

The (No-) Public Space. Reviewing the Transformation of Al-Qaed Ibrahim's Urban Image

Iman Hegazy

Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany

Department: Architecture and Urbanism

iman.hegazy@uni-weimar.de

Abstract

Public spaces are defined as places that should be accessible to all inhabitants without restrictions. They are spaces not only for gathering, socializing and celebrating but also for initiating discussions, protesting and demonstrating. Thus, public spaces are intangible expressions of democracy - a topic that the paper tackles its viability within the context of Alexandria, case study Al-Qaed Ibrahim square.

On the one hand, Al-Qaed Ibrahim square which is named after Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque is a sacred element in the urban fabric; whereas on the other it represents a non-religious revolutionary symbol in the Alexandrian urban public sphere. This contradiction necessitates finding an approach to study the characteristic of this square/mosque within the Alexandrian context—that is to realize the impact of the socio-political events on the image of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square, and how it has transformed into a revolutionary urban symbol and yet into a no-public space.

The research revolves around the hypothesis that the political events taking place in Egypt after January 25th, 2011, have directly affected the development of urban public spaces, especially in Alexandria. Therefore methodologically, the paper reviews the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square throughout the Egyptian socio-political changes, with a focus on the square's urban and emotional contextual transformations. For this reason, the study adheres to two theories: the "city elements" by Kevin Lynch and "emotionalizing the urban" by Frank Eckardt. The aim is not only to study the mentioned public space but also to figure out the changes in people's societal behaviour and emotion toward it.

Through empowering public spaces, the paper calls the different Egyptian political and civic powers to recognize each other, regardless of their religious, ethnical or political affiliations. It is a step towards replacing the ongoing political conflicts, polarization, and suppression with societal reconciliation, coexistence, and democracy.

Keywords: public space, urban image, socio-urban meaning, Egypt revolution, Al-Qaed Ibrahim/Alexandria

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1. Introduction

The introduction explains the paper framework, including the following: terminologies, as well as gaps and questions, in addition to methodology and case study.

1.1 Terminologies

The term "Public space" is used to differentiate between the "private" and "public" urban areas. On one hand, the "Private spaces" are mostly owned by the local authority and private agencies, where the space is controlled and restricted for specific societal-groups. On the other, the "Public spaces" are "open spaces" where all the inhabitants should have easy access to it without any restrictions. However, public spaces are not only for gathering, socializing and celebrating but also for initiating discussions, protesting and demonstrating. Indeed, the "public spaces" deeply reflect the non-material dimension of society, such as regarding religion, values, beliefs, norms, morals, ethics and all nonphysical ideas. Thus, the "public spaces" generate intangible expressions and strategies of democracy under the form of "the right to the city" which allows more societal interaction, integration, and equality (Assala, 2014/2015).

1.2 State of the Art - Case Study

Since the mid-80s, the concept of "civil society" has been taken a notable path into social science and global policy studies. The public domain begins to see the public sphere as a power that can promote democracy, effective governance, sustainable development, equality and social cohesion (Hendawy, 2014/2015). According to Arnstein (1969), many social scientists tried to examine the civil society's ability to achieve these purposes of openness while taking into consideration that the citizens are the focal scope around which all the associations and relationships arise. The inhabitant contribution is a clear-cut expression for their impact on the public sphere. However, there is a difference between undergoing the practices of contribution and having a real impact. That is in order to have a vital on-ground transformation. Therefore participation without a redeployment of power is a vacant process for the citizen (Arnstein, 1969). Alike did Assala (2014/2015), in his research "whose city?". He realized that the concept of public spaces depends on the citizens' interaction with space, as a democratic communication of conversation and debate. In addition, the citizens' accessibility to the spaces is a matter of mobility, it depends on the individual liberties, under the form of "the right to the city". Both ideologies, the former and the latter emphasize the question of the city image.

In Egypt, the constitution pledges the right of the general public to contact with the government. That is in Article 85 which does not incorporate any responsibility on the authority's reactions with the inhabitant involvement in the socio-political public sphere. Therefore, it is challenging to evaluate whether public users are truly reflected in the on-ground implementations or not (Hendawy, 2014/2015). However, since the 25th of January 2011, when the Egyptians revolted and demanded to end of Mubarak's regime, the public spaces such as "Medan El Tahrir" in Cairo and "Al-Qaed Ibrahim" in Alexandria, turned into a public platform for protesting, discussion, conflict and political contestation, through public initiatives and social movements. As a result, the society started to re-interpret the city's public spaces in a more democratic way, free from the top-down policies and open to the bottom-up revival approach (Hendawy, 2014/2015).

Friday prayers at Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque in 2011 and *Rabaa Al-Adawiya* mosque in 2013, were used as a gathering point to mobilize the “silent masses”. Hundreds of thousands of people from different social groups, affiliation and religion were getting into these squares named after the mosques to express their political position. A unique solidarity was born that extended beyond prayers to maintain a revolutionary fervor alive. According to El Taraboulsi (p. 7) "in a report (April 2012) by the Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies on the role of religion in the Revolution, the author describes how "Egyptian mosques, as is the case in Syria and earlier in Yemen, were places for organization and mobilization" for the "disaffected and angry, places to assemble and protest" against the regime".

Therefore, this new approach of thinking of public spaces and square/mosques had a direct impact on the society and the authorities' ideologies in the way of perceiving open squares. The public sphere identification transformed from being an urban governmental image to be a significant aspect of the socio-political transitions in Egypt. As a result, according to Hendawy (2014/2015) and due to the political events starting from 2011, the Egyptian activists began to propose a new configuration of public spaces. They created new visions and representations of the Egyptians' collective perception which was unplanned by the authorities, architects and urban planners. These spatial practices have developed the socio-urban meaning of public spaces in Egypt.

Yet, in order to realize the impact of the political events on the image and function of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square, and how the whole context has transformed into a non-religious urban symbol and now into a no-public space due to its political denotation, it is essential to review the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space. For example, before the 25th of January 2011, Al-Qaed Ibrahim public square was a religious sacred element in the urban fabric; only in the post-revolution period, the meaning of this public space has changed into a non-religious revolutionary symbol, and latter since 2013, it has transformed into an unwelcomed square because of the inhabitant fear of using the space or even to be there—for the sake of being named after the political party that is against the current regime (interviews). It is a dilemma, a pragmatic shift causing remonstrations in the use and image of Al-Qaed Ibrahim "Public" context in the Alexandrian urban sphere.

In comparison with Cairo, Egypt's capital, most of the researches studies either Medan El Tahrir or Rabaa squares in Cairo, the most well-known revolutionary public spaces in Egypt. Thus, there is a lack of studies that elaborate on the other revolutionary squares/public-spaces in Egypt, especially Al-Qaed Ibrahim square in Alexandria.

Therefore, the author who is originally from Alexandria is studying the characteristic of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square/mosque within the Alexandrian context—that is to realize the impact of the socio-political events on the image and function of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square, and how it has transformed into a non-religious "Revolutionary" urban symbol and then into a "No-public space".

The paper researches the "Public Space" theme in Alexandria, with a focus on Al-Qaed Ibrahim square the research case study. The aim is not only to prove the transformation of the meaning of the aforementioned public spaces but to figure out the changes of the inhabitants' societal behaviour and emotion toward the Al-Qaed Ibrahim context.

1.3 Methodology and Research Questions

To methodologically understand the conditions of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square as a case study, the paper will adhere to two theories: the "city elements" by Kevin Lynch and "emotionalizing the urban" by Frank Eckardt. That is with the aim to review the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim context throughout the Egyptian socio-political changes, with a focus on the square's urban and emotional contextual transformations. How do political events have an impact on the "Public space" meaning? How the use of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public square has changed? And up to which extent do the socio-political events affect the people's emotions toward the Al-Qaed Ibrahim context? Based on Lynch (1960), the city image is quite changeable, it is not constant, but rather partial, fragmentary, and mixed with other concerns. Indeed, the city image deeply reflects the tangible/intangible aspects of society, such as with regard to the urban environment, events, and citizens. The observers "inhabitants" are not just users but they are also part of the city image and they form their own meaning of the space. The tangible and physical urban elements have hypothetical significations. They have a direct influence on the formation of the inhabitant's intangible socio-urban image. Therefore discovering Al-Qaed Ibrahim urban elements allow a general understanding of the square meaning in the Alexandrian urban public sphere.

Moreover, according to Eckardt (2013), the architectural and urban settings convey more than their simple objective meaning and function. They reflect the transformation of the people's sentiments which is not sustained, but rather changeable. Hence, the urban is deriving as a reaction of the transformation of the people's sentiments; it is not sustained, but rather partial, fragmentary, mixed with other concerns such as psychology, neurobiology, cultural and political aspects. Thus, the inhabitants adapt to the surrounding environment in different ways forming their own emotional image of the space.

Al-Qaed Ibrahim urban image is a mirror image of the inhabitants' sociology of emotions and meanings. The intangible psychosomatic significations change due to the individual way of action and interaction with the surrounding environment. The emotion of the urban is the composition of many completing elements such as events, peoples, and space. These are the research gaps that the paper will tackle.

The research is an ethnographic study that undertakes an emic observation approach. It depends on the relation between the "cause" and "effect". The author has conducted 20 in-depth and open-ended interviews with different Egyptian social groups with the age range 20-40. The discussions were mainly focusing on the use of the space before and after the revolution and the change or their sentiments towards the square. That is in addition to their expectation of the future image of the square.

2. Al-Qaed Ibrahim, "Public Space" development

Since 2011, the Egyptian "Public spaces" have been going through various phases, which used to switch between openness "democracy" and closeness "bureaucracy", and therefore affected the inhabitants' emotions toward the public spaces. Thus, this part studies the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim context, activism, and socio-political changes.

2.1 Al-Qaed Ibrahim Context

Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space is one of the most famous squares in Alexandria, located nearby Manshieh square in Al-Ramlh district. The square has a unique and clear form of space (Moussa, n.d.). It stands in sharp contrast to the general character of the city urban image. Inside the square, one feels always in clear relation to its iconic buildings such as Suzanne Mubarak Regional Center for Women's health, Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque, and the other Residential-commercial buildings. That is in addition to the present of tramline, street vendors, mix-use areas, landscape, and underground parking (observation). (See figure 1 showing Al-Qaed Ibrahim square's land use)

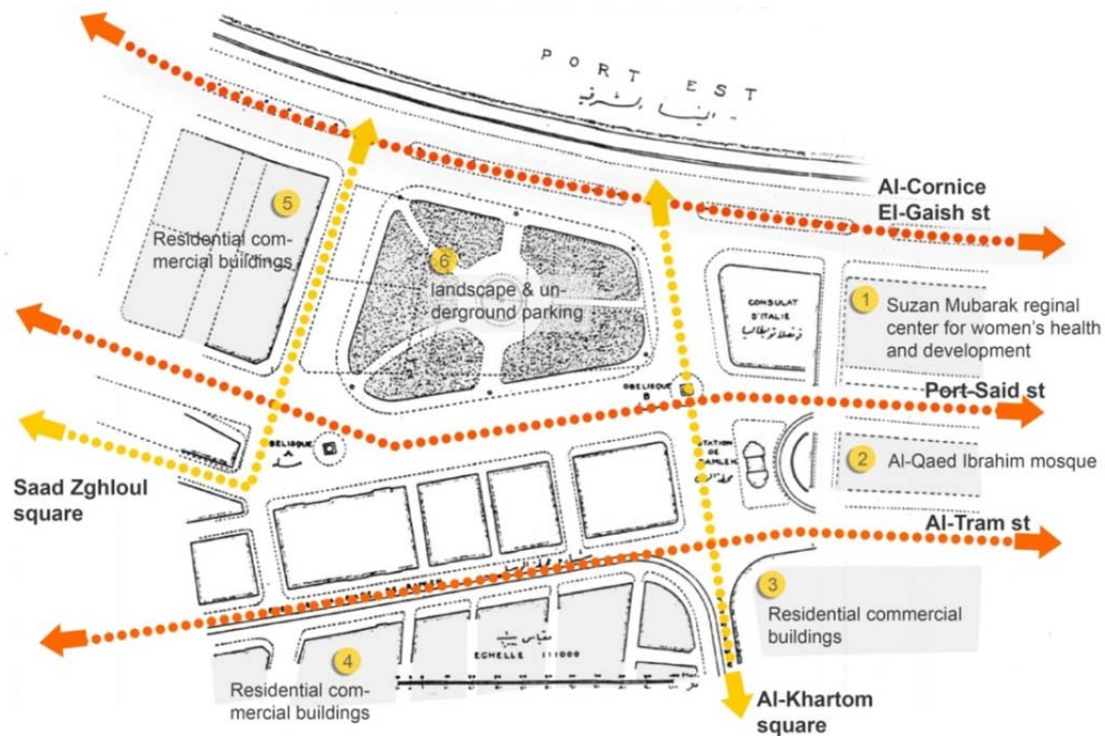


Figure 1. land use of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square (Illustrated by the author based on (Moussa (n.d.)).

On the upright part of the figure, there is Suzanne Mubarak Regional Center for Women's health and development. It was designed, In 1927, by Victor Erlanger, for the reason to occupy the elegant premises. Later, in 1929, the building was established as a house of the Quarantine office of the East. The building's uniqueness came from its architectural style and location, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Suzan Mubarak's building is one of the three such offices in the world; the two others are located in New York and Paris. from 1948 and until the organization moving to Cairo, the World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean office (WHO-EMRO) has employed the premises. In 2002, the Egyptian government reverted and commissioned the building to its present function as a regional center (Canadian Egyptian Association). In 1988, the old extension of the Regional Center for Women's health and development was added. Later on, in 2000 the whole building was remade. Yet, the building façade has been changed many times with the idea to return it to its original form (Moussa, n.d.).

Next to Suzanne Mubarak Regional Center, there is Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque with the square is recognized after. Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque is a religious symbol in Alexandria. It was built in Ramleh station in 1948 by the Italian architect Mario Rossi. It was built between several high buildings which was a risk of being invisible if Rossi did not elevate it. However, unlike other Egyptian and specifically Alexandrian mosques, Al-Qaed mosque overlooks the sea and has a unique architecture and landscape image. Specifically, with the visibility of its long elegant minaret and the beautiful rows of palm trees— Rossi was influenced by the Ottoman architectural and landscape approaches (Moussa, n.d.).

The square consists of the three Alexandrian main roads, first, Al-Corniche street which connect the whole city streets together, second, Port-Said road which ends by the military zone (the revolutionary march ending point), and finally, Al-Tram road which is the easiest way to get access to Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space. Indeed, the mentioned three roads tied the city together. They gave the observer a sense of clarity whenever he crossed them. They are well distinguished and have a clear destination. Therefore, they make of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space a well accessible context (Observation, interviews). (See figure 2 showing the clarity of Al-Qaed Ibrahim context).



Figure 2. Al-Qaed Ibrahim clear accessibility (taken and Illustrated by the author).

Yet by applying Lynch's study of the city elements on the Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space, it helps to understand the area, size, and boundaries of the context. The city image is divided into five tangible elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. Indeed, these classifications of categories define Al-Qaed Ibrahim as a great example of public

space, a clear accessible space with visible edges. The context includes great buildings, green areas, and a water edge which all come down to it. However, there is a strong contrast between the square's buildings. Thus, the surrounding buildings act as a kind of separation that closes the context region from the other regions.

From one side Al-Corniche road is playing the role of edge as there is nothing beyond it, except water. From the other side, the buildings that surround the square are playing the role of edges as well. Such as Al-Tram road, Suzan Mubarak Regional center, the residential-commercial buildings and Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque which makes the context enclosed from inside outside. Consequently, Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space is one of the sharpest points of the city image, an Alexandrian symbol. It is considered as a strategic spot due to its orthographic location and clarity of space form. Inside the square, one feels always in clear relation to its iconic buildings. The square stands in sharp contrast to the general character of the city. It is characterized by its highly typical space, planting, and activity.

Thus, the context is highly differentiated and structured within itself, as being an enclosed space. It gains its importance from being the condensation and concentration of some uses or physical character. The square is divided into two spaces (Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque and Suzan Mubarak Regional center) and with the distinctive city's landmark (Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque). Hence, Al-Qaed square's strength as a landmark seemed to derive from the contrast and irritation felt between its cultural, status and physical invisibility. The public space has a history, a sign, and a meaning attaches to Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque as an object which raises its value as a landmark especially with the visibility of its long elegant minaret. All made of the mentioned public space a symbolic key with a well-identified visual sign for the city. (See figure 3 showing the application of Kevin Lynch's study on Al-Qaed Ibrahim square).

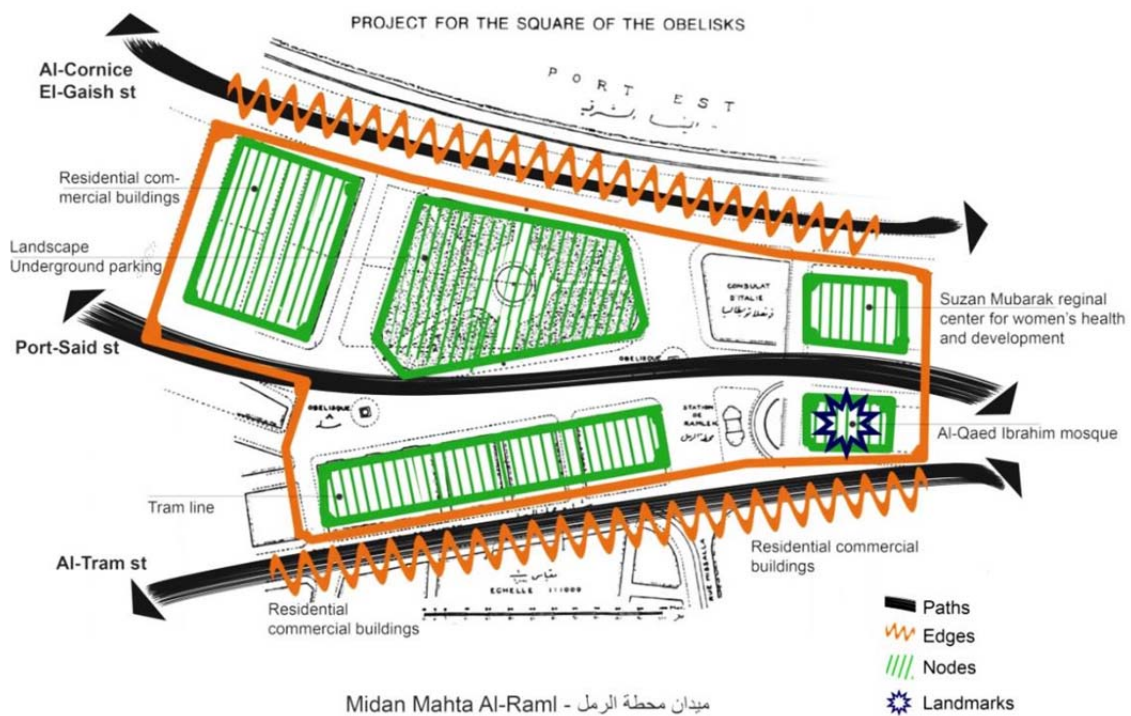


Figure 3. Al-Qaed Ibrahim square analyses (Illustrated by the author based on (Moussa (n.d.)).

2.2 Al-Qaed Ibrahim Activism

Al-Qaed Ibrahim square named after Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque used to be well-known of its "Imam" which was Sheikh Ahmed Al-Mehalawi (an official leader of Muslim brotherhood party). At that time, Anwar El-Sadad was the president of Egypt and due to the political conflict between the governance and the Muslim Brotherhood party, Al-Mahalawi was forbidden to pray with people at the mosque. Thus, the citizens began to argue and question this action, as a lot of people were regular worshipers at this mosque because of the Imam and his way of praying. From that time and because of the political actions, Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque starts to be related to Al-Sheikh el Mahalawi's name and also to his party and that had a direct effect upon the whole square on a socio-political level (Moussa, n.d.).

By 2008, the public space began a new era. Al-Qaed Ibrahim was attracting worshipers from all over the districts in Alexandria. The mosque was well-known for its Tahajjud and Taraweeh prayers during the holy month of Ramadan. Hundreds of thousands of prayers rally around the mosque from the middle of the night and until the early hours of dawn. Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque was usually reaching its peak by the end of Ramadan, especially during the last ten days. As the mosque was overwhelmed with prayers, individuals get to pray outside and around it. The worshipers used to stand along Midan Saeya Zaghoul, Al-Corniche road and also within the surrounding districts and around the Alexandrian library of Mahattet El-Ramehl and Al-Shatbi. The traffic is blocked. In order to fulfill the vast number of prayers, streets and open slots were closed. However, the number of prayers increases until the feast where most of the inhabitants gather to celebrate "Eid".

Next, due to Friday prayer, Al-Qaed Ibrahim square was always full-filled with prayers (Moussa, n.d.). Al-Qaed Ibrahim square continues to be more and more famous until January 25, when the space was converted to play the role of a political window for the entire inhabitant to express their political point of view. As it was used, as mentioned before, to mobilize the "silent masses", the emotion, image, and meaning of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space start to change. The context function was converted from being a place where people meet for a religious performance a "religious symbol" to be a gathering point for protests and marches a "revolutionary symbol". It is notable that Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque has spontaneously affected the whole context of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space. It converted the square into an iconic political symbol through the different socio-religious and political events (interviews).

2.3 Al-Qaed Ibrahim Socio-political Changes

In the pre-revolution phase, Al-Qaed Ibrahim square was recognized out of its religious symbolism due to the presence of the mosque. It was the gathering point for most of the Alexandrians citizens in order to communicate and celebrate the Islamic events as mentioned before. Later on January 25, the square was used as the public space where the demand, chants, and tolls to create social justice were reverberating, a feeling of openness without restrictions. The citizens were taking Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space as the starting point of their protesting marches.

According to Assala (2014/2015), In January 2011, Al-Qaed Ibrahim square was the "virtuous city" where the values of altruism, solidarity, fraternity, dignity, tolerance, and coexistence prevailed a social integration towards a common goal. Streets and open areas have been the medium to convey the demands of the citizens. This concept of

freedom in public has been absent from the mind of the Egyptians for a long time. The citizens' emotions toward Al-Qaed Ibrahim square change due to the revolution event. Their feeling transformed from exclusion to inclusion "right to the city" (interviews). Next, the inhabitant, as well as the authority, changed their methodology in the way of perceiving Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space—from just being a governmental and controlled space to be a public/open area under the power of the citizens. The public square was playing the role of a political window. Indeed Al-Qaed Ibrahim square was not only a public platform for discussion and conflict but also a political contestation battleground. On one side the regime embodied by its security forces and on the other the demonstrator and protestor (Assala, 2014/2015).

Since then, the socio-urban meaning of the public sphere has changed. As before January 2011 and according to (Hafez, 2013), the controlling regime contemplates public space as an element of threatening. That is indoor to control the public and maintain power over the inhabitants. Yet, the public squares turned to be open and accessible to all inhabitants, a public platform for discussions, protesting and demonstrating regardless of the citizens' religion, age and political interest. It is an exclusive space where the Egyptian voice can be heard. This perspective of using the public squares as a window to be heard all over the world was an unexpected comprehensible ideology; an intangible expression for democracy. Later, many Egyptian squares have transformed into a contestation battleground between the regime represented in its security forces, and the demonstrators (Hendawy, 2014/2015; Assala, 2014/2015).

In fact, the inhabitants were the most understanding social group of the meaning and effectiveness of the public space in the political sphere. The public domain begins to see the public context as a power that can promote democracy, effective governance, sustainable development, equality, and social cohesion. According to Arnstein (1969), the inhabitant contribution was a clear-cut expression for their impact on the public sphere. Apart from the protesting and demonstrating activities of the citizens against the government, the activists did successfully activate a process of space perception. They enabled the society to re-interpret the city's public spaces in a more democratic way which is free from the top-down policies and open to the bottom-up revival approach (Hendawy, 2014/2015).

After January 25th, most of the Egyptian public spaces have been reshaped. It was the result of the state's vulnerability and the citizen's self-empowerment. Public squares were not only taken as places to share the citizens' divers' ideologies but also to prevent new expressions on the use of open spaces. Due to the security vacuum and vulnerability of the state's power, many informal practices, new urban roles, and informal patterns have emerged (Assala, 2014/2015).

Unlike, after 2011, exactly in December 2013, the Egyptian socio-political situation has changed. Participating in demonstrations and protest-marches might cause three-year jail sentences (Carlstrom, 2013). These strict regulations have been set, as several Egyptians participated in demonstrations and protests against the current regime. However, these policies let the Egyptian citizens to feel insecure and not open as before, they became afraid of the public spaces. It is kind of forbidden to pray or even to gather at Al-Qaed Ibrahim square (observation). Therefore Al-Qaed Ibrahim as many other public spaces in Egypt transformed back into controlled spaces. A denotation of a "no-public" space (interviews).

3. Al-Qaed Ibrahim Urban Transformation

On January 25th 2011, Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space has been converted into a contestation battleground. On one side there was the regime, embodied by its security forces. And on the other side, there was the demonstrator and protestor, who were fighting for their future and the future of Egypt. The urban meaning has been redefined by adapting new urban functions to the square (Assala, 2014/2015). From that point, the emotion, image and meaning of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space start to change. The context function (known after the mosque) began to convert from being a place where people meet for a religious performance "a religious symbol" to be a gathering point for protests and marches, where the community demonstrates its ideologies through the social movements "a revolutionary symbol".

The above section, Al-Qaed Ibrahim, "Public Space" development gave an insight into the image of Al-Qaed Ibrahim context and socio-political changes in Alexandria. It underlines not only the impact of the socio-political events on the meaning of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space but also discovers the changes of the citizens' sentiments toward the context. Indeed it deeply reflects the changes in the use of the space. For this reason, this part analyses the on-ground tangible and intangible changes, and current situation of Al-Qaed Ibrahim square. On the one hand, the intangible reflects the transformation of society, the citizens' emotions. On the other hand, the tangible reflects the changes in the urban setting, in terms of practices, such as the newly built walls, public graffiti, and street vendors. Next, each of these intangible and tangible aspects will be separately discussed.

3.1 Intangible Changes

Since the 25th of January 2011, a new vision of national unity has been invented at Al-Qaed Ibrahim square. Even the non-protestant citizens would visit the revolutionary context to watch the creative public seen and be a part of the crowd (Assala, 2014/2015). As observed by the author families with their children were going to Al-Qaed public space to spend the day and enjoy food and sweets provided by the street vendors. Following the intensive days of demonstrating, the citizens obtained more sense of ownership over the Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space which was reflected in their performance way of cleaning after the sit-ins. However, this behaviour represents Al-Qaed Ibrahim as an example that is claimed, owned, and managed by the public to serve their own needs. According to Assala (2014/2015), this "right to occupy space" did clarify how much the Egyptian inhabitants have lacked their simple right in the public sphere (interviews).

However, this state has allowed the citizens to produce vibrant communities, live node to challenge all the physical, social and symbolic barriers (observation). Apart from this, Media such as the radio and T.V stations played an important role in raising funds as well as the citizens' awareness. With the rise of need, there was also a rise in the mobilization of resources to Al-Qaed square. The social media and word-of-mouth were the fundamental means of passing on requests for money, medicine, and food. Additionally, as a method to mobilize resources; the square was an online community recognized in 2011 on Twitter by a group of youth, their mission was to communicate the needs of the field hospitals in Al-Qaed public space to the public. It was requested on Twitter or over the phone (El-Taraboulsi, n.d.).

Furthermore, the citizens' way of interaction with the public space changed; instead of perceiving streets as parking slots or empty spaces run by the authority, they used it as sacred gateways to their homes. The paths of Al-Qaed square were used as shared spaces that guard the citizens to their neighbourhoods. Thanks to this transformation in the urban image, public art became an expression method of freedom, instead of being a political taboo. This was observed by the author. Hence, public squares were perceived as a meeting point or node to protest against the regime instead of seeing it as an impermissible fenced garden. These urban changes came to the idea that the meaning of the public spaces transformed due to political events. It proves that the socio-political events have a direct influence on the people's emotions and way of thinking toward of Al-Qaed Ibrahim context which is an intangible urban change (interviews).

3.2 Tangible Changes

In 2011 and during the sit-in at Al-Qaed Ibrahim square, new spatial uses and typologies have emerged. The space landscape was diversified. According to Assala (2014/2015), new humanitarian aid models were created to provide the protesters' needs of food, shelter, and medicine. The protesters had their own hospital, pharmacy, spaces for medical supplies, rehabilitation, and blood donation and even spaces for public restrooms, kindergarten, barber, as well as sleeping tents (observation and interviews). As Al-Qaed Ibrahim square was the centre of protester's mobilization and clashes broke out in the surrounding spaces, the presence of humanitarian aid was needed. Therefore, Making-shift hospitals within the square were essential to wound the demonstrators. According to El-Taraboulsi (n.d.) "street hospital" was staffed by volunteer doctors. With the donor open-handedness and support, field hospitals and their storage rooms have developed from ruins into well-equipped field hospitals [...] the Arab Awakening has brought to the foreground the nexus between social movements and resource mobilization... heavily influenced by the citizens in both form and content".

Platforms for public speaking, commercial hubs were also created and managed by street vendors. The citizens continued to flourish toward the revolutionary square by their sentiment and by being creative and innovative within the informal realm. Even, the Egyptian youth and artists had the chance to express their social and political views in an artistic approach. Public art became an expression method of freedom—instead of being a political taboo. It was the first time to see this way of contribution from the inhabitant. They went to the streets repainting the curbs with the colours of the Egyptian flag and expressing themselves on the walls with graffiti and artwork (Assala, 2014/2015).

In fact, The Arab Spring events in the Middle East region have created an "urban revolution ". New activities have emerged in the public sphere, such as street vendors (Nagati & Stryker, 2012). According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2011), the street vendors represent a major percentage of the informal economy. These street markets are mainly occupied by the rural-urban migration whose needs are not met by the authorities but they are still determined to be urban-citizen. However, these excluded citizens used to act in the face of the top-down planning model (Hendawy, 2014/2015).

Yet, after 30 June 2013, in order to block the demonstrators' marches and movement to reach the governmental institutions, some of the main streets in Alexandria were barricaded by the state (observation). This act reached its peak when the state built numerous huge block barriers, cutting the majority of the roadways leading from and to Al-Qaed Ibrahim square. These physical/tangible barriers, which could be solid or hard intervention such as reinforced concrete or the illegal structures built of more permanent materials, were blocking the mobility system in Alexandria. However, by placing these fences around Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space, the regime is not only crippling the infrastructure of the city but also destroying again the meaning of the public space (Hendawy, 2014/2015).

Al-Qaed Ibrahim context was gated by the rolling regime forces, which was a clear message that the public space is in-control and under the power of the state, not public anymore. Later in February 2014, the Egyptian Minister of Interior had ordered the removal of the concrete walls blocking the streets of the cities. This action created an impression that the public life is returning into normal, but practically, the blocking walls were replaced by steel gates. These fences barriers have been a part of the regime policy to restrict the citizens. That is in order to prevent the inhabitant from crossing the street or simply enjoying the "not-accessible" public spaces (Assala, 2014/2015). Nevertheless, many expressions of such forms of urban protest in the Egyptian cities have been physically redefined. On one hand, the cities have been cut into sections by walls, barriers, and disrupted infrastructures. On the other hand, cities have been reformed through the inhabitant's informal interventions in the public spaces which reflect their resistance and resilience to return back to the silent oppression; mentioned by many Egyptian citizens during the author personal interviews as well as by Heba (2014/2015).

3.3 Current Situation "the No- Public"

From an urban perspective, usually, the location of any democratic action, protesting or demonstrating, tends to take place in streets or squares. It is for the reason that the public sphere is the place where the citizens could get together to ask for their basic social and political rights. Furthermore, the public space is one of the critical measures that assess the city's vitality through reflecting the coagulation of events, activities, objects and people's accumulation. However, after 2013, the Egyptian public squares did merely returned back as being an urban spaces design shaped and produced by the state. The socio-political events have created a way of contestation in and from the public. However, this contestation could be traced between two societal scopes; the citizens, and the authority. From one side, there are the citizens who were calling for their basic rights, and from the other side, there is the current regime who is gaining control over the outraged rebels (observation and interviews).

According to Assala (2014/2015), the inhabitant turned once again to be socially and geographically marginalized and excluded. Consequentially, as a result of the latest political event in 2013, most of the Egyptian cities and more especially in Alexandria witnessed a clear lack of the public domain's participation in the socio-political life. The citizens turned once again being socially and geographically marginalized, excluded and segregated. However, this action was caused by ethnicity, religion, wealth and political affiliations which is produced by the ages of political authoritarianism.

Indeed, the Egyptian population is currently divided into two political orientations. These orientations reflect the Egyptian's social fragmentation which is characterized by two central ideological groups: the military and the Islamic once. They are ideologically distributed with regard to their domains, classes, social groups, as well as their identity and according to the personal social level within the larger community. Due to this ideological fragmentation, the urban public domain has been directly affected. The production of the public domains, gardens, and squares has been divided between the two above mentioned groups. Neither of the two scopes could accept the presence of any of the other scope participants. However, this act has led to a clear production of social segregation.

According to Race Riots in the publication of "Chicago in the red summer of 1919", he stated: "There is no public policy on segregation but there is a de facto segregation. "This is particular true for informal patterns of segregation as for the beaches... that Eugene Williams crosses the "imaginary line" between white and black by swimming accidentally to the other side where will be killed by whites. The police remain inactive although present." However, that is obviously similar to what happened in Egypt, a clear "imaginary segregated line" between the two different political groups. It is easy to spot the similarity between the two cases by comparing the above image in Egypt with the bellow figure in Chicago.

Due to the authorities dislike toward certain ideological classes or parties, and because of the state's social or physical barriers, a part of the Egyptian inhabitant classes has been displaced from the social public spaces and being identified as a threat to the state. Yet, the citizens' use of the urban public domain has been declined. Moreover, based on Levy (1999), streets in Egypt turned again from space for cultural, political and social gathering into a minor space for the public welfare movements. The political powers, who are mainly the controller of the decision-making process, returned to be the main factor in shaping the public urban domain, as public spaces that represent the power of the state (Assala, 2015). That is a clear production of social segregation. Yet, the citizens' use of Al-Qaed Ibrahim "Public space" is declined (observation), because of the fear and the unwilling of being recognized after a certain party, with a no-public space denotation (interviews).

4. Conclusion

Thanks to the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the socio-urban meaning and use of public spaces have been reshaped. The public squares became the measure of the city's vitality and dynamic. The areas that reflect the coagulation of events, activities and people's affiliations despite their political orientations and ideologies, all collaborate together in order to make the Egyptian dream of freedom (Hendawy, 2014/2015). Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space was transformed into the square where the demand for social justice was spoken. Consequentially, new urban roles and patterns have emerged (El-Taraboulsi, n.d.).

This concept of openness in the public sphere has been absent from the minds of the Egyptians for a long time, causing people to be closed, unaccepting and ignorant towards each other. As before 2011 some of the controlling regimes contemplate public spaces as elements of threatening to their authorities, as a part of the state domain. They persist

in operating and controlling the public sphere with the purpose of maintaining power and control over the inhabitants. That is in order to avoid any political involvement, contribution, and activities, in addition to oppressing the freedom of speech and press. After 2011, apart from the protesting and demonstrating activities of the citizens against the government, the activists did successfully activate a process of space perception. They enabled the society to re-interpret the city's public spaces in a more democratic way which is free from the top-down policies and open to the bottom-up revival approach (Hendawy, 2014/2015). The citizens were the most understanding social group of the meaning and effectiveness of the public space in the political sphere. The public spaces were mostly managed and owned by the public. The open squares turned to be more recognized as spaces accessible to all inhabitants, rather than being strictly abounded from the ruling regime. They are spaces not only for gathering, socializing and celebrating but also for initiating discussions, protesting and demonstrating regardless of their religion, age and political interest. Many of the activists, artists, practitioners, specialists and large segments of society have paved their way to express themselves. It was by stating their own political point of view and acting on initiatives that aim to claim their rights to the city and to the public space. However, due to the security vacuum and the vulnerability of the state's power, many informal practices have arisen (Assala, 2014/2015). Yet, some of these practices have been removed, displaced or sheltered, while some of them are still visible and interacting with the current Egyptian's daily lifestyle.

Yet, yes, the research confirmed that the physical urban transformation and civic emotional changes both play an important role in reshaping the urban public sphere's meaning and use. The paper adheres to two main theories. The first is Lynch's study in order to study the Al-Qaed Ibrahim urban context as a public space, while the second is Eckard's theory in order to investigate the citizens' emotional changes toward the square due to the changes of events. Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque/square is a public space. It seizes a special emotional substance in the Alexandrian society. Thus Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque surpasses its basic religious functions because it provides additional socio-urban roles.

By applying Lynch's study and comparing its city elements (paths, nodes, and landmarks) with the alexandrine context, the paper figured out that Al-Qaed Ibrahim square is an example for a clear open space. It is, therefore, a public space and an iconic symbol in the Alexandrian public sphere. Moreover, the paper unveiled that the citizen's emotions toward Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space have been modified due to the changes in the Egyptian political discourses and power conflicts. In 2011 many activists, artists, practitioners, and specialists started to be free in expressing themselves; that is to claim their rights to the city and space. Yet, a clear segregation between inhabitants in the social and political domains has emerged. Furthermore, the citizens' use of urban public spaces has declined. For instance, the comparison between the number of people praying at Al-Qaed Ibrahim mosque in 2013, 2015 and now underlines that the citizens' emotions toward space have changed. In 2013 the number of prayers was extremely huge in comparison with the current number in 2019. Likewise, Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space has transformed, from being a secure space used for performing religious rituals, into a square where people are afraid to visit because of the turbulent and violent political actions.

The paper draws attention to the fact that the political conflict in Egypt, unfortunately, threatens the Egyptian societal coherence. It goes far beyond polarization, as it ruins the Egyptian positive social harmony. For instance, Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space has transformed into a segregation node—that is destruction to the Alexandrian socio-urban fabric. When socio-political conflicts take place, like in the Egyptian case, neither claiming to have the absolute right nor creating a dictatorship, justifying brutalities and validating discrimination, can create long-lasting public solutions. Through this research, the author calls the different Egyptian political and civic powers to talk and recognize each other. That is for the belief that for the current situation there is no solution, but through the complete societal reconciliation, coexistence, and peace with the aim of establishing freedom, justice and equality. This is to reconstruct Egypt, which should be for all Egyptians.

Finally but also importantly, based on the current situation of Al-Qaed Ibrahim public space, like many other public square in Egypt, the square is theoretically annotated as "public space", but practically it is not, it denotes a "no-public space" image, in terms of meaning and use. Therefore, how to return the use of the space as it should be a "public space" without any restriction? How to overcome the citizens' anxious emotions, feeling and memories toward space and returned again into a "welcoming" public space for all social groups? These are the gaps that the research suggests for future researches.

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This paper is a reproduction of part of the author's unpublished master dissertation, written in 2015 in the English language, entitled: Beyond the Religious Denotation: A study on the development of Al-Qaed Ibrahim's socio-urban denotative meaning—In the Post-Revolution Context. The master was in the European urban studies (EU) program from 2013 until 2015. The master dissertation was under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Frank Eckardt and Dipl.-Ing. (FH) Philippe Schmidt. The author has revised and developed the first and last part of the dissertation to present this paper in the English language to expand the utilization of its content to a wider range of researchers. The author is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Bauhaus University Weimar in Germany, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Frank Eckardt.

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