



RECLAIMING OF HISTORICAL PIAZZA IN ISLAMIC CAIRO AL-HUSSEIN PIAZZA CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Urban public space and social interaction play an important role in the urban environment and can be a refuge from the hustle and bustle of city life. Public space refers to non-domestic physical sites that are distinguished by their relative accessibility such as parks, restaurants, cafes, the street. Al Hussein piazza is one of the oldest and largest areas in Fatimid Cairo. Many of the activities organized throughout the year periodically. In recent years, some infringements occurred formal or informal. It led to poor urban value. This study aims to evaluate the current situation of Al- Hussein piazza and redesign it from an integrated sustainable vision to reclaim it again for visitors. The methodology that was used in this study is a field survey of the piazza and do some interviews. The research shows that multiplicity causes deterioration in the region, which can be classified as physical degradation, environmental degradation, and social deterioration.

KEYWORDS:

reclaiming, historical piazza, Islamic Cairo, al-Hussein Piazza

INTRODUCTION

The historical piazza is the heart of the historical city, where it attracts cultural, social, commercial, and political activities. Unfortunately, the piazza can lose urban heritage when creating urban development, such as roads, networks of facilities, and construction of new buildings that do not correspond to the surrounding buildings.

This research studies Al-Hussein piazza, one of the essential piazzas in Fatimid Cairo in Egypt. It has the largest area and contains a unique collection of historical buildings exceeding 1,000 years. Therefore, it holds an annual celebration since the establishment of the Al-Hussein mosque, where great numbers of visitors spend almost a week. The last development for the piazza was coordination, like adding some green areas, paths around the piazza without any positive impact on reclaiming the piazza for users. However, the Piazza suffers the increasing density of breakthrough traffic cars due to the surrounding economic activities, bus station, parking next to historical buildings, besides a bridge breaking the urban fabric into two pieces. All these negatives elements probably lose piazza its urban value [1]. This study aims to evaluate the current situation of Al-Hussein piazza and redesign it from an integrated sustainable vision (social, environmental, and economic) to reclaim it again for visitors.

METHODS

For this research, data and information were collected based on literature, internet, books, articles, papers, and old documents related to the history of the Fatimid Cairo in the Islamic city in Egypt. The study of similar case studies, i.e., Sultan Ahmed in Istanbul has also been done to strengthen the argument. In addition, a field survey to select important piazza in famed Cairo has also been done. Besides, the researcher also studied the current problems leading to piazza deterioration and interviewed users and make SWOT.

DISCUSSION

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SPACE

There is a growing body of evidence that public space is able to deliver a range of benefits across economic, social, and environmental spheres. A high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centers. The presence of piazza and other public open spaces become important business and marketing tools. Public places attract companies, and these, in turn, attract customers, employees, and services. Public spaces are open to all, and as such, represent a democratic forum for citizens and society. They can bring communities together, provide meeting places, and foster social ties of a kind that have been disappearing in many urban areas.

These spaces shape the cultural identity of an area, are part of its unique character, and provide a sense of place for local communities[2][3].

One of the benefits of high-quality public space is its potential as a venue for social events, Well-managed festivals, and other events could have a positive effect on the urban environment, drawing the community together and bringing economic, social and environmental benefits. Piazza, in particular, could reintroduce the kind of civil society that has been lost in too many cities [4][5].

According to citizens who have made it clear that they need spaces where they can interact with fellow citizens and try to persuade others of their viewpoints [6][7]. Lack of public space is an insidious expression of a lack of democracy in the past. Public squares were invested with a symbolic power that could evoke pride and public interaction. A crucial role of architecture and urban design in a democracy is the creation of public spaces that encourage civic interaction and discourse [8].

Public squares have important social and cultural roles, providing people with places to meet, rest or stop and talk. These activities take place where outdoor areas are of suitable quality. They also offer important focal points, which demonstrate that visitors have reached the heart of the city. Historical or otherwise, significant buildings need a context, and squares can be an expression of civic pride, historical power, and the importance [9] [10] [7].

The significance of a renaissance of buildings and activities that define society cannot be overstated. The importance of bringing symbolic buildings back to prominent positions in city centers. Locating them in proper settings is at its core. It leads to the concept of a square for every symbolic building [11]. Increasingly, it is being recognized that identity and place have enormous roles in reinforcing society. The most important function of public spaces that is accessible to every resident of a city and where people can move freely is to create a social life among buildings. Social life is created when several people gather and communicate with each other in a public space and thus form a shared identity [2]. Public areas feature traces left by the public, remind people of what they have witnessed, guide future actions, and provide clues for social identities by creating an association. Public spaces have different characteristics in terms of their physical properties, modes of use, and values that they are intended to express. Meeting people's needs is the main priority in some spaces, whereas symbolic values may be necessary for others. Functionality, accessibility, aesthetics, and security are among the other characteristics of public spaces in terms of their meaning [12]. Almost every city has a piazza, serving an important purpose as a social and commercial meeting place [13]. They are usually surrounded by shops, restaurants, and a city hall. There is often a fountain, monument, or a statue at the center of a piazza. Besides these similarities, town piazza also has its unique history[14][15]. Nowadays, there are some of

the most famous city squares around the world. The examples are Djemaa El-Fna (the highlight of any visit to Marrakech and one of the top tourist attractions in Morocco), Piazza San Marco (the principal square of Venice), and The Red Piazza (located in the heart of Moscow and the first destination for most visitors to the city). Those piazzas can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The variety of piazza in a different county (Prepared by the author using Google Earth)

RECLAIMING CITES

Reclaiming the city is an oft-used phrase in the urban literature, referring to the upgrading of derelict urban zones and the reclaiming of space by disenfranchised groups [16][17]. Urban transformations are aimed at creating worldly landscapes, world-class environments, and activities targeted at communities, often with no previous connections to the place [18]. The creation of such spaces throws open the possibilities for new uses and encounters, but it also generates concerns about the instability of city living and the loss of indigenous lifestyles [19].

There is a three-fold typology in Table 1 to serve as a guide, which differentiates among reclaiming functionality (where land uses, or on-site functions are transformed), reclaiming access (where spaces and environments are 'opened up' to new publics), and reclaiming the local (where history and cultures are commemorated). The different forms of reclamation are championed by different agents, by the state planners, and transnational property developers, or public users like on-site residents, local citizens, or visiting tourists. The different forms of urban reclamation do not occur specifically because of anyone agent, or that any single agent champions a particular 'purpose.' The reclamation process is more often than not a sophisticated collection of

contributions from multiple agents. The typology in Table 1 serves as a heuristic device to sensitize readers to the main types of reclamation and their respective dominant agent. These agents embody differing relationships with place and socio-urban agendas (agenda refers to the kinds of reclamation the agents support, the purpose behind their support, as well as their idealized vision for the city). While planners, property developers, and special-interest-groups have clear-cut mandates in the city, members of the public are often not as co-ordinated but no less partisan in the way they relate to a place. Indeed, people’s actions and opinions (for example, patronizing or eschewing a place; criticisms or compliments) are strongly undergirded by self-interests that supply the root motivations for the particular reclamation they advocate.

Functional reclamation is fuelled by an entrepreneurial state which views the city as a growth machine. As the goal is to maximize capital returns through land-use optimization, there is no room for sentimentality. Justifying a ‘city on the move’ as serving a ‘public good’ [20], government planners tightly control the types of activities that should (and should not) take place in the most public of urban spaces.

Table 1. Typology of urban reclamation: agents, purposes, and goals

Type of urban reclamation: what is being reclaimed?	Agent: who is primarily responsible/ pushing for reclamation?	Purpose: why is reclamation necessary	Urban vision: what is the long-term goal of reclamation
Reclaiming function (i.e., land use and activity)	Government authorities, planning agencies, property developers, business enterprises	To recover economic utility of urban space; to maximize the function of land; To reclaim	An economically vibrant city
Reclaiming access (i.e. space)	Local communities, citizen groups, activists		An accessible city
Reclaiming the local (i.e., culture, history, identity)	Tourists, cultural enthusiasts, special-interest groups (for example, heritage societies)		A culturally rich and ‘authentic’ city

SULTAN AHMED PIAZZA IN ISTANBUL AS A MODEL SIMILAR TO AL HUSSEIN PIAZZA

Studying of Sultan Ahmed piazza in Istanbul as a successful case study and can be used in the proposed study area (Al-Hussein piazza), which is similar in the architectural configuration of Al-Hussein piazza.

The development of Sultan Ahmed piazza has undergone four years. The all of parts and buildings are overlooking the piazza. The development is not only the mosque but also a primary school, a hospital, a covered market, a Turkish bath, a place to feed the poor, and shops.

The Sultan Ahmed piazza is the old part of Istanbul in the faith district (Figure1). The piazza is quite large and has green areas, a fountain in the middle, cafes, and restaurants as well. The mosque has a museum and blue mosque facing each other from the opposite sides and hippodrome next to the blue mosque. The Basilica and top Kapi places are located nearby. It is placed where the urban morphology contains resting places, safe walking routes, ground floor frontages, a restaurant, high-quality footpath, accessibility for all, public baths, and provide information anywhere. Figure 2 the current situation and the elements of urban morphology sultan Ahmed piazza.

THE STRENGTHS THAT LED TO THE SUCCESS OF SULTAN AHMED PIAZZA

- The wed of area and containment of important historical buildings in sultan Ahmed piazza.
- It contains big piazza to accommodate a large number of visitors to the place.
- Benefits of visitors and users for green areas in sultan Ahmed piazza effectively.
- There are enough seats in different places in the piazza.
- There are many garbage baskets in more places.
- Reuse of some buildings as public services.
- The variety of use piazza as collective eftar in Ramadan.
- Investment the walls of Hagia Sophia and Sultan Ahmed as gift shops.
- Organizing street vendors in the square with official and one color for the sale booths under the supervision of the municipality of Istanbul.
- Separation of traffic movement for the Pedestrian movement.



Figure 2. Sultan Ahmed Piazza Istanbul, (Prepared by the author using Google Earth)

AL-HUSSEIN PIAZZA

Al-Hussein piazza is one of the important piazzas in Fatimid Cairo. It is the heart of the historic Cairo, which was included in the list of the conservation of the world heritage, and it is the most significant area in Fatimid Cairo.

Al-Hussein piazza includes some of the important buildings in Fatimid Cairo like Al-Hussein mosque, Mohamed bik abo Eldahab mosque, Elzarakasha khan, Al-Azhar admiration building, and Al-Azhar mosque. It was built on the order of the Fatimid caliphate Al-Muizz li-Din Allah in 972, shortly after the founding of Al-Qahira. It was the first mosque established in Cairo, the city that today is known as the city of thousand minarets. The mosque imitated the AmrIbn El-as and the IbnTulun mosque. Al-Azhar soon became a center of learning in the Islamic world. It is said to be the oldest university in the world. The mosque of Al-Azhar is a popular place for tourists all over the world.

The piazza between the two venerated mosques of Al Azhar mosque and Al Hussein mosque, Cairo, and remains an important space at feast times, particularly on Ramadan evenings and during the moulids (religious festivals) of Hussein and the Prophet Mohammed. The square is a popular meeting.



Ensure resting places in front of Sultan Ahmed mosque



Public toilet in one of the historical building between Sultan Ahmed Mosque and Hagia Sofia



Variety of types paths and introduce high-quality footpaths.



Use the piazza as a point for group breakfast in Rama



Restaurants and cafés are overlooking on the piazza

Figure 3. Elements of urban morphology Sultan Ahmed piazza (Prepared by the author using Google Earth)

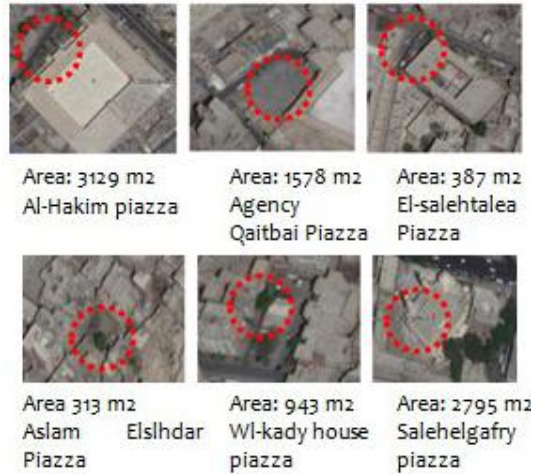


Figure 4.The important historical piazzas in Fatimid Cairo (Prepared by the author using Google Earth)

The physical form of the piazza

The general urban fabric of the blocks and the spaces around the piazza is an irregular urban texture in which the blocks of buildings intersect with the paths and winding roads. The total area of Al-Hussein piazza is 10522 m². The physical form of the piazza and Urban Spaces form of the piazza in Al-Hussein piazza, Figure 5.

Urban Spaces form of the piazza

The axis of movement leading to the piazza for pedestrians through the streets of the narrow area, such as Al-Mashhad, Al-Husseini and Khan Al-Khalili, where the commercial, social and cultural activities are spread, and the forms of these streets are narrow and tortuous and form a tree and often ends with a closed-end, Figure6. Use of space- high density of tourists at piazza el-Hussein

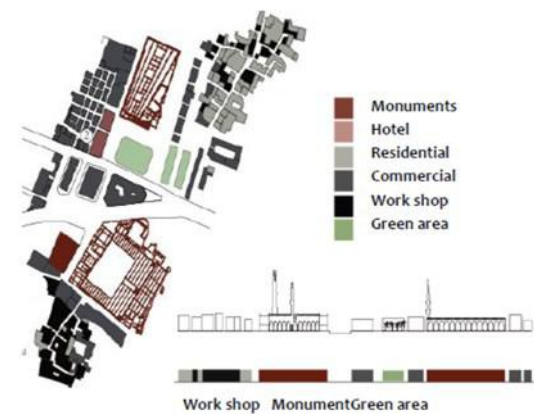


Figure 5. The physical form of the piazza and Urban Spaces form of the piazza in Al-Hussein piazza (Prepared by the author using Google Earth)

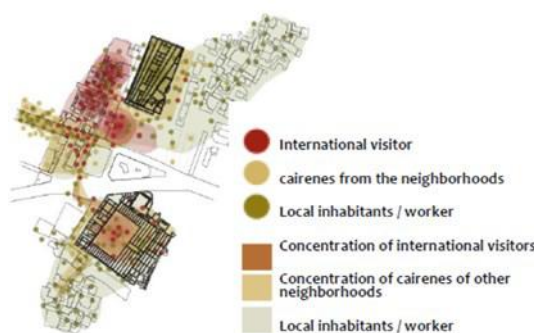


Figure 6. Use of space- high density of tourists at piazza el-Hussein.

THE COMPONENTS OF PIAZZA

Heritage buildings dominant in piazza: buildings with high heritage value, including the identification of its location in the outer perimeter of the piazza and its relationship with each other them, Figure 7. Components of piazza (Prepared by the researcher using Google Earth), identify their features and distinctive facades.

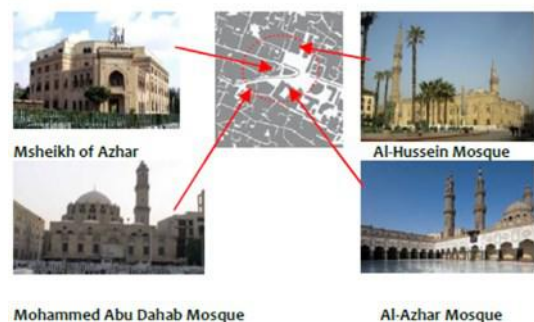


Figure 7. Components of piazza (Prepared by the researcher using Google Earth)

Table 2. Current problems leading to piazza deterioration (source; author)







		
<p>Overcrowding traffic, automatic overlap movement with pedestrian movement and high-intensity automatic movement</p>		
 <p>Street vendors</p>	<p>Use of space with inefficient roads network.</p>	<p>They can be used to sell products better and more systematically</p>
 <p>Green areas</p>	<p>Steel edge and, palm trees leading to bad clarity</p>	<p>There is the largest green area.</p>
 <p>Restaurant and shops</p>	<p>Figure on the piazza and non-compliance with the specified areas</p>	<p>Should be moved to another place that is better exploited and larger</p>
 <p>Tower of ventilation</p>	<p>Exploitation of a large area without any benefits.</p>	<p>Reused in a better distinctive style and made it a tower to see Fatimid Cairo</p>
 <p>The Shops located east of the piazza</p>	<p>Don't use well, and without any distinctive style.</p>	<p>Reuse other activities.</p>
		<p>Floor tiles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Asphalt used in paths not likable It can be replaced with environmentally treated stone material ☐ Raw materials are not desirable, such as granite. ☐ Marble seats UN describe the Fatimid Cairo.

Table 3, SWOT

Type	Potentials	Strength	Problems/Constraints
Urban Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Al-Azhar Street interrupts the urban street. The shrine and the entrances to the tunnel divide the urban space. Valued Buildings compose boundary to the urban space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existence of potential urban space allows for its formation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The abundance of exploits and infringements The urban spaces and building finishes are in adverse conditions. Lack of sense of the urban space and its characteristics
Activates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant tourist activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existence of activities that support the touristic aspects. The possibility of making use of the current activities to serve the proposed project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The contradiction of some activities with the natural place. The existence of audio activities, visually, environmentally contaminated.
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual connecting axes for the project parts. The mausoleum is a primary visual element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The possibility of developing new optical axes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The interference of vision Weak visual axes
Vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas for parking plots should be provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underground Parking places Suggestions for parking places outside the area Make use of vacant areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of parking plots The visual movement network is not clear
Urban Fabric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buildings with high value that should be maintained. The existence of Al-Azhar University as a strong determinant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of spaces that can be used. The presence of buildings of a distinctive character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of deteriorated tissue which affects negatively on the urban area picture
Entrances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the project entries. Neglect secondary entries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the existing entrances can be enhanced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance current entries. Weak expression of entries and their follow-up
Movements		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations to deviate the paths of pedestrians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The movement of the pedestrians and vehicles are mixed up
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of the landscape elements is adaptable to the location and space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential in the current landscape (Palms-Landscape for the Azhar urban space) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of landscape which adds to the place. The bad condition of the current landscape
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deteriorated buildings that can be used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Buildings are considered a wealth of real estate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The bad condition of the buildings The absence of the significant main character
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adherence to current networks (size and condition). Al - Azhar tunnel as a parameter (level and path). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of the infrastructure network that can be developed and upgraded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deterioration of the infrastructure in some areas. The absence of detailed documentation for the infrastructure.

(source; author)

THE GENERAL OBJECTIVE TO DEVELOPMENT

The development of Al Azhar, Al Hussein, and the surrounding area is in line with the character of the area. In addition, it is the heart and the lungs of Fatimid Cairo with the spread of development concepts that affect them a comprehensive framework.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Preserving the distinctive urban fabric of the area.
- Pay attention to the pedestrian movement and give it over to the vehicle movement.
- Requirements for seasonal religious activities (Ramadan celebrations - the birth of Hussein).
- Activate the role of the local community and give an urban push to the place.
- Preservation and restoration of monuments and development of the surrounding urban environment.
- Tourism and economic development through attraction points and the development of cultural activities in line with the general framework.
- The philosophy of development was adopted through direct questions. The questionnaire methodology was based on straightforward questions:
- Determine the type of user in the arena space
- Ask a set of questions To select priority Development and rapid intervention
- Show a collection of architectural ideas that work to reclaim piazza.

Group 1: Determine the type of users in the piazza.

- ◆ Are you an indigenous or expatriate resident?
- ◆ A worker or a craftsman in the region
- ◆ The owner (Bazaar - Cafe - Restaurant - Workshop - Hotel)
- ◆ Visitors to the yard daily - Weekly - Yearly.
- ◆ Tourist
- ◆ Students
- ◆ Visitors in the birth of Hussein
- ◆ Visitors in Friday prayers

Group 2: Identification of problems and user satisfaction:

- ◆ Are you satisfied?
- ◆ How many times visit the piazza
- ◆ What is the reason for the visit?
- ◆ Did you feel safe there?
- ◆ Do you find an overlap between pedestrian traffic and cars?
- ◆ Are there parking problems?
- ◆ Are you satisfied with the columns lighting model?
- ◆ Is there a garbage box?

- ◆ Do you find the green area sufficient?
- ◆ Are you happy with the vendors' locations?
- ◆ Are you satisfied with the number and shape of seats?
- ◆ Do you see the street width suitable?
- ◆ Are there public bathrooms?
- ◆ Are there enough hotels for Hussein's ceremony visitors?

Group 3 present the development proposals as the guide in the process of reclaiming piazza

- ◆ Make tunnel from beginning from the borders of the Al-Azhar Mosque until the middle of Al-Azhar Street.
- ◆ Make parking next to the side of Al-Azhar Mosque
- ◆ Redesign the southern (main) piazza of the Al-Hussein Mosque and creating seating piazza that is sufficient to accommodate the number of visitors.
- ◆ Remove palms located in the southeast of the piazza.
- ◆ Remove of some dilapidated houses on the eastern side of the Al-Hussein Mosque and built a hotel in the upper floor overlooking the mosque directly and removing the edge of steel that separates the mosque and the east courtyard and has a courtyard to accommodate the celebration of the birth (birth of Hussein).
- ◆ Make a commercial mall under the eastern piazza, which includes a collection of shops (handicraft products).

The development philosophy was based on the results of the questionnaire, which was based on the researcher in the field.

- ◆ Canceling the tunnel of the bidder and closing Al-Azhar Street and making another track for cars under the ground
- ◆ Development ventilation tower and reuse to see Fatimid Cairo.
- ◆ Establishment of public service facilities for visitors.
- ◆ Provide organized and visible places for street vendors.
- ◆ Remove/ reduce the height of the fence and trees/palms surrounding the mosque to avoid blocking the vision.
- ◆ Development of the facades of cafes and shops surrounding the square to suit the overall style.
- ◆ Design of the piazza to allow more waiting places green area, water elements and provide services and facilities suitable for visitors.

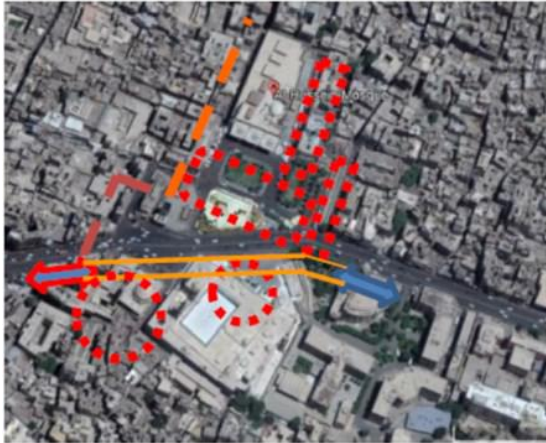


Figure 8. The piazza Before modification and the important point that will be redesign, Source: author



Figure 9. The piazza after modification: source; author



Figure 10. The piazza after modification: source; author



Figure 11. The piazza after modification: source; author

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the Multiplicity of the causes of the deterioration in the region which can be classified as follows:

Factors of physical degradation

- The construction of new buildings in the different plastic artist, lacks the nature of the historic district, with a lack of commitment to the regulations
- Modern high rises buildings duplicated the value of the monumental architecture, created many visual problems which reduced the sense of monuments and urban fabric of the neighborhood as a whole.

Factors of environmental degradation

- Visual pollution resulting from the overlap of outmoded uses as a result of the change in the urban fabric and rises modern buildings in this historic area.

Factors of social deterioration

- The increased population density and an increase in the rates of congestion within the housing units led to the drawbacks in dealing with the facilities and buildings in the historical area.
- The palaces of cultural awareness of the value of the historic area of the majority of the inhabitants of those areas, which primarily seek to achieve personal interests and win daily strength, without consideration of the historical and cultural significance of the area in which they live, which led to the occurrence of violations of the historic buildings with the absence of social services and the lack of active participation of the population in the preservation of the heritage value to the region.
- The economic and social transformations in the area led to a change in the use of the buildings. It was like the case in the agency's motels, where it adopted the new establishment of centers to attract people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are general guidelines and almost well-known. Therefore, it should be modified to show practical major and minor phases or steps:

- Expansion of the application of the continuous development concepts in dealing with areas of historical value:
- Proper resource management of the historic district, which is in the urban, cultural heritage, and the population.
- Protection of the environment by avoiding the degradation of the natural elements of the environmental factors, and represented in the air, as well as the built environment.
- Satisfy the human needs of the people of the region and the social services, health, education, and others.
- Re-use and recruitment of buildings of historical value to increase the value of these buildings

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