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► **To cite this version:**

Amr Abdalla Abdelaziz Attia. Linear Parks and Informal Areas. Opportunities & Constraints. Ambiances, tomorrow. Proceedings of 3rd International Congress on Ambiances. Septembre 2016, Volos, Greece, Sep 2016, Volos, Greece. p. 419 - 424. hal-01414064

HAL Id: hal-01414064

<https://hal.science/hal-01414064>

Submitted on 12 Dec 2016

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Linear Parks and Informal Areas

Opportunities & Constraints

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Abstract. *This paper attempts to explore the emerging uses that enable the upgrading of informal settlements through the prism of ambiances. The seminar on 'Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances', which took place at Ain Shams University in Cairo, discussed the potential of Linear Parks along waterways (rivers, drainage and irrigation canals) to improving the quality of life in informal areas. The paper will document the findings of the seminar and assess the debates against the relevant literature/findings from other studies.*

Keywords: *ambiances, linear parks, informal areas, Cairo, waterways.*

Introduction

The gradual growth and spread of informal settlements along the waterways have become a source of pollution rather than an opportunity for creating public parks offering attractive waterfronts for the settlements. The establishment of Linear Parks along the waterways offers a quick nationwide provision of public space.

The potential of Linear Parks to improve the quality of life in the informal settlements was discussed during a seminar on 'Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances' at Ain Shams University. The seminar outlined the opportunity that the Linear Parks along waterways could offer to the quick improvement of the informal areas focusing on the role of water as a creator of an ambiance. The discussions during the seminar analysed similar urban contexts in other countries such as in São Paulo in Brazil, Bogota in Colombia and other cities that have applied the concept. Hence, this paper attempts to document the discussions of the seminar and explore the opportunities of Linear Parks along existing waterways (rivers, irrigation and drainage canals and their branches that penetrate the urban fabric) to improve the quality of life in informal areas.

Informal Areas

Egypt suffers from the burden of supporting a population growing faster than its ability to expand infrastructure and provide basic services. Rapid urbanisation

resulted in encroachments on agricultural land¹, which has mostly been informal. Around 18-20 million Egyptians² live in informal or squatter settlements (GOPP 2007) where over 50% households live in informal settlements, out of which 82% built on agricultural lands (*ibid*).

The informal expansion of the urban built-up areas took place on the peripheries of cities mostly along the irrigation and drainage canals because they offered easy accessibility and a source of water. There were no provision of services and infrastructure and the government had little control on these developments, which left no choices for the 'squatter citizens' but to dispose debris as well as solid and liquid wastes in the canals making them an additional source of pollution.

The response to these challenges has been articulated by an international consensus of comprehensive approaches for improving the living conditions in informal areas, guaranteeing legal and secure tenure, improving the quality of life in poor and deteriorated areas, and creating the opportunities for long-term poverty alleviation (GTZ 2009). Many NGOs have contributed to these efforts. Some focused on the physical regeneration of the informal areas while some assisted in the provision of infrastructure or social services. Other NGOs have assisted in creating jobs for the poor households and others have focused on the social aspects of the informal areas.

One of the noteworthy contributions was the pilot project of an NGO³, which created a Linear Park along the Marioutiya drainage canal in Giza, Egypt. Their Renovation & Development of Sakkara Touristic Road project aimed at planting and beautifying 9000m² of a Linear Park along the canal. This pilot project was presented as a best practice at the Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances seminar at Ain Shams University.

Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances

The idea of exploring the opportunities of utilising Linear Parks along the waterways to improve the conditions in informal areas was initiated in September 2014 during the first seminar of the GDRI (Groupement de Recherche International) in Nantes, France, which was organised by the International Ambiances Network. Egyptian and French scholars participated in the seminar as part of the 2 years scientific collaboration program between Ain Shams University in Egypt and the 'Ambiances Architecturales et Urbaines' in France (IMHOTEP project 2014-2015)⁴, aiming at

1. The total prime agricultural land lost to urbanization during the period between 1952-2002 amounted to 120,000 hectares (GOPP 2007).

2. Egypt's population has grown to more than 90 millions in 2016 (CAPMAS 2016)

3. Pilot Project by Resalet Nour Ala Nour in Giza, Egypt (see Table 1).

4. A scientific Franco-Egyptian collaboration was initiated in January 2014 between Ain Shams University, Faculty of Engineering, Department of Urban Planning and Urban Design (DUPUD) and Grenoble School of Architecture (ENSAG), Cresson Laboratory (Research Center on Sonic Space & Urban Environment, UMR CNRS 1563 Ambiances, Architecture, Urbanités in France, as a part of the "IMHOTEP program". The IMHOTEP Program is funded by Campus France and the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology.

introducing the notions and methodologies related to ambiances into the Egyptian academic and professional context.

In December 2015, the concept of Linear Parks along the waterways and its potential was discussed during a follow up seminar on 'Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances: Emerging concept to enhance the quality of life in informal settlements'. The seminar had participations from South American countries and South Mediterranean countries exposing the Egyptian–French project team with many international examples from multidisciplinary domains of the Ambiance network. During the seminar, the participants had "table long" discussions to debate the constraints and opportunities of the concept. The seminar participants presented several relevant examples to bring the lessons learnt to the Egyptian context. The following sections recount the discussions from the seminar to outline the parameters that were seen as essential for the successful implementation of the Linear Park along the waterways to improve the living conditions and quality of life in informal areas.

Participation

Community participation and bottom up decision-making are key ingredients for the successful implementation of Linear Parks. The seminar participants presented best and worst practices in slum upgrading programs. The successful examples were when the residents of the informal areas became active participants in the decision-making and in the implementation of slum upgrading initiatives. Experiences have indicated that the sense of ownership is very important for the success and sustainability of programs that deal with low-income groups.

The analysis of some examples of Linear Parks along waterways indicated that the community who had been accustomed to dumping their wastes and pollutants into the waterways are the only ones who could become the protectors of it. The active participation of people to create and maintain Linear Parks is an essential ingredient to the recuperation of public space. Pascaline Thiollière (see Table 1) argued that participation was key to the recuperation of public spaces in Bogota, Columbia; and defined it as spaces where people spend a moment to step back, take a break, and distance themselves from sensory stimulations of the metropolis (pollution, noise, transactions, interactions).

Jacques Lolive (see Table 1) presented the Prosamim project area in the city of Manau, which is home to 80,000 inhabitants. The area is intersected by more than 130 water streams extending to more than 200 km long. The Prosamim program's objective was to utilise Manau's waterways to create Linear Parks and improve the quality of life to its citizens. However, the program was criticised for the absence of community engagement and participation. The residents had been displaced without consultation. In addition, the environmental aspects had been disregarded. The Igarapés (streams) have remained polluted and their canalisation and grounding would aggravate floods. The new housing areas did not include sewage treatment, which would increase the pollution of the Igarapés. The Manaus wastewater drained in the Rio Negro increasing its pollution and contamination. All of these negative outcomes could have been avoided if the residents were consulted and participated in the decision-making and implementation of the program.

Cintia Okamura (see Table 1) has drawn the correlation between ambiances and the participatory Process in São Paulo, Brazil. She explained the importance of promoting participatory processes to take into account the potential of the ambiances as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work to work out an inter-institutional and cross-sectoral partnership. She argued that articulating the power of ambiances would support the production of a new experience and catches attention, thus enables transformations and induces public policy. The design of a Linear Park is the product of a collective synthesis through a participatory process that allows building links and shared responsibility for the implementation and management.

An Integrated Approach

The seminar participants raised an important concern, which is the potential resentment of the community to prioritise the provision of open areas and parks over the provision of basic services that the poor communities residing in informal areas may need. Indeed, an integrated approach (education, health, land development, etc) to the improvements of the informal areas should be adopted. The provision of Linear Parks cannot be separated from other programs and projects that aim to improve the informal areas such as educational programs, health improvement program, infrastructure provision, waste collection and all other services that integrate to upgrade the informal areas.

As pointed out by Jacques Lolive, the housing program in Manaus failed because it was not integrated within a wider framework of sewage treatment systems and environmental management. Indeed, the UN Habitat (2009) argued that slum upgrading is only effective when linked with other initiatives or goals, such as poverty alleviation, health and education, preservation of historic city centers, environmental and sanitation improvement and city-wide infrastructure and transportation expansion.

Economic/Commercial Activities

The community will be encouraged to participate in implementing the Linear Parks and protecting the waterways if there is a financial benefit to them. Based on their experiences, the seminar participants argued that commercial activities should be encouraged in the Linear Parks. The commercial activities would offer jobs to the community in retail shops and bazars, kiosks, open air cafes, flower and plants nurseries, and some agricultural activities. These activities will bring quick returns to the community and will have a spinning effect to increasing the approach and repeating it in many other areas.

Public Awareness

An awareness campaign is a prerequisite to educate the community on the benefits of open areas and the protection of the waterways. The door-to-door engagement with the residents of the informal areas would recruit trainers and educators to spread the awareness among the community of the benefits of the Linear Parks. In Sao Paolo, the lack of awareness of people who use the Linear Park had negative

implications on the sustainability of the regeneration programs. Awareness is a key ingredient for participatory planning and participative management. The pilot project by Resalet Nour ala Nour NGO (see Table 1) indicated that the implementation of simple rehabilitation schemes for the Marioutiya Canal was a quick solution to an improved quality of life in the area, which generated awareness and spawned pride and a sense of ownership to the community.

Governance - Regulations and Penalties

The seminar participants presented an approach adopted by an NGO, which recruited senior women to monitor the park. Financial incentives were given to those women when the weekly visit from the NGO auditors found the area clean and well maintained. The women and their children would want to sustain the incentive and thus would monitor littering and stop the polluters of the waterways.

The municipal program of creating 40 Linear Parks in the city of São Paulo informed public policy through integrating the concept of Linear Parks and environmental concerns into the 2002 City Master Plan. Popular participation was a key component for the formulation and promotion of the public policy in São Paulo and a major factor for the enforcement of regulations and governance.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has outlined the opportunities that Linear Parks along waterways could offer to the improvement of the quality of life in informal areas through the intensification of the ambiance. It has documented and analysed the discussions and outcomes of the Linear Parks & Urban Ambiances seminar focusing on the debate about ambiances and the typology of places. The paper had recounted the seminar discussions while accounting that those findings are both fulsome, and also situated in the related literature/findings from other studies.

The seminar participants agreed that the concept of Linear Parks has an important role in ameliorating the poor conditions in informal settlements. The concept helps in preserving the water identity of the irrigation and drainage canals of former agricultural lands and creates a particular ambiance along the waterways. In the case of cities suffering from the lack of spaces like Cairo, Linear Parks provide a space where people can breath, meet, enjoy and entertain.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the seminar participants for their valuable insights and contributions. A large number of Professors and students of Ain Shams University participated in the seminar in addition to the following key participants:

| <i>Key Participant</i> | <i>Position</i> |
|------------------------|---|
| Dr. Sherif El Gohary | Manager TA & CB Unit, Informal Settlement Development Facility. |
| Mr. Hatem Farrag | Chairman of Ressalat Nour ala Nour. |

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|-----------------------|--|
| Pascal AMPHOUX | Founder and director of CONTREPOINT - urban projects, Lausanne. |
| Pascaline THIOILLIERE | Architect and an associated researcher to CRESSON laboratory. |
| Dr. Jacques LOLIVE | Senior researcher at CNRS (National Center of Scientific Research of France). |
| Dr. Cintia OKAMURA | Sociologist/Researcher at the CETESB (Environment Company of the State of São Paulo) |
| Dr. Jean-Paul THIBAUD | Senior Researcher at CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research, France). |

Table 4. Key Participants in the 'Linear Parks and Urban Ambiances' seminar at Ain Shams University in Cairo in December 2015

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