the built-up area should be reduced to provide for more open spaces and green areas.
4. The ratio between the width and depth of the building lots should allow the best design opportunities and the building heights should be limited to maintain a reasonable human scale.
5. Consideration should be given to the streets' design and furniture, such as, pavements, sidewalks, planting pots, signboards and light poles.
6. Development of the laws for practicing the profession.
7. The general environment should be protected from various polluted elements.

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