

## Article

# Social Mobility and Green Open Urban Spaces With Special Reference to Cairo

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## Abstract

*Many rudiments and dynamics formulate the quality of life in cities; one of them is urban green space. Green urban area plays a vital role in improving the quality of life in cities, on the environmental level and social level as well. This paper examines the interrelationship between socio-economic mobility and the form, the use and the quality of green space with a particular reference to Cairo, Egypt. It also seeks to determine the critical factors in making those spaces up to user's expectations. The paper debates the notion of green urban spaces, development through time and the type of users in association with the socio-economic and political dimensions through a comprehensive literature review. It critically observes and documents the changes and the transformations in the green urban open space in Cairo, which, happens in consequent with socio-economic changes and political drifts taking Zamalek district, Cairo as a field study area. The paper reaches its results using correlation analyses, which approves the interrelationship between socio-economic mobility and physical changes and transformations in urban green spaces.*

**Keywords:** Socioeconomic Mobility; Green Urban Spaces; Cairo; Egypt

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## 1. Introduction

In developing countries, the role of public green spaces in urban contexts is often underestimated. Whereas those spaces potentially have a considerable positive impact on the quality of urban life is very well recognised in the literature, on the contrary in real life. Urban green spaces are some of the tools for achieving environmental sustainability through which we improve the quality of life, air quality and healthy development for urban areas. Green public spaces can provide many benefits to the cities. The benefits can be socio-economic, social, environmental and psychological. Green spaces increase people's appreciation of the natural environment. (Liverpool Government, 2014) Though those benefits are difficult to measure in a precise manner, they are still recognised. (PPS, 2001) The famous cities generate its power not only from their economic sovereignty or Cultural symbols but also from the urban green spaces that appear as landmarks. (Hassan, 2007). Dunnett (2002) Stresses on the public benefits of the gardens and all the green spaces; thus gardens inside the city or the district can draw the mental image in the user's minds.

*"Urban green spaces provide the green fabric of the urban landscape, complementing the built environment that often dominates the scene. Both parts of the urban landscape have value in their right, but it is often when high-quality buildings and green spaces occur together that special "gems" of townscape are created."* (Dunnett, 2002, p.87)

Local authorities of Liverpool (2014) stated the benefits of green spaces in their recent project regarding green spaces development, on which Marwa Hassan (2007) agreed, and added more educational and urban benefits. Table no.1 summarises it all. In the end, it could be said with confidence that today's municipalities can no longer ignore the role that, green spaces play.

<b>The different benefits of the public green spaces</b>	
<b>Urban</b>	Creating mental image seems like a city's lung breathe, recreation, relaxing, spending leisure time, enjoying the natural scenery & intervention of happiness and joy.
<b>Economic</b>	Property value &revitalize the economy by attracting retaining business and residents.
<b>Social</b>	Fewer Crimes & make stable district and connected community.
<b>Educational</b>	Doing workshops for children & establishing programs to work with the kids.
<b>Health</b>	Psychiatric benefits & physical benefits
<b>Environmental</b>	Supporting biodiversity, limited pollution, offer the climate comfort zone & supporting landscape and culture heritage.

**Table no. 1: The benefits of the public green spaces. (Source: Marwa Hassan, 2007)**

## **2. Foundation**

The following paragraphs address the interrelationship between social changes, economic orientations, and political shifts. Moreover, realise the lifestyle and culture variations in the Egyptian community caused by the globalisation force.

### **2.1 Socio-economic mobility about political drifts**

Socio-economic and cultural trajectories are the results of a specific political regime (Wanas, 2013). In Egypt, There is an eternal interrelationship between the political drifts and economic demands, which affect the social and culture lifestyle. Galal Amin (2009) argues that the primary dominant force producing the Egyptian new lifestyle was the social mobility driven by economic liberalisation and political orientations. Furthermore, he links this to religious fanaticism, globalisation, and westernisation. The transformation due to globalisation began with the integration of the economic system into the world capitalist system, economic openness policies, and liberalisation. Economic adjustments are always in a relationship with political shifts. It has a significant effect on social changes (Shahine, 2011) Political authorities have a lot of power, which has its impact on urban areas whether it is developed or still under development. Consequently, development policies can have a physical and non-physical impact on urban open spaces such as; form, edges, motion, type, number and nature of users, sense of place and sense of belonging (Wanas, 2013).

### **2.2 Lifestyle and culture changes**

Egypt is oriented to a global culture. Globalisation is one of the main factors that can make significant changes in the social classes and lifestyle (Salem, 2011). Globalisation, in general, can be defined as the increasing integration of economies, societies, and cultures around the world. In another opinion, it can be defined as the denationalisation of economies and culture. It is also the transfer of power and influence from national states to the global markets. Globalisation makes the world today more interconnected than before (Urban Elite, 2010). The significant shift in the urban form in cities can be observed due to the industrial revolution, globalisation and the changes in priorities. Therefore, most cities around the world became similar, and their fabric developed to be familiarly mediated with new technological systems (Abou El-Ela, 2003). The spread of shopping malls, golf courses, and coffee shops instead of parks and public gardens are the reflections of globalisation in the lifestyle that caused the transformation of the urban green open spaces physically and non-physically. That happened due to adopting a new way of life, which affected Egyptian culture and identity (Abaza, 2006).

In This context, the paper argues that changes in the green urban public spaces in Cairo be results of Socio-economic changes and political shifts.

### 3. The case in Cairo, Egypt

For many decades, the Egyptian government was oriented to face problems related to economic development, informal urban areas, traffic, and overpopulation. The building, developing and maintaining urban green spaces were at the end of the list of priorities. It came after the infrastructure and providing services and utilities and so forth.

#### 3.1 The Growth of Cairo and new orientations

Population growth in cities, lack of infrastructure, traffic, and housing problems are major challenges in the process of implementing sustainable development. Thus, rapid urbanisation and the speed of social and economic development are the new factors to be added to those challenges (Shah Md & Atiqua Haq, 2011).

The government's main task is to manipulate these difficulties along with putting in consideration that urban green space is an indispensable element in the surrounding environment that cannot be ignored or compromised. Marwa Hassan (2007) mentioned that the importance of the green spaces is not less than the infrastructure of cities. Will Rogers (2004) agreed and stated:

*"Sure, parks are nice. However, are they important? Do parks contribute to a community's health and vitality, in the same way, traditional urban infrastructure does? Recent studies say yes. Parks are not an extra that can be ignored in tough economic times. As a part of the urban infrastructure, they are as essential as roads, bridges, and utilities."*  
(Rogers, 2004, P.9)

Starting from the middle of the 20th century, Not only the Egyptian government's policies ignored increasing and developing green urban public spaces but also permitted wasting legacies. El-Azbakeya garden is a typical case. The garden lost 40% of its green area to infrastructure projects. Street vending activities, formal and informal markets wasted the quality of the garden. The following maps demonstrate the origin and configuration phase and transformation phase from 1798 to 2010. Moreover, also document the physical changes in the urban green space.

The last third of the twentieth century witnessed the following (Nasser, 2013).

- 1- Cairo municipality detached the garden fence
- 2- Garden maintenance has been ignored
- 3- Waste and garbage collection has been ignored
- 4- Phenomenal accretion of street vendors around the garden
- 5- In 2012 Cairo municipality allocated street vendors inside the garden to solve street vending activity chronic problem

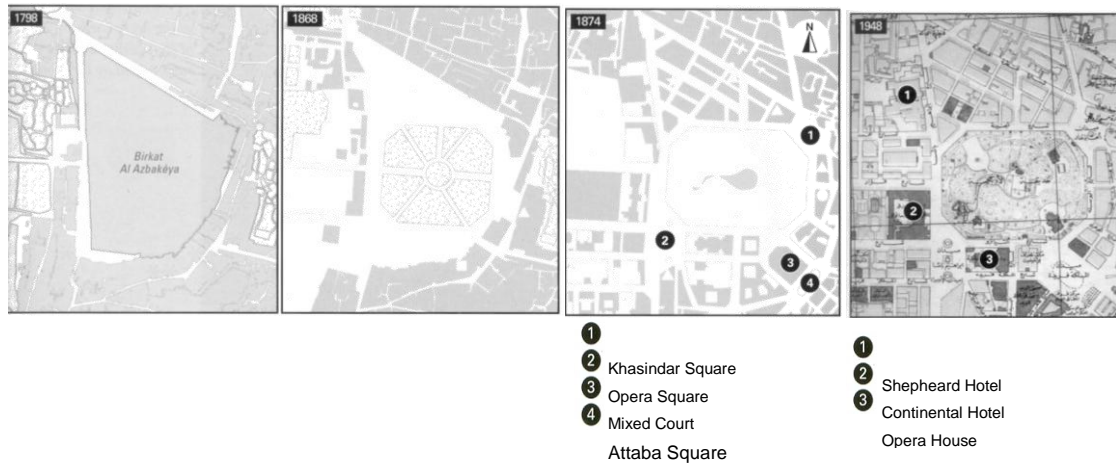


Figure no. (1): El-Azbakeya garden's Origin and configuration phase since 1798 till 1948 (Source: El-Kadi, 2012)



Figure no. (2): The transformation phase of El-Azbakeya garden, (Source: Edited by the Author After (El-Kadi, 2012)

Green spaces supposed to be designed to fulfil dweller's social, economic, environmental and psychological needs. Governments along with designers and planners should develop criteria to generate and assess that (S.Balram & S.Dragicevic, 2005).

The population of Cairo has tripled between 1952 and 2005. Roughly reached 17 million, which made Cairo one of the most densely inhabited cities of the world. By that time, the share of the person of green space was one square foot. In 2010, it reached 0.5 m<sup>2</sup>/person (Aga Khan, 2004).

Table 1: The Share of the person in urban green spaces of Cairo over time. Source: (By the Author)

Year	Persons' share in green spaces	Source
1870	15-25 m <sup>2</sup> / person	Supreme Council for Planning and Urban Development
1954	8m <sup>2</sup> / person	Supreme Council for Planning and Urban Development
1975	1.2m <sup>2</sup> / person	Cairo government
1990	One footprint/person	Supreme Council for Planning and Urban Development
2004	.0308m <sup>2</sup> / person	Aga khan, 2004
2007	1.83m <sup>2</sup> / person	Cairo government
2008	1.5m <sup>2</sup> / person	Supreme Council for Planning and Urban Development
2010	0.5 m <sup>2</sup> / person	Cairo government

### 3.2 Users of Cairo is urban green spaces

Cairo's modern urbanisation and public social life started in the 19th century. The triangle between Shepard's Hotel, Al Azbakeiyah Garden, and the Opera house was the centre of a new public life in the newly developed district as shown in figure no. 3

These green spaces invited various groups of users seeking entertainment. The users were either the original neighbourhood residents or lived in the surrounding areas.

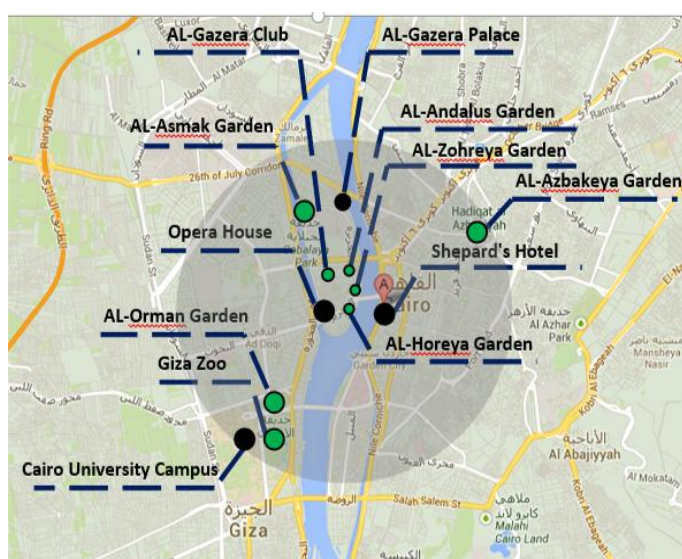


Figure no. (3): The map of the first modern green urban spaces setup in 19th century, Source: Google map, Edited by the author.

Most of the users were the elite of the society, bourgeoisie, and Europeans who visited these spaces simply because it met their needs and expectations, figure no.4. Due to the social class of users at that time, entering these green spaces was controlled (Ahmed, 2001).

Aya Nasser (2013) sustained the previous belief and called that new trend "modern global meta", which resulted in



Figure no. (4): The social class of El- Azbakeiyah garden visitors in 1943, Source: <https://www.faroukmisr.net/photos>, accessed: 27/2/2014

the appearance of modernity and raised the hygiene.

Due to the government deficiency in providing public green urban spaces in Cairo over the last decades, the public had to find other outlets. The shopping malls, which, have been built recently were there to fill in the gap, without searching too far. The private sector intervention was massive in providing coffee houses, shopping malls, places of entertainment, huge floating boats and other types of places for the public to socialise and mix with groups. Apparently, investing in such trades become a profitable business. The unused green urban spaces are not the first choice for the people who have the financial capacity to use other available alternatives. The non-users of the gardens find these places more accommodating, have a better atmosphere and comfortable. They find it ideal for meeting friends, dating and a field for various activities besides shopping (Abaza, 2006).

#### **4. Method**

To investigate the interrelationship between socio-economic mobility and the form, the use and the quality of green space in Cairo, a field study was conducted on one of the largest green urban spaces of Cairo, Egypt. Urban green spaces in Zamalek Island have been selected. Those spaces were among Khedive Ismail's plans for modern Cairo. Once they were part of the royal palaces of the Khedive, visited only by the elite in a social sense before it is decided to be open to the public (Nasser, 2011). Zamalek Island and its gardens have been chosen because of their historical value and their location, which is central and close to a residential area as well. These reasons made them exposed to the public and accessible as well. Nowadays, these gardens namely; "Al-Andalus", "Liberty and Friendship", El-Nahr and El-Massala". The field study is conducted through documentation of the physical changes and transformations in consequent to socio-economic changes accompanied by political drifts. The paper used qualitative descriptive methods to reach its goal.

#### **5. Green urban spaces in Zamalek district – origin and configuration**

The island of El- Zamalek was an agricultural land. In 1863, Khedive Ismail was fascinated by the European gardens, and he decided to transform the island into a huge park. In 1869 Khedive constructed the royal gardens to surround El-Gezira palace. On the top of that, he divided the island into five main parts, which were: El-Gezira palace, grotto garden, the new promenade, El-Zohreya palace, and Ezbet El-Kobri. In 1879 El-Gezira Palace and its attachments were sold to repay the khedive's debts. The new owner was Misr Hotels Company, which converted it to El-Gezira hotel. With the increase of the British power in Egypt due to the British colonisation in 1882, 120 acres have been cut from the Khedivial horticulture garden to be dedicated to a sporting club. At that time, it was called Khedivial Sporting Club, which is El-Gezira sporting club now. A few years later, another part of the garden

was granted to the African missionary to support the Egyptian-African relations at the time. As a result, the island has been divided into three main sections. The northern section, which contains the African missionary farms, El-Gezira palace and, Grotto garden. The Middle section, which includes Khedival sporting club. The Southern Section, which has El-Zohereya palace, the experimental garden, and Ezbet El Kobri. (The organisation of survey, 2014)

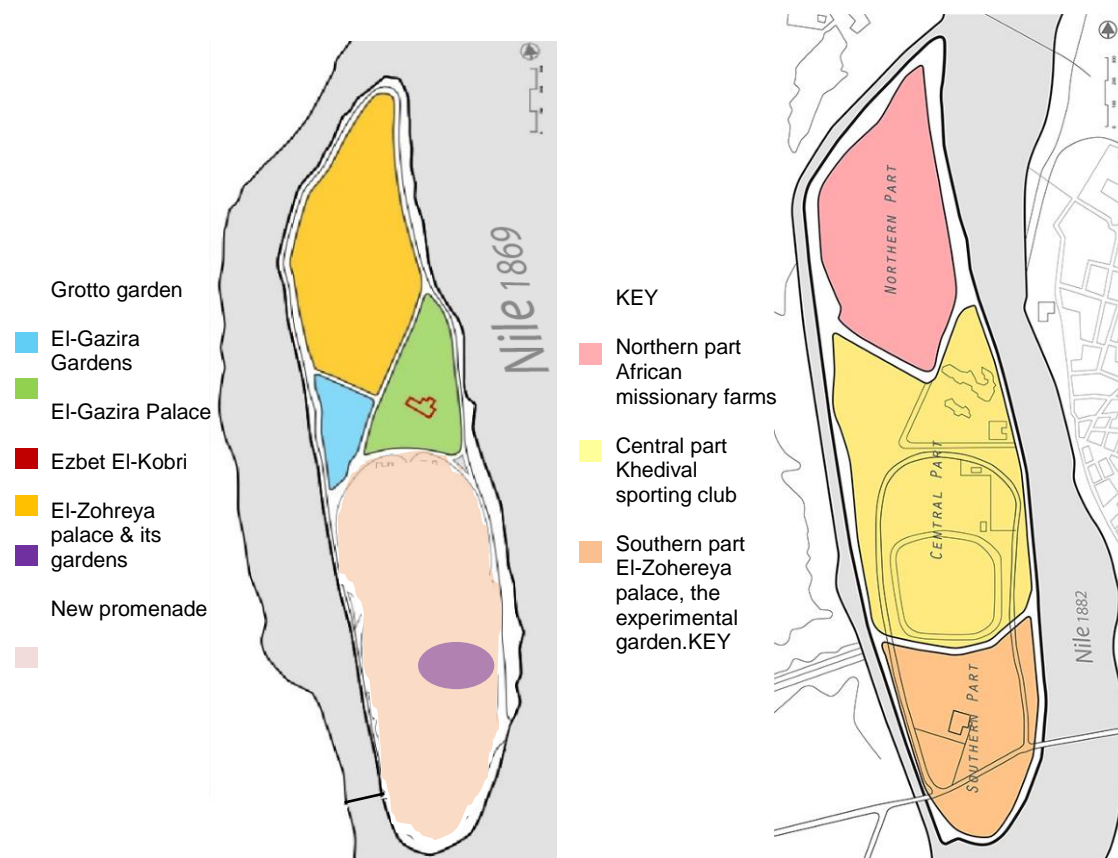


Figure no. (5): (Right) The Island in 1869, Source: By the Author, after Organization of survey, 2014  
(Left), The Island after 1882, Source: By the Author, after Organization of survey, 2014

After the end of World War I in 1918 the tourism sector completely collapsed. El-Gezira Palace and its gardens were sold to Lebanese Prince, who used it as his residence.

Within the activities of the propagation of local culture and arts after 1952, the ministry of El-ma'aref decided to build a museum inside El-Gezirah gardens. It is dedicated for Mahmoud Mokhtar sculptures and to host his body after his death. Moreover, El-Ahli Sporting Club has been granted a vast area as a gift for the youth who supported the 23rd of July revolution. The Police Sporting Club occupied a different area. On another field of the Gardens, Cairo Tower has been built to support a new wave of nationalism. In 1956, a presidential decree Issued to deduct 97 acres



from El-Gezira Sporting Club to construct El-Gezira Youth Club to serve the low-income social class in support to socialism trajectory. In addition to, El-Gezira gardens have been allocated and opened to the public at an affordable ticket price to serve the low-income class excluding spring festivals when they were open for free. In 1962, after the nationalisation of El-Gezira Palace and its remained gardens have been used as a hotel (Omar El-Khayam Hotel) in a governmental plan for promoting tourism. In the seventies, due to the open-door economic policy Marriott International company earned Omar El-Khayam Hotel management after building two high-rise buildings and one low-rise in the gardens of the palace to allow for more rooms. The construction 6th of October fly-over, which was one of the solutions to the chronic traffic problem of Cairo also, has its impact on the green spaces of the island. It covered some of the green areas to create unfavourable new green urban spaces.

Clearly, the 23rd of July Revolution brought a new political regime. The strident turn in the administrative system affected all aspects of life in Cairo. The turn came with its socio-economic and cultural trajectories. The nationalisation movement and the path of socialism caused tangible social mobility, which needed to be catered for at this time of history. Between the years 1952 and 1977, the public sector was dominating the Egyptian economy. The decisions of dividing the green areas in Zamalek Island and the reallocation happened to accommodate social mobility and to support the principles of socialism. After 1977, the open-door policy ended the dominance of the public sector and encouraged both domestic and foreign investment in the private sector causing another wave of social mobility. Capitalism limited the chances and the opportunities of using the green public urban spaces not to mention the loss of some green scape.

Ironically, the same scenario is happening after more than fifty years. In response the inquiries of Jan 2011 revolution the government reacts. On April 2014, in an attempt to provide for a unique social class, the minister of youth and sport receives a generous fund to renovate El-Gezira Youth Club, which has been neglected for years. The renovation included five football green fields, five tennis courts, a basketball court, two handball courts, a playground for Power Olympics players and some multi-purpose playgrounds.

Taking a closer look at the urban green spaces in Zamalek Island, specifically on the eastern and southern edge indicated in the figure (6). This green strip has witnessed physical changes over the last decades, which may help to understand the relationship between physical transformation and social mobility.

The green strip was intact till the construction of Qasr El-Nile Bridge, which connected the island with the eastern bank of the Nile. It divided the green strip into two parts, which have been developed by Khedive Ismail in 1876 to be Liberty Garden in the south and El-Nahr Garden in the north as shown in Figure (6). The total area of the two gardens is around 42 acre.

### **5.1 The Liberty and Friendship Garden**

The total area of The Liberty Garden, when constructed was around 27 acre.

In the fifties of the twentieth century, around 11.5 acres of the garden have been deducted to form "El-Baladia Sporting Club", currently "Cairo Sporting Club". This deduction happened to dedicate an area to the growing middle and high-middle social class in support to the principles of 23rd July 1952 revolution and to reflect the vision of the government at that time. As mentioned previously Mahmoud Mokhtar Museum has been constructed on the garden soil. Tourism sector took another cut to build El-Gezirah Hotel. The hotel is a high-rise building overlooking the Nile, currently managed by Sofitel International Company. This action was a result of the open-door economy in the tourism sector. (Figures 7). The Liberty Garden has lost close to 20 acres of its original area for many reasons as mentioned (EL Messiri, 2015).

Cairo municipality gave permission the contracting company of Cairo underground metro line to use it for storage purposes with negligence to the botanical value. During that time, the garden was serving as a storage yard. In the late nineties of the twentieth century, the garden was subjected to a conservation project to protect the historic botanical heritage. It reopened to the public in 2001 (The organisation of specified gardens, 2014). Figure (8)

### **5.2 El-Nahr Garden**

In 1909, the southern part of El-Nahr Garden was used as El-Gezirah skating arena and the Theatre of the Ambassadors. Figure (9) At that time, Egypt beset by the British colonisation. It makes sense that land-use signifies that. In 1929, Zulfakar Pasha funded the same area mentioned to be developed as a beautiful garden. It was divided into three sections namely; Al-Andalus, Al-Ferdous, and Al-Pharaoh.

The northern part of El-Nahr Garden was a fenceless extended green urban space directly connected to the Nile. The landscape was primarily designed to accommodate two pedestrian pathways. One was by the Nile rim, and the other was central and directed north-south. The only building within the garden was a mosque, which has been built by Khedive Ismail. (Organization of survey, 2014)

Another area has been deducted from El-Nahr Garden for "SONO Cairo" for media production. The Arabic name is "Sout Alqahira Company". The company is initially founded and owned by the Egyptian singer Mohamed Fawzy before Nationalization. Fawzy established the company as "Microphone Company" in the late forties, and in 1959, as "Al-Shark Al-Awsat Factory" for sound disc production than "Sono Cairo" for media production. After 1952 revolution, the new government with its new political regime required a voice to reach for not only Egyptians but also the Arab nation. Nationalising "Sono Cairo" was the short cut. In 1977, "SONO Cairo" became

one of the companies of the Radio and the Television Union, which is owned by the Ministry of Media (SIS, 2014). Seems that at that time being the official media voice of the government, qualifies the company to occupy this strategic location in Cairo and to expand at the expense of losing more green public urban space. Figure (10)

In 2001, Due to the decrease in the Nile water level, a piece of land had been added to the island. It was parallel to the eastern rim and directly connected to the green stripe but on a lower level. Cairo municipality assigned it as a public garden and names it El-Gezira Garden. The Nile waterfront was always attractive for floating restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs. Open-door economy, flourish of tourism, and capitalism facilitated for eight multi-story floating restaurants to moor by the riverbank. Pedestrian walkways, which were parallel to the Nile edge, are transformed to vehicular streets to serve for the floating restaurants. Also, some perpendicular vehicle streets have been added. Those streets shredded the garden into relatively small fenced green pitches (The organisation of specified gardens, 2014). The streets and the sidewalks are used as car parking area – Vale Parking – to serve the top social class visitors. Pedestrian bridges were required to access the boats from the street level. Those bridges fly over the public green urban space that has been added to the island, which is now closed to the public for security reasons. The owners of the boats complained to the government that their guesses do not feel comfortable next to a busy public space serving a different social class.

The Mosque, which has been once open to the garden, has a fence to separate its landscape from the rest of the garden. Maybe the strength the religious power or the government desire to monitor and control the activities carried out in mosques were the reasons behind constructing the fence. Figure (11)

## **6. Conclusions**

The urban green space is a vital component of the built environment. It directly affects the quality of urban life. It is confirmed that Cairo suffers from a lack of urban green spaces on two levels; quantity and quality. It is believed that every citizen must have not only a fair share of urban green space but also the right to access, to use and enjoy it freely and comfortably. In Cairo, green spaces were neglected, eroded, and deformed. The paper confirms the interrelationship between social mobility, economic trajectories, political changes and the form, the use and the quality of urban green space.

The urban green spaces have been divided to accommodate different types of use. Sometimes the new use is still recreational and some other times it is not. However, there is always a political reason behind the change. Some of the divisions have changed from public use to semi-public, to serve a particular social class. In pure mathematics, the green area is eroded because the semi-public sporting clubs require

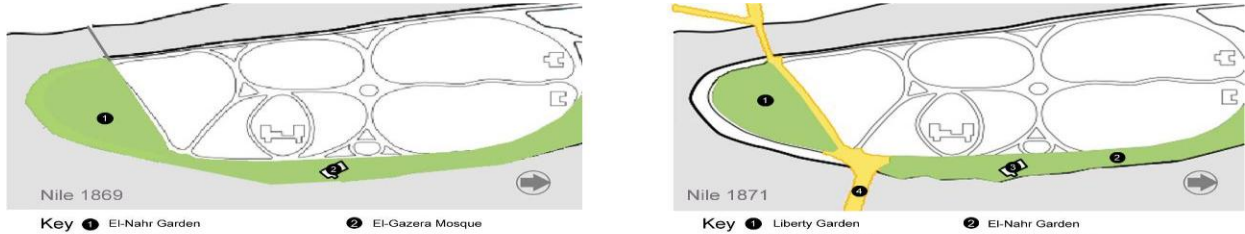


Figure no (6): Left: El-Nahr garden in 1869 before the construction of Qasr El-Nil Bridge, Source, by the Author after the General Organization of survey. (Right), El-Nahr garden in 1871 after street and Qasr El-Nil separate the Liberty garden, Source, by the Author after the General Organization of survey

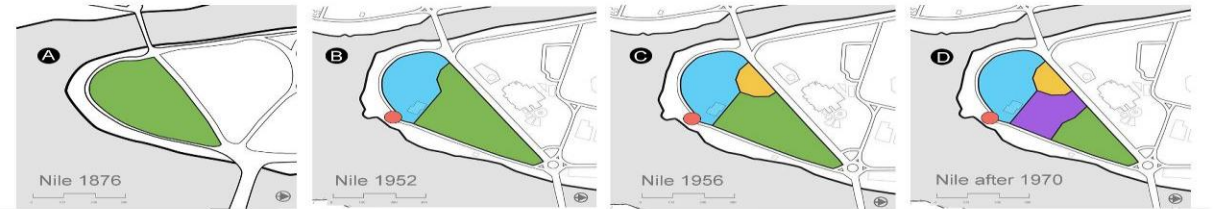


Figure no (7): (A), Liberty garden in 1876 , (B), Liberty garden, Cairo sporting club and sofitel El-Gazera after 1952 , (C), the liberty garden after construction of Mokhtar Museum in 1952, (D) Constructon of Military area closed to Liberty garden after 1970, Source, by the Author after the General Organization of survey

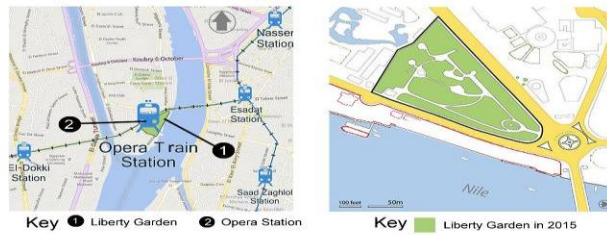


Figure no (8): Left: Map showing Metro line and Metro station in a relation to the liberty garden , Source, by the author after National Authority of Tunnels, (Right), The land scape of the Liberty garden in 2015, Source, by the Author after the General Organization of survey

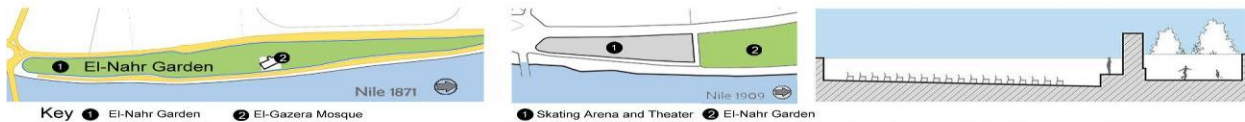


Figure no (9): Left, El-Nahr garden and El-Gazera mosque in 1871. Middle, Layout of the skating Arena and Theater in 1909, Right, cross section in the Arena and Theater, Source, by the Author after the Organization of specified gardens



Figure no (10): Left, The landscape of El-Andalus garden in 1929 , Middle, El-Andalus garden in a relation to El-Nahr garden, Right, El-Nahr garden after bulding Sono Cairo in 1964, Source, by the Author after the Organization of specified gardens



Figure no (11): Left, Map showin the landscape of El-masala garden in 1962. Middle, El-Nahr garden after constructed the 6th of October Bridge. Right, El-Gezral garden after 2001 , Source, by the Author after the General Organization of Survey

some structures, such as swimming pools, sports facilities, restaurants, and admin buildings. However, regarding use, it is still green recreational space. Some divisions have been allocated for buildings. The use of those buildings varies from being an infrastructure facility to real public service. Usually, the main purpose of those buildings was of a national, political nature, which served a particular socio-economic cause at its time.

The paper documents the change, which took many forms. Many green spaces have been eroded. Lost its area for buildings, roads, and other facilities. All divisions, allocations, and changes are reflecting socio-economic mobility, which accompanies political shifts.

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