

Beyond Informality: Relocation from a Traditional Village 'Mit Oqbah' to Masaken El-Barageel and the Role of 'Urf in Governing Built Environment, Egypt

Authors : Sarah Eldefrawi, Maike Didero

Abstract : In Egypt, residents' urban interventions (colloquially named A'hali's interventions) are always tackled by government, scholars, and media as an encroachment (taeadiyat), chaotic (a'shwa'i) or informal (gheir mokanan) practices. This paper argues that those interventions cannot be simply described as an encroachment on public space or chaotic behaviour. We claim here that they are relevant to traditional governing methods ('Urf) that were governing Arab cities for many decades. Through an in-depth field study conducted in a real estate public housing project in the city of Giza called 'Masaken El-Barageel', we traced the urban transformations demonstrated in private and public spaces. To understand those transformations, we used wide-range of qualitative research methods such as semi-guided and informal interviews, observations and mapping of the built environment and the newly added interventions. This study was as well strengthened through the contributions of the author in studying nine sectors emerging by Ahali in six districts in Great Cairo. The results of this study indicate that a culturally and socially sensitive framework has to be related to the individual actions toward the spatial and social structures as well as to culturally transmitted views and meanings connected with 'Urf'. The study could trace three crucial principals in 'urf that influenced these interventions; the eliminating of harm (Al-Marafiq wa Man' al-Darar), the appropriation of space (Haqq el-Intefa') and public interest (maslaha a'ma). Our findings open the discussion for the (il) legitimate of a'hali governing methods in contemporary cities.

Keywords : Urf, urban governance, public space, public housing, encroachments, chaotic, Egyptian cities

Conference Title : ICMEUDP 2020 : International Conference on Municipal Engineering, Urban Design and Planning

Conference Location : Buenos Aires, Argentina

Conference Dates : February 27-28, 2020