MEDIA COVERAGE AND USERS' REACTIONS: AL AZHAR PARK IN THE MIDST OF CRITICISM AND POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Cairo encompasses fragments that represent a symbiosis of urban, natural, cultural and economic processes. Much of what manifests itself today as Egyptian politics, knowledge and culture was and is the product of the modern physical, socio-cultural and socio-economic realities of this city. History adds another dimension to Cairo's architecture and urbanism. It reflects the intersection between place, society, culture and technology. This has made it a complex and diverse city with over 18 million inhabitants and a range of established traditions, where the symbols of religious, political, institutional and economic power are often competing (Salama, 2002). Accelerated population growth has had a severe impact on the city's infrastructure and services where the capacity to cope with that growth is really limited. Immigrants from rural areas to the urban metropolis continue to live in squatters' settlements on the urban peripheries of the city. This in turn has increased the pressure on the public services thereby attracting substantial political attention at the expense of other issues where the need for open green spaces has become an urgent necessity.

Al Azhar Park is a new project that was inaugurated in Cairo in March 2005. The project is regarded by the local authorities, the developers, and the planning and design team as a catalyst for social, economic and cultural sustainability and is believed to have far reaching consequences for the 200,000 residents of the neighboring Darb al-Ahmar district. It was conceived in the mid-eighties as a metropolitan park that offers much needed greenery and open space to the residents of Cairo. Characterized by distinctive spatial qualities the planning of the park is conceptualized as a series of self contained zones along a central circulation spine and secondary axes (AKTC, 2004). The project was –and still is -- celebrated in the media, and has received a considerable coverage in over 100 publications in different languages including local newspapers, tourist

information packages, and specialized international and regional architectural trade magazines.

This paper introduces a fresh look that pertains to the hypothesis that "projects celebrated in the public or specialized media are not necessarily meeting users' expectations or satisfying their needs." This premise is derived from a considerable number of writings developed in the past three decades (Gans, 1978; Nasar, 1986, 1994; Newman, 1980; Salama, 1995; Wolfe, 1981). For instance, reviewing the publications of the Museum of Modern Arts-MOMA that have a direct impact on the profession one can find that those publications foster the image of architecture as art and only art. This is clearly evident as they present the formal aspects of the work of star architects where the creation of the built environment is seen within geometric abstract and artistic terms (Salama, 1995). It is possible to wrangle that in the media typically very little attention is given to users' feedback or behavior, needs or expectations.

Examining three architectural influential magazines (*AIA Journal*, *Architectural Record*, and *Progressive Architecture*) during the two decades of 1970s and 1980s reveals that the written and visual content is presented in a manner that places emphasis on the physical and formal characteristics of the built environment at the expense of other human, social and behavioral aspects (Nasar, 1986). Concomitantly, it is widely acknowledged that a considerable portion of the general and architectural media still adopts the view of architecture as art thereby the media content is expected to be supportive of this view. Stemming from this argument, the purpose of this paper is to examine whether the intensive media coverage of Al Azhar Park as a sustainable urban development project indicates its success from the users perspective, a massive project that is portrayed as a new green lung for Cairo.

In order to achieve the aim of this research a multilayered methodology was devised in a manner that involves the implementation of three investigation mechanisms. The first is an argument that articulates the value of criticism and Post Occupancy Evaluation-POE as tools for improving the built environment. In this context, the media coverage of the project represents criticism in architecture while the core of this research represents Post Occupancy Evaluation-POE. This is followed by a brief critical discussion of the spatial qualities of the Park. The second is a preliminary content analysis of a total of 64 online and printed publications that covered the project in reporting, descriptive, as well as analytical terms (**1**). The objective of this procedure was to discern the way in which the project was portrayed in the media and what aspects were most praised. The third mechanism is a survey interview that involves users' reactions as it relates to park design, nature of activities, and management issues. By implementing this mechanism, responses from 184 users were analyzed while relating aspects celebrated in the media to users' feedback (**2**).

By developing knowledge on how the users and visitors of Al Azhar Park perceive the project and how the spatial qualities meet their needs, an in-depth insight into the understanding of the merits of the project is developed. As well, assessing different aspects of the park may reveal shortcomings or specific negative aspects, which would eventually lead to recommend ways of improving those aspects.

1.. The author is indebted to William O'Reilly and Françoise Rybin of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Geneva for providing the necessary materials, media clippings, and press releases on the project. Without their help the content analysis procedure would have never materialized.

2. A fourth mechanism was performed to investigate use patterns, key attractions, and how users interact with the natural and built environment of the park. It adopts behavioral mapping as an observation tool that demystifies the way in which users and visitors interact with different zones within the park which were described in the literature as the most important attractions. Nevertheless, its contribution goes beyond the scope of this paper thereby only the results of other mechanisms are presented.

THE CRUX OF THE DISCUSSION: CRITICISM AND POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION, CONFLICT OR CO-EXISTENCE

Since the mid 1960s the architectural and planning community has been discussing the value of both criticism and evaluation studies. Continuously, while not so confrontational- there are fundamental disagreements. While many theorists appear not to be familiar with the value of evaluation studies and tend to favor criticism over evaluation, researchers and scholars do not seem to see the value of criticism. It is the position of this author that both have value toward either the development of an intellectual discourse on architecture, urban design and planning while raising the awareness of the public of the overall physical environment, or improving the quality of future environments (**3**). Therefore, it is critical in the context of this discussion to shed light on the definition, underlying concepts, and the values of each.

Criticism

Criticism has been defined as the "the art of judging the qualities and values of an aesthetic object" (Sharp, 1989, 9). In his classical writing *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey states that criticism is judgment. He defines judgment as an "act of intelligence performed upon the matter of direct perception in the interest of a more adequate perception" (Dewey, 1934, 299). These definitions indicate that criticism is typically subjective. Sharp argues and rightly so that most criticism is personal and written by an individual for popular or specialist consumption (Sharp, 1989). However, he attempts to introduce objectivity by putting the responsibility on the critic. In Sharp's words

> "…the importance of objectivity has to be stressed. A lot is demanded of the critic in the judicious administration of this goal. It has to be allied to good sense and clear judgment, to sagacity and it must be in the hands of someone who can hold their own against the spread of mediocre mass cultural values." (Sharp, 1987,11).

While attempting to make criticism more objective, this statement in fact makes it more subjective as the individual critic has to employ his/her good sense, inner feelings personal perceptions, and creative impulses in making judgments.

A more balanced analysis of criticism is evident in *Architecture and Critical Imagination* of Wayne Attoe who stresses the importance and prevalence of criticism in architecture, ranging from: critics' columns in newspapers, journals, and magazines; between architects and other parties involved in the decision making processes of funding, planning and designing, and building, and among architects themselves. Attoe observes the typical obstacles facing criticism, "Too often when criticism starts, excuses begin, and so defensiveness gets in the way of good, responsive work" (Attoe, 1978, 2). He strives to reach a better understanding of the types and methods of criticism, "so that instead of threatening and intimidating, criticism can be used as a tool for generating better work." Attoe identifies that criticism falls under three basic categories outlined below.

The first category is *normative criticism* is grounded in the belief that there is "a model, pattern, standard, or principle against which its quality or success may be assessed" (Attoe, 1978, 11). Systematic criticism is one of underlying types of this category and, is an "alternative to the single doctrine… [it] is an interwoven assemblage of principles or factors" (Attoe, 1978, 21), a more general system of values. Measured criticism is another type that assigns numerical standards to provide the norms

against which something is judged (Graham, 2003). The second category involves interpretative criticism that is highly personal as Attoe explains, "the interpretative critic seeks to mould other' vision to make them see as he does" (Attoe, 1978, 49). Advocatory criticism -as an underlying type, is employed by a critic who is an advocate of a building or place and is, "concerned primarily with engendering appreciation, not with passing judgment" (Attoe, 1978, 49). Impressionistic criticism "uses the work of art or building as a foundation on which the critic then constructs his own work of art" (Attoe, 1978, 74).

Descriptive criticism represents the third category; it does not seek to judge nor even intend to interpret, but to help people see what is actually there (Attoe, 1978). In all of its types it does not offer judgments, but merely depicts what exists; such as, how people move through space and/or provides information about the social, political, and economic context within which built environments are designed and created.

Post Occupancy Evaluation-POE

Post Occupancy Evaluation-POE is the process of assessing and evaluating the performance of the built environment (interior spaces, buildings, or urban spaces). In a recent article, the evolution of POE as a field of study was traced to mid sixties (Preiser and Nasar, 2008). It grew into a systematic process with increasing rigor during the 1970s and was further routinely applied to a wide range of building types and settings during the 1980s and 1990s (Preiser et al., 1988; Rabinowitz, 1989). POE, which is distinct from Pre-Design Research (PDR) (Bechtel, 1989; Sanoff, 1992), is continuously applied to a wide variety of environments. However, it poses potential for further enhancement particularly with the proliferation and use of specific research methods and measurement scales for various physical and behavioral factors.

Unlike criticism in architecture, POE is regarded as a branch of environment-behavior studies which is conducted on a building or a portion of a built environment for different purposes. In some cases, it is performed to solve problems that might occur in buildings after they are occupied. In other cases, its results are used to improve specific spaces within a built environment through continued users' feedback. Other reasons for conducting POEs include documenting successes and failures of performance in order to justify requests for renovations, additions, or new construction. An important feature in the majority of POE studies is that it involves systematic investigation of opinions, perceptions, and view points about built environments in use, from the perspective of those who use them.

There are multiple benefits of POE. While discussing them elaborately might go beyond the scope of the discussion, Preiser et al. (1988) have identified a number of benefits at various levels: short-term benefits that include determination of solutions to problems in buildings and built environments while offering recommendations to improve the quality of decision making; medium-term benefits that include an imbedded flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances of how the building or the built environment is functioning, and long-term benefits that include a continuous feedback and updating of data bases, standards, and design criteria for similar buildings or environments.

While POE studies have proven tremendously successful to the clients and owners of various environments and building types, the greatest obstacle is that professionals must guard their reputation and avoid litigation

(Doidge, 2001). Other obstacles include the lack of integration of POE methodology with professional architectural design and planning services, and no clear economic incentive for conducting the POE in the first place (Lackney, 2001). Client organizations whether public or private are not supportive of POE efforts due to the potential for bad publicity if problems are uncovered soon after a large expenditure of public or international aid funds.

The preceding analysis indicates that some aspects of criticism may overlap indirectly with POE' aspects such as systematic, measured, and descriptive criticism types. Those involve either making judgments on a building or a portion of a built environment based on a specific set of criteria or just presenting facts based on stating or documenting what is there. It is widely perceived that criticism in architecture is not a science or discipline, and does not appear to have developed in both the developing and developed worlds. Nonetheless, POE is increasingly accepted as part of the academic and professional activities.

By and large, the discussion suggests that both criticism and POE are important and aim to contribute to the creation of 'better environments' despite the fact that each is performed for different reasons and addresses different audience or reader. While POE may influence the quality of future decisions at the technical level involving physical and socio-behavioral aspects, criticism may influence decision making at the political level involving public and institutional awareness aspects. However, it is evident that in criticism 'better environments' are viewed from the perspective of the critic while in POE they are viewed from the perspective of users. In essence, this fosters the assumption upon which this paper is based; it accentuates that both are needed as one involves subjective view points and the other is used to verify arguments resulting from those view points.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SPATIAL QUALITY OF AL AZHAR PARK PROJECT

A key objective in the planning and design was to promote the development of the area with careful attention to the surrounding culture and heritage. Therefore, the project was developed as an urban park, the aim of which was to bring some greenery and open spaces to Cairo, a city with less than one footprint of green for every resident (AKTC, 2001)(**4**). The site is centrally located derelict 30 hectare in Darrassa neighborhood, abandoned for over 500 years, bordering the 12th century Ayyubid wall, the 15th century Mamluk City of the Dead, and the vibrant historical yet ever decaying Darb Al Ahmar district (**Figure 1a, 1b**).

In the context of discussing media coverage of and users' reactions to the project, it is important to offer an overview of the spatial qualities of the project. Despite debating the project in a considerable number of publications, it appears that the spatial qualities have not received enough coverage. Literature indicates that spatial quality of a place is perceived as relational to a reference to formal variables associated with meanings (Rapoport, 1970). Spatial quality involves *physical*, *symbolic*, *behavioral*, and *experiential* aspects. Thus, this section introduces selected physical features of the project at the micro, meso and macro levels highlighting some of these aspects.

The location's prevalent vehicular and pedestrian patterns increased the need for a main parking area in addition to the pedestrian walkway present in the entire park (Architecture +, 2005) that coherently connects

4. The Park's irrigation system is made up of a central irrigation management system stemming into a combination of a pop-up head system for areas of low slope and a drip feed system for steeply sloped areas. This eases the management and monitoring of the water usage. "In cases of emergency if the main water line becomes disconnected from the Nile, the lake at the south of the Park doubles up as an irrigation water reservoir to supply the irrigation system with ample amounts of water" (AKTC, 2001).

Figure 1a. View of Al Azhar Park to the north: a centrally located derelict 30 hectare in Darrassa neighborhood became a responsive urban intervention (Photo: Gary Otte, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva).

Figure 1b. The location of the park in relation to neighboring historical Darb Al Ahmar district (Photo: Gary Otte, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva).

Figure 1c. the Park Master Plan district (Photo: Gary Otte, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Geneva).

all park features and areas. The park was conceived to include: main spine (palm colonnade); formal garden; hilltop lookout kiosk; hilltop restaurants; children's structured play area; children's amphitheatre and stage; lookout plaza; water cascade and stream; lake. These elements are missing from most public spaces in Cairo and thus relate the *behavioral* and *experiential* aspects underlying spatial quality.

Relating its visitors to Cairene heritage the park was strategically planned to provide an exceptional panorama of prominent monuments, such as the Citadel and the Sultan Hassan Complex to the south of the Park. From the hilltop restaurant in the northern section of the Park towards the citadel

Figure 2a. View to the north of the park through the main spine (A. Salama).

Figure 2b. A typical garden with flat lawn and fountain of the main spine (A. Salama).

Figure 3a. The enclosed main seating area of lake-side café (A. Salama).

Figure 3b. Shaded walkways and mashrabiyas, a common characteristic of lakeside café design (A. Salama).

Figure 3c. Shaded and semi shaded areas accommodating different users' preferences (A. Salama).

runs a linear main spine that ends at the southern section of the Park at a manmade lake and a lakeside café, which provides a scene of Um Sultan Shaaban mosque and minaret combined with the Citadel. Stemming from the main spine are many smooth and flat areas of lawn, fountains, (**Figure 2a, 2b**). and flowering trees and plants, unlike the steep slopes across from the Ayyubid Wall which are used to stabilize the soil by the treatment of xerophytic plants and ground cover (AKTC, 2001).

The artificial lake on the south, measuring over 6000 sq. meters, considerably modified the dry land conditions. Beautified with the unique plant life, the surrounding green fields provide the Park visitors with a balance of nearby services and relaxation in a garden setting. Dramatically situated adjacent to the lake is the lakeside café, designed by the French architect Serge Santelli, overlooking eye-catching views (**Figure 3a-4d**). The café can accommodate up to 150 persons in its interior and external seating areas at once (**Figure 5a-c**). At the micro level, it offers a notable balance between contemporary style and principles of Islamic gardens. Such principles include the prevalence of symmetrical forms, the use

Figure 4a. View from lakeside café to the south, Salaheldin Citadel and Mohamed Ali Mosque (A. Salama).

Figure 4b. View to the lake though lakeside café main space (A. Salama).

Figure 4c. View to lakeside café from the south eastern playfields (Ragaei S. Abdel-Fattah).

Figure 4d. View to lakeside café through the lake (Ragaei S. Abdel-Fattah).

Figure 5a. Variety of external seating arrangements offer offered to satisfy wide variety of preferences. (A. Salama).

Figure 5b. Adopting the idea of *Iwan*, derived from traditional Cairene houses offers privacy for families (A. Salama).

Figure 6.a. View to the northeast showing hilltop restaurant and the gardens facing it. (Ragaei S. Abdel-Fattah).

Figure 6.b. Front view of hilltop restaurant showing outdoor terraces and the Mamluk architectural motifs adapted to create a contemporary image in harmony with the context. (A. Salama).

Figure 6.c. Stepped water channels and fountains facing hilltop restaurant (A. Salama).

of water features, the commonness of shade areas, and the Mashrabiya. These features are manifestations that the Park enjoys unique *symbolic* qualities and that it was conceptualized as a series of areas and sub-areas or enclosed zones along the central passage system. The hilltop restaurant located on the north, designed by Ramy Al Dahhan and Soheir Farid to simulate conventional Mamluk architectural motifs and themes. It encompasses large indoor and outdoor open spaces on different ground levels (**Figure 6a-c**) that include an external terrace, internal banquet hall, a gallery space and a *manzara* (roofed overlook porch). Further north is a small amphitheater with a stage and nearby services were created on the western side facing a major round 12th century tower and serves the park's musical program.

Adding to the *experiential* quality of the Park, several other features include car free zones where visitors may be transported within the park by a small rubber tire train (**Figure 7**), while its operations team uses electric vehicles (i.e. golf carts). Moreover, tree lighting and lighting of the water elements are used with the intention to provide sufficient lighting, thus allowing the public to visit until midnight (**Figure 8**). Usable green spaces were maximized to take up to 10,000 persons in any given day. The park is furnished with 89 varieties of trees, 51 shrubs, 5 types of grass, 14 climbers, 50 groundcover plants, and 26 varieties of succulents. As an advantage, the diverse seasonal variations of plant life are a concomitant result of Egypt being home to a variety of plant species (AKTC, 2001)(**5**).

While the preceding analysis concerns itself with the micro level, the Park contributes to the meso and macro levels. At the meso level, the redevelopment of Darb Al Ahmar district and the restoration of the

Figure 7. Rubber tire train for transporting users provided to achieve users comfort while creating a completely car-free zone. (A. Salama).
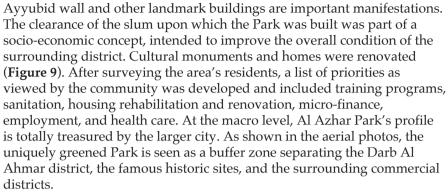

Figure 8. Lighting post along one of the main promenades (A. Salama).

Figure 9. Example of renovated huses in the neighboring historical Darb Al Ahmar district. (Ragaei S. Abdel-Fattah).

Ayyubid wall and other landmark buildings are important manifestations. The clearance of the slum upon which the Park was built was part of a socio-economic concept, intended to improve the overall condition of the surrounding district. Cultural monuments and homes were renovated (**Figure 9**). After surveying the area's residents, a list of priorities as viewed by the community was developed and included training programs, sanitation, housing rehabilitation and renovation, micro-finance, employment, and health care. At the macro level, Al Azhar Park's profile is totally treasured by the larger city. As shown in the aerial photos, the uniquely greened Park is seen as a buffer zone separating the Darb Al Ahmar district, the famous historic sites, and the surrounding commercial districts.

AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION INTO THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF AL AZHAR PARK

In examining the media coverage of Al Azhar Park project, a number of procedures were conducted. While media as a term is typically defined as the means of communication including mass media such as television and radio, the exploratory process of media coverage of the project involved textual information only.

First, gathering all the available articles, clippings or announcements from a wide variety of sources including printed and online published texts of newspapers, magazines for public consumption, and specialized trade architectural and design magazines for professional groups. A total of 64 articles were identified for investigation. Those selected were written in English and were published during the period between 2002 and 2005. However, additional 26 articles were also identified but were not utilized as some were written in different languages such French, Italian, and German. Second, a 'content analysis' procedure was conducted to examine the selected articles. While some scholars define the term in a broader sense: "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." (Holsti, 1969), others attempt to limit it to more objective measures and define it as a standard methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication (Roberts, 1989; Smith, 1992).

Content analysis is used as a technique for the systematic and quantitative description of the text covering the project.   It is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, sentences within texts and to quantify their presence in an objective manner. In essence, concepts and terms are identified and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying their presence. The procedure involved the following steps:

- Reading through all the articles to get a preliminary idea about the range of concepts or issues involved.

- Repeating the previous step while citing all the major issues to identify and establish categories of concepts and terms and their underlying meanings.

- Conducting a search in order to determine frequency of concepts or terms where the written text would match the established categories. It is noted that the underlying concepts or terms that represent essentially the same issues are cited under the same heading or category.

- Transforming the categories of ideas or concepts into numerical values The concepts or terms identified to perform the investigation included:

- **Redevelopment**, which includes meanings that pertain to revitalization, rehabilitation, and restoration.

- **Slum Clearance,** which encompasses meanings related to soil, garbage, and poverty.

- **Cairo's Past,** which involves terms such Islamic Heritage, or reference to specific historical eras.

- **Recreational Space,** which refers to words or phrases that include fresh air, pollution, greenery, green space, and oasis.

- **Socio-Economic Development**, which refers to community related issues including community involvement, employment, loans.

Results reveal that Al Azhar park project was portrayed as a '*Redevelopment*' project where the total frequency of this category appears to be the highest among other established categories as it was mentioned 24 times in the 64 articles and clippings examined. This includes aspects related to rehabilitation, restoration, and alike. An example of this categorization appears in the article published in *World Monuments-ICON*, 2004, which is published by the World Monuments Fund in the United States. "…The challenge was to revitalize this heritage in ways that turned traditional notions about cultural monuments on their head -that rather than being a drain on resources, they could be a stimulus for social and economic development."

The project was also protruded as a '*Recreational Space*' offering opportunities for the surrounding community and Caierene society at large to perform public activities in a green environment they missed for decades. The frequency of '*Recreational Space*' appears to be the second category among others where associated issues were stated 19 times. This in fact expresses an implicit interest in aspects underlying spatial quality, and is evident in the article of Deborah Campbell published in *The Walrus Magazine* of Canada, 2004 which is concerned with discussing environmental issues: "Orchards and formal gardens of native Egyptian plants are interspersed with sunken gardens that lead to a pavilion-café perched on a small lake." **(5)**

The categories of '*Slum Clearance*' and '*Cairo's Past*' appear to be equally mentioned where the issues and underlying meanings related to them were stated 16 times for each. 'Slum Clearance' category is apparent in an article published in *Al-Ahram Weekly*-November 2004, a weekly newspaper produced in English by Al-Ahram Corporation which is "… the 500-year-old heap of debris proved quite a challenge, requiring excavation of a total of 1.5 million cubic meters of rubble and soil- the equivalent of 80,000 truck loads." An example of the '*Cairo's Past*' category appears in the article of Jacky Tuinstra published in *Egypt Today,* a magazine which is published in English for the English speaking communities in Egypt including local and international readers: 'The [Ayyubid] wall is one of the most important Islamic finds of the modern day, says AKTC's Francesco Silva, who explains that it will be a focus of an interpretive visitor's center, which will provide the kind of information about Islamic Cairo that tourists now lack."

Frequency of Concepts						
Redevelopment which includes meanings that pertain to revitalization, rehabilitation, and restoration						**24**
Ex.1	Spring 2004	Not Specified	CAIRO BLOOMS	*World Monuments ICON*	39-45	
	The challenge was to revitalize this heritage in ways that turned traditional notions about cultural monuments on their head – that rather than being a drain on resources, they could be a stimulus for social and economic development.					
Ex.2	01.05.2004	Philip Jodidio	CAIRO'S FIVE CENTURIES OF RUBBISH	*Art Newspaper, The*	pp. 26	
	Apart from the restoration of a large section of the Ayyubid Wall, the AKTC has also undertaken extensive renovation and social work in neighboring Darb Al Ahmer.					
Slum Clearance which includes meanings related soil, garbage, and poverty						**16**
Ex.1	11.11.2004	Not Specified	MONUMENT TO FANCY	http://www. weekly. ahram.org.eg	n/a	
	… the 500-year-old heap of debris proved quite a challenge, requiring excavation of a total of 1.5 million cubic meters of rubble and soil – the equivalent of 80,000 truck loads.					
Ex.2	20.10.2004	Nicolai Ouroussoff	A VISION OF GREEN IN CAIRO	*International Herald Tribune*	n/a	
	Built over a mountain of debris that had served as the city's garbage dump for centuries, it also replaces one of Cairo's most trenchant symbols of poverty and decay.					
Cairo's Past which involves terms such Islamic Heritage, or reference to specific historical eras.						**16**
Ex.1	22.08.2002	Nevine El-Aref	ISLAMIC CAIRO REBIRTH	*Al Ahram*	n/a	
	… the Ministry, in collaboration with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, launched a program to preserve part of Cairo's Islamic heritage and save this distinguished Ayyubid architecture from destruction.					
Ex.2	01.04.2004	Jacky Tuinstra	EGYPT'S NEWEST JEWEL	*Egypt Today*	62-63	
	"The [Ayyubid] wall is one of the most important Islamic finds of the modern day," says AKTC's Francesco Silva, who explains that it will be a focus of an interpretive visitor's center, which will provide the kind of information about Islamic Cairo that tourists now lack.					
Recreational Space which refers to words or phrases that include fresh air, pollution, greenery, green space, and oasis						**19**
Ex.1	01.07.2004	Sylvia Smith	DARB EL AHMAR PARK PROJECT IN CAIRO	*Horus (Egypt Air In-flight)*	pp. 24-27	
	More than 250 royal palms have been planted with another 100 date palms… Overall there are 300 plant types and from each of these thousands of examples will fill the park with color and fragrance.					
Ex.2	01.11.2004	Deborah Campbell	MONEY FOR NOTHING, A RENO FOR FREE	*Walrus*	n/a	
	Orchards and formal gardens of native Egyptian plants are interspersed with sunken gardens that lead to a pavilion-café perched on a small lake.					
Socio-Economic Development which refers to community related issues including community involvement, employment, loans.						**8**
Ex.1	20.11.2003	Gretchen Peters	A NEW PUSH TO CLEAN UP THE WORLD'S SLUMS	*Christian Science Monitor, The*	n/a	
	"This project has allowed us to save the urban fabric of this historic neighborhood," says Mohamed El Mikawi, the project manager. "More important, we are creating jobs and giving them a future."					
Ex.2	07.10.2004	Amina Khairi	AL-AZHAR PARK, CAIRO'S GREEN LUNG	*Al-Hayat*	n/a	
	In addition to a loans program, the Foundation is undertaking a number of projects in this quarter, which will create new working opportunities.					

Table 1. Categories of concepts/terms utilized in the content analysis of media coverage of Al Azhar Park.

'Socio-economic Development' category occupies the lowest frequency as its underlying issues were stated only 9 times in 64 articles. An example of this category appears in an article by Gretchen Peters published in the Christian Science Monitor, 2003: "This project has allowed us to save the urban

fabric of this historic neighborhood," says Mohamed El Mikawi, the project manager. "More important, we are creating jobs and giving them a future."

Two major aspects are important to note; the first is that the titles of some articles may refer to a category of concepts or terms while the content of the article places emphasis on another category, the second, which represents a result of the first, is that the majority of the articles refer to more than one category. However, the classification and quantification of categories was based on the explicit expression of concepts and terms rather the implicit conceptual understanding which might be left to the interpretation of the reader.

All in all, the project was projected before its completion and was depicted after its occupancy in the media as a sustainable urban conservation intervention that translates cultural, social, economic needs into a physical reality. It was dramatically represented as a successful project that addresses multiple issues of concern to the immediate context of Al-Darb Al Ahmar district of old Cairo, to the Governorate of Cairo, and to the Cairene society. **Table 1** illustrates all the categories utilized in the content analysis with two examples of articles representing each category. Importantly, catchy, compelling, and powerful article titles were used to attract the attention of the reader to the merits of the project (**Table 2**). 15 titles out of a total of 64 appear to be most attractive and involve

Table 2. Compelling titles used by the media to project and depict Al Azhar Park.

Powerful and Compelling Titles					
No.	Date	Author	Article or Clipping Title	Media Title	Pages
1	29.03.2005	Not Specified	CAIRO'S HEART GETS 'GREEN LUNG' TRANSPLANT	Egyptian Gazette, The	7
2	27.11.2004	John Daniszewski	CAIRO DIGS INTO ITS PAST TO GIVE PARK-STARVED RESIDENTS AN OASIS	Los Angeles Times	n/a
3	12.03.2005	Hadani Ditmars	A SHOCK OF GREEN IN CONCRETE CAIRO	Globe and Mail	n/a
4	01.04.2003	Paul Bennett	CAIRO, ONCE THE PARIS OF THE NILE	Architectural Record	79-80
5	21.09.2004	Maria Golia	PARADISE IS A GARDEN, AND CAIRO NOW HAS ITS OWN	Daily Star, The	n/a
6	23.10.2004	Lisa Kaaki	AL AZHAR PARK: CAIRO'S GREEN JEWEL	Arab News	n/a
7	11.11.2004	Not Specified	MONUMENT TO FANCY	Weekly.ahram. org.eg	n/a
8	01.04.2004	Jacky Tuinstra	EGYPT'S NEWEST JEWEL	Egypt Today	62-63
9	07.10.2004	Amina Khairi	AL-AZHAR PARK, CAIRO'S GREEN LUNG	Al-Hayat	n/a
10	Spring 2004	Not Specified	CAIRO BLOOMS	World Monuments ICON	39-45
11	01.01.2005	Sylvia Smith	A BREATH OF FRESH AIR	Open Skies	53-56
12	27.10.2004	Seif El-Rashidi	EGYPT'S LARGEST GREEN SPACE	Architectural Record	n/a
13	28.03.2005	Sophie Claudet	FROM GARBAGE DUMP TO GARDENS OF SPLENDOR	AFP (Agence France Presse)	n/a
14	22.08.2002	Nevine El-Aref	ISLAMIC CAIRO REBIRTH	Al Ahram	n/a
15	01.05.2004	Philip Jodidio	CAIRO'S FIVE CENTURIES OF RUBBISH	Art Newspaper, The	26

some powerful messages. Some of these were like this 'Cairo's heart gets 'green lung' transplant', 'A shock of green in concrete Cairo,' and 'From garbage dump to gardens of splendor.' In all cases, the articles reflect the contribution of the project involving different types of criticism that are referred to earlier.

USERS' REACTIONS: DISCUSSIONS OF MAJOR FINDINGS

In order to comprehend users' reactions, a questionnaire was developed to address key issues emerged from the analysis the media coverage of the project. It involved users' reactions as it relates to park design, nature of activities, and management issues. Questionnaire forms were distributed by the research team over 5 visits to the park during the summer of 2005 (**6**). Responses to closed ended questions were analyzed based on simple frequency procedure, while content analysis was utilized to analyze closed ended questions.

Reactions to the Overall Planning and Design of the Park

Rating the overall park design in terms of 'excellent, good, fair, and bad' illustrates that the majority of respondents believe that it is either excellent (61.5%) or good (38.46%). While 28% of the respondents have not stated the reasons for selection, those who have responded mentioned one or more of the reasons as shown in **Table 3**. Notably, expressing the local culture (22%) and the variety of activities (20%) were the most important reasons for rating the quality of design as excellent or good while spaciousness (8%) and views (10%) were less important. 12% of the respondents stated that the relationship between buildings and green spaces is an influential factor for their judgment of design. It is observed that some of the respondents were thoughtful and were able to express their views elaborately while others were short but concise. While the park serves all types of people of socio economic and cultural backgrounds, it is noticed from their selection and the reasons for those selections exhibit the fact that the park is visited by enlightened visitors who are able to comprehend the environment in which they entertain.

Key Places from Users' Perspective

Selecting the best place where users spend their time when they visit the park, the majority of the respondents selected both the gardens and fountains off of the main spine (31%) or lakeside café (20%). Those who have selected gardens and fountains as their best place stated one or more of these reasons: they are quiet and private settings; relaxing; and peaceful.

Reasons for Users' Rating	Percentage
• The design brings Arabian influence and utilizes greenery very well with fountains… Design is not borrowed from somewhere in Europe or America	22%
• Variety of green areas, cafes, and the availability of different types of settings	20%
• The design of buildings is simple and is in harmony with the landscape	12%
• It is a spacious and beautiful place	8%
• It offers nice views to the old city.	10%
• No response	28%

Table 3. Reasons for users' rating of the park design as excellent or good.

Figure 10a, 10b. Signage system and sign design: was a major course of users' dissatisfaction. (see, list of comments stated by the users) (A. Salama).

Figure 11a, 11b. Lights and lighting system: while designed to achieve dramatic visual effects in aesthetic terms, it was a source of users' dissatisfaction in functional terms. (Gary Otte, AKTC, Geneva).

On the other hand, those who have selected lakeside café were more elaborate and stated one or more of the following reasons: the freedom of choice to sit in a private area, or by the lake or closer to more noisy spaces; the intimacy of spaces; spectacular views; and variety and patterns of tiling.

It appears that the hilltop restaurant and the amphitheater were the least preferred places from the perspective of the respondents as they were selected only by 6% and 4% respectively. Spending time along the main spine appears to be of equal interest with the children play area where each was selected by 12% of the respondents, while the green space adjacent to major facilities was preferred by 15%. In this respect, it was expected that the children play area and the amphitheater would be of more interest to the respondents as the majority of the visitors are families with children.

Best Design Feature as Viewed by Park Visitors

A number of design features were presented in the survey questionnaire, and respondents were asked to select one best feature available within the park. It is noted that about 6% have not respondent to the question. As well, 7% could not make one selection and ticked more than one design feature; therefore their response was not considered valid.

The presence of gardens and water bodies and the gardens around the main spine appear to be the best design features as viewed by the users; each was selected by approximately 22% of the respondents. Views to cultural attractions and the presence of cafes seem to occupy the second level of preference where each was selected as the best design feature by 16% of the respondents. The major spine itself was the least preferred design feature as only 11% selected it as a best design feature.

On the best feature, those who have selected gardens and water bodies and the gardens around the main spine as best design features stated one or more of these reasons: adds another dimension to the beauty of the park; gives the feeling that the weather is cooler and temperature is lower during the summer; excellent treatment for Cairo's climate; well spread throughout the park; adds to the overall relaxing mood; offers more refreshing atmosphere.

A shared interest across the majority of respondents who have selected views to cultural attractions as the best feature was that the park should be a major or first place Cairo tourists should go to; it is a perfect introduction for them to old Islamic Cairo before they get closer to it. Moreover, considerable percentage (44%) stated that the dramatic scenic view to the citadel and Mohamed Ali Mosque and its minarets was a reason for their choice. On the other hand, those who have selected the major spine mentioned one or more of these reasons: spending relaxing time for chatting with family and friends; and children can play in wide green flat areas around the spine but in close proximity to where their parents sit.

Wayfinding and Signage System

Responding to the way in which visitors find their way around the park, 30% stated it is difficult for them to find their way and/or to know their position within, while 10% and 50% mentioned it is very easy or easy respectively. On the other hand, 10% have not responded. These responses relate to another question on how they value the design of signs and the signage system as 33% valued signage as 'bad' while 36% as 'fair.' Some of the comments stated by those who valued signage and sign design as 'bad' included one or more of the following reasons (**Figure 10a, 10b**):

- The only visible sign in lakeside café area was inside the café but there are no maps or signs near its entrance.

- There is a need to have 'you are here' maps.

- Size of lettering is small compared to the size of some signs.

- Because lettering is too small we do not rely on the signs.

- The problem is at night where signs are not easily seen.

- We started to become familiar with the park after our first visit, but first time we came we were confused.

- Signs are not well distributed in the park.

- While signs are neatly designed they do not satisfy their purpose.

Lights and Lighting System

Assessing the lights and lighting system, it is noticed that 'excellent,' 'good,' and 'fair' are equally valued by the respondents where 20% is given to each of these qualities. However, while 5% have not responded, 35% appear not satisfied with lights as a major design aspect and have commented one or more of the following reasons (**Figure 11a, 11b**):

- Lights are not good, especially near steps and water channels

- The level of lighting in most cases, especially in lighting posts, is at the eye level which is disturbing

- The areas behind the lakeside Café and the side of the hilltop Restaurant are not well lit

- You can see the source of lights only, not the surroundings

- Lights block vision; you feel they are in the way of viewing the whole location

- Some places are scary as they are completely dark.

Visiting Patterns and Users' Activities

The majority of the visitors come with their families (64%) and less with friends (31%). Visiting patterns appear to very different across the year. During the fall and winter seasons 55% stated that they visit the park in the afternoons during the week or in the weekends; 24% stated weekend mornings, while only 16% stated weekend nights. In the spring and summer seasons 50% stated that they visit the park in either week nights or weekend nights, while 30% visit in late afternoons during the week or weekends, and only 9% stated they visit in the week mornings. Strikingly, none of the respondents stated that they visit the park during weekend mornings. Across the respondents, it is evident that the majority either prefer nights or late afternoons to visit the park.

The preceding visiting patterns correspond with the results of selecting gardens and water bodies and gardens around the main spine as the best design feature. On the other hand, such patterns corroborate the results of the continuous visits to the park by the research team during the summers of 2005, 2006, and 2007 which reveal that the park is completely vacant in the mornings and early afternoons.

Over 80% of the respondents believe that the design of the park allows for many activities that family members can perform during their visits. The majority agree that there are special places developed to stratify all age

List of Activities	Frequency & %
• Walking (along the main spine)	34 (06.71%)
• Dining in Hilltop restaurant	23 (04.53%)
• Dining in Lakeside cafe	56 (11.04%)
• Contemplating while sitting in any open or semi open areas	47 (09.27%)
• Chatting with family and friends	91 (17.92%)
• Sitting in isolation under one of the gazebos distributed throughout	32 (06.30%)
• Sitting in one of the gardens off of the main spine	87 (17.10%)
• Playing with kids in one of the green spaces off of the main spine	72 (14.20%)
• Playing with kids in the children play area	49 (09.66%)
• Attending a concert or public performance.	16 (03.16%)
Total No. of Frequencies	**507 (99.89%)**

Table 4. Activities people perform when visiting the park.

groups including restaurants, greenery, and children play areas. Selecting three major activities performed while visiting reveals a wide range of interests and activities that the park is accommodating (**7**) as illustrated in **Table 4**.

Certain activities appear to be favored by the respondents; these include chatting with friends (17.92%); sitting in one of the gardens off of the main spine (17.10%); and playing with kids in one of the green spaces off of the main spine (14.20%). Dining in lakeside café appears to be favored over dining in the hilltop restaurant (4.53%). These results correspond with the results if favoring views and seeing the gardens and fountains around the main spine as key attractions within the park. They also indicate that the presence of the lake is a determining factor in people liking the southern portion of the park.

Management and Operation

By utilizing a five point scale, people were asked to express their degree of satisfaction with the management and operation of the park. While 6% have not responded to this question, the majority of the respondents are either very satisfied (29%) or satisfied (53%). Only 4% have expressed dissatisfaction and 8% were neutral. None of the respondents stated very dissatisfied. Respondents commented positively on the cleanliness and neatness of the park. However, few commented that the marble tiling in the garden areas is beginning to show signs of deterioration.

As it is known to the public that park is managed by a service private company (**8**), people were asked if they were with the idea that the management of the park is transferred to be under the jurisdiction of Cairo Governorate in terms of management, maintenance and operation 87% of the respondents stated that they are not advocates of this idea at all. While this result is striking, it was expected, since some respondents introduced assertions like: "the park will deteriorate with public government ownership," "because typically government facilities often deteriorate, and there are many examples of similar projects," "it won't be so good." Some went to the extreme and commented that "because they will mess it up," and "there is a very big chance that the park would go back to its original use, a dump site". These statements reflect a severe lack of trust in the government's ability to run and manage large public projects.

7. The total number of frequencies does not represent the total number of responses where three activities are required for selection. Therefore the total number of frequencies is equivalent to the total number of respondents multiplied by three.

8. See note **7**.

Praising the Project by the Users

Asking people to comment on the park as an urban intervention and whether it has promoted cultural awareness of Cairene heritage and whether it has impacted the surrounding community positively, over 40% have not responded to the question, 42% agree with these statements, and 18% do not see the connection and look at the project as a separate entity they go to for recreation and entertainment. Those who see the project's value in creating public awareness while impacting the surrounding environment stated one or more of these reasons: "the project gave me a chance to see places I have never seen through the views it offers," The project is one of the -if not the only- cleanest green space in the city that has proven to be successful so far," "I have had the chance to be introduced to the Islamic monuments and better understand the city," "it is possible to introduce change through this and other similar projects," "the Darb Al Ahmar district is becoming cleaner and now differs from other parts in old Cairo," "because I live nearby in the Katamiya area, I see the improvements the park has made," "I see the park raised behavioral awareness of the public in terms of keeping it clean and in order, but no.. It has nothing to do with the cultural awareness." While these statements came from few respondents (11%), they correspond with other results in terms of rating the overall design, key places within the project, and best design features.

CONCLUSION

This paper argued for the need to examine the media, especially that which celebrates large influential projects. The assumption that "projects celebrated in the public or specialized media are not necessarily meeting users' expectations or satisfying their needs", was scrutinized by adopting a multilayered methodology to investigate the relationship between the media coverage of Al Azhar Park project and the actual users of the park. Primarily, as a result of this methodology four major conclusions can be set forth:

- The media still gives little attention to users' behavior and feedback on needs and expectations. Nevertheless, the content analysis written to analytically describe and praise the project illustrates that there are attempts for more responsiveness to real and pressing issues including protection of the built heritage, slum clearance and environmental concerns, and socio-economic development aspects. Despite these honest attempts the media fell short in articulating users' feedback, cultural behaviors and attitudes or addressing the concerns of the users. As well, spatial quality appears not to be of a major concern including its underlying symbolic, behavioral, and experiential aspects.

- Findings indicate that users' reactions to the planning and design of the park and their use patterns of different zones correspond with the way in which the project is celebrated in the media. With relative degrees, users expressed their satisfaction with the park environment, the available amenities, and with the available opportunities to engage in a wide spectrum of activities.

- Two design features seem to fall short in meeting users' expectations. These are the lights and lighting system, and the signage and the way-finding system. While these two aspects were not covered by the media, they were uncovered through getting users' feedback. In fact, the lights and the lighting system were portrayed in the media

through photographs that emphasize the dramatic visual effects of the lights used on the park, but functional and experiential aspects were the concern of the users.

• Strikingly, the media have not addressed the issue of operations and maintenance; an aspect That can only be revealed by POE. In this respect, while users expressed satisfaction with the current operation and maintenance, the results corroborate a severe lack of trust in the government to manage and operate the park.

The fact that most planning and design aspects of the park were satisfactory to -and in some cases were praised by- the users is an indicator of the degree of the project success. As well, the results of the interview questionnaire which reveal that a considerable number of users praised a wide spectrum of features through their reactions and responses are evidence that the project is successful and deserve such recognition it has received in the media. However, the underlying aspects of spatial quality including behavioral, experiential, and symbolic elements were not explicitly portrayed in the media. However, users referred to one or more of these aspects in their reactions to the issues outlined in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, the lighting and way-finding systems appear to have been compromised based on the users' reactions. While some may claim that no planning or design outcome is completely perfect and is satisfying everyone, one should assert that a project of this scale, magnitude, and amount of recognition is not expected to have these influential aspects as major sources of dissatisfaction.

Projects covered in the media are based on criticism which is in fact personal and written by a writer, a critic, or a journalist for popular or specialist consumption. The habit of criticism has contributed to highly subjective view points and judgments about the environment. The examination of projects celebrated in the media is not a luxury; it is a necessity for the development of theory and practice. The argument introduced and the methodology adopted in this paper pave the road for an alternative, yet complementary paradigm, POE, which represents a dramatic departure from typical subjective discussions about the environment. However, one should assert that it is not a situation of either/or; criticism and evaluation are both needed toward the development of a responsive environment and the improvement of the quality of design decision making at different levels.

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BASIN-YAYINDA YER ALIŞ VE KULLANICI TEPKİLERİ: ELEŞTİRİ VE KULLANICI DEĞERLENDİRMESİ KUŞATMASINDA EL EZHER PARKI

Kahire'de Mart 2005'te yeni tasarlanmış bir açık alan olarak hizmete giren El Ezher Parkı'nı, yerel yönetimler, yatırımcılar, planlama ve tasarım ekipleri, toplumsal, ekonomik ve kültürel sürdürülebilirlik açısından bir katalizör olarak değerlendirdiler; üstelik hemen komşu Darb el-Ahmar bölgesinde yaşayan 200,000 kişi için de sonuçları tahmin edilenden daha büyük olacaktı. 1980'lerin ortasında metropoliten bir park olarak tasarlanırken Kahire sakinlerinin çok gereksinim duyduğu yeşil alan ve açık mekan beklentisi gözönünde tutulmuştu. Ağa Han Vakfı raporlarına göre parkın planlanması, bir ana dolaşım omurgası ve ikincil eksenler çevresinde kurgulanan bir dizi içe-dönük eylem alanından oluşmaktaydı (AKTC, 2004). Projenin kendisi, park açıldıktan sonra ve bugün de, hala büyük bir kabul görüyor: Aralarında yerel gazeteler, turist bilgilendirme dergileri ve tur kitapçıkları ile alanında uzmanlaşmış uluslararası ve bölgesel mimarlık dergileri de bulunan çok değişik dillerdeki 100'ü aşkın farklı yayın organınca park üzerine yayın yapılmış olması bunun en güçlü kanıtı

Bu yazı "kamusal basın-yayın organlarında olumlanan projeler, her zaman kullanıcı beklentilerini ya da onların gereksinimlerini karşılar,"biçimindeki varsayıma yeni ve taze bir bakış gündeme getirmeyi amaçlıyor. Bu araştırmanın amacına ulaşmak için çok katmanlı ve üç sorgulama işleyimini gündeme sokan bir yöntemsel yaklaşım benimsendi. Bunlardan ilki, yapılı çevre değerlerini iyileştirmek için eleştirel bakışa ve kullanıcı değerlendirmesi sistemine önem veren bir bakış açısıdır. Bu bağlamda, projenin basın yayın organlarında yer alışı mimarlık eleştirisi alanında kalırken, bu araştırmanın ekseni kullanıcı değerlendirmesinde bulunmaktadır. İkincisi, 64 sayısal ve basılı yayın örneğini değerlendiren

bir içerik analizine dayanmaktadır; bu yayınlar yalnızca duyuran/haber veren, betimleyen ve analiz yapan türdeki malzemeden oluşmaktadır. Bu işlemin amacı, projenin basın-yayın organlarında yeralışını ayırt etmek ve öne çıkarılıp övülen yönleri serimlemektir. Üçüncü işleyim ise parka ilişkin, orada yeralan etkinliklere ve parkın işletimine ilişkin kullanıcı tepkilerini derleyen söyleşi-sorgu amaçlı bir yöntemdir: Bu işleyimle basın-yayın organlarında yeralan değerlendirmeler kullanıcıyla yeniden buluşturularak 184 kullanıcı değerlendirmesi ele alınmıştır.

El Ezher Parkı kullanıcı ve ziyaretçilerinin projeyi nasıl algıladıkları ve planlama ile mimari tasarım özelliklerinin onların gereksinimlerini nasıl çözdüğü üzerine bilgi edinmek, projenin tasarım değerleri hakkında derinlikli görüşler oluşturmaya yardımcı olmuştur. Bunun yanında, parkın farklı özelliklerini ele almak, daha sonra giderilebilecek tikel olumsuz noktaları ve zayıf olan yönleri de ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu yazıda tartışılarak benimsenen ve seçenek olan, ancak tamamlayıcı bir paradigma da oluşturabilen 'kullanıcı değerlendirmesi' yöntemi, öznel sonuçları olan kullanıcı değerlendirme yöntemlerinden ciddi biçimde farklılaşmaktadır. Yine de belirtmek gerekir ki; kesin tercihlerin kullanılacağı bir durum sözkonusu değildir; farklı ölçeklerde tasarım kalitesinin ve tasarım kararlarının iyileştirilmesi ve uyumlu bir çevrenin yaratılması için hem eleştiri ve hem de değerlendirme ortamları ve araçlarının kullanılması gereklidir.