

The New Administrative Capital:

An investigation into the triggers of the construction of new capital cities in Egypt and the evolution of the discourse around their development

The Construction and Discourse of New Capital Cities in Egypt

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Abstract

The New Administrative Capital of Egypt is a city from scratch located in the desert, 60 km east from Cairo, set in motion in 2015 and already visible on site. Egypt's government promotes the new capital as the key to reducing Cairo's urban load due its explosive overpopulation. The main strategy is to relocate the government buildings from their current location in Downtown Cairo to the new capital with the aim of drawing people away from Cairo's saturation. This desire to build a new capital is not unique in Cairo's rich history with Nasr City, in 1958 and Sadat City, in 1977, both built to tackle the same problem. The purpose of this research is, through understanding Cairo's' explosive population, explore the framework of the emergence of each of the three capital cities and analyze the evolution of the discourse around their development, how they were promoted to and received by the people, revealing their individual agendas.

Key words

New capital city, urban planning, capital city construction, Cairo, Nasr City, Sadat City, New Administrative Capital, discourse analysis.

Introduction

Set in motion in 2015, the New Administrative Capital of Egypt is a city from scratch located in the desert, 60 km east from Cairo. Egypt's government promotes the new capital as the key to reducing Cairo's urban load due its explosive metropolitan population, from the current 21.3 million projected to over 40 million by 2050.¹ The government's strategy is to relocate the government buildings from their current location in Downtown Cairo to the new capital with the aim of drawing people away from Cairo's saturation. The New Administrative Capital is well underway with ongoing construction clearly visible on site and from neighboring cities such as New Cairo. Cairo is one of the oldest and largest cities in the world, with its origin dating back to its establishment by the Fatimid Empire in 973 AD. It is a city whose name means both the Victorious and the Oppressor. Being such a historically significant and layered city opens up the questioning of the Egyptian government's decision to build The New Administrative Capital, a new city planned with the intent of replacing Cairo as Egypt's capital. This new capital becomes the catalyst for the investigation into the underlying triggers of the development of new capital cities and the narrative that is spun around their construction.

On a global scale, this is not an isolated incident. Capital cities are experiencing varying urban processes of growth that have exceeded these cities' capacity to accommodate their inhabitants. Over the last 50 years, it is evident that there is a pattern of emergence of a typology of new capital cities such as Brasilia, Islamabad, Naypyidaw and Jakarta, which is further set to be replaced by Nusantara by 2024. Although the final outcome for each city is the same, the construction of a new capital, the narrative of each varies from political control to economic prosperity to social segregation. Looking at Cairo in specific, its population has been described in multiple local and international news headlines as a "time-bomb",² set to explode at any given moment and has been claimed to be the main driver for the construction of a new capital.

¹ Cairo's metropolitan population was 3.7 million in 1960 and has reached 21.3 million in 2021. World Bank Open Data, Egypt, Arab Rep., 2021. ID EN.URB.LCTY. License CC BY-4.0. Accessed April 20, 2023.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.URB.LCTY?locations=EG&view=chart>

² Amir El-Fekki, 'Time Bomb: Egypt's Growing Population Reaches 98 Million - Dailynewsegypt'. Daily News Egypt. *In Focus* (blog), December 9, 2018,

<https://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2018/12/09/time-bomb-egypts-growing-population-reaches-98-million/>.

Euronews. "Egypt: The Population Time-Bomb." Euronews, July 12, 2013,

<https://www.euronews.com/2013/07/12/egypt-the-population-time-bomb-#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20the%20United,reach%20105%20million%20by%202030.>

The expressed desire by the current Egyptian government to build a new capital city is neither a new nor unique phenomenon. Many of the statements being made today to promote the new capital seem to parallel the statements made around other capital cities proposed in the history of Egypt. The first historical precedent came at the hands of President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958 with the decision to plan and build Nasr City (translating to Victory City), the first new city intended to rival Cairo for the title of capital city. Following the footsteps of his predecessor, President Anwar Sadat set in motion in 1977 the plans for Sadat City, which he envisioned as the new capital of Egypt. This New Administrative Capital highlights a historical pattern and continuity. Therefore, the main research question is what urban processes of growth trigger the construction of new capital cities in Egypt and how has the narrative around their construction evolved from Nasr City (1958) to Sadat City (1977) to The New Administrative Capital (2015)?

The nature of this research is in essence a piece of spatial-political history, instead of looking at the history of space, it uses space as the lens to understand history. It looks beyond the physical urban explosion³ of Cairo and instead looks to interpret its context in relation to the influence that political agendas had on the construction of new capital cities and the propaganda surrounding them. Therefore, the methodology of the research follows a literature review of Egypt's political history, geographical mapping of Egypt's urban explosion, drawing analysis of the master plan of the capital cities and discourse analysis of the planning and construction of the capital cities. As indicated, the significance of this research lies in identifying the pattern driving the development of new capital cities by utilizing Cairo as the main case study and understanding how its history has an influence on its future. The research structure follows an overview of the contextualization of the New Administrative Capital in relation to the population crisis, a parallel analysis of Nasr City, Sadat City and The New Administrative Capital that investigates the context of the development, the master plan, the statements used to promote it and a reflection on the reality of each capital city.

³ Urban Explosion is a theory developed by Niel Brenner.

The Image of Cairo

Driving along one of the most heavily congested arteries of Cairo, Salah Salem road in Nasr City, passengers are confronted on a daily basis with a screen at the top of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization Statistics building. This screen broadcasts a live counter of the Egyptian population (figure 1). It serves as a constant reminder of the exponential growth of the population of not only Cairo, but Egypt as a whole. The “time bomb” is one of the most used phrases to describe the explosive Egyptian population by several local and international news outlets.⁴ It is growing at a rapid pace of approximately 2.3% annually between 1960 and 2021, with the 2021 growth rate of 1.7% and population of 109,262,178,⁵ and this is particularly concentrated along the Nile Valley.



Fig. 1 Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics population counter

Changing scales and looking at satellite imagery of Greater Cairo from 1985 to 2020, the scale of the population crisis and urban spatiality becomes crystal clear (figure 2). Although these patterns of habitation had been inherent to the country for years, with a significant percentage of agricultural land being urbanized, what this research aims to investigate is to what extent the narrative around new capital cities is influenced by this phenomenon and if it has or

⁴ Euronews and Daily News Egypt headlines reading “Population Time Bomb”

⁵ World Bank Open Data, Egypt, Arab Rep., Population, 1960-2021. ID SP.POP.TOTL. License CC BY-4.0. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=EG>

has not changed over time. The urban manifestation of this population crisis takes on two lives, a formal one and an informal one. The formal one takes shape in the government's response to developing planned districts to house people along the outskirts of Cairo. These are mostly planned cities with middle-income and upper-income housing solutions with the exception of a few low-income housing projects.⁶ As a result, the informal one has developed as a response to the government's neglect to provide sufficient social housing for its majority low income communities. These are communities that are by far much denser by nature and are living in poorer conditions. Their growth happens sporadically stretching over remaining agricultural land in and around the city in the form of self-made housing solutions. The Arabic term used to describe these neighborhoods is "ashwaiyyat", meaning informal, random and unplanned in the most negative light possible, with "uncontrolled growth, inadequate infrastructure and deteriorating housing conditions,"⁷ a term extremely armed with negative connotations. However, little attention is paid to how these informal settlements came to be.

Everyone is always too quick to judge Cairo. There is a dire need to move away from the offhand remarks and superficial analysis that make it extremely difficult for the simple realities of Cairo to emerge from the noise. One of the purposes of this research is to show how easy it is to judge and be superficial when tackling the subject of a huge urban city. In 1950, a significant portion of Cairo's development was considered formal through real estate projects and land subdivisions that were in line with the laws in place at the time. During that time, most of the poor and working class were condensed in historic Cairo in districts such as Bulaq, Sayyida Zayneb, Abdin and Masr al-Qadima. Others were in nearby villages west of the Nile, such as Mit'Uqba, Imbaba and Giza while others found affordable housing in North Cairo in al-Wayli, Shubra, Rod al-Farag and Helopolis.⁸ This meant that in 1950, informal settlements were almost non-existent around Cairo. Sims explains that there is no official record of when informal settlements started, however, their growth was linked to the early 1960s. It first appeared in Manshiyat Nasir whose first residents had relocated there from slums in al-Darrasa and al-Azhar. Later in the 1960s and early 1970s, these informal settlements multiplied in many locations in Cairo both on desert and

⁶ High and middle income housing in satellite cities such as New Cairo and Sheikh Zayed and low income housing such as Iskan Mubarak and Iskan Shabab in Obour City and Shorouk City.

⁷ Nezar Al Sayyad, *Cairo: Histories of a City*. Harvard University Press, 2011, 260

⁸ Sims, *Understanding Cairo*, 46-49.

agricultural lands.⁹ Rural housing at the time was not regulated, therefore this explains why perhaps the growth of these informal settlements was overlooked by the government. This research does not claim to address the complexities of the informal settlements of Cairo and acknowledges that there are multiple publications investigating this such as *Housing Cairo: The Informal Response*,¹⁰ *Egypt's Housing Crisis: The Shaping of Urban Space*,¹¹ *Learning from Cairo: Global Perspectives and Future Scenarios*¹² and *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City out of Control*.¹³

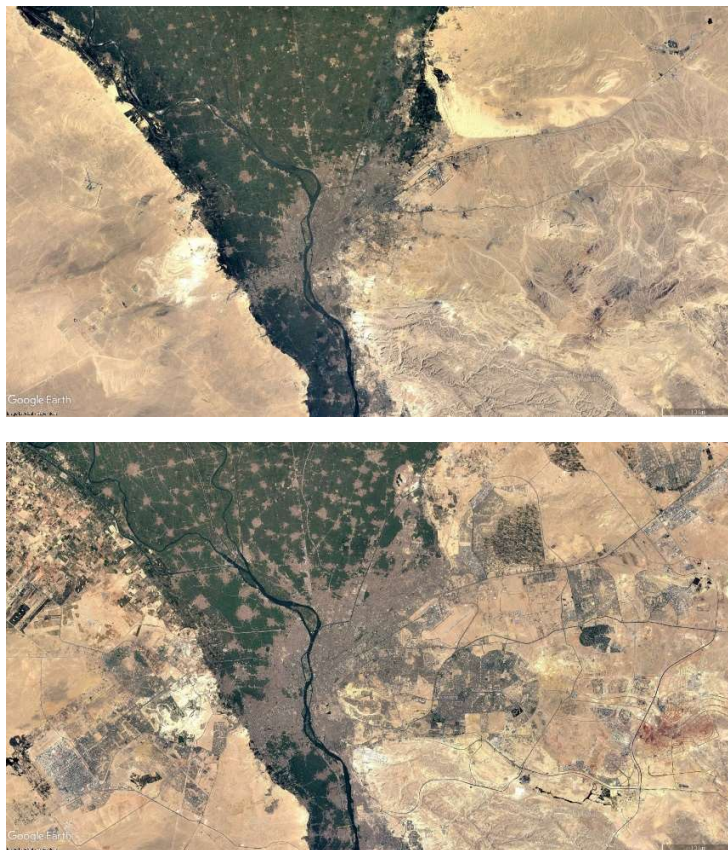


Fig. 2 Satellite images of Greater Cairo in 1985 and 2020 highflying the impact of population growth on the city's urban fabric

⁹ Sims, *Understanding Cairo*, 59-62.

¹⁰ Marc Angéilil, Charlotte Malterre-Barthes, and Something Fantastic, *Housing Cairo - The Informal Response* (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2016).

¹¹ Yahia Shawkat, *Egypt's Housing Crisis: The Shaping of Urban Space* (The American University in Cairo Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2ks6zb8>.

¹² Beth Stryker, Omar Nagati, and Magda Mostafa, *Learning From Cairo: Global Perspectives and Future Visions*, 2013, <https://learningfromcairo.org/publication/epub/>.

¹³ David Sims, *Understanding Cairo: The Logic of a City Out of Control*, Illustrated edition (Cairo ; New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012).

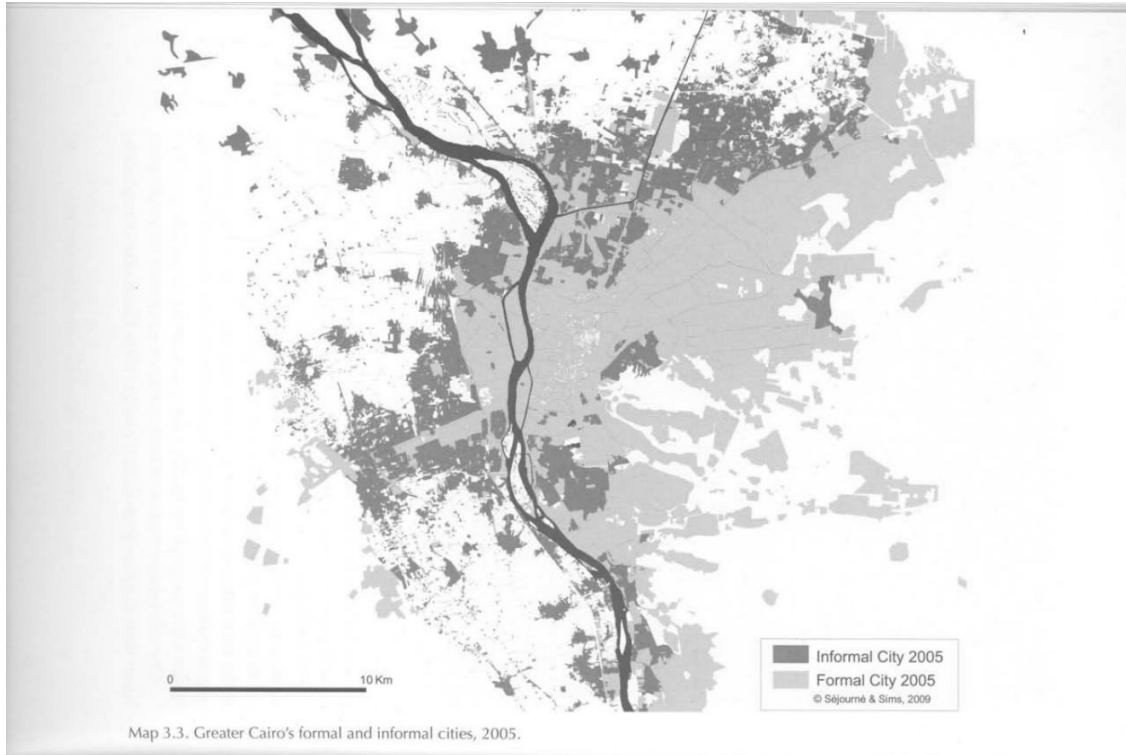


Fig. 3 Urban analysis of Cairo, comparing the formal and informal city in 2005.

Cairo's strength lies in its rich history as a city that is over four thousand years old if Memphis and the Giza are considered part of it and one thousand years old if they are excluded and the history starts with the Fatimid era.¹⁴ Unfortunately, instead of recognizing its deep history, “the words chaotic, overcrowded, cacophonous, disorganized, confusing, polluted, dirty, teeming, sprawling, and so on”¹⁵ are frequented by foreigners as well as Egyptians themselves. Perhaps for these reasons, governments are eager to move away from these associations and choose to start with a blank canvas every time. The narrative of the explosive population is spearheaded as the main driver for the development of new capital cities in Egypt time and time again, for Nasr City in 1958, Sadat City in 1977 and The New Administrative Capital in 2015. However, a historical and discourse analysis of the circumstances around each of the proposed capital cities in Cairo's modern history exposes that there is more to the story. The first of three narratives to be explored in this research follows this exact model.

¹⁴ Sims, *Understanding Cairo*, 10.

¹⁵ Sims, *Understanding Cairo*, 1-2.

Nasr City: The Capital of the Revolution

Nasr City, which today is one of the most crowded neighborhoods in Greater Cairo, was once envisioned as the new capital city of Egypt. The city was built in 1958 as the “City of the Revolution” after Gamal Abdel Nasser’s military regime took power in 1952. The city is known to its locals as Madinat Nasr, its Arabic name. To begin to understand a city, an understanding of the man behind it must be first established. The time period of President Gamal Abdel Nasser was perceived by many as a time of hope and rebirth. President Gamal Abdel Nasser was deemed by many the people’s man as he had very humble origins. After years of colonization, the Egyptian people seemed eager to “invest their hopes in an indigenous government run by well-spoken young men who were educated in Egypt and who would serve as role models.”¹⁶ Nasser was the first exception to a series of leaders who had a foreign education and could not relate to the Egyptian people. He spoke in a “compelling simplicity ... that allowed all Egyptians to feel as if they were stakeholders in that vision”. His regime was the birthplace of nationalism and set out to claim its legitimacy by developing nationwide mega projects, such as the Aswan Dam.¹⁷ Furthermore, the regime sought to create multiple job opportunities in Cairo which resulted in a heightened sense of nationalism among the people causing abrupt change. Cairo’s population rapidly grew, exceeding expectations reaching 6.5 million in 1965, with more than a third of that population migrating from outside of Cairo. In order to absorb this vast influx of people, the concept of Greater Cairo emerged with multiple cities growing around Cairo such as Helwan, Shubra al-Khayma, Imbaba, Mohandeseen or the City of Engineers, Sahafeyeen or the city of Journalists and Nasr City, as the states response to burdens of urbanization.¹⁸

Nasr City was a large scale urban development that was proposed by Egyptian architect Sayed Karim multiple times to the municipality and numerous ministries but was refused on several occasions (figure 4). However, a chance encounter with President Nasser presented an opportunity to propose this city once again, which then gained traction as the new capital city, with government offices, a stadium and a convention center, symbolizing the power of the regime (figure 5). The city was located east of Abbasiya district and South of Heliopolis on military owned

¹⁶ Al Sayyad, *Cairo*.

¹⁷ Mohamed Elshahed. ‘Nasr City Was Once Egypt’s New Capital, but Things Went Wrong.’ Cairoobserver. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://cairoobserver.com/post/114391196879/nasr-city-was-once-egypts-new-capital-but-things#.ZBoxmnbMKUn>

¹⁸ Al Sayyad, *Cairo*, 245-49

land with a plot area of 1200 square kilometers. The city was revealed by Karim to be a symbol of the accomplishments of the revolution. It was a fresh start away from the spatial associations of British colonialism. The process of implementing Karim's vision began with the Presidential Decree No. 815 in 1959, which established Nasr City Foundation. The main goals of this foundation were to relieve the housing crisis and population density of Cairo, provide new governmental headquarters, provide housing for government employees, provide serviced residential areas, and expand infrastructure into the desert land.¹⁹ The master plan in figure 5 shows the initial phase of the project with Cairo Stadium as one of the first constructed buildings to the left and residential blocks to the right which include orthogonal streets and hierarchy of open spaces from super block central gardens to smaller open spaces between apartment buildings.²⁰

There are many possibilities to why this site was chosen for Nasr City. Perhaps, the Nasser government wanted to extrapolate on the success of the model of Masr Al-Gedida,²¹ a neighboring district built in 1905 by Baron Empain.²² Perhaps it was an opportunity for a fresh start away from the memory of the British colonization in Downtown Cairo. The result remains that Nasr City as the new capital would act as a connector between Masr Al-Gedida and Downtown Cairo. Nasr City was able to attract "white collar professionals and members of an expanding government bureaucracy", however, little consideration was given to planning of low-income housing. Despite that, the relocation of government offices there was one of the key contributors to its exponential growth and by 1970, the city's population had reach approximately half a million inhabitants.²³

¹⁹ Arab Republic of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, "Presidential Decree for the Establishment of the Nasr City Organization in Abbasiya in Cairo," Presidential Decree No. 815, 1959. Manshurat. <https://manshurat.org/node/61580>

²⁰ Mohamed Elshahed, 'Revolutionary Modernism? Architecture and the Politics of Transition in Egypt 1936-1967' (Ph.D., United States -- New York, New York University), accessed April 19, 2023, 311. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1666860666/abstract/E608F2FD68DC4738PQ/1>.

²¹ Masr Al-Gedida translates to New Egypt and is also referred to as Heliopolis.

²² Belgian businessman, engineer and industrialist, Baron Empain.

²³ Al Sayyad, *Cairo*, 249.

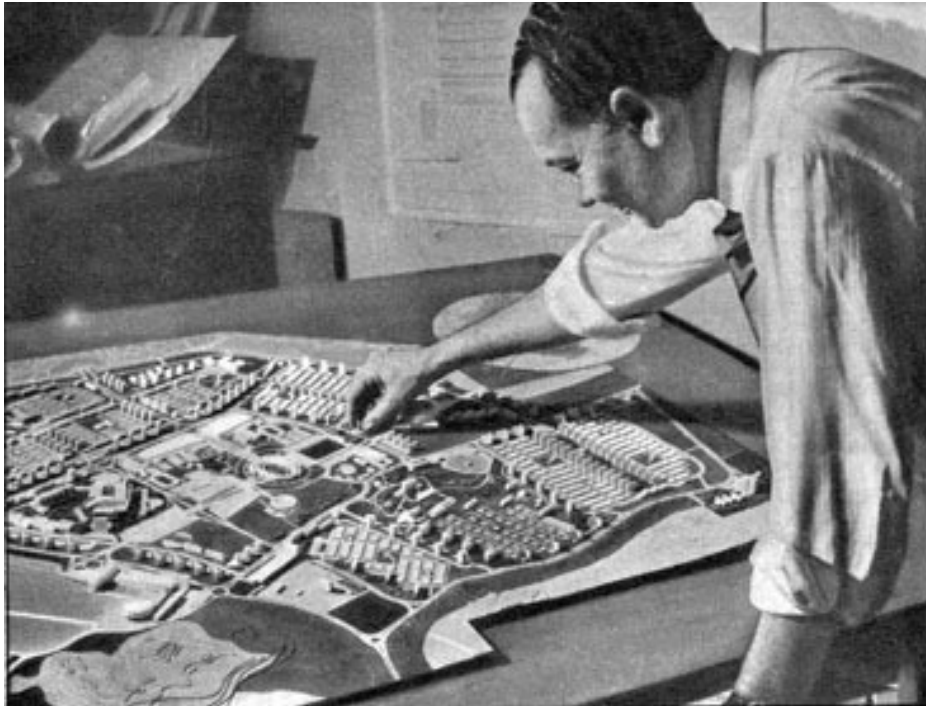


Fig. 4 Architect Sayed Karim with a model of Nasr City.



Fig. 5 Nasr City master plan.

What is truly fascinating about Nasr City's documented presence in the largest news conglomerate in the region, Al-Ahram, is that it is nearly negligible during 1958, the year of the project's announcement. It is almost as if the capital city did not carry the weight or have an effect on the public discourse. Most news headlines that year were centered on exposés on plots against the regime, Middle East and global politics, the union between Egypt and Syria, and the Aswan Dam²⁴. This may have had an unanticipated impact on the people's perception of the city. However, Nasr City appeared in newspaper articles later in the 1960s. Other than the military parade (figure 6) and the opening of the stadium which included the presence of President Nasser, it is unclear whether there was any other form of documentation of the momentous event.

In a manner perhaps more fitting to the times, a brochure was prepared by the Nasr City Organization (Mu'assasat Madinat Nasr) to advertise the city's emergence to the people. The brochure is vibrant in its colors in keeping with the aesthetic of the 1950s, presents an image of the master plan with the logo of the city, introducing it as the "City of the Revolution" (figure 7). The master plan of Nasr City on the brochure had the stadium as the focal point with a series of building clusters composed of freestanding towers and architectural model presenting three H-shaped housing blocks arranged diagonally above a shared podium. As a whole, the brochure offers a promise by the government to "provide improved housing, more industry, and tangible progress."²⁵ An interesting feature of this brochure is that it was written entirely in English rather than the country's mother tongue, Arabic. The statement becomes clear that although the government presented the city as one for all Egyptians, where the brochure included the phrase "a hearty welcome to all", the propaganda was targeted towards a particular social class that had the necessary education to understand the content. It also highlights the government's position on what it believed constituted a "modern" city.

²⁴ A summary of the headlines of every Al-Ahram newspaper front page from January 1, 1958 till December 31, 1958.

²⁵ Elshahed, "Revolutionary Modernism?" 311.



Fig. 6 Military parade through Nasr City showing the first phase of 10-storey social housing blocks in the back ground.



Fig. 7 Brochure produced by the Nasr City Organization in 1958.

The promotional medium may have played a role in the fate of the city as a rival capital to Cairo. It appears that the connection between people and the space they occupied was too strong to be broken by the dreams of the government. The reasons as to why the people chose to keep their livelihood close to their residences may be linked to the reported lack of infrastructure at the time connecting the old capital with the new one and perhaps the mere whispers carried by the media. While some governmental offices moved to Nasr City, the major symbols of state power such as the parliament remained in Downtown Cairo.²⁶ Eventually, the reality of Nasr City transformed into something starkly different from the glorious “city of revolution” envisioned by

²⁶ Elshahed. “Nasr City.” Cairoobserver.

President Nasser. It spiraled into a chaotic metropolis, congested with heavy vehicular traffic, lack of public transport and dense high-rise building blocks lacking character. It was never viewed as an independent city and only acted as a connector between Downtown Cairo and Masr Al-Gadida, Even in the 1960s it was still being referred to as a work in progress, failing to manifest the “revolutionary urban setting it promised” and resolve the ever-present housing crisis, with the press referring to it as a plan as opposed to a reality.²⁷ With this in mind, Sadat City emerged as a chance at redemption from the short comings of Nasr City as the new capital of Egypt.

Sadat City’s Pipe Dream: The Capital of Industry

During the mid-1970s, the discourse around the over population and saturation of Cairo and the consequent load on its infrastructure gained traction. It led to the initiation of the “new cities” planning policy,²⁸ with the aim of reducing the pressure on both Cairo and Alexandria. It was officially set in motion in 1979, when President Anwar Sadat established law 59 that initiated the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA).²⁹ This authority’s objective was the “creation of new civilized centers for achieving community stability and economic prosperity in addition to redistribution of inhabitants far from the narrow strip of the Nile valley and extension of urban spines to the desert and remote areas.”³⁰ Since its establishment, the NUCA has developed over 30 new cities, not only surrounding the Greater Cairo region but also to the north and south of the country.

The first city that began the domino effect of desert city development, advocated by President Sadat, was Sadat City. Noting that most Egyptian cities are built along the Nile River and Delta, Sadat believed that “the life of the Egyptian people cannot remain confined to such a limited area and that it was time for drawing a new map for Egypt through the integrated development of new regions for population concentration and new economic activities.”³¹ However, he did not only want this to serve as an average city, he wanted it to become his new

²⁷ Elshahed, ‘Revolutionary Modernism?’ 399. Reference to an article by Samia Hammam, “Madinat Nasr, Will it Solve the Crisis?” in *Bina’ al-Watan*, January 1, 1966, 51.

²⁸ Salah El-Shakhs, ‘Sadat City, Egypt and the Role of New Town Planning in the Developing World’. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 11, no. 3 (1994): 241-42.

²⁹ Arab Republic of Egypt. “Law of Establishment of the New Urban Communities Authority,” Law 59, 1979. <https://manshurat.org/node/251>

³⁰ New Urban Communities Authority website. ‘هيئة المجتمعات العمرانية الجديدة’. Accessed February 22, 2023. <https://www.nuca.gov.eg/>.

³¹ El-Shakhs, “Sadat City,” 244.

capital of Egypt. It is not atypical for regimes to want to demonstrate their political power by developing mega projects, similar to Naser's Aswan Dam, for President Sadat this new capital would act as his marker. It was proclaimed as "the spearhead for the country's Green Revolution, promoted as the new center for greening of reclaimed desert" as a part of a strategy aiming to salvage and restore agricultural land.³²

Sadat City was planned along the Alexandria Desert Road, the main highway connecting Cairo and Alexandria. It was strategically located along the border of the Nile Delta, with the aim of attracting people from the two major urban centers as well as from neighboring rural areas. Its location was considered far enough from both cities to discourage commuters and encourage permanent relocation. The projected population was half a million people with possible expansion to one million by the end of the twenty-five year plan set in place.³³ The planning of the city is centered on an axial spine "with direct expansion to the northeast and will accommodate the major commercial, institutional, governmental and recreational facilities with district spines serving residential areas crossing the main spine"³⁴ (figures 8, 9).

The spine, housing governmental, commercial and cultural institutions, as the focal point for the master plan surrounded by a residential layer and finally an industrial layer, may have been intended as a means of attracting people into the city in addition to being a melting pot for residents to gather creating a sense of community in an otherwise sterile environment. A news report in *Progressive Architecture's* October 1978 issue describes the scope of Marcel Breuer Associates³⁵ in designing the "first buildings to house the Ministry of Development and New Communities and Ministry of Land Reclamation, the first government agencies to be relocated in the new city."³⁶ This highlighted that in fact the government's plan was to relocate the government buildings to the new capital to establish their center of administration and to attract the rest of the population to follow suit. An ambitious goal such as this should have been based on prior knowledge that people are not only able but also willing to uproot their lives. The case of Nasr City alone may have given prior notice that the Egyptian people had neither.

³² El-Shakhs, "Sadat City," 245.

³³ El-Shakhs, "Sadat City," 245.

³⁴ Marcel Breuer Archive drawings of Sadat City Ministries Complex, Cairo, Egypt, 1976-1981

³⁵ Marcel Breuer Associates was founded by Marcel Breuer, a Hungarian American modernist architect.

³⁶ Marcel Breuer Archive drawings of Sadat City Ministries Complex, Cairo, Egypt, 1976-1981

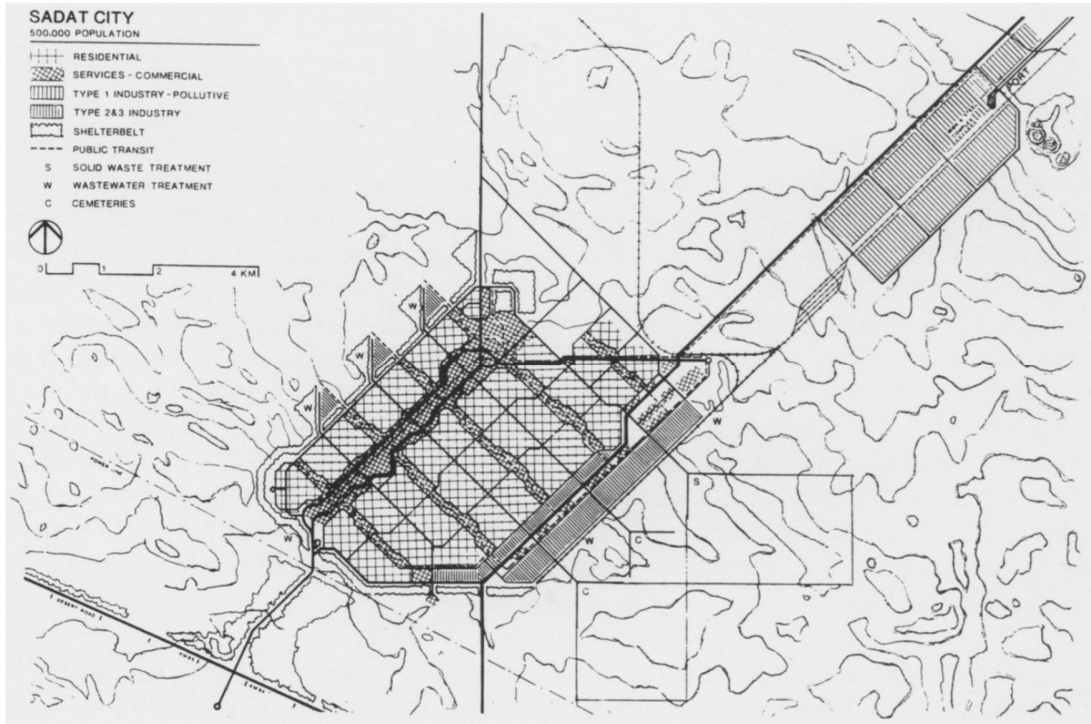


Fig. 8 Sadat City master plan

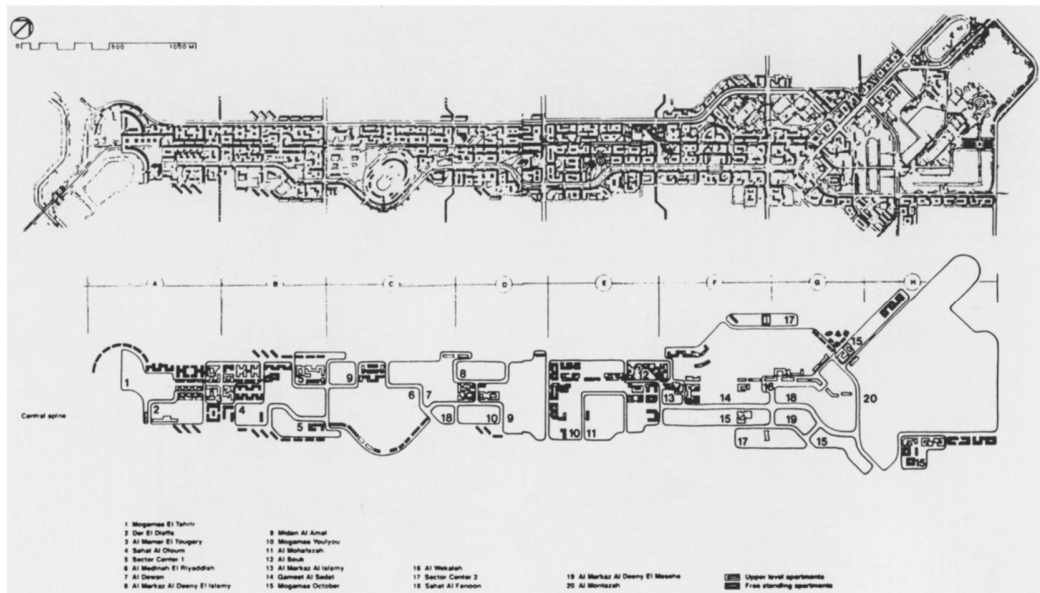


Fig. 9 Sadat City spine layout

When it comes to addressing the discourse around Sadat City, multiple headlines appear. The ones found between the period of 1978 and 1979 in Al-Ahram,³⁷ as the city was still in its planning and early construction stages, detail the impact of Sadat City as a hub for industry, boasting about the number of jobs created in a very short period of time (figures 11, 12). While other headlines exaggerated the “Green Revolution” taking place in Egypt by the Sadat government in an effort to preserve agricultural lands (figure 10). However, another newspaper article in 1980, a time when the city was well underway, read “the urban planning of Sadat City is sound” (figure 13) signaling that perhaps everything was not as sound as they would like it to appear, in particular with the choice of words used by general manager and engineering consultant Mohamed Salah El-Din Hagab to assure the people that the choice of location was the right one. The Sadat government seemed to have been put in a position where it had to act fast to reassure the people that Sadat City was viable as the new capital of Egypt and not permitting any of the articles to fault the city in any way but instead reestablishing the narrative of the city’s stability and the stability of the government.

Although the plan for the new capital, Sadat City, sought to create a new desert hub, the reality played out differently. Unfortunately, the growth in population and employment presented by the opportunities in the new industrial capital were much lower than anticipated. The main struggle was ironically that the approximately 105 government agencies which, at the time, employed around 112,000 persons, seemed unwilling to move and, in time proved that they never would.³⁸ In contrast to Nasr City where there was no proper transportation infrastructure in place at the time to connect the people to the new capital, Sadat City had facilitated such infrastructure. Despite that, people did not appear enthusiastic about the move reflect of the uncertainty of the transitional state of the city’s future. Another possible explanation for the lack of enthusiasm is that Egyptians typically design their cities around bodies of water, which dilute the otherwise severe desert climate. Perhaps, this meant that at the time, Egyptians were not ready to adapt to the perceived harsh desert climate; little did they know that they eventually would.

³⁷ Al-Ahram is the largest newspaper in Egypt and the Middle East.

³⁸ El-Shakhs, “Sadat City,” 256-57.



Fig. 10 Al-Ahram Newspaper front page, 03 April 1978, title translates to “Sadat gives signal for the Green Revolution by giving ownership to 14 thousand feddans³⁹ in the New Valley”.



Fig. 11 Al-Ahram Newspaper article, 03 April 1978, title translates to “Sadat City: Investigating the efficiency of movement and services to accommodate the rapid housing growth and achieving 60,000 job opportunities in the industrial sector during the first 25 years”.

³⁹ Feddan is an Egyptian unit of area equivalent to 1.038 acres (0.42 ha).

مدينة السادات الصناعية تستوعب ٧ آلاف عامل ومجمع للحديد والصلب مزرعة للأبقار على مساحة ٧ آلاف فدان ٦ ملايين جنيه هبة أمريكية لتنمية القرى

دمنهور : حسين ثابت :

اعلن المهندس حسين كامل مهندس محافظة البحيرة ان خطة المحافظة للتعمير والتنمية تبدأ بإقامة مدينة السادات التي ستكون مقر مجمع الحديد والصلب الجديد وستنشأ حولها منطقة صناعية تستوعب ٧ آلاف عامل بهدف جذب التجمعات السكانية الى المناطق العمرانية الجديدة على الأراضي الصحراوية .



حسين كامل مهندس

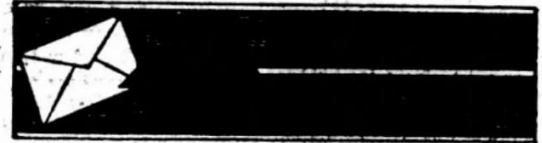
والصالحات
الجديدة تستهدف إنشاء مزرعة مساحتها ٧ آلاف فدان لتربية ابقار الفريزيان بمنطقة غرب النوبارية وستقوم في المرحلة الأولى ببناء ٣ مزارع وتبلغ تكاليف هذا المشروع ٣ ملايين جنيه بالإضافة الى إنشاء مصنع لإنتاج اللحوم والزيتون من فول الصويا بتكاليف تبلغ ١٨ مليون دولار . بجانب ٤٥ مزرعة سمكية تنسم في تحقيق الأمن الغذائي .
وقال المهندس حسين مهندس ان وكالة الامريكية للتنمية الدولية قد اعطت على منح محافظة البحيرة مئونة مالية تبلغ نحو ستة ملايين جنيه للمساعدة في تحسين المرافق والصحة العامة الريية اولاً .
وسيخصص ٢,٥ مليون جنيه من هذه المئونة لإنتاج الفواجن واللحوم واتشاء عدد من ورفق التجارة للصناعات الريفي ومصنع اسنيرات نقل البضائع والركاب بالخليج .
المحافظة .
والصالحات ان تجربة استخدام اللؤلؤ الطبيعي الذي سيجري التفاوض من الخلفيات الزراعية سنويًا في ٣٠ قرية .
تجربة استخدام الطاقة الشمسية في ٢٠ قرية اخرى من قرى المحافظة .
كما تقرر ان يخصص مبلغ مليون و٨٠٠ الف جنيه لتحسين الطرق القروية وتوسيع مياه الشرب الى المناطق المحرومة .
و في مجال التعليم قال المهندس المحافظ ان لدينا حاجة الف طفل يخشى ان يعجزوا عن التعليم بسبب تخلفهم عن التمام المرحلة الابتدائية وذلك فشرت المحافظة إنشاء عدد كبير من مدارس الفصل الواحد بجانب إنشاء عدد كبير من الكليات التي سيراعى فيها التعليم العام والبيئي والتدريب المهني .
وختم المحافظ تصريحه بان هذه المشروعات قد تضمنتها خطة المحافظة لعام ١٩٨٠ .
بجانب الجهود الذاتية التي بدأت تساهم في مشروعات التنمية وان خططها مشروع جامعة البحيرة الذي يشترك في اعاده نحو مائة استاذ جامعي من ابناء البحيرة . □



١٥٠ مسكنًا

اقتصاديا بمبنيتي العريش وبئر العبد

اتفقت محافظة شمال سيناء مع شركة البحر الأحمر للمطارات على بناء ١٥٠ مسكنًا اقتصاديا بمبنيتي العريش وبئر العبد موزعة على عشر سائر لتوزيع أزمة الإسكان في هذه المنطقة وقد اتمتت المحافظة لهذا الغرض ٧٥٠ الف جنيه . وقد وصلت معاد الشركة الى مواقع التنفيذ لبدء العمل بالعمى سرعة ممكنة .
ويجري الآن بمدينة العريش حفر بئرين جديدتين بتكاليف ٤٤ الف جنيه لتوفير مياه الشرب للمدينة .



تخطيط مدينة السادات سليم

ردود

بالإشارة الى ما نشر من اقتراح للتخطيط لمدينة السادات والقدم من م . اسماعيل حساد جينيف سويسرا . يرجى التكرم بالإحاطة ان ما تصورته سعادته من ان مدينة السادات تستوعب الى شرق وغرب الطريق الصحراوي الذي يربط القاهرة بالإسكندرية هونصوخالطه ، اذ ان محفل مدينة السادات يقع مند الكيلو ٩٧ على طريق القاهرة - الإسكندرية الصحراوي وليس مدينة السادات نفسها ، والتي تقع على بعد مائة كيلو مترات شرق هذه النقطة وقد يكون ما نلاحظ لسعادته هي لافتة مدينة السادات على الطريق الصحراوي وليس المدينة نفسها .

واود ان اطمئن سعادتم والسادة القراء اننا قد اخذنا في اعتبارنا في اختيار الموقع وفي تخطيط المدينة المبادئ التخطيطية السليمة المتعارف عليها علميا على المستوى العالمي وكان امرنا الا توجد أى منشآت خاصة بالمدينة على الطريق الصحراوي حتى لا يوجد ما تصارف عليه المخططون بالتعمير الشريطى ما بين الطريق الصحراوي وموقع المدينة في الداخل وحول الطريق الواصل الى المدينة واخذنا في الاعتبار حجم الحركة المستقبلية على الطريق خاصة مند بدء تولد حركة المرور من وإلى المدينة ما استخدمه تصميما لادراج الطريق في منطقة سيدة امام مدخل المدينة .
المدير العام المهندس الاستشاري محمد صلاح الدين هجاب

Fig. 12 Al-Ahram Newspaper article, October 24, 1979, title translates to “Sadat Industrial City accommodates 7 thousand workers and an iron and steel complex” (Left).

Fig. 13 Al-Ahram Newspaper article, July 19, 1980, title translates to “The planning of Sadat City is sound” (Right).

Although Sadat City prompted high media coverage as the new capital city at the time, it was only one of many desert cities later developed by the NUCA. These desert cities were designed to alleviate the pressures on Cairo by attracting the population away from the center and dispersing it more equally all over Egypt. Some of the major satellite cities built surrounding Greater Cairo were New Cairo, Sheikh Zayed, 6th of October, 10th of Ramadan, 15th of May, Al Shouruk, Badr and Al Obour. The intended role for these new cities was the expansion of the economic bases of the country with 10th of Ramadan city as an industrial and manufacturing hub and 6th of October city as a tourism and agro progressive hub.⁴⁰ Although these cities are claimed to absorb Cairo’s growing population, most of the housing built was middle-income and high-income housing with

⁴⁰ Stewart, Dona J. ‘Cities in the Desert: The Egyptian New-Town Program’. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86, no. 3 (1996): 459–80.

little attention to low-income and social housing, noting that approximately 70% of Cairo's built environment is composed of informal settlements. What is even more intriguing is that, in reality, these desert cities have reached only 20-30% of their planned capacity today.⁴¹ This triggers the investigation that perhaps the desire to build so many new cities is an economic tool and real estate venture for the state, with parcels of land being sold to the highest bidder, rather than a means of alleviating Cairo's population density.

The incremental liberties taken by the NUCA in reclaiming the desert over the past 35 years ultimately opened the door to the possibility of building a new city at an exaggerated depth into the desert. This city is not just another desert city, it is intended to be the New Administrative Capital of Egypt. It is easy to question, if the NUCA never built desert cities, whether the conception of the idea of the New Administrative Capital would have ever been possible.

New Capital City Dry Spell

Nasr City and Sadat City highlighted a trend in new capital city planning and development as a political tool that at first seemed to target the housing crisis resulting from the population's exponential growth but later revealed political agendas promising the prosperity of the regime. There is almost a suspiciously long period of time until this trend reemerges. The Egyptian people were lulled for a period of thirty years under the rule of President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak. There are too many questions as to why a new capital city for Mubarak was never constructed. The Mubarak regime was associated with the rise of Neoliberalism, "a type of liberalism that favors a global free market, without government regulation, with businesses and industry controlled and run for profit by private owners".⁴² This meant that priority was given to the private sector above everything else, an undertaking which the regime seemed mainly preoccupied with. However, as it turns out, this did not mean that despite a new capital not being constructed at the time that plans for one had not been made.

⁴¹ New Cairo current population 1.5 million, target population 4 million. New Urban Communities Authority. Accessed April 20, 2023. http://www.newcities.gov.eg/english/New_Communities/Cairo/default.aspx
6th of October current population 1.5 million, target population 6 million. New Urban Communities Authority. Accessed April 20, 2023. http://www.newcities.gov.eg/english/New_Communities/October/default.aspx

⁴² "Neoliberalism," in *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, accessed April 7, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/neoliberalism#:~:text=%2F%CB%8Cni%CB%90%99%99%CA%8A%CB%881%C9%AAb%C9%99r%C9%991%C9%AAz%C9%99m%2F,for%20profit%20by%20private%20owners>.

On November 20th 2007, an article on the front page of the issue of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper reads “Mubarak cancels the government’s project to establish a new capital 48 hours after its announcement.”⁴³ This article revealed that in fact there were plans for a new capital during Mubarak’s time, however, Mubarak did not stand behind the decision to proceed with its plans at the time. The article states (figure 14), quoting Mubarak explaining that he would “not spend large sums of money on establishing the capital at a time when the state needs these sums to achieve social justice for citizens” continuing to say that although plans are being made “for the future for a period of 10 to 15 years, and there are practical studies and continuous planning, this does not mean that we will implement immediately everything we plan for.”⁴⁴ This caused mass confusion within the government and the General Authority for Urban Planning as it presented a non-unified front.

Juxtaposed to Mubarak’s statements, the period of his neoliberal regime brought about the exponential growth of the gap between the social classes, almost eliminating the middle-class. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer, both in their own bubbles while the regime thrived. Perhaps for this reason it was not inclined to prove its relevance by building a new capital city in its image. That all ultimately changed on the 25th of January 2011 with the Egyptian revolution altering the country’s status quo. The years that followed provided little stability, as the race to grasp power settled and President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was elected president in 2014.

⁴³ Wafaa Bakri and Hany Abdel Rahman, “Mubarak Cancels the Government’s Project to Establish a New Capital 48 Hours after Its Announcement,” *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, November 20, 2007, 262 edition, 1.

⁴⁴ Bakri and Abdel Rahman, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, 1.



Fig. 14 Al-Ahram Newspaper front page, November 20, 2007, title translates to “Mubarak: The priority is for social justice and not for the establishment of a new capital”.

The New Administrative Capital: The Capital of the Future

The New Administrative Capital (NAC) was announced as a national project at the Egyptian Economic Development Conference in March 2015 as the solution for the over expansion of the megacity, Cairo.⁴⁵ Today, this capital city from scratch is located in the desert, 60 km east from Cairo between Suez Road and Ain Al-Sokhna Road, halfway between Cairo and Suez (figure 16). It is one in a series of mega projects proposed by President El-Sisi since his rise to power in 2014. These mega projects include the expansion of the Suez Canal, New Alamein City, and vast nationwide road and transportation infrastructure works including Tahya Misr Bridge (also known as Rod El Farag Axis Bridge), the Monorail and numerous bridges across

⁴⁵ Hassan Elmouelhi, ‘New Administrative Capital -Cairo: Power, Urban Development and Social Injustice -the Official Egyptian Model of Neoliberalism’, in *Academia*, 2019, 3. https://www.academia.edu/39148426/New_administrative_Capital_Cairo_Power_Urban_Development_and_Social_Injustice_the_Official_Egyptian_Model_of_Neoliberalism.

multiple districts all over Cairo.⁴⁶ The NAC is once again spearheaded as a means of alleviating the over congestion of Cairo, a capital city that draws from the rich history, culture and heritage of Cairo yet offers a global, modern and innovative lifestyle.⁴⁷

Intended to house an estimate of 7 million inhabitants, the NAC is allocated a plot of 170,000 feddan with a master plan that is divided into three main phases, which includes a total of 20 residential districts of varying typologies and densities (figure 17). The initial framework and core principles of the city have been developed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM)⁴⁸ in collaboration with Egyptian Ministry of Housing and Capital City Partners Ltd, a private real estate investment fund.⁴⁹ Dar Al-Handassah⁵⁰ has since taken over the development of the master plan sharing a detailed scope of work on its website⁵¹ and expressing its gratitude to the Egyptian government for their participation in the mega project in its corporate DAR magazine's 16th issue.⁵² The first phase of the master plan has been under construction since 2015 with significant progress with the Iconic Tower, allegedly Africa's tallest skyscraper, currently visible on site (figure 19).⁵³ It contains eight residential districts, governance district, arts and culture district, business district, embassies district, the Green River, mosque, cathedral and international airport (figure 18). The scale and features of the master plan of the NAC humble those of Nasr City and Sadat City. Such an undertaking, on the one hand, opens up numerous work opportunities in multiple disciplines from engineering services to construction labor as well as the potential to activate the local industry of the country, in particular the cement

⁴⁶ Reuters, 'Egypt's Sisi Defends Mega-Projects with Economy under Strain', *Reuters*, January 23, 2023, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egypts-sisi-defends-mega-projects-with-economy-under-strain-2023-01-23/>.

⁴⁷ "Documentary Film on the Planning of the New Administrative Capital", ON Live, YouTube, October 11, 2017, 0:20, https://youtu.be/A3eOhwNk_CY.

⁴⁸ SOM is an American architecture firm, with main headquarters in Chicago, USA.

⁴⁹ "SOM Is Leading the Planning of 'The Capital Cairo,'" SOM, March 14, 2015, <https://www.som.com/news/som-is-leading-the-planning-of-the-capital-cairo/>.

⁵⁰ Dar Al-Handasah Consultants is a privately-owned international consulting company active in engineering, architecture, planning, environmental consulting, project and construction management, facilities management, and economics with main headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon and active principle design center in Cairo, Egypt.

⁵¹ "New Administrative Capital," Dar Al-Handasah, January 1, 2019, <https://www.dar.com/work/project/new-administrative-capital>.

⁵² 'Dar Magazine I16', Dar e-publications, January 1, 2019, 36-57. <https://dar.com/content/publications/i16/>

⁵³ Walsh and Lee, "New Capital," *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/08/world/middleeast/egypt-new-administrative-capital.html>.

industry. On the other hand, it poses the question of whether the country would be able to afford the “45 billion dollar” development (figure 15).



Fig. 15 Al-Ahram Newspaper front page, March 15, 2015 announcing the new capital project, title translates to “\$45 Billion for the establishment of the New Administrative Capital”.

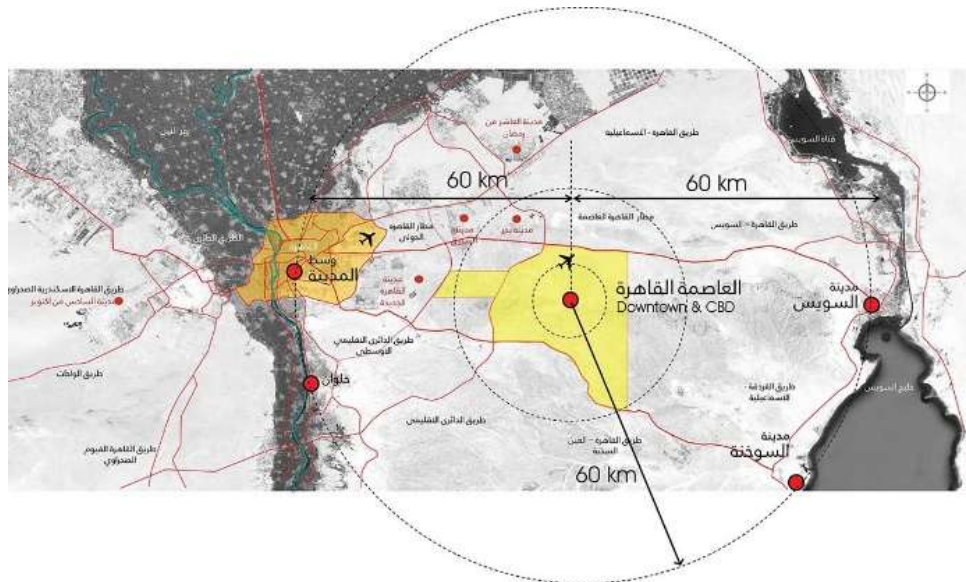


Fig. 16 The New Administrative Capital location relative to Cairo and Suez.

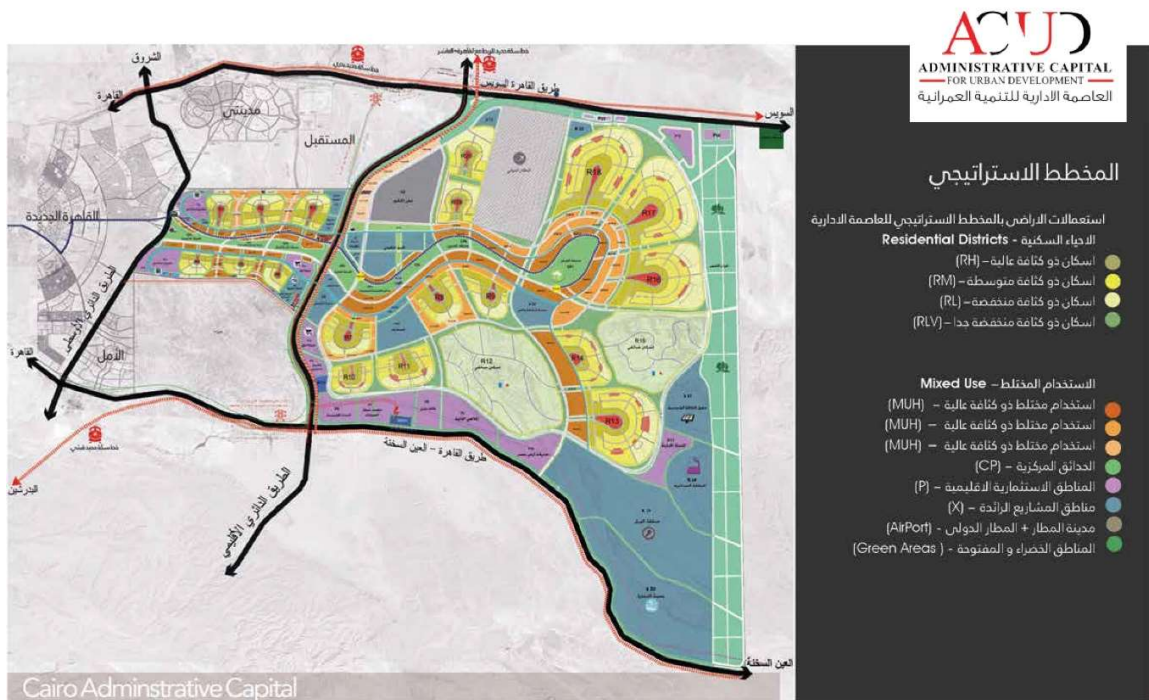


Fig. 17 The New Administrative Capital master plan by the Administrative Capital for Urban Development Company.



Fig. 18 Master plan of the first phase of development of the New Administrative Capital.

Upon close inspection, two parallel narratives around the construction of the New Administrative Capital emerge. The first narrative is curated by the regime that is responsible for the planning and construction of the capital. There are abundant promotional campaign documentaries and interviews with representatives such as with the Head of the Administrative Capital Authority⁵⁴ and the Deputy Head of the Administrative Capital Authority⁵⁵ boasting about the accomplishments of the capital, appearing in unison to advocate for its success as a model capital city. The propaganda for the NAC insists that it provides residential opportunities for all Egyptians alike and is equipped with the necessary public services.⁵⁶ Yet these documentaries and interviews depict high-end residential villas and apartments, high-rise luxury towers, commercial, mixed-use and cultural districts. The intentions behind the capital city transition to the desire to create an exclusive city, for those who can afford it, with little attention paid to actually solving the housing crisis predominantly among the lower working class, at least in its early stages of construction. What is interesting, however, is that one of the earliest articles released by Al-Ahram in January 2015, two months prior to the official announcement of the capital later in March, reads “The new capital ... big aspirations from limited resources.”⁵⁷ The article’s strength also comes from addressing the shortcomings of Sadat City as a predecessor to the new capital and highlights that effort should be placed to avoid repeating history. This level of self-reflection, although premature, provides a refreshing take on the narrative as it shines a light, albeit a dim one, on some of the concerns about the project.

Sifting through numerous headlines, a few local and global news articles appear offering a more critical lens on the new capital. A New York Times article reads “A New Capital Worthy of the Pharaohs Rise in Egypt, but at What Price?”⁵⁸ This seems to be the main question at hand with current macro-economic conditions of the country and the plunge of the Egyptian Pound in recent

⁵⁴ Rania ElShamy, “Reconstruction - a Meeting with the Head of the New Administrative Capital Authority and a Tour of the Projects of the Ministry of Housing in the New Capital”, ON, YouTube. August 26, 2022. Video of Interview. 28:59, <https://youtu.be/q3AvCsJNSuk>.

⁵⁵ "Al-Hayat Al-Youm - M/ Ahmed Al-Arabi Nai, Deputy Head of the Administrative Capital Authority, in an Exclusive Interview with "Al-Hayat Al-Youm"." Al Hayyah TV Network, YouTube. December 31, 2022. Video of Interview. 8:48, <https://youtu.be/6SAOub8bxPY>.

⁵⁶ “Documentary Film on the Planning of NAC,” ON Live, 2:34.

⁵⁷ Essam El-Din Rady, “The new capital ... big aspirations from limited resources” *Al-Ahram*, January 02, 2015, 33.

⁵⁸ Declan Walsh and Vivian Yee, ‘A New Capital Worthy of the Pharaohs Rises in Egypt, but at What Price?’, *The New York Times*, October 8, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/08/world/middleeast/egypt-new-administrative-capital.html>.

months⁵⁹, it becomes extremely difficult to justify the enormous sums of money, estimated around 59 billion US dollars, poured into this capital. Another article from Al-Estiklal Newspaper questions what “the real reasons behind Sisi’s New Capital building” is, bringing to light the relationship between the events of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and the spatial relationship between people and their government.⁶⁰ Another article from Reuters reveals that the New Administrative Capital had a limited capacity for social housing and that the government is racing to make Badr City, a neighboring city on the periphery of the NAC, the host of “thousands of mid-level civil servants.”⁶¹



Fig. 19 Workers at the Iconic Tower skyscraper in 2021.

History appears to be destined to repeat itself. If the city was in fact designed to accommodate the explosive population of Cairo, then its inability to consider the accommodation and integration of multiple social classes as its first priority contradicts that

⁵⁹ Patrick Werr, ‘Analysis: Pressure Builds on Egypt to Devalue Currency Further’, *Reuters*, March 28, 2023, sec. Currencies, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/pressure-builds-egypt-devalue-currency-further-2023-03-28/>.

Netty Idayu Ismail, ‘Egypt Pound Hedging Frenzy Unmasks Growing Devaluation Anxiety’, *Bloomberg.Com*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-04-13/egypt-pound-hedging-frenzy-unmasks-growing-devaluation-anxiety>.

⁶⁰ Nuha Yousef, ‘What Is the Real Reason Behind Sisi’s New Capital Building?’, Al-Estiklal Newspaper, September 11, 2022, <https://www.aestiklal.net/en/view/15040/what-is-the-real-reason-behind-sisis-new-capital-building>.

⁶¹ Patrick Werr, ‘Egypt Rushes to Build Public Housing for New Capital Employees’, *Reuters*, August 16, 2021, sec. Middle East, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egypt-rushes-build-public-housing-new-capital-employees-2021-08-16/>.

intent and promotes an exclusive modern lifestyle directed at those who can afford it, even though it is important to acknowledge that painting a picture of prosperity, hope and a better life is appraisable, the reality is not that simple. In the end, these large scale urban development initiatives prioritize capitalist interest over population interest, turning the capital city into an investment opportunity. Although funding for the capital is largely coming from United Arab Emirates⁶² and Chinese⁶³ investors, selling land to private developers provides an influx of capital from within the Egyptian economy as well. As for the architecture community, it is also struggling to comprehend the principles with which the city is designed and built paying little attention to the local environment and global trends of sustainable urban city development, discussed in the panel following the Lafarge Holcim Forum presentations in 2019.⁶⁴

Despite a layered investigation into how this capital city came to be, what still remains unclear is who this city is built for and whose future it represents. Following the narrative, it does not seem to be built for all people but instead built as a symbol of the regime's strength and prosperity, aiming to change Egypt's perception as a modern global capital. Similar to the previous capitals, the government has already begun the transition to the NAC with multiple government workers relocating to their new offices as revealed by recent headlines from BBC News and Al-Ahram Online,⁶⁵ with the transportation ministry leading the way and ensuring that transportation infrastructure is set in place during the early stages.⁶⁶ Another question that only time has the capacity to answer is whether people will in fact relocate to the new capital, as seen with the government's refusal to relocate to Nasr City, or whether it will become a ghost town, similar to Sadat City. What remains certain is that the New Administrative Capital has

⁶² Mary Sophia, 'UAE To Build Egypt's New Capital City | UAE News', *Gulf Business*, March 15, 2015, <https://gulfbusiness.com/uae-to-build-egypts-new-capital-city/>.

⁶³ 'Egypt Signs Deal with China Construction to Build, Finance, Part of New Capital', *Reuters*, September 7, 2015, sec. Industry, Materials and Utilities, <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-china-financing-idUSL5N11D1W720150907>.

⁶⁴ Alejandro Aravena, Norman Foster, Christine Binswanger and Maria Atkinson, "Alejandro Aravena's question to Norman Foster and Christine Binswanger at the Lafarge Holcim Forum," The American University in Cairo, filmed April 4, 2019, video of forum discussion, 4:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=809i7PLZz_M.

⁶⁵ Gamal Essam El-Din, "Moving to the New Capital," *Al-Ahram Online*, Cairo, March 20, 2023. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/492623.aspx>

Abdul Basri Hassan, "New Administrative Capital: Thousands of government employees move to their new workplace." *BBC News Arabic*, Cairo, March 3, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-64836699>

⁶⁶ "Transportation ministry to fully operate from New Administrative Capital starting from March," *Egypt Today*, Cairo, February 21, 2023. <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/3/122673/Transportation-ministry-to-fully-operate-from-New-Administrative-Capital-starting>

gained traction in global discourse and will act as a precedent for capital city development in the global south as other capital cities reach their capacity and regime's strive to prove their legitimacy.

Conclusion

The research offers a lens through which an understanding of the historical process of the construction of new capital cities in Egypt's modern history is explored in parallel to an analysis of the discourse that emerged around them. The image presented by each capital city, Nasr City, Sadat City and the New Administrative Capital, shows an overall shortcoming of solving the issue of an "explosive population" and acting as a means of decentralizing the capital. Moreover, on every account, the prospective new capital has been unable to present a viable narrative that convinces the people of Cairo to abandon it and instead have acted in the interests of their respective regimes. The research reveals that the population crisis may not be merely a driver for the construction of new capital cities but instead is a catalyst that leaders use to promote their political agendas, the construction of a symbol of prosperity for their regimes.

Nasr City, Sadat City and the New Administrative Capital, although varying in location and scale, all present the consistency and commitment of the Egyptian government to the strategy to shift away from Cairo, the rich historic yet highly dense capital city. The uniqueness of the circumstances of the emergence of each of these cities presented a tailored narrative that, at first seems different, appears upon close inspection to be repetitive. Nasr City, designed by an Egyptian architect, presented a narrative of the "City of the Revolution" centered on establishing the image of a regime that is liberated from British colonialism, under the supervision of Nasr City Organization with one of its main goals of tackling the emerging population crisis by providing multiple housing opportunities, mainly middle-income housing. Sadat City, designed by a Hungarian American architect, was presented through the lens of the Green Revolution that offered a new opportunity to combine agriculture and industry, once again promising housing opportunities that would alleviate the pressures on Cairo that resulted from the "infitah", not only through Sadat City but also through the establishment of the New Urban Communities Authority that sought to domesticate the desert. Instead of targeting the majority of the population, namely low-income communities, these desert cities provided middle to high-income housing acting as a means for the government to make money by selling land to private owners and developers instead

of addressing the “real problem.” The New Administrative Capital, designed by an American architecture firm, comes with a new promise, a capital city that draws from the rich history, culture and heritage of Cairo yet offers a global, modern and innovative lifestyle, providing an abundance of housing districts and typologies which appear on the surface to be for all Egyptians but neglect to make low-income housing a priority, following in the footsteps of its predecessors.

Agendas in hand, all three capital cities used the tactic of moving the government offices to the new capital as the first step in an effort to lead by example and attract people to relocate. If people cannot find a viable reason to move, they will not do so; therefore, the narrative presented by the government through the media had to be convincing. It is unfortunate that this was insufficient both in Nasr City, due to the lack of infrastructure and transport systems, and Sadat City, due to people’s genuine unwillingness to leave their livelihood. Another common thread that is difficult to ignore is that the so-called population crisis has increased exponentially over the timeline between the constructions of each of the capital cities, from 1958 to 2015. The only period of time where the government chose to hold back on developing a new capital was during the Mubarak regime, when Mubarak himself chose to go against the housing ministry and parliament to focus on improving the lives of the people first. This would come as a shock to many as the regime was associated with the disappearance of the middle-class and the uneven distribution of wealth. If the population crisis and improved quality of life were in fact the number one priority, as presented by the media, each of these cities would have been designed differently with a modified agenda and narrative that matched its purpose, supporting that people’s perception of the respective capital cities plays a vital role in their success.

Although differences in perception between people and their government and between expectations and realities of new capital cities are inevitable, one thing remains clear and that is the people of Cairo have displayed that their bond with their capital is unbreakable. Whether the New Administrative Capital will be able to rival that attachment is yet to be discovered and perhaps it will be the first in a series to cause the paradigm shift that the previous capital cities, Nasr City and Sadat City, failed to accomplish. This opens up the possibility for further avenues to be explored to paint a fuller picture of how new capital cities emerge, how they are designed and constructed, how they are represented and perceived and their relationship with the global narrative of new capital city construction. This research offers multiple departure points for further

investigation on the construction of new capital cities. Although the main focus of the discourse was on Al-Ahram newspaper articles, how different would the narrative be if a purely architectural lens was explored, such as through architecture magazines depicting these capitals? How would the architect's background and their knowledge of the culture and people influence the design of the capital and its success or lack of, in terms of urban planning as well as architectural character? It would also offer interesting possibilities to compare these Egyptian capitals with other global capital cities to identify the variations in the discourse. The present construction of the New Administrative Capital in Egypt acted as the main trigger for this investigation, however, it has opened up the possibility to uncover the patterns of an emerging category of new capital cities lending itself as a reference as other global cities reach their capacity and new capital cities emerge elsewhere.

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Conclusion