

THE PYRAMIDS PLATEAU: A DREAM SEARCHING FOR SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT:

Recognized as one of the most unique sites in the world, the Pyramids Plateau exhibits the three grand pyramids and the sphinx, tombs, five smaller pyramids, and other monuments. Through years, such Plateau has been playing a great role in introducing the Egyptian civilization to the whole world. Recently, the Pyramids Plateau is declared as one of the world heritage sites and as one of the most iconic travel spots on the planet.

In the past few years, the location of the new Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) within the sitting of the Giza Pyramids Plateau re-triggered the debate between scholars, practitioners, and activists over development activities to be considered within and surrounding such unique site. Consequently, an ever growing conflict between aims of conservation for the Plateau and aims of development for the surrounding areas re-emerged.

This paper explores the above conflict aiming at documenting while emphasizing the gap between the ideal development sittings within and surrounding the Pyramids Plateau based on national and international conservation laws and charters; and existing land use pattern and development trends.

KEYWORDS

World Cultural Heritage Sites (WCHS), Giza Plateau, Zoning Configuration.

BACKGROUND

“Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritages are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. Places as unique and diverse as the wilds of East Africa’s Serengeti, the Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and the Baroque cathedrals of Latin America make up our world’s heritage.” (UNESCO 2007)

The idea of creating an international movement for protecting heritage emerged after World War I. The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage developed from the merging of two separate movements: the first focusing on the preservation of cultural sites, and the other dealing with the conservation of nature.

In 1959, initiated and led by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the former movement started as a worldwide campaign to save the Abu Simbel temples in Egypt, which would have been flooded by water trapped behind the Aswan High Dam. The success of such campaign led to other safeguarding campaigns, such as saving Venice and its Lagoon in Italy and the Archaeological Ruins at Moenjodaro in Pakistan, and restoring the Borobodur Temple Compounds in Indonesia. Consequently, UNESCO initiated, with the help of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the preparation of a draft convention on the protection of cultural heritage (UNESCO 2007; ICOMOS 2007).

In 1948, the later Movement started to emerge by the foundation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) - also known as The World Conservation Union (WCU) - in Gland, Switzerland following an international conference in Fontainebleau, France with a prime mission “to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable” (IUCN 2007).

The idea of combining conservation of cultural sites with those of nature came from the USA in 1965 where a White House Conference in Washington, D.C., called for the creation of a ‘World Heritage Trust’ that would stimulate international cooperation to protect ‘the world's superb natural and scenic areas and historic sites for the present and the future of the entire world citizenry’. Three years latter, in 1968, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and its affiliate commission, the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), and International centre for the study of preservation and restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) developed similar proposals for its members (ICCROM 2007; UNESCO 2007).

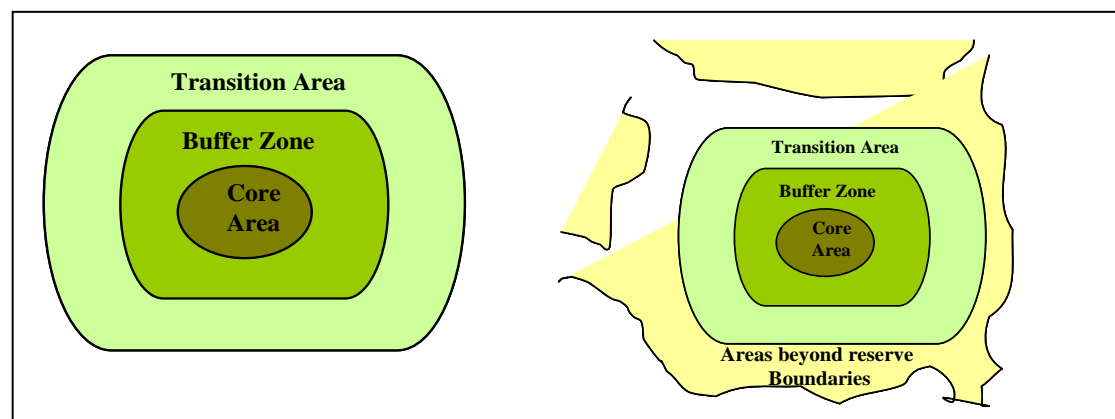
Such proposals were presented to the 1972 United Nations conference on Human Environment in Stockholm. Eventually, a single text, The World Heritage Convention (WHC), was agreed upon and signed by 180 countries. The text was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on 16 November 1972. To date, the WHC is administered by UNESCO and considered to be the sole heritage conservation bible (IUCN 2007). There are currently 812 designated World Heritage sites (WHS), including Giza Pyramids Plateau, that span over 137 countries and are protected by the 1972 World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2007).

1. PLANNING PRINCIPLES OF WCHS

The relentless effort and commitment of international institutions (e.g. UNESCO, IUCN, ICOMOS) to formulate protective legislations for WCHS as well as integrating of such legislations within planning systems of countries all over the world is well documented. In addition, practitioners, theorists, scholars and governments have also done their part to join the pace in search for workable zone configuration that protect such valuable sites as well as guarantee sustainable city development.

The merge of the above efforts resulted in the emergence of several zone configurations concerning the land use management of WCHS and its surrounding land use patterns: for instance, the Canadian Land Use Classification (Abd El Hamid, 1998; Tolba, 2003), the American Land Use Classification (Tolba, 200; El Khateeb, 2006), the IUCN Land Use Classification (Tolba, 2003), The Concentric Zone Concept (Tolba, 2003), The Classic Three Zones Configuration (Abd El Hamid, 1998), and the Nodes and Linkages system (Abd El Hamid, 1998). Although the above zone configurations vary according to the urban environments within which they are applied, they share the very basic planning principles adopted and recommended by UNESCO international practice standards.

Figure (1): UNESCO Zone Configuration for WCHS



Source: (Raslan, 2003)

As stressed by the UNESCO international practice standards (UIPS) “the definition of WCHS zone configuration is the most essential part of all protected area management plans” (UNESCO 2007). It is considered to be the critical step of all conservation process where the definition, justification and mapping of physical boundaries and management regulations of protection zones are to be set. According to the UIPS, the zone configuration of any WCHS shall explicitly include the following zones as shown in figure (1):

1-1 Core Zone

The core zone, the backbone of the WCHS, is defined as “a legally constituted nucleus that represents a strictly protected area, of the highest protective priority, devoted to long term protection” (El Khateeb 2006). The core zone may represent:

- **Sanctuary / preservation:** ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity.
- **Research / Education:** ecologically sound research and education activities.
- **Cultural:** cultural activities or monuments such as the pyramids plateau

Although the erection of buildings and roads is totally forbidden in the core zone, facilities such as rudimentary camping sites, shelters for mountaineering, trails for bicycling and walking, and horse riding may be permitted. Facilities of research activities as well as educational purposes might also be allowed (*Abd El Hamid, 1996*)

1-2 Buffer Zone

The Buffer zone(s) is a clearly defined area surrounding to the core zone(s) that represents the interface between the protected areas and associated surrounding settlement. Like core zones, boundaries of buffer zones are established by law aiming at providing complementary but less restrictive land management measures to areas surrounding core zones; while preventing encroachment of human activities into core zones.

Erection of buildings shall be noticeably minimal, if not forbidden, where activities such as eco-lodges, camping, and research centres may be permitted. Nevertheless museums, information centre and tourism facilities should be provided at the outer edge of such zone where entrance(s) to the WCHS shall be located (Bovey and Lawson, 1998).

1-3 Transition Zone:

The transition zone is located beyond buffer zones representing the territory where WCHS blends with surrounding urban areas. Sustainable resource management practices should be promoted and developed in such zone. The aim is to reduce negative human impact while seeking the balance between economic, social and environment aims of urban development (Bovey and Lawson, 1998).

Tourism and recreation facilities (e.g. accommodation, catering, sport, picnicking) and associated buildings maybe permitted, however its sitting and quality shall be under strict

building and planning regulations. Buildings and facilities are also preferred to be grouped near access routes and existing settlements.

1-4 Zones beyond WCHS Boundaries:

Zones outside protected areas are sometimes referred to as the “matrix zones” where it represents all surrounded mixed use zones beyond the transition area. These uses must be compatible to the presence of the protected area and shouldn't have any negative impacts on it. Protected areas are not ecologically, economically, politically and culturally isolated units but rather linked to surrounding areas. Consequently, planning and management of protected areas must be incorporated within local and regional physical plans as well as policies.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to measure whether the surrounding activities of the WCHS are compatible or not. As some activities might be compatible to one WCHS, it might be not compatible to another. Generally, there is a common agreement between theorists, scholars and practitioners, on the one hand, that all activities generating large amounts of waste and pollution and require pressing supply of utilities and services are not the best of activities to be located near to the WCHS. Activities such as, among many others, polluting industries, low and middle-income residential areas, public buildings, whole sale commercial activities and services, power stations and recycling facilities fall under such category. On the other hand, recreational, educational, eco-tourism, religion and administrative activities as well as public services are considered to be suitable for the nature of the WCHS. Nevertheless, the definition and justification of activities within zone beyond the WCHS boundaries depends on both the nature of the WCHS as well as the urban planning and management system and socio-economic environment within which zone configuration plan would be adopted.

2- THE PYRAMIDS PLATEAU (GIZA, EGYPT)

The ancient remains of the Pyramids Plateau are recognised as one of the human treasures. Due to its cultural and historic value, among five sites in Egypt (i.e. Abu Mena, Ancient Thebes and its Necropolis, Islamic Cairo and the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae) the Pyramids Plateau was declared as category-one WCHS by UNESCO in 1979. Two other sites joined the pace: Saint Catherine Area (2002) and Wadi Al-Hitan (Whale Valley) (2005) (Salmon 2006; Cristallinks 2007).

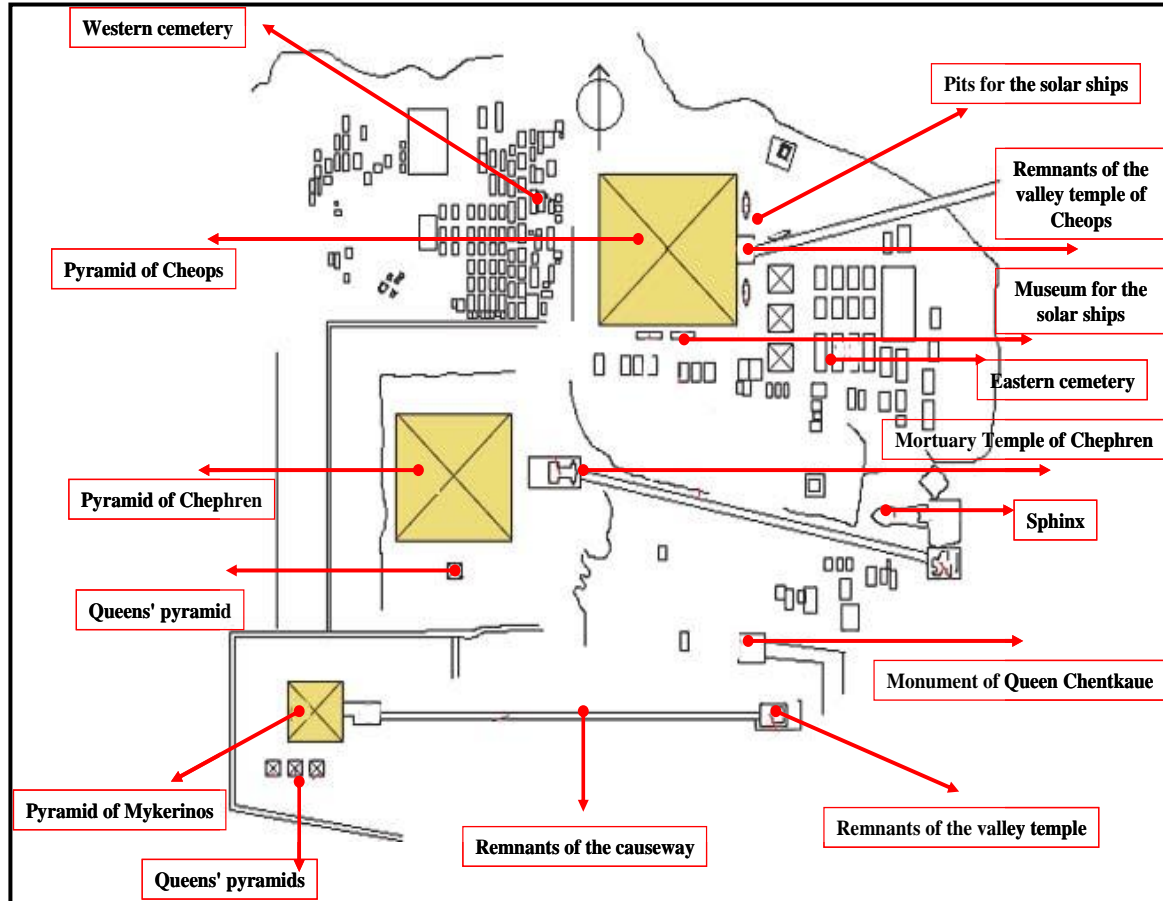
The site has attracted visitors and tourists of classical antiquity since Old Kingdom monuments were already over 2,000 years old. It was popularized in Hellenistic times when the Great Pyramid was listed as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Today it is the wonder of the Seven Wonders of the World that remains in existence (Wikipedia 2007).

2-1 Description of Site

The site covers an area of 2x 2 km and its history goes back to at least to the reign of king Ninetjer of the second dynasty .The Pyramids complex belong to three rulers of the 4th dynasty; however they are not the oldest monuments built on the plateau. As seen in figure (2), the site consists of the Pyramid of Khufu (also known as the Great Pyramid and the Pyramid of Cheops), the somewhat smaller Pyramid of Khafre (or Chephren), and the

relatively modest-size Pyramid of Menkaure (or Mykerinos), along with a number of smaller satellite edifices, known as "queens" pyramids, causeways and valley pyramids, and most noticeably the Great Sphinx (Nicholas,2000).

Figure (2): Major contents of the Pyramids Plateau



Source: the Researchers

2-2 Management Plans of the Pyramids Plateau:

Hawas (1997) points out that there was no management plan for the site before 1988. It was merely some uncoordinated efforts to conserve and protect monuments within the plateau rather than an overall policy or plan for the site despite its enlisting as a WCHS in 1979. Paradoxically, as mentioned before, the status-quo of site remained untangled for nine years since 1979. It was not until February 1988 when a 250-kilogram slab of limestone peeled away from the Sphinx's right shoulder and dropped to the ground below, an indication of just how much wear and tear the structure was suffering, that the government aided by UNESCO started to galvanize the 1988 management plan for the plateau. At the time, the plan was considered to be a major event where it was the only WCHS in Egypt for which a site management plan was put into effect since 1979.

The 1988-2001 Management Plan

Because of the critical circumstances within which the plan was formulated, it received great political and financial support from the government at the time as well as the concerned international agencies.

The plan consists of the four phases: the first phase was designed to secure the much needed conservation for the great and middle pyramids and to manage the overall access to the site and movements of visitors and vehicles. The site management plan called for an entrance gate which monitors the entrance of buses and cars, and provided a method of making sure all tourists who came onto the plateau purchase admission tickets. After the completion of the first phase within a year, in 1989, the Egyptian Government declared that the decrease in foot traffic and the increase in revenues was more than worth the cost and maintenance of the gate (Hawas 1997).

The second phase was concerned with the conservation and restoration program in other areas of the plateau as well as the removal of all new constructions disfiguring the archaeological zone and its buffer. Thirty tombs were planned to be documented and restored every year. A plan for making monuments in the area east of the Great Pyramid accessible to tourists was included. Nevertheless, the most important recommendation of all was the removal of the road built over Khufu's funerary temple in 1949 to minimize vehicle movements within the site.

The third phase called for the physical site management plan. Egyptian experts, as well as experts from UNESCO were to be invited to prepare a master plan for this purpose clearly setting up the much needed management zones and boundaries of site. Nevertheless, the 1988 sets some recommendation in that matter to guide the future UNESCO led management plan. Such recommendations included:

1. The construction of a ring road around the plateau to limit vehicle traffic within the plateau.
2. The establishment of two cultural centres to be located at the entrance to the plateau, and the south of the third pyramid.
3. The construction of stables at the south of the third pyramid where horses and camels shall not be ridden within the pyramid area but rather should be kept to the proposed "ring road" area.
4. The establishment of a picnic area for visitors.
5. The establishment of antiquities offices and conservation lab for the preservation of the artifacts.

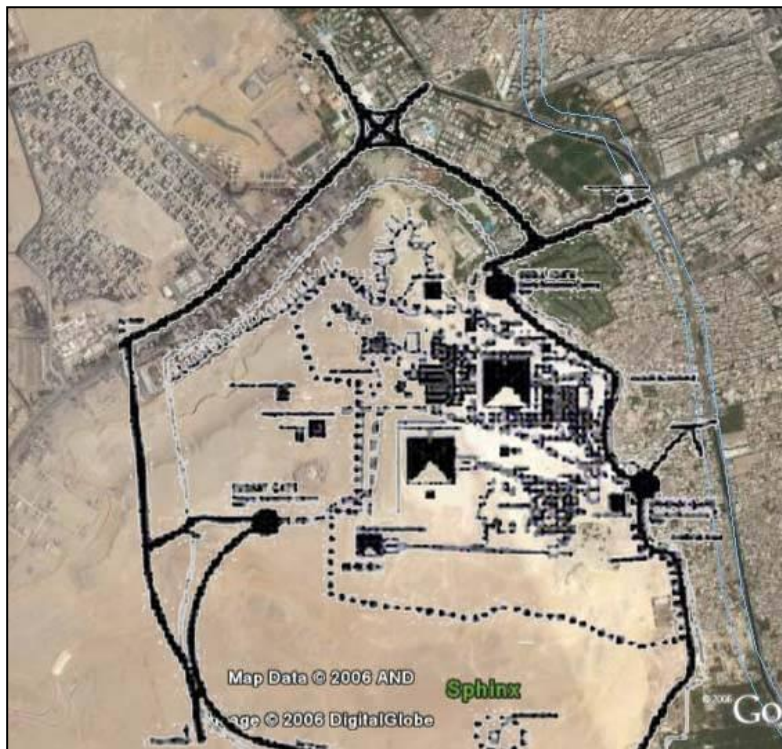
The fourth phase was planned to expand over a period of 10-15 years dedicated for the purpose of archaeological research and conservation, protection and infrastructure development, and formulation of a visitor management program.

UNESCO 1992 Giza master plan

In the early 1990s, UNESCO raised deemed concerns relating to the impacts caused by tourism and urbanization on the monuments on Giza Plateau. Inspectors had noticed distinct deterioration, despite efforts by Egyptian government to preserve the monuments by improving the management of tourism. Consequently, UNESCO commissioned the conservation practice (TCP), a British based team of conservation architects, to conduct a preliminary study and prepare a report for the sustainable management plan of the site that follows the guidelines of the 1988 management plan. The TCP developed an initial outline of the management plan, which throughout the early 1990s was followed by progress reports on the development taking place at the Giza Plateau.

The 1992 management plan, once more, highlights the need to remove the tarmac roads that run through the pyramid area and the removal of some of the unnecessary modern structures. The construction of a ring road around the Giza plateau, defining the boundary of the site was also deemed necessary. To improve the visitor experience the construction of three visitor centers, the Khufu Gate, the Sphinx Gate and the desert Gate was also recommended. In addition to the above recommendations, the management zone plan seen in [figure \(\)](#) was proposed yet they had to be approved by the Egyptian government and officially submitted to the World Heritage Centre for registration (UNESCO 1992).

Figure (3) the master plan of the Giza Plateau.



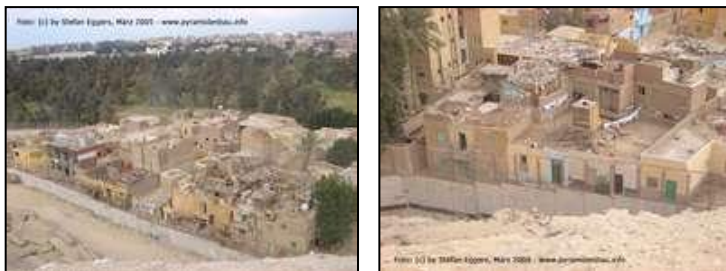
(Source: (UNESCO, 1992))

4- CURRENT CONDITION OF THE PYRAMIDS PLATEAU:

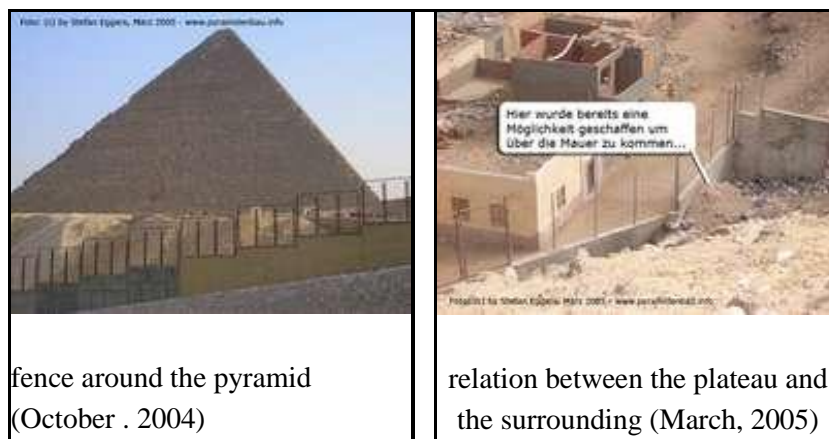
Given the critical conditions of the plateau, one should assume vast and sweeping changes should have been taken place to improve and enhance the management of the site. Paradoxically, in its (2005) periodical progress report, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) regrets that “no management plan for the entire property has yet been developed and submitted to the World Heritage Centre as requested in previous decisions” (UNESCO 2007). Consequently, it requested the Egyptian State Party to submit, by 1 February 2007, a report on the progress made in the development of this Management Plan for the entire property, for examination by the Committee at its 31st session (UNESCO 2007).

To date, the management plan has never been submitted to the WHC as requested and all achievements of site conservation were uncoordinated efforts and projects (Ross 2007). Yet the major achievements of all are the abolition of the ring road link project which was penetrating the Giza plateau, the building of an electronically secured fence, seen in photo (1), around the plateau encompassing many tourist facilities such as, toilets, first aid office and research facilities, the banning of automobiles circulation and parking on site, and the building of horse and camel stables (Hawas 2004).

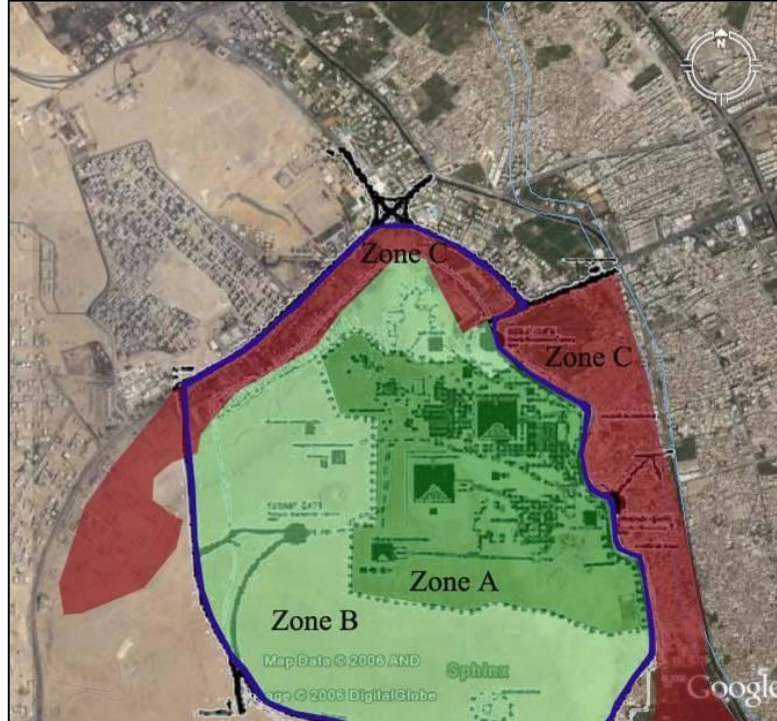
Photo (1) the separation wall



Source: (Eggers, 2006)



Source: (Eggers, 2006)



4-1 Analysis of the uses inside the plateau

Today this unique site is threatened a rash of uncontrolled building development, and the Plateau is being taken over by tourist. Some promoters have even envisaged making golf courses and artificial lakes near to this plateau. In other word, there is a risk that one of the wonders of the world is threatened by the uncontrolled development and tourism.

Figure (4): Map of Giza plateau and the analysis of the zone configuration on it
 Source: Researcher based on (UNESCO management plan, 1992)

Zone A	Core Zone
Zone B	Excavation zone
Zone c	Urban environment inside and close to the plateau
	Pyramids plateau's border

Table (4): Zone configuration of Giza Plateau. Source: Researcher based on (UNESCO management plan, 1992)

Zone A: (core zone)

The core zone area is the zone that contains the three pyramids and the other remains. It is about 2 km * 2km.

Zone B: (Excavation zone)

Excavations at Giza Have discovered many monuments and secrets. Until now, there are a three areas were discovered many remains of the Old Kingdome. This excavation zone is contains a part of Nazlet El Seman area; this area may be the major domestic part of the settlement lies under the modern town, which makes the work of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in this area of vital importance.

Further excavations and study are required if we are to understand the relationship between the complexes thus far excavated and the people who used them. Were these complexes first established for the pyramid builders and later used by the temple community? And if so, what

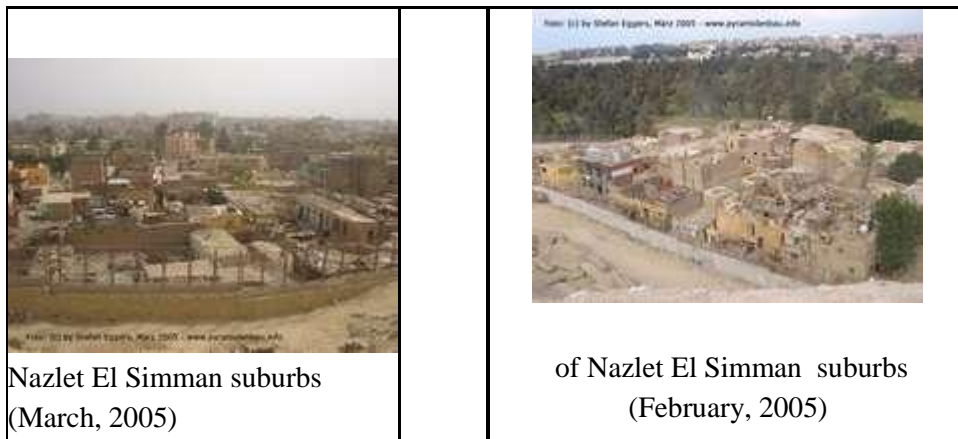
changes can be detected when one group replaced the other? (UChicago, 1998), this area is a very big area and it surrounded all parts of the core zone as shown in figure (11).

Zone c: (Urban environment inside and close to the plateau)

This area includes many types and patterns of urban environment, in the east part of the plateau there is the squatter settlement of Nazlet El Simman. In the north area, there is the GEM project, Remaya club, and the residential area, and in the northern east site there is a group of hotels and resorts zones. This area is separated from the plateau by regional road of Cairo –Alex road. The urban area inside the plateau, in the north side is contained of hotels and other tourist facilities and it is built on the preserved plateau.

From the analysis of the plateau we can illustrate the following:

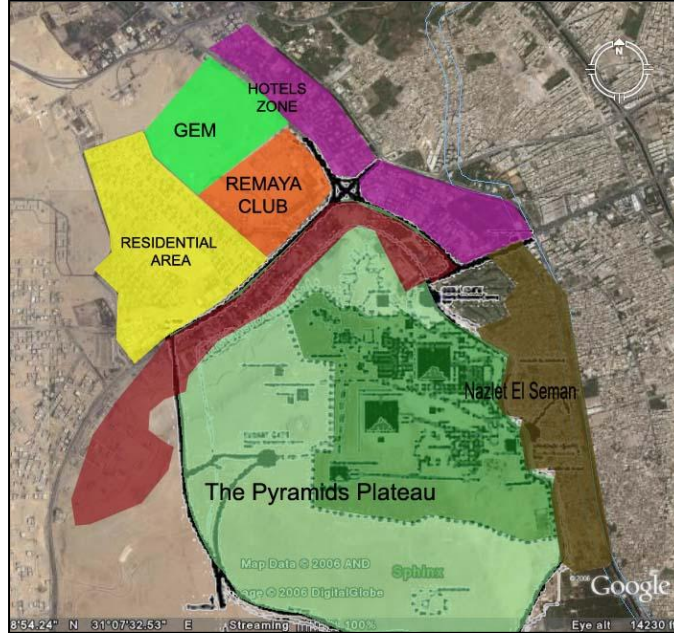
- 1- We can notice how the suburbs of Cairo lie in relation to the Giza plateau from the aerial view, as part of this plateau is a part of the surrounding urban environment.
- 2- There is no respect to the buffer around the plateau, as from the study of the management plan concepts of the CWH sites; we notice that there is no current buffer around the site. (This buffer supposes to take a distance varied from 100 to 1000 m).



Source: (Eggers, 2006)

4-2 Analysis of the surrounding uses:

Figure (5) The surrounded urban uses of the Pyramids Plateau.



(Source: (www.googleearth.com) adopted by the Researcher)

Activities around the PAs system		
Urban use	Impacts	Degree of compatibility
Remaya club	Generally this open area has no negative impacts on this site.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nazlet El Seman	Main impacts came from the resident's behavior, and sometimes human domestic sewages can affect the environment. (pecially geographical PAs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Luxury residential areas have small impacts on the PAs.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Grand Egyptian museum	Generally it is the most compatible activity, especially for PAs which have a cltural.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hotels zone	Its impacts depend on the human behavior.(need big parking plots)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Residential zone	This area is far away from the plateau, and it is a planned zone.	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Table (5): Compatible and incompatible activities around the pyramids plateau boundaries.

(Source: Researcher) based on the previous evaluation study

5- Conclusion

Major problems that face the Pyramids plateau:

From the pervious analysis of the current condition of the plateau, we can reach that there is a conflict between the management plans and the implementation. As until now there is no overall plan for visitors flow, and there are many ways in which visitors can arrive to the site. The urban expansions around the plateau are threatened its safety. We can illustrate these problems in the next points:

- 1- The growth of unplanned settlements at the base of the plateau, such as Nazlet Al – Simman and Kafret Al Gabal, to feed the souvenir market, but which also seeps sewage onto the plateau.
- 2- The dumping of litter, sewage and horse dung in the area.
- 3- Pollution and uncontrolled access to the plateau.
- 4- Unofficial guides who turn a blind-eye to inappropriate behavior, such as climbing the monuments.
- 5- There is no respect to the existing buffer zone.
- 6- Many urban uses were built inside the plateau.
- 7- This plateau is close to the Giza suburbs, as Naslet El Seman is attached to the right side of the plateau. (Actually it is laid on the buffer zone of the plateau as shown in figure 4).
- 8- Many of the surrounding uses to the plateau are incompatible to the presence of this unique site.

According to the previous problems the research put a guideline for the supposed buffer zone based on the rendering model of the plateau and the UNESCO's master plan of the pyramids plateau.

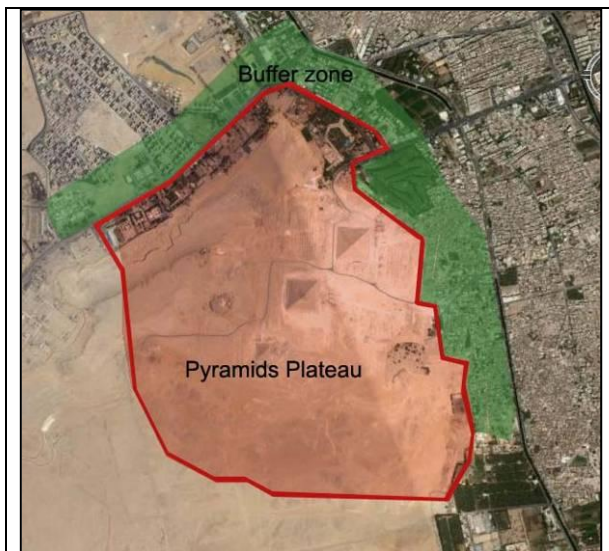


Figure (6) the supposed buffer zone of the pyramids plateau according to the previous analysis

(Source: (www.googleearth.com) adopted by the Researcher)

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