Tourism, Public Spaces and Urban Cultures

Alternative Urbanism in the Historic City Centre: A Transnational Perspective on Theory and Practice

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Abstract: Historic city centres are characterised by the tension between the local, represented by authentic spaces of everyday life, and the global, responding to the needs of tourism industry and capital flows. Under the neoliberal paradigm, state-led urban regeneration projects often benefit developers and private investors with little regard to the socio-economic dynamics of existing communities. Recently, this approach has been challenged by alternative practices of placemaking that represent a transition from top-down imposition of urban change to the co-production of space. Such practices are characterised by a more temporary, flexible and tactical approach to the design of space. They represent a collective desire that involves several actors, from local residents and business owners, to civil society organisations and design professionals in the role no longer of the exclusive author but as facilitators and mediators of change. Observing the development of such practice in the western world, and the corresponding theorisation attempts developed mostly by western scholars, this paper looks further to its applications in the global South, with evidence drawn from empirical research in London, UK and Cairo, Egypt. The paper suggests that alternative urbanism may be indicative of a longer-term transition towards a more equitable urban planning practice.

Keywords: alternative urbanism; place-making; co-production; community

Introduction: Alternative Urbanism

In recent years, there has been a growing interest, both theoretical and practical, in small community-based urban interventions that have been proliferating in cities around the world and their potential contributions towards activating and reshaping urban spaces. These urban practices indicate different ways of acting and thinking in relation to urbanism that pays attention to ordinary local city spaces of everyday life such as repurposing overly wide streets, vacant lands, highway underpasses, parking lots and other little-used or abandoned spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris and Mukhija, 2017). Such spaces or what Groth and Corijn (2005) describe as 'places that are not coded for market-led development' (506) open possibilities for urban design experiments, artistic expression and informal improvisations allowing a more vibrant everyday urban life. Even in prime locations in city centres, innovative interventions in vacant lands temporarily ignored by investors are argued to be catalysts for urban development that rework orthodoxies of conventional urban planning (Tonkiss, 2013). The approach of intervention is based on the efficient use of existing resources, local skills and knowledge to revitalise the cityscape. Alternative to neoliberal large-scale flagship regeneration projects largely based on the sanitisation and aestheticisation of space, such practices are characterized by emphasis

on the lived experience of public space to be enjoyed by all through a more creative, flexible and tactical design of space.

Despite originally emerging as urban activism in opposition to official prioritisation of economic gains and indifference towards local socio-spatial dynamics, these practices are now seen as tools for urban regeneration garnering the attention of developers and local governments, especially after the global economic downturn of 2008. Carried out formally under the conditions of austerity, such practice has enabled the synergy of two seemingly oppositional forces, community and development needs (Kamvasinou, 2015), leading to a co-production process where various stakeholders participate: from local residents and business owners, to civil society organisations and design professionals in the role no longer of the exclusive author but as facilitators and mediators of change.

Along with the development of such practice in the Western world, there are corresponding theoretical attempts mostly by western scholars to conceptualize and interpret these projects. In the academic literature, these community-oriented urban interventions are given diverse names among which tactical urbanism, temporary urbanism, everyday urbanism, or open-source urbanism. The shared characteristics across these practices are that they are mostly small-scale or incremental, cost-effective, relatively short-term and participatory, whereas the majority of published work addresses mostly case studies in Europe and North America. While citizen-led urban practices have been dominant for years in the global South as survival tactics born out of need, they are differentiated from what Devlin (2017) describes as 'desired informality' promoted by western scholars to capture the essence of the traditional humane city enlivening the public realm. In less developed cities, informal actors repurpose the seemingly abandoned or little used plots of land to acquire the basic necessities of life (Bayat, 2012). However, in recent years such citizen-led activism has been further manifested in the global South through a surge of urban actions involving local communities, experts and international collaborations reclaiming and revitalising ordinary spaces while embracing existing informalities and creatively setting them on the legitimate path. Even though planning institutions in many areas in the South still hold to outdated modernist clean sweep planning ideas, creative collectives mediate between the conflicting interests inventing opportunities for transformation (see Watson, 2009).

Placemaking, diversity and inclusion

Placemaking is a term that has its origins in the works of planners, urban designers and geographers such as Jane Jacobs (1962) who advocated for community-based urban design and lively neighbourhoods, Edward Relph who explored Place and Placelessness (1976), W. H. Whyte who famously researched what contributed to the successful social life of public spaces (1980), and Dolores Hayden who discussed Placemaking, Preservation, and Urban History (1988). Together with creating a distinct identity, these people-centred approaches underlie many of the current works on placemaking in research and practice, including those of the Project for Public Spaces, a consultancy carrying on the work of Whyte on small urban spaces. They have led to Urban Design being termed 'the art of placemaking'.

Placemaking is an important dimension of regeneration projects. According to Project for Public Spaces, it is a collaborative process by which we "maximise shared value", promote "better urban design", or facilitate "creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution" (Project for Public Spaces, 2007).

Cities need spaces for diversity, social mixing and inclusion, where people meet, interact and even 'clash' (Dines and Cattell, 2006). Streets, squares, parks and other public spaces constitute the 'public realm' and such spaces link to the economy, the environment and human health (Carmona, Magalhães and Hammond, 2008). In multicultural societies such as London's and Cairo's, not only the design of

spaces is of importance but their control and management through private, public or community organisations. Placemaking brings together diverse actors (including design professionals, planners, elected officials, residents, and businesses) to improve a community's cultural, economic and social environment.

Local heritage is often used in regeneration projects to provide continuity, distinctiveness and a sense of belonging amidst new development (Adams, 2014), as people's attachment to an area is often motivated by their memories (Dines and Cattell, 2006). As Relph has put it "authentically made places", as opposed to places "invented or imposed", "arise when the physical, social, aesthetic and spiritual needs of a culture are adapted to particular sites, and this can happen unselfconsciously through vernacular practices, or self-consciously through thoughtful design" (Relph, 1976, 67-68).

If Placemaking is the more formal planning and design of urban space to include not just physical interventions but moreover the social and identity aspects of urban space and the communities therein – creating a place, place-shaping is similar in intention but usually more bottom up, temporary and tactical. It is incremental and organic and may lead to placemaking, but it's also more precarious and vulnerable to change and erasure. One of the key tools of alternative urbanism is place-shaping.

Under globalisation, with our cities under increasing demand, innovative approaches to the use of space have embraced temporary place-shaping (Hou, 2010). Place-shaping strategies and tactics can lead to a set of development-led placemaking strategies with the purpose of redeveloping the site while ensuring the legacy of temporary uses (Andres, 2013). Nowadays spaces can sometimes be activated almost instantly, with the aid of digital place-shaping through social media and civic engagement - the Occupy movement events in London in 2011-12 and the Egyptian uprising events at Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011 demonstrate exactly this.

The cases we present here focus on alternative urbanism as the ability of spaces to adapt to societal, governance and physical change and the role of small urban interventions towards the longer-term shaping and reimagining of our cities.

Cairo Case Study

This alternative urban paradigm is manifested in one of the most significant central areas in Cairo, namely 'Downtown Cairo', through spatial interventions known as 'Downtown Passageways' that were initiated in 2014. The idea of the project was to revitalise the pedestrian passageways in-between buildings as alternative spaces for developing the old decaying core of Cairo.

Downtown Cairo has been the urban centre of the city, with major cultural, commercial, administrative and political activities. It was established in the late half of the nineteenth century along the lines of Haussmann's Parisian model with exquisite historical architectural styles, elegant public squares and wide boulevards, but has been experiencing significant deterioration over the past decades. Public spaces have been either securitized and underused; or extremely congested with informal encroachments, mobile vendors, clothes racks and food stalls. Moreover, being the home of the Egyptian Uprising in 2011, it witnessed unprecedented demonstrations which added a layer of complexity to the use and meaning of its public spaces. Besides the tension that arises from being the urban centre of the city with different competing interests, heritage assets, businesses and touristic attractions, downtown Cairo has gained after the revolution a national symbolic meaning of urban activism and political expression.

In post-revolutionary Cairo, after almost three years of political instability (2011-2014), the development of Downtown Cairo surfaced in the official discourse, particularly nostalgic towards Downtown's golden age with an intention to promote tourism. This nostalgically-driven approach led to more attention towards restoring architecturally significant facades and cleaning up undesired uses and activities. Emphasis on cosmetic issues would transform the area to an open air museum catering

for tourists and elites, but alienating existing communities (ElShahed, 2007).The state's plan of 'museumification' started to manifest in painting old buildings and sidewalks, white washing graffiti, and an enormous flag in the middle of Tahrir Square, the heart of the Egyptian uprising, along with tighter security, forced removal of street vendors and restricted car parking (Rabie, 2016). On the other hand, the private sector had another approach for development, particularly Al-Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment company, which is a major stakeholder owning more than five percent of downtown. El Shafie, the cofounder of Al-Ismaelia, believes in building a creative city narrative that would position downtown Cairo among the major urban centres in the world, reclaiming its lost place in global competitiveness (Rabie, 2016). Al-Ismaelia has supported creative industries in downtown such as independent art spaces, street performances and art festivals. It also has been working on buying and renovating abandoned cinemas and theatres; and leasing vacant properties for start-ups and small businesses. Both approaches of the state and the private sector raised concerns among the public regarding gentrification. The third vision of developing downtown besides the government and the private sector's is that of activists trying to find a common ground between the government, the private sector and local communities. Community-aligned activist professionals in urban design, planning and arts collaborated and established firms positioning themselves differently in relation to the formal planning system. Cairo Laboratory for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research (CLUSTER), a research platform and urban design practice founded by the urbanist Omar Nagati and the curator Beth Stryker, is an example of these professional entities particularly interested in downtown urban issues. Being based in one of Downtown's main streets, the CLUSTER team consider themselves a part of the local community. They can be described as practical activists who, while being keen to support less powerful underserved groups, are against demonising private investors.

The Passageways project started as a mapping and design exercise as part of an urban design studio led by Omar Nagati in one of Cairo Universities. The aim of the academic project was to propose realistic and creative urban solutions to revitalise Downtown's passageways.

The CLUSTER team led by Omar Nagati and Beth Stryker turned the academic coursework into practice, through which they established their firm after the initial conversations with the local community. CLUSTER proposed the concept of in-between-ness as an alternative framework for urban development, referring to a variety of spatial gaps between buildings ranging from passageways, commercial arcades and setbacks to courtyards, dead end streets and pedestrianised zones (Nagati and Stryker, 2016). Such spaces represent an urban typology that is less visible from the main arteries of downtown and the official public realm, allowing a more vibrant everyday urban life mediating between the formal and informal (Nagati and Stryker, 2016). In an interview with Nagati (2018) he said that without compromising security or traffic, the passageways can accommodate creative possibilities such as bike lanes, book fairs, vegetable markets and arts exhibits, nurturing a nuanced dimension of publicness.

While the CLUSTER team had a broad vision for revitalising the downtown area as a whole through its passageways, they did not have the capacity, power or resources to implement the whole idea. Nonetheless, they were willing to apply their approach partially for the experimental advantage of implementing small changes with an intention to induce activism, create social networks and potentially cause positive ripple effect (Nagati, interview, 2018). The opportunity came for CLUSTER when foreign Danish organisations provided a fund to regenerate Cairene public spaces after the revolution. Two passageways, Kodak and Philips, were proposed by CLUSTER as a pilot project under this fund. They supplemented the fund with small amounts of money from Al-Ismaelia, the Real Estate Development Company, local shop and property owners (Nagati, interview, 2018).

For the purpose of this paper, the transformation of one of the two passageways, Kodak passageway has been traced. It is in a prime location, and highly securitized as it lies across from downtown's

Jewish synagogue and close to multiple banks. Before intervention all the shops overlooking the passageway were vacant except two, and the passageway was mostly underutilised (Nagati and Stryker, 2016).

The redesign engaged Egyptian and Danish University students, artists and the local community. It involved re-tiling the passageway, incorporating tree planting, benches and gardens. Design elements were subjects of contestation and intensive negotiations; compromises were necessary (Nagati and Stryker, 2016). For example, one of the landlords complained that benches would bring 'undesirable' people or activities. He threatened to surround these benches with barbed wires if CLUSTER insisted on them, but Nagati convinced him to give the project with its benches one month as a test period after which the benches would be removed, which never happened (Nagati, interview, 2018). Also, municipal authorities objected to integrating benches for security reasons, thus the design was amended to present them as raised lighting features rather than explicit benches, which was officially approved (Nagati, 2018).

The renovations have produced an unexpected uniqueness triggering passers-by's curiosity attracting them out of their daily routines. The cosiness of the space with its seats and green landscape transformed the passageway into a mini-park encouraging people to sit, meet and take a break from their harsh days. When asked what is different about this space, one of the passers-by stated the passageway "feels like home"; another said it is "serene and alive".

In the following years CLUSTER collaborated with Al-Ismaelia a few times to organise events and curate exhibitions in the passageway and the surrounding vacant shops, which significantly added to the liveliness of the space, attracting a wide range of visitors. Such creative events have produced interesting public encounters and created a suitable environment for social interaction. The passageway and the surrounding shops have taken on an 'edgy' character enriching the experiential dimension of the area. Over time, the vacant shops have transformed into well-known venues supported by significant web presence. Moreover, the temporary art installations in the passageway implemented by Al-Ismaelia Company have attracted a wide range of users across different age groups and from different social backgrounds that have interacted with the art pieces. For example, in April 2017, a swing and spring-inspired decorations were installed which was a quite a novelty in Cairene public spaces. The passageway transformed then into a 'must-visit spot' in downtown Cairo. The narrative of creativity was further enforced by the activities of the users of the space and their interaction with the public installations. For example, the scenery intrigued a couple of university students to sit for hours to sketch the space.

Another substantial consequence of the renovations is the opening of Eish and Malh Restaurant around the corner, which quickly became one of the favourite restaurants for locals and tourists. In collaboration with CLUSTER, the like-minded owners of the restaurant organised a community Ramadan Iftar in the passageway which brought the community and representatives from the municipal authorities together (Nagati and Stryker, 2016)

After five years of the intervention, Kodak passageway is still in a good condition as it has been looked after by the local community. A board of tenants, property owners, and businesses was set after the intervention to manage the space. Although a public space, driven by their sense of ownership, they gather money monthly for gardening, trash collection, electricity water and general maintenance (Nagati and Stryker, 2016) The surrounding community are very proud of their passageway that became the 'living room' of the area. The space also received recognition from the local government, for example it was selected for launching events and exhibitions as one of the key sites to celebrate the International Heritage Day. Also, the minister of Tourism visited the space that was hosting a photography exhibition around the theme of promoting Egypt to the world.

London case study

King's Cross is a central London area and one of the largest redevelopment sites in London covering 67 acres of land. It has a rich historical past with 19th Century heritage assets ranging from industrial buildings, such as the Granary building, to fully operational and revamped train stations (St Pancras and King's Cross), and the Regents canal, originally introduced in the 1820s to link the city to Birmingham and the new industries of the Midlands but currently being used for leisure purposes. By the beginning of the 20th century the site was an array of 'stations, sidings, railway buildings and related warehouses', crisscrossed by railway tracks which were removed in the 1980s: 'The adjacent neighbourhoods housed the working poor and the destitute. It was not an attractive place but it worked' (Bishop and Williams, 2016, 23). The area went through decline in the mid-20th century; after the Second World War, changes in freight transfer rendered the goods yards obsolete and led to unemployment and deprivation for the local communities. Before the first redevelopment proposals were voiced in the 80s, the area was "notorious" for vacant wastelands, crime, prostitution and drugs, but also attracted nightclubs and artists as the rents were cheap (Bishop and Williams, 2016, 25). It also had a range of emerging and vocal community actors.

Various masterplans were proposed in the 80s including Norman Foster's in 1989. However, they did not materialise due to a combination of technical and financial constraints, unfavourable market conditions and resistance from the local community. In 1996 the King's Cross Partnership was set up as a public/private partnership between Islington and Camden Councils, Railtrack and London and Continental Railways (LCR), and community representatives. They sought a development partner that would have a participatory approach and ability to work with stakeholders, among other things. Developers Argent, who had successfully delivered Brindleyplace in Birmingham, won the competition in a joint venture with St George, a housing company, but they eventually parted in 2004 and Argent carried on the masterplan. The presence of two conservation areas, an important collection of historic buildings and industrial archaeology meant there was a legal requirement for a detailed application assessing the impact of the development on them (Bishop and Williams, 2016, 74); the development clearly took these into account and turned them into assets for placemaking, linking to the history of the place and local identity, and attracting tourists. English Heritage, the then advisory body for listing buildings, was involved in the process from the outset. The famous Gasholder no 8, Grade-II listed, now forms the centrepiece of the new Gasholder Park, which is bordered by a unique triplet gasholder hosting new housing – both historic gasholder structures were dismantled and reconstructed on a different part of the site. Another asset of heritage value that was respected and supported was Camley Street Natural Park, a small nature reserve and ecological heaven on the canal that had been preserved in the 1980s through successful campaigning by local activists.

Of interest to us is that strengths of the masterplan included the respectful and creative treatment of heritage assets and the focus on a diverse public realm throughout the lengthy process of redevelopment (2008-2020). Making physical and psychological connections for the local people to access the site, particularly during its construction, by introducing relevant uses on the edges and in the centre of the development was key to its success and acceptance (Bishop and Williams, 2016). This came up strongly during the extensive public consultation too, which pointed to the need to address social and economic issues including unemployment and health in the local community and particularly young people, and for 'meantime' social projects to be incorporated into the longer-term regeneration process. Temporary uses had always been part of the history of the site, particularly during the years of decline; now public spaces such as Granary square were open to the public as new civic spaces before even the buildings were occupied or built, and temporary uses such as the Skip Garden were brought in to link the different stakeholders and communities together and with the new development. The success and longevity of a temporary project such as the Skip Garden therefore owes a lot to the supportive approach of the developer.

The Skip Garden was inaugurated in 2009 in the early construction stage of the development. It is run by the sustainability education charity Global Generation (GG) and has received support from the two local authorities, Camden and Islington, local businesses (e.g. The Guardian newspaper) and the developers of the King's Cross masterplan. It consists of gardens planted in skips and maintained by young people, often from local schools, employees from local businesses and other volunteers. It was initiated by Jane Riddiford, currently CEO of GG, and the CEO of developers Argent who supported "the idea that business and activism don't have to be either end of the spectrum" (Riddiford, interview, 2013). The gardens are portable so they can be moved around the site as the development progresses through its phases. The skips represent, and were donated by, the construction companies on site (Kamvasinou, 2015).

The first Skip Garden was opposite St Pancras Station and lasted for two years (2009–2011). It moved to another part of the site awaiting development in 2011. In 2012, it moved to its third location just off York Way that hosted the Garden until May 2015 when it moved to Tapper Walk near a much shorter temporary art project, a natural swimming pond; the garden is still there in 2019.

According to Riddiford, the project is "about 65% grant funded and probably 35% through commissions, through venue hire, through the business training days", or more generally through "relationships with businesses". Part of it focuses on the Generators – young people in their late teens who join for a year and go through a programme of public speaking and learning about green issues. Through this the project can reach out to local businesses who then will actually pay to do workshops and offer internships to local young people (Kamvasinou, 2015).

The main focus of the project is to educate in the importance of sustainability. GG's aims and educational philosophy go beyond the physical site, while the 'skip' design relates to the particularities of the development site. A number of workshops and educational events have been built over the years, gradually allowing for more public accessibility, encouraging social interaction and educating about the origins of food. The project runs workshops on gardening and food growing, runs the local school Business BTec and works with the nearby textile department of the University of the Arts which is based in the Granary building. Companies such as the Guardian newspaper were looking for links with the local community and partnered up in a training scheme for their staff. The Garden has also attracted tourists and visitors to the site, who may have heard about it through the web or discover it through guided tours. This diversity of types of people or age groups has gradually come to be "the main marker of the project" (Richens, interview, 2013, cited in Kamvasinou 2015, 196). Although the garden has not been totally or always publically accessible, funded or managed, it contributes to the diversity of the public realm and placemaking through its ethos and the activities it supports.

Comparative remarks

The two case studies show several similarities and differences, and provide evidence to the application of alternative urbanism ideas in two very distinct cultural contexts. We now turn to examining some of these here, on the basis of a framework linking alternative urbanism to placemaking. This framework includes the synergies and challenges of co-production; the role of tourism; and activating urban space through place-shaping.

Co-production: synergies and challenges

Through a negotiated common ground, the Passageways project allowed the coming together of real estate developers, activists and the local community. Al-Ismaelia Company already had the intention to renovate the passageway aiming to create a coffee shop and co-working hub (Hassan, interview, 2019). Due to problems in officially licencing these uses, the proposal of the activists opened an alternative possibility for development and raising the value of their property and the whole surrounding area, while making use of local activism and winning the trust of the community. This

has helped to enhance Al-Ismaelia's public image that was linked to gentrification. In a personal interview with their head of marketing communications, she said their team operate under the slogan 'downtown for all' (Adel, interview, 2019). They promote this vision in all their community events to prove their good intentions which do not negate the importance of economic benefits to them. The vacant shops owned by the company hold temporary exhibitions open to the public for free and short-term rent-free leases are offered to creative local businesses on a condition of implementing pop-up creative installations in the passageway for the public. For example, the initiative of 'Downtown Goes Green' was launched where recycled materials were used in pop-up decorative art. Nevertheless, when interviewed about the reasons CLUSTER collaborated with Al-Ismaelia only a few times, the activist Nagati involved in the passageway project said they wanted to keep their neutral position within the community avoiding to be viewed as prioritizing economic interests over local needs.

Kodak passageway is a co-produced space by professionals and the local community. It was co-designed and people have contributed with their resources and knowledge both during implementation and through the continuous inclusive appropriation of space over time. Despite the involvement of investors, the local community retained control and ownership over the space, while nurturing a vibrant public realm and unique lived experiences for both locals and tourists alike.

On the other hand, the position of the Skip Garden in Central London highlights the possibility of producing fertile temporary 'edgelands' even within the context of high value business and an existing and successful ongoing regeneration project. The initiators were realistic about the prime location and the fact that they would have to be flexible and enter a dialogue with the developers to pursue their aims.

Consequently, the project has gained the support of the developers (although it was not part of the masterplan) and the two local councils of Camden and Islington. GG as a Charity runs the project and engages the private sector as well as local councils in supporting its funding while working towards establishing longer-term training programmes to self-fund in the future. Socio-culturally the project engages "local communities, including the local business and corporate communities, but also communities of interest: those wanting to learn more about food growing, sustainability and ethical business" (Kamvasinou 2015, 202). In kind support comes in many ways, including the donation of the skips from the construction companies on site, but further, through local businesses offering job opportunities or internships to local young people.

The concept was the brainchild of Paul Richens, a gardener. No designers were involved in the initial incarnations of the project, however temporary pavilions have been designed by architecture students from UCL at the latest site. The care and maintenance of plants also depends on the contribution of people participating in the gardening workshops. The Garden has supplied the nearby restaurants on Granary square with planters, while ongoing exchange exists with the University of the Arts textile department who use plant dyes from plants grown at the Skip Garden.

With regards to sanctioning the interventions, the two projects represent different challenges and approaches. In the Cairene context, the activist professionals followed a tactical approach to sanction the Kodak passageway project. The project's narrative was reframed for the authorities claiming that it was aligned with their beautification approach, restoring order to downtown after the political instability, while concepts of inclusiveness and diversity were understated (Nagati, 2018). The project obtained seven approvals from different authorities including electricity, water, traffic, security, and heritage preservation authorities and others; each time the design was reframed and presented so as not only to satisfy their technical requirements, but to also align with the authority's vision of development (Nagati and Stryker, 2016). Nagati (2018) explains that even the collaboration with foreign organisations was carefully presented as support for the local municipality.

Regarding the programmed events taking place in the passageway, CLUSTER took the risk of not obtaining official approvals particularly from the security apparatus when they organised the communal meal. Nagati (interview, 2018) points out "sometimes we have to take the risk". Although the local municipality was collaborative, the idea was not welcome for security reasons which led to an argument with security personnel on site but resolved quickly (Nagati, interview, 2018). Similarly, the building and tenant relations manager at Al-Ismaelia company confirmed that they did not seek approvals for the temporary installations in the space. Nevertheless, they did not include any physical signs of advertisement for their company in the passageway to avoid legal trouble (Mostafa, interview, 2019). The head of marketing and communication shared her observations with me about the change in the attitude of the security forces existing in the surrounding area over time. They got used to people congregating in the space, enjoying their time and pausing for pictures in a space in which previously holding cameras was considered suspicious (Adel, interview, 2019).

On the other hand, the Skip Garden started as a temporary project but has managed to endure and contribute not only to the development site but to policy change. "GG have a three-year [renewable] temporary lease for renting the land, with no rental costs, the expense being borne by the developers in full. As a Charity they also benefit from tax rates relief" (Kamvasinou 2015, 193). The temporary lease has serious break clauses, to protect the developer as well as determine the liabilities and the appropriate health and safety requirements, both for working with young people and school children, but also for working on a construction site. It was one of the first of its type, and pioneered the development of what is now in the UK called a 'meanwhile lease' (Kamvasinou 2015).

Tourism

While Egypt in general has faced a substantial decline in the tourism sector since the uprising as tourists feared coming to Egypt due to several terrorism-related incidents, Kodak passageway represented a touristic attraction to the few tourists visiting Cairo. This is evident in the number of international visitors rating Eish and Malh Restaurant on TripAdvisor. Also due to significant web presence the space received recognition in artists' networks attracting international artists and volunteers to exhibit their work and participate in the events such as 'From Rags to Riches' workshop which continued for a whole month in one of the vacant shops overlooking the passageway. Al-Ismailia Company installed 'I love Cairo' signboard - a common rhetoric promoting tourism in major cities in the same way 'I love London' for example is on souvenir mugs and t-shirts. The signboard created a hot spot for pictures taken by tourists or locals that are usually uploaded on social media platforms attracting more people. 'Internal tourism' has been clearly enhanced: more people, especially younger generations, come from different parts of the city to downtown just to experience the space. Moreover, the minister of tourism's visit is a formal recognition of the potential of the space to promote tourism.

The Skip Garden has an active and frequently updated website and has initiated promotional videos. This web presence has brought on site people from all around the world, including for example Brazil and China, which is "quite extraordinary, and wouldn't have happened twenty years ago…That's one of the major things, that suddenly you're not just a local player but you're a world player as well" (Richens, interview, 2013). Events organised there also help spread the word, and the information centre at King's Cross run by the developers also promotes the project through guided tours. As the King's Cross development nears completion, more people start flooding in and discovering its assets, including the Skip Garden – a different position compared to when it all started, when catalysing community engagement with the development site was the target.

Activating space and placemaking

Over a period of 10 years, as a mobile garden, the Skip Garden temporarily activated the sites it occupied through place-shaping activities but in the longer run it contributes to placemaking through

establishing longer term relationships between people – businesses and community. Its aesthetic is rather makeshift compared to other public spaces in the development, which are much more designed and polished (see Granary square, Cubitt square, Gasholder park) but that offers an alternative way of doing things that is still well-considered and serious. The Garden is still going strong ten years later and has become part of the identity of the new place, attracting both locals and visitors alike.

However it is unclear if the Skip Garden will stay on when the King's Cross development is completed. Some of the ideas for its future are, for example, to make use of green roofs on the new buildings or barges on the Regents canal. This highlights the precarious character of alternative projects but also the importance of flexibility.

Similarly, the Kodak Passageway project situates placemaking between two modes of intervention regarding time. The first incorporates permanent landscape alterations, while the second involves both spontaneous and programmed temporary activities or installations that leave no traces in the existing surfaces or structures. In both modes of intervention, throughout the process people were drawn out to the streets building social networks which triggered chain reactions and further interventions catalysing urban development in a long-term perspective (see Lerner, 2014). Therefore, alternative urban practices are sustainable in terms of creating a network of actors, as collective appropriations are expected to continue responding to new opportunities and new aims. Even temporary transformations of a space, which terminate by the end of the activity, do not always return to the pre-existing form but morph into something new (Dovey, 2016).

Both projects suggest "a different public realm to that proposed by mainstream urban design in the context of the neoliberal city, where emphasis is on commercial activity and which is often eroded by privatization and the exclusion of lower-income groups" (Kamvasinou 2015, 203). Activities that connect rather than divide, such as art, social events or gardening, create a public realm where people can meet, interact, reach each other and ultimately overcome their preconceptions and assumed differences. The often makeshift nature of the alternative urbanism projects, as opposed to the high-end public projects in city centres, makes it easier for some people to physically engage with them through designing, constructing, using or being responsible for their upkeep; they assume ownership and can see the impact on their everyday lives and neighbourhoods. "This diversity is much needed in the public realm of today because it caters for a variety of people with different disposable incomes, social status, ethnic background, age, gender or, more generally, interests" (Kamvasinou 2015, 203).

Conclusion

This research sought to address the potential of community-based urban interventions as a phenomenon and how it is reflected in theory and practice from a transnational perspective. As Friedman (2010, 161) has put it, "there is no single, best method [of placemaking]; each way is culturally attuned and has its own historical trajectory". The versions of alternative urbanism we have presented here confirm this. Both our cases, however, point to a transition from top-down imposition of urban change to the co-production of space generating uncommodified urban spaces that are not solely controlled and maintained by the state or the private sector. Within the historic centre of the city, in both Cairo and London, Kodak Passageway and Skip Garden projects represented catalysts for urban development away from the conformities of mainstream urban regeneration projects. At the same time, they empowered local communities to become key participants in this transformation. In both cases, there seems to be a shared transition towards more acceptance of initiatives that are not part of the official plan – of the developer or the state. Although this has led to policy change in the case of London, in the form of the meanwhile lease, such transition in planning policy is still awaited in the case of Cairo. Alternative urbanism is not a universal form of action as the idea has been articulated to address different problematic urban settings in different ways. The alternative approach proposes injecting informal activities to enliven sanitised contexts and conversely embracing informal landscapes to enhance the use and quality of deteriorated environments without pushing away the poor or prohibiting everyday improvisations. Alternative urbanism as a concept places design at the

interface between the formal and the informal: it creates a lived space open to individual and collective appropriations reflecting the complexity of the city and suggests a transition towards a more equitable urban planning practice.

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