

Rethinking New Communities Development - with Reference to Egypt's 40 Years Experience

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Abstract

The Egyptian New Communities development experience started in the mid-Nineteen Seventies, as part of a general strategy to tackle the complex problems challenging Egyptian settlements and context; mostly surrounded by invaluable agricultural land. New Communities were thought as an effective solution to the problems of rapid encroachment of agricultural land, deteriorating urban fabric, and low-quality living. It represented a serious endeavor and a heavy undertaking in a developing context burdened by challenging priorities and limited resources.

The New Communities drive and partial realization continued in full vigour for almost two decades. The authors were involved in many of the studies of New Communities during the said period, and followed the fortunes and lapses of the experience since.

The New Communities present scene, points-out their limited success in achieving underlying objectives and meeting declared development programs, in terms of: securing effective "resident" population, accommodating a balanced socio-economic mix, enabling lower income groups, achieving relative independence and autonomy, and providing sustainable living and quality settings.

The political upheaval in the wake of January 2011 uprising in Egypt transformed the political and socio-economic setting; allowed extensive informal physical interventions and hosted hastily formulated development strategies that ignored previous policies and products, slowed and stifled development (New Communities included).

The present work critically re-examines Egyptian New Communities, advocating the importance of continuous monitoring and critical assessment of earlier development plans and implemented policies, and in turn deployment of the related findings in formulating new development strategies and future planning scenarios. Supported by recorded satellite images and a limited pilot research, it reviews the New Communities recent changes and current status, pointing out means of revitalizing its role in the country's development drive and future planning policies.

The paper falls into three closely related sections, namely: Recalling Conception and Realization, Recent Transformations and the Present Scene, and Propositions for Revitalization and Development.

1. Recalling Conception and Realization

1.1. On Egyptian New Communities

The Egyptian New Communities (ENC) development started in the second half of the nineteen seventies and continued in varied-paces till the present. It is arguably among the most comprehensive and expansive in terms of scale and objectives, in developed and developing nations. ENC were mostly located outside the traditionally populated area away from the limited agricultural land “corridor”; according to an array of considerations including: relation to primate and major cities, accessibility and sites’ physical characteristics and suitability. ENC loosely fall into two major groups, namely: autonomous and semi-independent.

Many of the initial planning studies for the ENC were carried-out by joint local and international teams, [1], [2]. Most of the New Communities share four key features; mixed economic base, provision of job opportunities to the majority of its labour force, a balanced socio-economic groups’ mix, and ambitious growth targets (population and development phases), [2],[3], [4].

The profiles of the Egyptian New Communities (ENC) were presented in an earlier work by the authors [3]. It highlighted the conceptions, features and development context of the Egyptian New Communities movement, and discussed in some detail the status of five Egyptian New Communities, to delineate the features and “mixed fortunes” of the development experience.

1.2. Following New Communities Development

Continuous assessment is believed to be a key element in effective development processes. It should help in monitoring the realization of declared development objectives, and in detecting the factors hindering the achievement of expected development targets and related time schedules comprising, phases of implementation and contents.

Attempts to follow the Egyptian New Communities (ENC) development, progress started shortly after completion and approval of its Master Plans’ and development studies, and the ending of its initial growth phase (5 years), of the 1st generation of ENC, in the mid nineteen eighties and continued since. The monitoring and assessment of development aimed at setting data bases and evaluation of development; which might in turn, help in pointing out; merits, deficiencies, and potentials, as well as allowing problem solving and propositions.

The follow up and monitoring studies were assigned to a variety of consulting firms, research institutions, including the teams that prepared the Master Plan and Development studies for the ENC. Furthermore many follow up, monitoring and assessment studies were carried out by independent researchers and academics. ENC were also the subjects of many (unpublished) academic theses, reports and published papers and literature. A representative sample of the ENC follow up, monitoring and assessment studies are hinted at herewith.

The Swedish Consulting Firm, (SWECO), was jointly responsible for the delineation of the Master Plan and initial growth studies of the 1st Egyptian New Community, 10th Ramadan (1978), was commissioned by the Ministry of Development, Egypt, to report on the status of development of the city, [6]. The final Report was completed in 1982, it covered; existing conditions, growth rates and characteristics, observed deficiencies, and proposals for effective developments, [1], [4], [6].

In 1987 the Institute of Urban & Regional Planning, Cairo University, completed a detailed comparative study on four ENC (10th Ramadan, Sadat, 15th May and 6 October), for the Ministry of Development, Egypt. Besides establishing an updated data base recording the status of development for the selected New Communities, the study reviewed development, pointed out problem areas and deviations from approved plans, [4].

The ENC development assessment and policies were the subject of two unpublished research reports prepared by the New Communities Research Council, Academy of Scientific Research & Technology [7], and the National specialized Council, Housing and Development Division [8], in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Another detailed account of the ENC development experience was included in Rageh's [2] extensive study on Egyptian Urbanism; summing up the contents and findings of earlier investigations and reports, mostly published in the same period (1980s and early 1990s).

The authors - who were involved in many of the initial studies of ENC (1978-1992), and participated in the formulation of its Master Plans, detailed housing and urban planning and design studies - supervised a number of Doctoral thesis, that addressed and followed the ENC development, documented growth problems, and pointed-out related-causes and proposed alternative solutions for effective and sustained development, see for example [9], [10], [11]. Furthermore the authors followed, analyzed, evaluated ENC development, and proposed actions to enhance development, in three published works, in 1985 [1] and 2009 [3], 2013 [5].

The contents and findings of the array of research studies and reports (including the sample presented earlier) - addressing ENC development, and aiming at; establishing data bases for the new communities, critically reviewing development progress and assessing its relative success in securing delineated goals and objectives - that were carried-out during the past three decades since the initiation of ENC; collectively justify emphasizing the following three facts with regard to ENC development:

- The slowing down of ENC development was (and still is) generally referring to shortage in the implemented housing programs, numbers of resident/settled population (compared to planned targets), and realized community services/facilities provision.
- In most ENC the main infrastructure networks of those communities were completed at the early stages of development (1980s and early 1990s), at a relatively low costs if compared to current cost nowadays.
- The development of industrial areas, a key component in the economic base of most ENC, is invariably far more advanced than the rest of the community development components (housing and community facilities).

The previous findings present a fair and rational assessment of ENC experience against critical views doubting its wisdom and returns; on the grounds of wasted capital investments, and failure in reaching target population within the planned time frame (20 – 25 years).

1.3. Three Egyptian New Communities

The present work continues monitoring and critical assessment of ENC potentials, highlighting recent research findings on ENC development, backed by satellite images from Google Earth [12] over the past 7 - 8 years. It deploys a representative limited sample of the ENC (totaling some 35 New Community to-date) comprising three New

Communities, belonging to the first generation of ENC. Its initial development dates back to the late 1970's and early 1980's, namely; Sadat NC, Borg El Arab NC (formerly New Ameriya City NAC), and 6 October NC. A brief hint on each NC is first presented, to enable critical analysis and propositions, presented later.

Sadat New City (1977-78)

The studies for Sadat NC were completed and approved in 1978. It was developed as an independent urban centre, located mid way between Egypt's two primate cities (Cairo and Alexandria), with an urban mass of 42 square kilometers, and a target population of one million inhabitants, with half of the said target to be reached in 25 years (at the turn of the century). The new city was to provide full job opportunities to its residents, emanating from its mixed economic base, comprising: Industry, agriculture and services, [13].

Borg El Arab New City, ex. New Ameriya City (1978-80).

An Independent New City, located 60 kilometers to the west of Alexandria (Egypt's 2nd primate city) and 8 km from the Mediterranean coast; with a target population of 500000, to be reached in 25 years, and an urban mass of 48 sq. km. Planned to provide job opportunities to all its labour force, and to enjoy a mixed economic base combining industry, agriculture, services and tourism, together with a balanced growth phases to ensure self-sufficiency throughout its development [14].

6 October New City (1979-80)

The first (almost autonomous) New City in the Gt. Cairo Region, located some 34 km. to the west of Cairo; planned to draw excess population from the densely populated mega city. Six October NC was organized to have a mixed economic base, and to meet most of the job opportunities' demand of its resident population. The New City's designated area totaled 360 sq. km., with an urban mass comprising three closely linked extensive areas: the general urban area (the residential districts; local, district and city centres and community facilities, totaling some 5000 acres), the tourist (quality housing) area (4000 acres), and industrial area (2500 acres). The target population was 350000 to be reached in 20 years, [15].

2. Recent Transformations and the Present Scene

The late 1990's witnessed the formulation and hasty implementation of controversial decisions concerning the NEC, including: unsubstantiated increase of target population, allocation of lands designated to lower-income groups housing to higher-income demand groups and encouragement of intensive housing and mixed developments close to the new communities designated areas. This was negatively reflected on ENC development and status and continued since; burdening it with a chain of related problems, including; slow growth rates, distorted development (unbalanced land-use mix), skewed demographic structure (failure to accommodate target lower socio-economic groups), marginal/poor quality living environments, lack of independence and self-sufficiency, [2], [3], [5].

As hinted earlier the authors participated in the original studies of many of the ENC (including the selected sample of the 3 ENC). They enjoyed access to the original ENC studies and development framework; which in turn allowed to closely monitoring the interface between the proposed scenarios and the implemented schemes. The ENC development process varied from one New Community to another, in terms of: growth rate, balance of key development elements (e.g. housing, community facilities, and industrial development), and the size of resident population. The general status of ENC development processes will be delineated through the brief review of recent development

and current status of the selected three New Communities, namely; 6 October NC , Sadat NC, and Borg El Arab NC (formerly New Ameriya City NAC) – the synoptic profiles of which were outlined above .

The development process of the 6 October NC, [4], [15], although not strictly following the growth patterns delineated in the original studies, was by-far more active than other New Communities; in spite of the slow growth rate of its resident, hardly reaching 10% of the planned, throughout the initial development phase.[4]. The recent active growth may be attributed to its strategic location and proximity to Gt. Cairo. A recently published (2007) World Bank extensive study focusing on 6 October NC, emphasized the relative slowing down of development after “three decades of active growth”. The study was based on detailed field surveys, analysis of the 6 October NC’ 2005 satellite images, Google Earth [12], as well as on the findings of two closely related documents, namely; “Evaluation of Housing Subsidy Programs and Lessons learned”, USAID [17], and “Unlocking the Full Potential of the Six of October and Sheikh Zayed”, Mckinsey [18].



Six October, Tourist Area 2005



Six October, Tourist Area 2011



South west Tourist Area, 2005



South west Tourist Area, 2011

Figure 1: Satellite Images, Google Earth [11], showing the extensive development that happened between the years 2005 and 2011 at the Six of October City.

Six October NC status is quite different at present, the formal New Cities Organization (NCO), Egypt, web site [19], indicates that: the current resident population of 6 October NC is 915000, completed housing units of 500000, active industrial units 1398 (with another 420 under construction), the web site also gives details of completed infrastructure net works and developed community facilities. It also states that the NC target population has climbed to 5.5 million (without indicating the time-frame to reach it).

Recent (2011) satellite images, Google Earth, [12], show the extensive development that materialized in a relatively short time between 2005 and the present, Figure 1. The active growth was also supported in the findings of a limited field investigation, looking into ENC development transformation; recently carried-out by postgraduate students, at the Dept. of Architecture, Cairo University (2012), under the authors' supervision, [20].

It is justifiable to point-out that the presented recent active development (in spite the prevailing economic recession and administrative deficiencies) was induced and maintained because of the existence of the initially completed infrastructure networks. The active and sustained pattern of growth and the ambitious new population target (some 11 folds of the original) call for an in-depth investigation and critical adjustments of the development setting. It also clearly shows that the initial capital investment in the NC infrastructure was not wasted. It provided an added, viable resource and development asset.



Sadat City, 1st, 2nd and 3rd sectors in 2004



Sadat City, 1st, 2nd and 3rd sectors in 2011



Sadat City, 2nd and 3rd sectors in 2004



Sadat City, 2nd and 3rd sectors in 2011

Figure 2: Satellite Images, Google Earth [11], showing the extensive development that happened between the years 2004 and 2011 at Sadat City.

In Sadat NC, the development process and products, followed a far slower growth rate from the start of the implementation of its initial growth phase in the early and mid 1980's, [4]. The development process maintained the slow rates for two decades, as recorded in the 2005 satellite images, Google Earth [12], Figure 2. The completed development is hardly matching the planned first phase targets, [13]. This is supported by the formal figures on the New Cities Organization, Egypt, web site [19], indicating that: the current resident population of Sadat NC is of the order of 140000 (less than the population of NC 1st urban sector (150000), that was to be achieved in the early 1990's), the completed housing units of 32000, and the operating industrial units are totaling 500 (with another 427 under construction). The NCO, Egypt, web site also gives details of the advanced infra structure net works, and the slowly developing community facilities. The development status is far behind the planned population target of one million, which was to be reached within 25 to 30 years from the start of implementation. The recent 2011 satellite images, Google Earth, [12], clearly point-out urban active development since 2005, Figure 2. New districts and neighborhoods were completed (in Sectors 1, 2 & 3) and the pattern of growth is seemingly picking up, [19].



Ameriyah City 1st, 2nd and 3rd districts, 2005



Ameriyah City 1st, 2nd and 3rd districts, 2012



Ameriyah City, north of 3rd district, 2005



Ameriyah City, north of 3rd district, 2012

Figure 3: Satellite Images, Google Earth [11], showing the extensive development that happened between the years 2005 and 2012 at the Ameriyah (Borg-el-Arab) New City.

Similar indicators and analysis loosely apply to the development status of Borg El Arab New City (BENC), (ex. New Ameriya City (NAC)), [4], [14]. The NC's recorded 2004 satellite images, Google [12], show that the development completed in three decades is almost equivalent to that planned for the first phase of the NAC, totaling 150000 resident population, together with related community facilities and surrounding industrial areas, [14]. The formal figures on the New Cities Organization, Egypt, web site [19], confirms the indicated slow development pace, stating that: the current resident population of BENC is of the order of 115000 (less than the population of NC 1st urban sector, that was to be reached in the early 1990's), the completed housing units of 17000, and the operating industrial units totaling 522 (with another 170 under construction). It also shows that the originally planned target population for the completed NC (500000 inhabitants), is still the same. The NCO, Egypt, web site also gives details of the advanced infra structure networks' development, and the limited community facilities completed to-date. The recent Google satellite images, taken in 2011 (when compared with earlier 2005 shots), Figure 3., show a moderately active growth pattern. New districts and neighborhoods, in the 1st Sector, have been added, Figure 3. This confirms the BENC's relaxed development time frame, pointed out earlier. It also emphasizes the potentials of the implemented infrastructure network, as a resource and catalyst in activating development rates, (see also Abdel Kader, N. and Ettouney, S. [5]).

3. Propositions for Revitalization and Development:

The limited success of ENC in achieving its declared objectives and targets may be attributed to many factors, including:

- Poor management, deficient coordination and conflicts between central government institutions and NC development authorities.
- Poor monitoring, lack of proper/sufficient documentation and continuous assessment.
- Ignoring the original ENC' development strategies and related plans.
- Poor housing policies, land allocation and deficient settlement policies.

The critical investigation and assessment of the extensive and ambitious Egyptian New Communities development experience and related; strategies and projects, call for a comprehensive and rational approach. Statistical data and quantitative assessment focusing on population growth, completed housing units, community facilities, and operating industrial units, as well as completed infra-structure networks, compared to target figures adopted in the original master plans and related studies could be misleading.

The briefly presented and analyzed three ENC case studies, collectively pointed out the deficient development patterns and slow growth rates of the New Communities, prevailing for more than three decades. The growth rates started to escalate (at different paces) in recent years, Figures 1, 2 & 3. The positive escalation and active development pattern, could suffer again because of the political unrest and stifling economy, characterizing the Egyptian setting, after the January 2011 uprising. It could be argued as highlighted earlier, that the existence of the completed infrastructure networks, (implemented at relatively low cost) in many of the ENC will continue to provide a valuable resource and an effective development potential. It should also be emphasized that national development strategies should maximize the use of urban serviced lands in existing ENC before advocating the development of new areas.

A number of key actions to address the problems hindering the ENC development, were proposed by the authors, in their critical assessment of the ENC status in 2009, [3]. The lapsing three years since, witnessed the January 2011 uprising, and the political unrest and social upheaval in its wake, which adversely affected the national development context. It could be argued that most of those propositions are still valid, and worth recalling and rephrasing.

In this framework the key actions urgently needed to address the ENC's reviewed and highlighted development issues, may be summarized as follows:

- Establishing a comprehensive updated data-base covering the various physical and non-physical aspects of ENC, to allow; better understanding, rational analysis and the formulation of appropriate solutions.
- Changes to completed and approved ENC's master Plans and strategies and related studies should only be made after proper investigation and careful assessment.
- New Communities should enjoy autonomy and independence, and to be treated as balanced comprehensive developments.
- Integration of fringe and "casual" developments, in the vicinity of planned ENC into "Mother" New Community.
- Careful assessment and adjustment of the target sizes and population of the ENC.
- Readdressing the needs of "lower income groups" in terms of housing and land allocation, to restore socio – economic balance in the new communities.
- "Settlers" attraction is a prime target and a key action in new communities development. It can be achieved through the integration of the urban trio: appropriate housing supply, attractive and efficient community facilities, and rewarding job opportunities.
- Land allocation should primarily target residents and prospective settlers.
- Revitalization of mixed economic bases of the ENC, including agriculture and services besides industry.

The Egyptian New Communities present an invaluable asset, that survived years of conflicting policies, poor management and deficient development control. The proposed chain of related-actions delineate a flexible framework; that is likely – if adopted - to enable the transformation of ENC into effective growth magnets in the drive to revitalize Egypt's comprehensive development.

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