Trajectories and Challenges of Cultural Heritage Conservation in Historic Cairo Since the Mid-20th Century: Towards an Appropriate Conservation Approach for the Historic City

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Abstract Historic Cairo, in Egypt, is a living urban entity that was registered by the UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1979. Its historic urban core is crowded with outstanding medieval buildings which overlap with the city’s modern architecture and local people’s daily life activities. Unfortunately, despite receiving several conservation interventions, since the mid-20th century, most of the historic buildings in Cairo are in constant deterioration. Therefore, the study aimed at identifying the reasons behind this controversial situation, based on theoretical and practical methodologies. Through critical review of related literature and field survey, the study identified the shortcomings in the main conservation practices, implemented in Historic Cairo after the mid-20th century, and the current challenges for its effective conservation. The research findings clarified that no significant conservation effort was made in Historic Cairo during the 1950s and 1960s. While, since the early 1970s, about 17 mega conservation projects have been conducted, by national and international organizations, most of these projects adopted inappropriate conservation approaches which ignored the living nature of Historic Cairo and undermined the active participation and needs of the local community. The ‘top-down’ strategy prevailed in most conservation projects, in which the historic buildings were either ‘restored then closed’ without adaptive reuse or conserved for ‘touristic’ purposes without monitoring after conservation. Finally, the study concluded that the ‘local community’ oriented approach is the most appropriate for the effective conservation of Historic Cairo.

Key words Historic Cairo, heritage conservation, living cultural heritage, local community

Introduction

Recently, there has been a worldwide concern on safeguarding the significant historic cities as cultural heritage sites of outstanding universal values. The origins of this global interest and the contemporary policies of heritage conservation date from the 1815 ‘Congress of Vienna’, which set the basis for governmental approaches to safeguarding culture and nature (Bharne and Sandmeier 2019). However, collaboration on cultural heritage conservation didn’t globally gain force until the late 1960s, a period in which a series of events, such as the mission of saving the ‘Abu Simbel’ temples in Egypt, set the opportunity to prepare the 1972 UNESCO convention. Currently, about 869 properties are listed by the UNESCO as World Cultural Heritage Sites.1

Throughout the ages, numerous conservation approaches to cultural heritage sites have been developed. The early traditional conservation approaches emerged in Western European countries, such as Great Britain and Italy, during the Renaissance era (14th to 17th centuries) (Jokilehto 1986: 6–7). Such approaches focused on preserving the memorial and aesthetic qualities of specific historical buildings, for ‘nostalgic’ purposes, as references to past greatness. Then, during the 1870s, the socio-economic shifts and industrialization movement stimulated some developed countries to upkeep their cultural and natural resources for ‘leisure’ purposes (Hall 2011: 2). Later, a broader concept of cultural heritage and unconventional conservation approaches were developed through international treaties, conventions, and charters, to tackle contemporary issues. For instance, in response to the increasing forces of globalization, the Venice Charter of 1964 and the Nara Document on Authenticity of 1994 were declared to ensure the ‘Authenticity’ of cultural heritage sites and respect of ‘Cultural Diversity.’ Similarly, in response to the worldwide spreading processes of industrialization and urbanization, the 1972
UNESCO convention recommended the ‘sustainable development’ approach in which cultural heritage sites serve as catalysts for environmental, economic, and social well-being (Labadi 2019). Moreover, the 2005 operational guidelines of the UNESCO convention promoted the involvement of ‘local community’ as a main partner in the conservation process of the historic urban landscapes (UNESCO 2005: 3). This approach aimed at addressing the shortcomings of the ‘materially’ and ‘visually’ trends, which dominated the ‘authorized heritage discourse’ on historic urban landscapes, and often resulted in conflict between local people and policy makers (Fouseki 2019).

In a similar vein, Sedky (2009: 18) identified three groups that should be involved in the conservation of cultural heritage sites: 1) The local people, 2) The international heritage community, and 3) The national government. The involvement of the three groups in the conservation projects is indispensable, especially, in living cultural heritage sites which are still inhabited and where traditional lifestyle, skills and crafts of its inhabitants still exist (Ahmed 2007). Inevitably, the daily interaction of local people with the historic buildings in these sites generates symbolic meanings and socio-economic values to cultural heritage (Mahdy 2017: 98), that should be considered by the conservation actors. Moreover, the conservation process of such sites should be treated as a “dynamic social process” (Tanaka 2018) of “multi-disciplinary practices” (Hampikian 1999), which requires consensus between all concerned groups.

Historic Cairo (القاهرة التاريخية) is a living world cultural heritage site. It is considered the world’s largest urban entity which maintains traditional medieval features (El Hakeh 2018: 15). Moreover, it is argued that “only Rome, in the entire the world, can rival with the importance of Cairo’s architectural heritage” (Antoniou et al. 1985: 120). The living nature of Historic Cairo is maintained through the deep intersection between its historic buildings and daily traditional activities of local people. However, since the mid-20th century, this nature is threatened by severe problems and inappropriate conservation approaches. A governmental report in 1951 indicated that about 130 of 622 medieval buildings in Cairo, listed by the Egyptian government, have completely vanished (Sutton and Fahmi 2002). Unfortunately, the local government could not deal with the matter, due to lack of financial and technical abilities. Therefore, the international community was urged to safeguard Cairo’s legacy, especially after Europe has lost its medieval heritage (Bacharach 1995).

Since then, several national and international conservation efforts were conducted to stop the deterioration of Historic Cairo, including its registration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Despite these efforts, the degradation of Historic Cairo continued, and another eighty historic buildings have vanished over the past forty years (Lamei 2005). In this context, the study examines the controversial case of Historic Cairo, after 1952, when substantial changes in the management and state of conservation of its cultural heritage got underway. It aims to identify the actual reasons behind the deterioration of Historic Cairo since the mid-20th century, despite receiving several conservation projects.

**Methods**

The discourse in this study is based on theoretical and practical methodologies, including literature and field surveys. Firstly, a brief background is provided on Historic Cairo and its history of conservation through an intensive review of recent studies and Sayyid (2004) which is an important edited and republished prime historical resource of the historian ‘Al-Maqrizi’ with detailed and comprehensive information on Islamic Egypt and its capitals. Moreover, the final reports and related literature of the main conservation projects implemented in Historic Cairo since the mid-20th century, were critically analyzed to identify the shortcomings in its approaches. Some of the current challenges for the conservation of Historic Cairo were identified through reviewing the UNESCO’s annual ‘State of Conservation’ (SoC) reports, since 1993, and recent studies on Historic Cairo.

Secondly, during a field visit to Historic Cairo in December 2018, further environmental, socio-economic, and managerial conservation issues have been directly observed at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ and ‘Khan El-Khalili’ quarters (Figure 1). Both quarters were selected as typical examples of impoverished and touristic historic quarters, to the South and to the North of Historic Cairo, respectively. Then, during another field visit in December 2019, the preliminary observed data was supported by further discussion with stakeholders and local people at both historic quarters. Three stakeholders, who represent three different levels of responsibility with broad experience of the recent conservation projects in Historic Cairo or both historic quarters, were carefully selected and interviewed: The current executive director of the Historic Cairo Restoration Project (HCRP) was interviewed as a representative of a general governmental unit which supervises and monitors all the conservation projects in Historic Cairo since 1998. Likewise, the current director of the ‘Khan El-Khalili Antiquities’ was interviewed,
as a representative of a regional governmental administration where conflict with shopkeepers often emerges during the conservation projects. And the current director of Megawra Built Environment Collective (hereinafter Megawra) was interviewed, as a representative of a national NGO which was involved in recent conservation projects at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ quarter. Through semi-structured interviews, the three stakeholders were asked about their perspectives on three main points: the recent conservation approaches in Historic Cairo, the role of local people in the conservation process, and the current challenges for the conservation of Historic Cairo. Similarly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 shopkeepers at the ‘Khan El-Khalili’ quarter and about 50 residents were surveyed, through paper-based questionnaires, at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ quarter. To avoid bias, the interviewees at both quarters were randomly selected. They represented different groups of gender (male/female), age and residence period (18–65 years), and residence status (tenants/owners). In general, the local people were surveyed in streets, shops, or houses and were asked about two main points: their perceptions on the values of the surrounding historic buildings to them and whether they have previously contributed to their conservation or not. All interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed, translated, and thematically analyzed, while the questionnaires’ data was statistically analyzed using the SPSS software.

**Historical Background**

The distinctive identity of Historic Cairo was formed by various accumulated layers, when it served as the economic, religious, political, and cultural center of the Islamic world, during the medieval ages. Historic Cairo is a complex of four successive capitals, of Islamic Egypt, which were built on the Eastern bank of the Nile River (Figure 2). These capitals were: ‘Al-Fustat’ (The tent) built in 642, ‘Al-Askar’ (The soldiers) built in 750, ‘Al-Qata’i’ (The pieces) built in 868, and ‘Al-Qahira’ (The victorious) or Fatimid Cairo built in 969. As a sign of full control, it was the Muslim rulers’ habit to build a new capital with a
congregational mosque in the newly conquered countries (Raymond 2000: 12). As shown in Figure 2, the four capitals extended from South to North, due to the extension constraints of the ‘Al-Moqattam’ hills to the East and the Nile River to the West. Accordingly, in 1171, the Ayyubid sultan ‘Saladin’ decided to enclose the four previous capitals into one wall, instead of building a new capital (Sayyid 2004: 15–157). The large capital of ‘Saladin’ maintained its borders during the following Mamluk and Ottoman ages (1250–1805), despite the Nile river’s continuous regression westward which provided more space for extension (Williams 2002: 8). Then, during the reign of ‘Mohamed Ali Pasha’ and his family (1805–1952), a new European style area called ‘Khedival Cairo’ was established to the West, outside the borders of ‘Saladin’ capital (Figure 1).

Unfortunately, nothing remains from the first three capitals except for a few religious buildings, such as the mosque of ‘Amr Ibn Al-Aas’ (Figure 3a), which was enlarged several times, and the mosque of ‘Ahmed Ibn Tulun’ (Figure 3b), which is almost intact. The first capital, ‘Al-Fustat’, was burnt down in 1168, during a struggle between Fatimid viziers over rule (Raymond 2000: 75), while ‘Al-Askar’ and ‘Al-Qata’i’ were largely destroyed during the catastrophic famine which occurred between 1064 and 1071 (Ta‘ā 1998: 12). Therefore, most of the surviving historic buildings in Cairo were built between the late 10th and the mid-20th centuries, and they are concentrated in the ‘Fatimid capital,’ ‘Al-Qahira,’ alongside the ‘Al-Muiz’ street (Figure 1).

On March 9th, 1979, the UNESCO registered ‘Islamic Cairo’ as a World Heritage Site. Interestingly, its first designated area was extremely aligned with the Northern and Eastern borders of ‘Saladin’ capital (Figures 1 and 2). In the 1990s, the boundaries of the property were extended southward to include the Coptic quarter and the archeological site of ‘Al-Fustat’ (Sedky 2009), known as ‘Old Cairo.’ Finally, upon the Egyptian government’s request in 2007, the UNESCO changed the property name to ‘Historic Cairo’ after including the ‘Eastern Cemetery’ in its boundaries (Rappai 2012). Hence, the current designated area of ‘Historic Cairo’ could be
divided into four sections: 1) ‘Old Cairo’ to the South, 2) ‘Fatimid Cairo’ to the North, 3) The intermediate urban area between ‘Old Cairo’ and ‘Fatimid Cairo,’ including the ‘Al-Khalifa’ and ‘Al-Darb Al-Ahmar’ quarters, and 4) The Eastern cemetery.

Transitions of Heritage Conservation in Cairo Since the Mid-20th Century

Actors of conservation

In Cairo’s medieval ages (642–1805), most religious buildings were autonomously maintained through the ‘Waqf’ (Endowment) system in which rich people donate the rents of their private properties to finance the regular maintenance of specific religious buildings. In addition, a few voluntary efforts were implemented by caliphs, sultans, and emirs to conserve an individual or cluster of historic buildings. For instance, a large restoration initiative was conducted by the Mamluk sultan ‘Al-Nasir Mohamed’ after the destructive earthquake of 1303 (Hampikian 1999), while, in Cairo’s modern age (1805–1952), the conservation process became more systematic, centralized, and included non-religious buildings. In 1835, a governmental authority called the ‘Diwan Umumy Al-Awqaf’ (General Bureau of Endowments) was founded to manage the endowments’ financial resources in Egypt. Then, in 1881, the ‘Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe’ (hereinafter Comité) was established, as a specialized committee, to supervise the conservation of the historic buildings in Egypt. Then, in 1881, the ‘Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe’ (hereinafter Comité) was established, as a specialized committee, to supervise the conservation of the historic buildings in Egypt. It included national and foreign experts who conducted significant conservation efforts in Historic Cairo. After the revolution of 1952, the existence of foreigners was no longer welcomed in the Egyptian administrations (Sutton and Fahmi 2002), therefore, the Comité was replaced by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization (EAO) which included only Egyptian members. Surprisingly, the UNESCO report of 1980 stated that the monuments of Historic Cairo were well preserved until the mid-20th century (Antoniou et al. 1985: 14), which indicates the effective efforts of the Comité and the negative consequences on Historic Cairo after the cessation of its work.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the situation in Historic Cairo was drastically changed and several historic buildings were seriously deteriorated. Mahdy (2017: 75) argued that the EAO adopted an abstracted restoration approach which sometimes harmed the historic buildings and disregarded the local people’s needs. Then, as shown in Table 1, since the early 1970s, many national and international organizations, NGOs, and research institutes have been involved in the conservation of Historic Cairo, especially after its registration as a World Heritage Site in 1979.

In 1994, the EAO name changed to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) which was affiliated with the Ministry of Culture (MoC) and included a special department for Historic Cairo. Then, in 1998, the Historic Cairo Restoration Project (HCRP) was founded as an independent governmental unit to encompass the concerned bodies with the conservation of Historic Cairo. The unit was headed by the minister of culture and included representatives from the Ministry of Endowments (MoE), Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA), National Organization of Urban Harmony (NOUH), and Cairo Governorate, however, they rarely meet (Sedky 2009: 225). Then, in 2011, the HCRP unit became part of the Ministry of Antiquities (MoA) which replaced the SCA in supervising and conducting the conservation projects in Historic Cairo. In December 2019, the ministries of

Figure 3. Remains of the first three capitals of Islamic Egypt. a. Mosque of Amr Ib Al-Aas. b. Mosque of Ahmed Ibn Tulun. Source: taken by first author (October 2015).
Antiquities and Tourism were merged. Nevertheless, the efforts of both national and international conservation actors didn’t stop the continuous degradation of Historic Cairo (Angl 2018). The following section highlights the shortcomings in the main conservation projects that have been implemented in Historic Cairo, by both national and international conservation actors, since the mid-20th century.

**Policies of Conservation**

Since the mid-20th century, several conservation projects with different approaches were implemented in Historic Cairo. During the 1950s and 1960s, almost no significant conservation effort had been done in Historic Cairo (Mahdy 2017: 68). Then, in the early 1970s, the dilapidated status of historic Cairo prompted the international community to take a role in its conservation, either individually or through cooperation with the Egyptian government. Table 1 shows the main conservation projects conducted in Historic Cairo, since the early 1970s, which could be classified into three main categories: Planning, Restoration, and Rehabilitation or revitalization projects.5

Table 1. Main conservation efforts in Historic Cairo since the 1970s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Organizations’ Abbreviation</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972 - 2000</td>
<td>The Polish-Egyptian Mission for the Restoration of Islamic Monuments in Cairo</td>
<td>Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology &amp; Egyptian Antiquities Organization</td>
<td>PCMA &amp; EAO</td>
<td>⃝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973 - 1983</td>
<td>The Rehabilitation of Durb Qirnim Quarter</td>
<td>German Archaeology Institute &amp; Egyptian Antiquities Organization</td>
<td>DAI &amp; EAO</td>
<td>⃝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 - 1983</td>
<td>The Restoration of ‘Gawhariya’ Madrassa</td>
<td>Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts</td>
<td>KADK</td>
<td>⃣</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1998</td>
<td>The Italian-Egyptian Restoration Project</td>
<td>Italian-Egyptian Center for Restoration and Archaeology &amp; Egyptian Antiquities Organization</td>
<td>CIERA &amp; EAO</td>
<td>⃣</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>The Conservation Plan of the Old City of Cairo</td>
<td>UNESCO World Heritage Center</td>
<td>UNESCO-WHC</td>
<td>⃣</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 1987</td>
<td>The Restoration of ‘Al-Nasir Mohamed’ Madrassa</td>
<td>German Archaeology Institute</td>
<td>DAI</td>
<td>⥧</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 - 2005</td>
<td>The Restoration of Al-Madrassa Al-Salihia &amp; Bab Zuwayila</td>
<td>American Research Center in Egypt</td>
<td>ARCE</td>
<td>⬬</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>The Rehabilitation Plan of Historic Cairo (HCRP)</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 - 2006</td>
<td>Historic Cairo Restoration Project</td>
<td>Ministry of Culture</td>
<td>MoC</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 - 2006</td>
<td>The Rehabilitation of Old Cairo ‘Mugamma’ Al-Adyan’</td>
<td>Ministry of Tourism &amp; Italian-Egyptian Debt for Development Swap &amp; Cairo Governorate</td>
<td>MoT &amp; IEDS &amp; CG</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 - 2004</td>
<td>The Revitalization of Al-Suyeda Zeinab Quarter</td>
<td>Ministry of Tourism &amp; City of Paris &amp; Cairo Governorate</td>
<td>MoT &amp; CoP &amp; CG</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 - 2014</td>
<td>Urban Regeneration Project for Historic Cairo (URHC)</td>
<td>UNESCO World Heritage Center</td>
<td>UNESCO-WHC</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 - 2015</td>
<td>The Restoration of Shagaret Eddor and Fatimid Domes</td>
<td>American University in Cairo &amp; Barakat Trust &amp; Megawra Built Environment</td>
<td>AUC &amp; BT &amp; Megawra</td>
<td>⬤</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Main conservation efforts in Historic Cairo since the 1970s

Source: edited by authors based on data in Rappai (2012) and several projects’ reports.
economic conditions in Historic Cairo’s district. Then, the plan proposed a practical strategy for conserving 450 historic buildings in six priority zones, over five years (Antoniou et al. 1985: 7). According to Sedky (2009: 18), the UNESCO plan adopted the concept of ‘Area Conservation’ in Historic Cairo, which targets the conservation of a cluster of buildings and its surrounding urban area. Besides, it recommended the consideration of the local people’s needs in the subsequent conservation projects, even though the plan and its approach are not yet fully implemented. The second plan was introduced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1997. Its framework proposed a set of conservation guidelines for five urban areas in Historic Cairo (UNDP 1997: 45), which overlap with those identified in the UNESCO plan of 1980. However, the scope of the UNDP plan is more specific; targeting poverty alleviation, rehabilitating the historic buildings, upgrading the infrastructure, and restructuring a management system (Rappai 2012: 15). The plan proposed the ‘tourism-oriented’ approach to tackle the financial issues of conservation and guarantee the regular maintenance of Cairo’s historic buildings through maximizing their economic value. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government was widely criticized for the improper implementation of the UNDP strategy (Sutton and Fahmi 2002), which led to an intensive touristification of historic rearward quarters, such as the ‘Khan El-Khalili.’

The third plan was designed by the UNESCO World Heritage Center in Egypt (UNESCO-WHC) over two phases, between 2010 and 2014. The first phase focused on urgent and critical issues, such as identifying the property borders and buffer zone, tracing its development, creating an information system, and assessing the historic

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**Figure 4.** Distribution of the main conservation projects in Historic Cairo since the 1970s.
Source: Rappai (2012) and updated by authors.
urban fabric in 69 districts (Rappai 2012: 18). In the second phase, the UNESCO-WHC plan proposed a management system and an action conservation strategy for a pilot study area, which was intentionally ignored in the previous two plans. Although the national technical staff was trained on implementing this strategy (Drumm 2014: 11, 48), no significant effort has been yet made in that area.

Restoration Projects Since the early 1970s, about nine restoration projects have been implemented in Historic Cairo. Most of these projects, which were either funded or conducted by foreign organizations, targeted the restoration of individual or complexes of historic buildings at the Northern section of Historic Cairo (Figure 4). The first project was conducted by the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) and the EAO, between 1972 and 2000. The Polish-Egyptian mission restored the 16th century complex of the Mamluk emir 'Qurqumas' at the Northern cemetery (Kania 2000). Despite its long term, the project included archaeological excavation, documentation, and designation of a buffer zone which allowed for the conservation of nearby complexes that were neglected until then (Witkowski 2011). However, no functions were allocated to the restored complexes which would have boosted the socio-economic values of the nearby poor community.

In 1973, the German Archaeology Institute (DAI) and the EAO initiated a rehabilitation project for the 'Darb Qirmiz' historic quarter. Over ten years, the first two phases of the project were completed and resulted in the restoration of seven listed buildings in the quarter, while the second two phases, which targeted the rehabilitation of all houses overlooking the main streets in the quarter, were not completed due to financial issues. Nevertheless, the project was praised by the global heritage community for its significant outcomes and for employing local artisans in the restoration process. Thus, it received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (AKAA) of the 1981–1983 cycle (AKAA 1985: 96). Later, in May 1974, a group of students and professors from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (KADK) proposed a comprehensive restoration framework for the 15th century 'Al-Madrasa Al-Gawhariya' building, adjacent to the 'Al-Azhar' mosque (Wohlert 1996: 6). The implementation process was preceded by a full documentation of the building which allowed for an inclusive restoration of its deteriorated masonry and decorations. The project was implemented over ten years, through the cooperation between students, experts, and craftsmen from Egypt and Denmark. Its outcomes were appreciated by the global heritage community, and therefore, it received the AKAA award (AKAA 1992).

Over two phases, between 1976 and 1998, the Italian-Egyptian Center for Restoration and Archaeology (CIERA) and the EAO conducted a collective restoration project for a cluster of historic buildings in Cairo. In 1988, the first phase was completed by the restoration of the 16th century 'Tekeyia Al-Mawlawayia' building, which currently functions as a cultural center for folk arts and Sufism festivals (Zaki 2019). While the second phase, which lasted for ten years, resulted in the restoration of neighboring 14th century buildings, e.g., the 'Sunqur Al-Sādi' Madrassa and the Mamluk palace of emir 'Yashbuk' (Fanfoni 1999). Then, in 1985, the German Archaeology Institute (DAI) launched a significant project for the restoration of the 14th century Madrassa of 'Al-Nasir Mohamed Ibn Qlawun' at 'Al-Muiz' street. Over two years, preceded by careful documentation and mapping of the buildings, the project team managed to repair and maintain the decayed masonry, ceiling, and wooden and metal artifacts of the building (Speiser 2008). Then, the building was re-opened for the public and tourists. Clearly, the CIERA and the second DAI projects had significant outcomes, which have direct implications on the socio-economic values of local people, through the adaptive reuse of the restored historic buildings in cultural and touristic activities. Nevertheless, nothing is mentioned in the projects’ reports about the involvement or consultation of the local community on these activities.

Similarly, between 1995 and 2005, the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) conducted two restoration projects for individual buildings in Historic Cairo. The first project applied an ‘honest restoration’ approach for the 13th century building of 'Al-Madrasa Al-Salihya', through uncovering the accumulated stucco layers over its remaining parts (Hampikian 1999). Currently, the local people use the restored entrance of the building as an access to their houses and shops, while the second project targeted the restoration of the 'Bab Zuwayla' gate, built in 1092, at the Southern end of 'Al-Muiz' street. Although the restored gate attracts many tourists, the project led to the clearance of small local businesses during the superficial beautification of the urban landscape around the gate. Additionally, the Egyptian Ministry of Culture, through the HCRP unit, implemented an enormous restoration project in Historic Cairo with foreign funds, especially from the UNESCO. Over four phases, between 1998 and 2006, the HCRP unit targeted the restoration of about 147 listed buildings and 48 non-listed
buildings in Historic Cairo, but only 149 buildings were actually restored (Aalund 2005). Currently, some of the restored buildings are used in cultural and touristic activities, such as folkloric arts or museums. On the contrary, most historic buildings were closed after conservation without a function and have gradually deteriorated. Moreover, the ICOMOS monitoring mission to Cairo in 2001 criticized the project for privatization, prioritizing income-generation, and distorting the historic city's identity (Aalund 2005; Mahdy 2017: 74). For example, the 'Al-Muiz' street has been transformed into an open-air museum and its traditional style buildings were modernized and reallocated to tourist-based activities. As a result, the HCRP director stated that his current role is limited to conducting necessary studies, monitoring the changes in the property, and supervising the on-going conservation projects in Historic Cairo. Clearly, this reflects the lack of global confidence in the local government’s skills and abilities in conducting effective conservation projects in Historic Cairo, and therefore, the subsequent governmental initiatives have been carried out in collaboration with international organizations.

Furthermore, between 2005 and 2009, an international NGO called the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) conducted several restoration projects at the ‘Al-Darb Al-Ahmar’ quarter in Historic Cairo. With the cooperation of the ARCE, it restored the 14th century mosques of ‘Aslam Al-Silahdar’ and ‘Aq Sonqur,’ which had deteriorated and were closed after the 1992 earthquake (ARCE 2009; AKTC 2015). The project employed skilled local laborers and craftsmen during the implementation process and both buildings were re-opened to the public. Later, between 2013 and 2015, the American University in Cairo (AUC) and the Barakat Trust conducted a massive restoration project at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ quarter. The project succeeded in restoring the mid-13th century burial dome of sultan ‘Shagaret Eddor’ and rehabilitating its adjacent non-functioning mosque to serve as a community center (Shoukry 2016: 73). Then, with additional fund from the ARCE, the project restored the Fatimid mausoleums of ‘Sayedat Atika, Sidi Al-Jafari, and Sayeda Roqwaya,’ in front of the ‘Shagaret Eddor’ dome (ARCE 2015). Currently, only the complex of ‘Shagaret Eddor’ is well-preserved and functioning, unlike the three Fatimid domes which are often closed and have deteriorated. Therefore, the project sponsored a regional NGO called Megawra to conduct field research on the groundwater problem threatening the historic buildings at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ quarter (Megawra Built Environment Collective 2016). In a similar vein, during the interview with the Megawra director, she highlighted the organization’s efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions in the region, over the past decade, which included heritage education programs for local children and women, and workshops and exhibitions for local artisans. Overall, this project highlights the inevitable role of national NGOs and ‘adaptive reuse’ of restored buildings, in compatible community activities, in maximizing the positive outcomes and sustainability of the conservation projects in Historic Cairo.

Rehabilitation and Revitalization Projects The earthquake of 1992 caused great damage to large urban areas in Historic Cairo (Aalund 2005), and thus, the restoration of individual buildings was insufficient. Therefore, four mega rehabilitation and revitalization projects have been conducted in specific historic quarters which have been badly damaged by the earthquake. Except for the project of the ‘Al-Darb Al-Ahmar’ quarter, which was fully implemented by an international NGO, all projects were implemented by the Egyptian government through financial or technical support of international organizations.

In 1994, with a fund from the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development (AFSED), the SCA launched the rehabilitation project of the ‘Al-Darb Al-Asfar’ alley at Fatimid Cairo (Figure 4). The project was completed in 2001 and led to the restoration of a historic gate and three historic houses from the 17th and 19th centuries. Moreover, the project upgraded the alley’s infrastructure and urban view, after consultations with about 100 local families, through a regional national NGO called Mashrabeiya (Elnoaly and Elseragy 2013). Although the local people were involved in the decision-making of the project, they criticized the project for restricting traffic. Meanwhile, the global heritage community criticized the project for the superficial beautification of some houses overlooking the main street, while ignoring those in the side lanes, and for removing six 18th century shops in the alley (Sedky 2009: 173). Similarly, between 1999 and 2006, the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) and Cairo Governorate implemented a rehabilitation project for the ‘Old Cairo’ quarter to the South of Historic Cairo. The project focused on renovating the public spaces and services and beautifying the façades of 350 houses and shops overlooking main streets for tourism purposes (Rappai 2012: 16). Then, with a fund from the Italian-Egyptian Debt for Development Swap (IEDS) program, the project accomplished minimal restorations to Roman and Coptic monuments in the quarter, and a new market was established to support the traditional crafts in
the area. However, Sedky (2009: 132) claimed that the merely ‘tourism-oriented’ approach of this project led to serious socio-economic consequences, such as the dramatic increase of land prices and rents, security and traffic restrictions, and depopulation. In general, the discrepancy between the objectives and outcomes of both projects is a natural result of restricting the role of local people to just consultation, during the planning process, and marginalizing their active participation, during the implementation process.

Additionally, in 2002, a joint technical project was launched by local government, represented by Cairo Governorate and Ministry of Tourism (MoT), with international technical support from the City of Paris. The municipality of Paris was invited to this project upon a friendship treaty signed in 1985, with Cairo Governorate, to transfer its experience in engaging the local community in heritage conservation. The project targeted the revitalization of the ‘Al-Sayed Zainab’ historic quarter, at the Southwest of Historic Cairo. Over three phases, proceeded by field survey, the project was completed in 2005 and resulted in the rehabilitation of some historic buildings at the ‘Abdul Megeid Al-Laban’ street, and the reallocation of workshops at the ‘Abu El-Dahab’ street (De Roeck 2005). Although the involvement of local community in decision-making was a critical part of its implementation (Rappai 2012: 17), the project’s outcome was quite different from its objective, by focusing on the surface beautification of urban areas surrounding the famous religious buildings for tourism purposes. This reflects the local government’s concern for the economic benefits of cultural heritage and their indifference to the local people’s values or needs. Finally, between 2000 and 2005, a significant revitalization project for the ‘Al-Darb Al-Ahmar’ historic quarter was implemented by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). The project adopted an unconventional conservation approach which focused on improving the residents’ quality of life and conducting minimal restorations to specific historic buildings in three main areas at the quarter (AKTC et al. 2005: 3). The project provided micro-credits for the residents who wished to rehabilitate their houses by themselves, after receiving an intensive training in restoration. Also, the global heritage community praised the project for employing skilled local craftsmen during the implementation process (Mahdy 2017: 77). The AKTC avoided several bureaucratic and legislative constraints that would have hindered the application of its approach by controlling all the project missions, upon a protocol signed with the Egyptian government in 1999 (Sedky 2009: 168).

Arguably, the AKTC project is a good model of active cooperation between local government, international NGOs, and local people. Meanwhile, it highlighted various managerial challenges for the effective conservation of Historic Cairo which will be discussed, together with other issues, in the following section.

Challenges for Heritage Conservation in Historic Cairo Since the Mid-20th Century

Hampikian (1999) described Cairo's historic core as “so dense and typically overlapping”, which refers to the complexity of the urban design in Historic Cairo and its conservation challenges. Most of these challenges are environmental and socio-economic issues that have emerged since the mid-20th century (Antoniou et al. 1985: 43–68). Additionally, some natural, legal, and managerial issues were identified in recent studies on Historic Cairo (Sutton and Fahmi 2002; Antoniou 2004; Aalund 2005; Lamei 2005; Sedky 2009; Gharib 2011; Mahdy 2017; Angl 2018; Osman 2018). Besides, further conservation issues were explored through direct observation and interviews with stakeholders and local people at the ‘Al-Khalifa’ and ‘Khan El-Khalili’ quarters. Table 2 summarizes the different types of challenges to the conservation of Historic Cairo since the mid-20th century.

Natural disasters, e.g., earthquakes and landslides are rare in Egypt. However, a few previous accidents had severe impacts on Historic Cairo which have not yet been handled. For instance, a destructive earthquake of about 5.4 magnitude occurred on 12th October 1992 and resulted in 554 deaths and 20,000 injuries (El-Sayed et al. 2001). Moreover, about 125 historic buildings were damaged (Mahdy 2017: 72). Then, in 2008, a massive rockslide of ‘Al-Moqattam’ hills (Figure 1) killed about 130 persons in the nearby slum area, and threatened unique medieval domes and mosques in the area. Additionally, the continuing global climate change poses severe problems to Historic Cairo. For example, the dust of seasonal sandstorms raises the elevation of streets and creates accumulated layers on top of historic buildings. Along with the high levels of humidity, seasonal rains, and lack of regular maintenance, the ceilings of these buildings are vulnerable to collapse (Antoniou et al. 1985: 61). Moreover, the naturally low level of Historic Cairo’s elevation resulted in widespread environmental problems. For example, the intensive urbanization of higher peripheral areas to Historic Cairo, since the early 1950s (Antoniou et al. 1985: 60) increased the pressure on its dilapidated water supply and sewerage systems, and thus, resulted...
in the rising of the groundwater table. Because most of Cairo's historic buildings were founded on a low level of about 3.5 to 4 m below street levels (Lamei 2005), they are currently submerged in sewage (Figure 5a). Another problem is the lack of a solid waste disposal system in Historic Cairo; therefore, the residents sometimes throw their wastes in vacant spaces or beside non-functioning historic buildings (Figure 5b). Besides, the historic buildings in the prevalent narrow alleys in Historic Cairo are always threatened by strong shakes by passing heavy traffic and are exposed to fire (Figure 5c). In addition, due to the dense urban tissue of Historic Cairo, there is a shortage of large green areas and public spaces where local people can enjoy outdoor recreational and cultural activities. Thus, the 'Al-Muiz' street and courts of some historic buildings are usually exploited in such activities with a large number of visitors, beyond its capacity, which may badly affect the historic buildings.

Moreover, several socio-economic conservation issues emerged in Historic Cairo since the mid-20th century. According to Aalund (2005), about 50% of Historic Cairo's inhabitants had only primary education. Meanwhile, a survey conducted in 2006 reported that about 20% of the population of Historic Cairo are illiterates (Rappai 2012: 79). The illiteracy, high population density, and low quality of life are common issues in Historic Cairo, especially in the Southern quarters (Gharib 2011). Usually, these issues lead to the encroachment on or abuse of historic buildings, owing to the lack of awareness of its value. Similarly, the intensive touristification of the historic urban areas in Historic Cairo, such as the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter (Figure 5d), often results in depopulation and abuse of historic buildings. Surprisingly, the shopkeepers at the 'Khan El-Khalili' have no problem with the exploitation of the quarter's historic buildings in business activities. Dialectically, one of the shopkeepers said that: “I think there is no problem; this [business] adds value to the buildings and inspires tourists”, while another shopkeeper said that: “there is no problem with those who use the interior spaces of historic buildings”. Obviously, the shopkeepers' comments reflect their indifference to the conservation of the historic buildings and their interest in their economic value only, which is also the favorite approach of the local government to the conservation issues in Historic Cairo. Such an approach contributed to the deterioration of many historic buildings in Historic Cairo. According to the 2012 UNESCO-WHC survey, about 86% percent of Cairo's historic buildings are in poor condition, deteriorating or partially in ruins (Rappai 2012: 90), but the lack of finance constrained the regular maintenance of these buildings. In contrast, almost half of the surveyed local people at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter participated in the conservation of specific historic buildings in their region, either individually or through an initiative of 'Megawra.' Interestingly, it is found that the conserved buildings have special meanings to local people, e.g., functional, memorial, or spiritual, which influenced their behavior towards its conservation. This unique case highlights the importance of understanding the symbolic meanings and values which are held by local people to the historic buildings, known as 'Sense of Place' (Shamai 1991).

**Table 2. Challenges for the conservation of Historic Cairo since the mid-20th century**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural</th>
<th>Environmental</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Earthquakes</td>
<td>- Dilapidated infrastructure &amp; rising water table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rockslides of Al-Moqattam hills</td>
<td>- Disposal of solid waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Climate change (sandstorms, dampness, and rains)</td>
<td>- Narrow streets and alleys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Low terrain level</td>
<td>- Heavy vehicular traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Disposal of solid waste</td>
<td>- Lack of green areas &amp; Wide public spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Economic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- High illiteracy</td>
<td>- Commercialization &amp; Touristification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Depopulation in some districts</td>
<td>- Inconsistent modern industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- High density in other districts</td>
<td>- Lack of financial resources for conservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Poor quality of life</td>
<td>- Unemployment &amp; Low income of local people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal</th>
<th>Managerial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Insufficient legislations</td>
<td>- Overlapping responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Contradictory laws and decrees</td>
<td>- Conflict of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inapplicable regulations</td>
<td>- Lack of regular maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inactive regulations</td>
<td>- Lack of coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Overlapping responsibilities</td>
<td>- Inappropriate approaches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: edited by authors based on data in related literature such as Antoniou et al. (1985); Aalund (2005); Lamei (2005); Sedky (2009); Mahdy (2017); Angl (2018); Osman (2018) and field visits
Moreover, a lot of national legislations were formulated, since the early 1950s, to stipulate responsibilities of the conservation agents and set the guidelines of heritage conservation in Historic Cairo (Table 3). Nevertheless, according to Osman (2018), these legislations are “several steps behind compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the world”. For example, the listed buildings in Egypt were protected by law no.215 of 1951, then, it is replaced by the current law no.117 of 1983 which stipulates that a historic building must exceed 100 years old be to be listed as an antiquity. As a result, many valuable historic buildings which didn’t exceed that life span were not listed (El-Gamal 2007: 84). Meanwhile, other historic buildings which are eligible for registration as national monuments were intentionally ignored and have gradually deteriorated. Moreover, law no.117 of 1983 commissioned the conservation of the listed buildings to the Ministry of Antiquities (MoA), which often conflict with the interests of other competent authorities. For instance, the Ministry of Endowments (MoE) owns about 80–90% of the historic buildings in Cairo (Aalund 2005), however, its plans to rent or sell these buildings are usually blocked by the MoA (Mahdy 2017: 68). Consequently, the MoE allocates little money to the conservation of its own historic buildings in Cairo, such as occurred after the earthquake of 1992 (Sedky 2009: 170). Also, an overlap of responsibilities emerged, since 1979, when Cairo Governorate gained legal authority over the historic buildings in Historic Cairo. On several occasions, Cairo Governorate issues permissions for the exploitation of some non-listed historic buildings in public and touristic services (Hampikian 1999), which is the identified task of

**Figure 5.** Views of current conservation issues at the Al-Khalifa and Khan El-Khalili quarters.

Indeed, the lack of systematic management is repeatedly mentioned in the UNESCO annual ‘State of Conservation’ reports on Historic Cairo (UNESCO 1993–2019), while structuring such a management system has not yet been considered by the Egyptian government. In this regard, the HCRP director warned that “the future of the historic city will be destroyed if urgent coordination didn’t exist between the competent state authorities”. His comment reflects the serious consequences of the overlapped responsibilities for Historic Cairo, and why solving this problem should be treated as a priority. Additionally, some legislations disregarded the complex nature of the historic urban landscape in Cairo. For example, the decree no. 257 of 1980, issued by the governor of Cairo, identified the buffer zone of the listed building in Cairo by 50 m radius. Practically, this regulation is inapplicable in Historic Cairo, especially in the highly dense urban areas, where the buffer zones of listed buildings, non-listed buildings, modern houses, and local people’s activities typically overlap. The HCRP director highlighted this controversial issue, stating that “although the punishment of encroachments has been tightened, some people are still encroaching on the historic buildings taking advantage of its interrelated buffer zone with their own properties”. His comment confirms the ineffectiveness of the current buffer zone regulations in Historic Cairo and the need for its reconsideration.

On the other hand, the non-listed buildings of distinct value in Egypt are protected by law no. 178 of 1961. However, until 2006, there were no restrictions on the demolition of dilapidated non-listed historic buildings, therefore, some of them were intentionally kept without maintenance to justify their demolition (Mahdy 2017: 112). In addition, until 1990, there was no control over the heights or finishing materials of the new constructions in Cairo’s historic urban areas. Later, the decree no. 457 of 1999, issued by the governor of Cairo, added more limitations on the new constructions in Historic Cairo. Nevertheless, the flexibility of these regulations and lack of field follow-up allowed for the legal vandalism of many historic urban areas in Cairo (Sedky 2009: 135). Eventually, law no. 119 of 2008 set special regulations for Historic Cairo in which the historic urban areas were classified into three main categories with identified borders, buffer zone, and unified code of activities. Virtually, these regulations have not been yet fully activated and the unified code has not been yet enforced, and thus, the historic identity of some quarters, such as the ‘Khan El-Khalili’, have been greatly changed. In this regard, the director of the ‘Khan El-Khalili’ antiquities admitted his responsibility for the six listed monuments, but he disavowed any responsibility for the historic urban landscape and non-listed historic buildings which are under the control of other authorities. Indeed, his attitude illustrates the lack of cooperation between Historic Cairo’s competent governmental bodies.

Finally, the inappropriate strategies adopted by the official stakeholders since the mid-20th century, are deep-rooted managerial challenges to the conservation of Historic Cairo. Steinberg (1996) argued that the ‘tourism-oriented’ approach, adopted by local government, led to the rapid decay and destruction of Historic Cairo. Also, Lamei (2005) claimed that the ‘restored and closed’ approach, which doesn’t promote the adaptive re-use of restored buildings, is ineffective for the conservation of Historic Cairo. According to the HCRP, the adoption of such inappropriate approaches may be owing to the lack of an updated information system whereby stakeholders can make decisions based on the local people’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Issued by</th>
<th>Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 215</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Protecting all the registered monuments in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 178</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Protecting the historic buildings with peculiar value in Egypt and organizing its demolition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 43</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Organizing the tasks of municipalities and administrative systems in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decree no. 257</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Cairo Governor</td>
<td>Preserving monuments and cultural heritage of Historic Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 3</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Identifying the regulations of urban planning in historic areas over Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 117</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Protecting the listed antiquities in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decree no. 250</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Minister of Culture</td>
<td>Controlling the heights of new constructions in Historic Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 1</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Issuing licenses for shops dealing with touristic services in Egypt and organizing their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decree no. 457</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Cairo Governor</td>
<td>Identifying the regulations and limits of development in the historic quarters of Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 144</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Protecting the non-listed and non-ramshackle historic buildings in Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law no. 119</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Egyptian President</td>
<td>Unifying the building code in Historic Cairo and identifying the buffer zone of its historic buildings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: edited by authors based on copies at the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and several online websites.
actual needs. In addition, the Egyptian government’s manipulation of all the conservation processes, through its ‘top-down’ strategy (Gharib 2011), was strongly criticized in recent reports (Angl 2018). Generally, the role of local people in the conservation process is marginalized, especially in the absence of a legislative framework that promotes their participation. At best, the local people are consulted or informed about the projects’ objectives, while in most cases, the local people’s involvement is totally ignored. The intentional alienation of the local people’s role could be clearly implied in the HCRP director’s comment, when he said: “Everything is kept to its time...we just delay how to deal with local people to the commencement of projects, according to the conditions of each intervention”. His comment reflects the common attitude of official stakeholders in Cairo, who disbelieve in the local people’s abilities to make decisions on heritage matters (Sedky 2009: 166). Also, this interprets the emergence of public controversy during the implementation of the conservation projects, which impose traffic restrictions, height limitations, or removal of shops and street vendors. A shopkeeper, at the ‘Khan El-Khalili’ quarter, pinpointed this issue by saying that: “We don’t benefit from these buildings absolutely; they cause problems for us with state authorities”. Indirectly, his comment reveals the severe implications of such dispute which may lead to hostile attitudes and deliberate destruction of historic buildings by local people.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study investigated the controversial case of Historic Cairo in Egypt, a World Heritage Site since 1979. Mainly, the study aimed at identifying the actual reasons behind the continuous degradation of Cairo’s medieval heritage, since the mid-20th century, despite receiving several conservation interventions. Based on literature and field surveys, some interesting findings are revealed. Firstly, it is found that the first designated borders of Historic Cairo by the UNESCO in 1979 are extremely aligned with the Eastern and Northern borders of ‘Saladin’ capital of Islamic Egypt, in the Middle Ages.

Secondly, since the mid-20th century, the number of conservation actors in Historic Cairo has been dramatically increased, especially after its registration as a World Heritage Site in 1979. A lot of national and international organizations, NGOs, and research institutes have been involved in the conservation of the historic city. They implemented about 17 mega conservation projects which can be divided into: planning projects, restoration projects, and rehabilitation or revitalization projects. However, most of these projects adopted inadequate approaches which overlooked the exceptional living nature of Historic Cairo’s cultural heritage. For instance, the three conservation plans suggested pragmatic approaches which aimed at maintaining the cultural heritage and improving the socio-economic values of local people. Nevertheless, two out of the three plans are not yet fully implemented, while the UNDP plan of 1997 promoted a ‘tourism-oriented’ approach, which was inappropriately applied by the local government. Such an approach has led to serious socio-economic consequences, such as the intensive touristification of backward historic quarters, e.g., the ‘Khan El-Khalili’. Additionally, most of the restoration and rehabilitation projects were concentrated in the Northern section of Historic Cairo and adopted inappropriate conservation schemes which disregarded the involvement and needs of local community. Most historic buildings were restored then closed, without follow-up or allocation of compatible functions, which smoothed the way for their gradual re-deterioration. Moreover, in some conservation projects, the active role of local people was restricted to participating in decision-making, such as the projects of ‘Al-Darb Al-Asfar’ alley, and ‘Old Cairo’ and ‘Al-Sayeda Zeinab’ quarters. Therefore, the outcomes of these projects were quite different from their objectives, focusing on the historic fabric, superficial beautification of urban areas, and tourism activities. Consequently, several socio-economic issues have emerged, such as the dramatic increase of land prices and rents, traffic and security restrictions, and depopulation. In contrast, few conservation projects focused on improving the local people’s quality of life and their integration in the implementation process, and thus, had positive outcomes and worldwide gratitude, such as the projects of ‘Al-Madrasa Al-Gawhariya,’ and ‘Darb Qirmiz’ and ‘Al-Darb Al-Ahmar’ quarters.

Finally, various natural, environmental, socio-economic, legal, and managerial issues which constrain the effective conservation of Historic Cairo have been identified. Most of these issues are, directly or indirectly, connected to shortcomings in the methodology or structure of the national management system. For instance, the overlapped responsibilities between the competent governmental authorities in Historic Cairo, often result in a conflict of interest. In addition, the local people’s involvement in the conservation projects of Historic Cairo is not legally promoted or even appreciated by the official stakeholders. Therefore, a public controversy often emerges between local people and local government during the implemen-
tation of these conservation projects. To solve this issue, Fouseki (2019) recommended the ‘critical historic urban landscape’ approach which allows for dialogue, negotiation, and reflection between local community and policy makers. In a similar vein, Sedky claimed that “bridging the gap between the government bodies and local people’s preferences is the proper way for effective area conservation and planning” (Sedky 2009: 33).

Accordingly, it can be argued that the ‘local community’ oriented approach is the most appropriate for the effective conservation of Historic Cairo, considering its current conservation issues. Such an approach in which the living nature of cultural heritage, and the local people’s active role and needs are wholly considered during all stages of conservation. Precisely, this approach targets the amelioration of the local people’s attitudes and behaviors, and the reinforcement of their ‘Sense of Place’ towards the historic buildings in their regions. Indeed, this conclusion aligns with the Washington Charter principles which stated that the conservation of historic areas primarily concerns the residents, and thus, their participation should be encouraged as an essential element for the success of the conservation plans (ICOMOS 1987).

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Notes

1. This number is retrieved as of 30 January 2021 (https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/).
2. The director of the ‘Khan El-Khalili’ antiquities, Mr. Alaa Ashour, was interviewed in-person at his office in Cairo, on 24 December 2019, and the interview lasted for about 20 minutes.
3. The director of the HCRP, Mr. Mahmoud Abdelbaset, was interviewed in-person at his office in Cairo, on 22 December 2019, and the interview lasted for about 11 minutes.
4. The director of Megawra, Mrs. Mai El-Ebrashi, was interviewed via telephone on 25th of December 2019 upon her request in an e-mail and the interview lasted for about 7 minutes.
5. Except for the archaeological excavations conducted at the Eastern walls of Historic Cairo, between 2000 and 2009 (Pradines et al. 2009).
6. The details of this disaster were published in Reuters newspaper on 13 June 2016 under the title of “Egypt builds new homes to replace crumbling slums”. (Retrieved online on 20 September 2020 via https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-housing-idUSKCN0Y21D9)

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(Ar) written in Arabic

(ArE) Arabic with English abstract

(Fr) written in French