

Pedestrian Street Life in Historic Cairo

Authenticity and Counterfeit

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Abstract

This study argues the authenticity and the counterfeit of the experienced street life when converted for pedestrians taking into account users' needs and requirements. Its main aim was to assess the potential for revitalisation of pedestrian street life in two areas in Cairo, on the basis of an evaluation of the mismatch between the physical characteristics of these areas and the local demands for usability, cultural identity and the use of street space for income-generating activities. The end purpose was to develop a checklist of the design key-factors and the intermediary variables that help in the revitalisation of pedestrian street life in Cairo. Data was analysed in an integrative process using quantitative and qualitative measures to fulfil the aims of the research. Results proved that although there were differences in physical features in the two streets, similarities were witnessed in the socio-cultural aspects of users' behaviour and activities.

Introduction

Pedestrian street life is an aspect that helps revitalising denied urban activities defeated by modern pragmatic requirements. In Cairo, like all oriental cities, the outdoor spaces of markets, bazaar, street cafés, and residential outdoor 'extensions' are plateaux for various activities for the inhabitants. They carry out their various occupations and advocations on the 'platforms' as much as possible. This is why street life in Cairo as a socio-cultural context is one of the significant features of the Cairene identity that has disappeared in some areas and threatens to vanish from others over time. In this respect, revitalising aspects of pedestrian street life became one of the urgent social and economic demands in Egypt's Developmental Plan.

Accordingly, since the last quarter of the 20th century many urban renewal activists have pushed for the creation of auto-free zones in some sectors of the metropolitan area. A few streets were chosen to be converted for pedestrians only, either on temporal or on permanent terms. This included narrow routes in old medieval Cairo, originally designed for pedestrian life, and the more recent car streets located in Khedivian downtown Cairo known as *westelbalad*. Although the chosen auto-free zones reduced crowdedness, tension and pollution affecting health and environmental sustainability, the experienced street life is subject to investigations considering that revitalising any district is a socio-cultural function directed to residential structure and economic features.

This study attempts at evaluating two of Cairo pedestrian life revitalisation cases, what could be regarded as "authentic" and what could be considered as "counterfeit". Authenticity has been defined philosophically and psychologically along history where it has been discussed for its duality (the self and the other). Writers (Ferrara, A. 1998; Taylor, C. 1992; Trilling, L. 1974 and Fromm, E. 1942), tend to agree that authenticity is something to be pursued as a goal intrinsic to "the good life". Counterfeit originally defined as forgery is also viewed as the antonym of authenticity. Therefore in this paper, "authenticity" is referred to as the permanence of street vitality in retaining its socio-cultural characteristics: residents' uses in their daily activities and in their ritual

Keywords:
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performances pertaining to beliefs and tradition. On the other hand, “counterfeit” relates to the instability of such vitality due to a one way political decision which sometimes disregards all other aspects.

The aim of this paper was to assess the potential for revitalisation of pedestrian street life in two areas in Cairo, in order to evaluate the mismatch between the physical characteristics of these areas and the local demands for usability, cultural identity and the use of street space for income- generating activities.

The end purpose was to develop a checklist of the design key-factors and the intermediary variables that help in the revitalisation of pedestrian street life in Cairo.

Background: Built Environment Problems

Since our cities have been permitted to grow with no concern for the future, the urban life is threatened by poor environmental quality, economic problems and socio-cultural breakdown (Rudofsky, 1969). Considering urban planning, the high-density sprawl, the urban removal, the loss of image and changes in functions create dramatic changes; the most important of all: **cities are for cars and not for people.**

The excessive change in scale, the loss of human scale hence of interest in the urban spaces and buildings has distinct economic repercussions. It fosters a whole cycle of negative social effects; a decline in number of central businesses, in district shoppers, in site viewers and retail sales; it causes bankruptcy, a loss in revenues from real estate and an increase in crime.

Many theorists then, called for controlling and/or lessening vehicle motion and for promoting pedestrianism. Appleyard (1981) has indicated that the automobile dominance in streets has had negative influence in the decline of public life. He asserted that it is crucially important that urban environments be made vital again, that we enhance and create rather than destroy important linkages.

In this respect, several urban design concepts have been introduced. Brambilla and Longo (1977) affirm that the term “traffic-free zone” has been applied to a wide range of urban spaces, such as parks, plazas and promenade, to name a few. However, the expression has been used to define a more specific concept, indicating urban areas where private motor vehicles have been banned and priority has been given to pedestrian movement and public transportation. Although there are various types of traffic-free zones that affirm this definition; pedestrian districts, pedestrian streets, transit ways, semi-malls and enclosed malls, they all share the following goals: economic revitalisation, environmental improvements, social benefits and traffic management. The **economic revitalisation goals** include improving downtown retail trade and attracting new investors, the **environmental improvements** take account of reducing pollution levels, improving the physical image of downtown: repaving, lighting, landscaping, providing street furniture and preserving and enhancing historic districts. The **social benefits of pedestrian zones** consist of providing space for pedestrian activities, enhancing the social image of the city and improving pedestrian safety. Finally, **traffic management** addresses changing the way the street is used and/or perceived such as circulation and parking problems, improving actual and perceived personal and road safety, providing for pedestrians and cyclists and the most important issue enabling street use by the disabled and people with special needs. These goals may vary from one situation to another, but the intentions, problems and aspirations behind them are interconnected.

Consequently, concepts and theories for converting **streets space from car to pedestrian use** were witnessed as a reaction. Works of Gehl (1996, 2001 and 2003) have introduced some considerations that can be concluded in two main streams: the first stream is the pedestrian culture itself; stressing on the urge that traffic culture is to include walking. He went further to suggest a pedestrian network or web to emphasise pedestrian priority. Gehl's second stream was the planning aspects of the pedestrian streets on the city map and their linkage. He also discussed several design aspects of pedestrian streets: footpaths, width, and existence of attractive pavements, frontages, lighting techniques, interesting vistas and views. His study provides some insightful

recommendations with respect to the importance of pedestrian streets for the special needy people, the chances of renovating the central city streets and developing boulevards and areas for pedestrians.

In "Cities for People", Wiedenhoef (1981) evaluated a number of public historic spaces, where he deduced ten basic aspects that influence the success of pedestrian streets; these are: sense of place; recognisability; sense of containment; separation of traffic from urban spaces; employment of elevation changes; sufficient places to sit and to perform human activities; shops and a source of food and drink, and lastly materials and textures of aesthetic quality in addition to the introduction of plant and water elements.

To sum up, the previous background draws three pivotal lines towards the authenticity of pedestrian areas. The first is the urge to integrate pedestrian culture with traffic culture. The second is to deal with "pedestrian environments" as a network of walking routes linked together in the city map to achieve social benefits, economic revitalisation, environmental improvements and traffic management. The third is to develop design programs, concepts and goals to create responsive pedestrian areas. Physical characteristics (pavements, proportion, scale, and colour, materials, lighting, furnishing and planting) are employed to provide sense of place, recognisability, sense of containment, safety and comfort in performing human activities.

Apparently, the three lines are linked together. Pedestrian culture is related to the community culture, while in each city map pedestrian life differs from one community to another, and finally, the design aspects are adapted according to the individual characteristics of the locale. Hence, the "local dimension" is paramount in rethinking "authenticity" in pedestrian streets.

Designing for Authentic Streets in Cairo:

In respect to the design field, two issues are central in creating reliable spaces for pedestrian life: the first issue concerns the activities and needs of the local community in Cairo as driving forces to shape aspects of a pedestrian environment; the second issue pertains to a holistic approach to pedestrian street design through the inter-connected relations among physical, socio-cultural, economical and environmental aspects of the local community.

This inter-connected relation is the key-aspect to design outdoor spaces for authentic pedestrian life in the Cairene society. Consequently, the case of Cairo is claimed as "sensitive", since the activities in pedestrian streets used to be a natural outcome of the socio-economic needs that have changed over time. Thus, the main question of the field research lies in whether the existing converted streets from cars to pedestrians allow real or fake pedestrian life for the local community. The main purpose is to contribute to the authenticity of Cairo's pedestrian life, and, to investigate the aspects involved in developing local pedestrian streets

Reviewing literature in this issue suggests its division into three major aspects:

Physical aspects are the qualifications of the setting, including: containment, protection and enclosure; comfort, ease of walk and sufficient places to sit; climatic response, provision of shelter and protection from sun; existence of plant and water; ample parking spaces; connection to public and transportation systems; frontage and building conditions; vistas and views and finally street furniture and signage. **Economic aspects** cover the usability and activities, including: mixed activities to do or to watch; programmed events, spectacles, street performances and public art; provision of food and drink; provision of shops and retail; night and day activities, and vending carts. Both the physical aspects and economic activities promote for the **social and human needs** as follows: security from insult and/or harassments, different types of accidents, and decreasing threats of criminal assault; comfort, relaxation, visibility, mixing and mingling; active and passive social engagement; mystery and discovery; opportunities for the physically challenged: children and the elderly. The three groups of aspects draw a framework to design methods and tools of the following research field study.

Study Cases:

First Case: al-Mu'izz Lidin Allah Street

“Street life in historic Cairo always consists of a little joking between neighbours or bargaining with a street vendor. In the small streets a lot goes on at doorsteps and cafés. The street plays a vital role in Cairo medieval sociability: an invitation for a cup of tea, food smell that wafts in from a nearby house or an ambulant vendor chanting over his merchandise. Such a neighbourhood holds a strange attraction. Something in the close-knit fabric of the buildings, in the vibrations of the passing crowd excites the imagination and provides a stimulating experience” (Gharib, 1997). In fact, the unique urban fabric of Historic Cairo was a reflection of its social structure (Bianca, 2004). In our first case, the UNESCO World Heritage Site: al-Mu'izz Lidin Allah Street – the *Qasaba* (Spine) of Fatimid Cairo, is rooted in the principle of symbiotic interaction between the members of its community. The street, over one thousands years old and one kilometre long is adorned with monuments of different historic periods: Fatimid (969 AD), Ayyubid (1171-1250) AD, Mamluk (1250-1517) AD and Ottoman (1517-1798) AD, constituting a splendid artistic composition of unparalleled beauty. Dominant activities – besides residential – are specialised crafts and small trades of jewellery, copper, leather, clothes, herbs; each activity located in a specific section of the street. User groups were well-to-do residents and merchants who have been replaced by a poorer working class community and a wave of emigrants from the Suez Canal cities. Originally designed for pedestrians, horses and cattle, the narrow and sinuous street has been transformed into an over-populated typical residential/commercial district due to the change in demographic characteristics of its users. Part of the street, subject to our investigation, (from Bab-el-Fotouh to the north, to al-Azhar street to the south) and the monuments along it underwent major restoration and rehabilitation work which started since the late 1970s (Speiser, 1990). The major target was to rejuvenate the street into a pedestrian market and an open museum of its monuments. This target has been achieved in early 2008. The aim was to revive the originality and authenticity of the medieval urban qualities and their traditional trades and crafts (Al-Murry & Abbas, 2008).

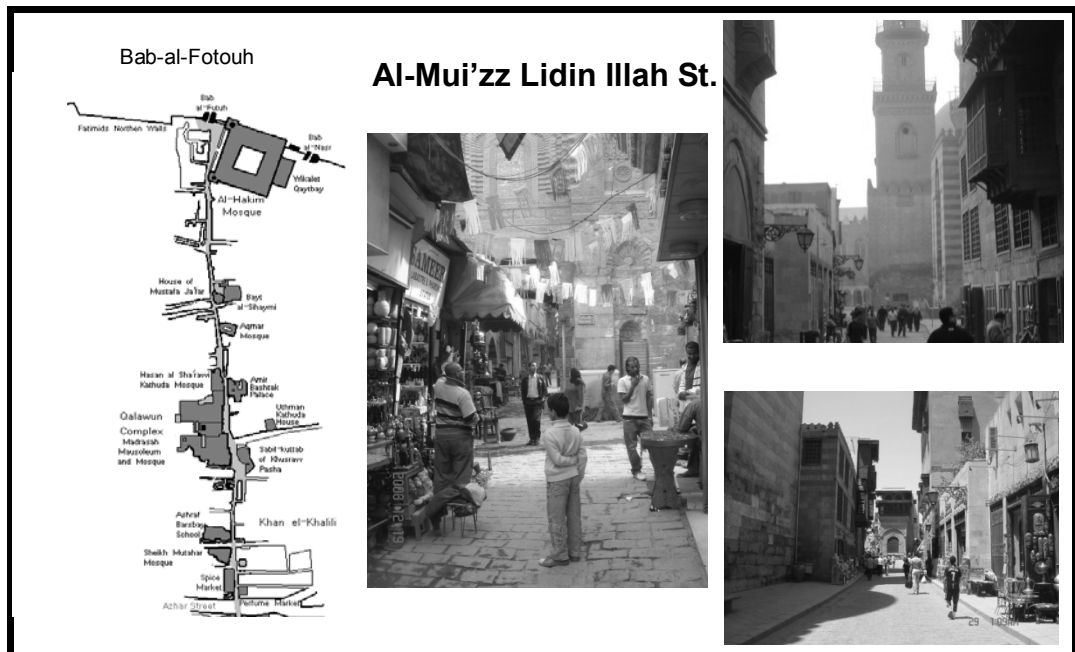


Fig. 1 –Map and shots in different sections of the study area in al-Mu'izz street
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Current physical characteristics of al-Mu'izz street:

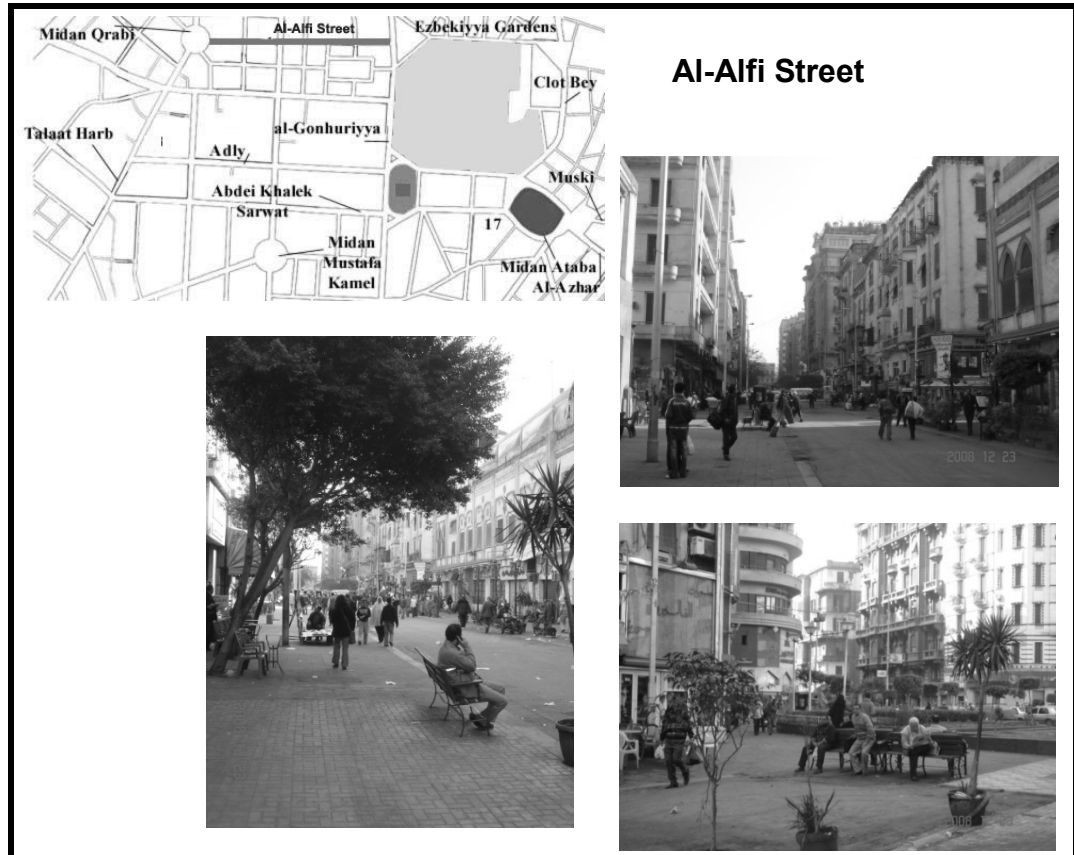
Designed as the spine of the gated city, al-Mu'izz street is a typical medieval street that has developed along a thousand years, narrow in section, with spontaneous varied widths and heights, creating interesting vistas and views along its path. Building façades also vary in styles according to the era and use of the building. The newly flooring material is dark raw basalt interlocked tiling, and light stone cladding for pavements. There are a few seats in front of the monuments in the wider shop-free sectors of the street. There are no shading devices, however, lighting effect is aesthetically designed, direct and indirect lighting units are well distributed.

Second Case: Al-Alfi Street

Streets of downtown or '*westelballad*' have a totally different taste. They reflect Khedive Ismail's vision of a "Haussmannian Paris along the Nile". Khedivian Cairo has started in 1863, reaching its apogee in 1907, when foreigners and élite began to invest heavily. "Grand palaces and beautiful European style buildings were erected, outstanding squares were designed. French architects, assisted by Italian contractors and designers undertook the building of a pleasant mix of neo-classic, art-déco, art-nouveau, baroque and a little later, neo-islamic styles" (Mintti, 1999 & Hawas, 2002). Along its "belle époque", banks, insurance companies and wealthy individuals invested in blocks of flats. The very luxurious apartment buildings were then rented out as offices or private dwellings to a cosmopolitan élite careful to preserve the buildings in excellent shape.

Later in the 1930s, downtown tenants abandoned their less fashionable address and transformed their flats into well appointed offices for their own use or as an investment. Elegant boutiques provided shade with their colourful awnings to a selective clientele who preferred shopping in Cairo rather than in any European capital. Physicians, dentists, lawyers and accountants vied for clinics and offices in such prestigious surroundings.

Fig. 1 –Map and shots in different sections of the study area in al-Alfi street
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The situation changed drastically after 1956, the exodus of the foreign community hit hard at the heart of the area. Over half a century, its activities diminished, its boutiques no longer

attracted the élite and its apartments were taken over by a social mobility that accompanied the nationalisation and centralisation. The user groups, the land uses, and the urban fabrics have changed. Established shops changed ownership and indulged their own decorating schemes. "Negligence in laws and regulations enforcement helped establishing commercial buildings into the neighbourhood, with no regards of maintaining aesthetic harmony or preserving the historic buildings" (Al-Ahram weekly, 2001). Parking problem, together with car exhaust fumes added to misuse and lack of maintenance of buildings and pavements. Being part of 'westelbalad', our second case al-Alfi street witnessed "la belle époque", elegantly designed on large land plots, on appropriate density calculations for both built-up areas and residents. Originally designed for vehicles, the street is wide and extends from Midan Orabi on the west to the al-Ezbekeyyah gardens on the east (200m long). Now, it includes day and night entertainment activities of fast food, restaurants, cafés and cabarets. The part converted ten years ago into a pedestrian street is only one hundred meters long starting west from Midan Orabi (El Khorazaty, 1998).

Current physical characteristics of al-Alfi street:

Designed primarily for vehicles, connecting between Ezbekeyyah gardens and Orabi roundabout, al-Alfi street was designed on the Haussmannian scheme and developed along the first half of the twentieth century, on large land plots. The buildings' façades vary in their turn of the century design styles, creating a rich experience for visitors. In the present, ground floor façades are hidden by chaotic signage and billboards, while upper storeys suffer from individual adaptations for use and lack of maintenance. The newly flooring material is primarily of concrete, and tiling for pavements. Few back to back seats are distributed along sides along with rows of shrubs. Cafés extend their outdoor furniture without specific order.

Method

The field investigation was planned and designed to reveal aspects of authenticity and counterfeit in al-Mu'izz and al-Alfi streets, detecting core concepts of pedestrian streets, with the aim of developing a design check list. It was conducted on two facets: naturalistic observation and users' perception investigation.

Several tools were employed for data gathering; walk-through evaluations, photographs and annotated sketches of spaces and activities, structured interviews on a random sample of residents, shop-owners and visitors to the streets. Understanding the physical qualities, the types of activities and the locations that attract people, enhance or prohibit their enjoyment of pedestrian life were compared with local needs, discussed, and evaluated.

Data was analysed in an integrative process using quantitative and qualitative measurements to fulfil the aims of the research. Several statistical analyses elaborated users' perception in both streets using frequency distribution and regression analysis by SPSS program of the covariance correlation analysis.

How the Pedestrian Streets Really Work?

This part elaborates on the result of the field study of this research. The results will be introduced in four main sections to fulfil the study aim: the first one reflects the users' perception of positive and negative aspects in order to understand their needs, ideas and expectations concerning the current situation of the street being for pedestrians. The second part focuses on listing the activities that take place in both streets (economic, social and human); so as to reveal how does the transformation of the street into pedestrians' affect the street use and help in evaluating the misfits between the physical characteristics of the street and the use of the space for income generating activities. The third part is concerned of the type of users who frequent the street to indicate the essential functions that should be fulfilled in each street. The fourth part deals with the

correlations of all the previous aspects to define the intermediary variables in order to sort out the design key factors that help in the revitalisation of the street.

Users' Perception of Negative and Positive Aspects:

Positive aspects as major comments expressed by **al-Mu'izz** street users (shop owners, residents and visitors) were "safety", "beauty", "quietness", "accessibility", "shopping enjoyment"; "visibility of shops", "safe place from vehicles, thieves and fights", "attraction to family outings". **Negatives** were expressed in the harshness of the paving material (rough basalt) causing walking difficulties; moreover, loading and emptying goods became problematic; many customers- especially from outside Cairo have to make a particular effort in reaching some destinations; ambulances and fire brigades cannot reach some off-streets easily. Commercial activities decreased in volume and in rate with the quietness of the street, along with the transformation of the street into a touristic site rather than the local market it has always been. The presence of police cars was a negative concern. The number of passing bikes was considered to be dangerous.

Al-Mu'izz users suggested changing the paving material, increasing the litter bins and their distribution along the street, allowing regulated traffic for longer durations by day time, creating parking lots along its length, lessening the number of police cars, preventing the homeless and the jobless from hiking in the street.

Positive aspects as expressed by **al-Alfi** street users (shop owners, residents and visitors) were the chances to walk freely and to sit in a less polluted and less noisy street. Some expressed that the street after it has been converted for pedestrians only: "is a nice place to have rest during shopping time in downtown Cairo", "it allows better commercial activities, and revitalises the concept of pedestrian life", "a place for meeting with friends away from home", "here we can socialise and eat". **Negatives** were expressed in the insufficient number of seats, poor lighting, and over all mediocre street furniture. Less security: "the existence of teenagers and jobless youth causes frequent street fights and an overall negative behaviour". Mixed social standards were also expressed among major negatives in addition to the actual absence of the original visitors of the street (élite, intellectuals and artists).

Al-Alfi users suggested that maintenance, cleanliness and renovation of building façades should be considered; as well as lighting, seating arrangement and introduction of greenery and shaded areas. Increasing security in the street is sought as means to prevent fights. Finally, allowing regulated traffic for longer durations by day time was also suggested.

Based on the preceding qualitative analysis of respondents' comments, some remarks should be highlighted. To begin with, there are some similarities in the users' perception in both streets, these are the quietness, pollution free, ability to walk freely, spend time, and retail shopping. Also, in both streets, suggestions were focused on preventing the homeless and the jobless, and allowing regulated traffic more frequently during day time.

A further remark is that, there are many aspects involved in evaluating pedestrian streets, as derived from literature, were not at all pointed out by users. For example, in al-Muizz street, climatic response, provision of shelter, protection from sun, existence of plant and water elements, frontages and building conditions, vistas and views, street furniture and signage, programmed events, spectacles, street performances, public art, provision of food and drink, absence of vending carts, active and passive social engagements, enjoyment of discovery, opportunities for the physically challenged, elderly and children, were issues that did not appear in the investigation. This may be due to the fact of the novice transformation of the street (2008), which comprised some alterations in its characteristics from a local market to an open museum. On the other hand, in al-Alfi street, parking, vistas and views, programmed events, spectacles, street performances, public art, opportunities for the physically challenged, seniors and children, again, were issues that did not appear in the investigation. This may be explained as a cause of the current user group of the street, utilising the street as a rest/stop/pause.

Users' investigations Analysis:

Activities in the Streets:

Economic Activities: investigation revealed that, in both streets: converting the street for pedestrians only neither affected the loading activity nor the relationship that existed between different commercial activities in the street. In al-Mu'izz a considerable negative effect was revealed in respect to the density of shoppers; in al-Alfi street, a slight negative effect was indicated with respect to density of shoppers.

Social and Human Activities: investigation revealed that the two streets were used most commonly as spots for meeting of teenagers and youth. Using the streets for home-extended activities and celebrating events is very common in al-Mu'izz street, while rare in al-Alfi street; Social meeting appeared to be rare in al-Muizz street while it is common in al-Alfi street.

Types of Users in the Streets:

Results showed differences in the types of visitors in the two streets under investigation: in **al-Muizz Street**, the residents living in the area are the most dominant together with the visitors from outside Cairo. However, tourists are comparatively less than local shoppers whilst the least frequent visitors are residents of the neighbouring communities. This could be related to the notion that al-Mu'izz street is engraved in the collective memory as a place of particular products for which visitors come from other Egyptian cities and villages and from nearby countries to shop. On the other hand, in **al-Alfi Street**, residents from distant communities are the most common visitors to the area while the least number of users are tourists. This could be related to the street function as being the entertaining place in Cairo downtown for the local community. **In both streets, visitors and shop-owners activities could be considered the most provoking for pedestrian life and particularly in al-Alfi street where the area has shifted from residential to commercial use.**

Correlations:

Table 1- illustrates the direct and inverse correlations among investigated variables based upon the regression analysis by SPSS program, and the covariance correlation analysis resulting from the users response to the structured interview:

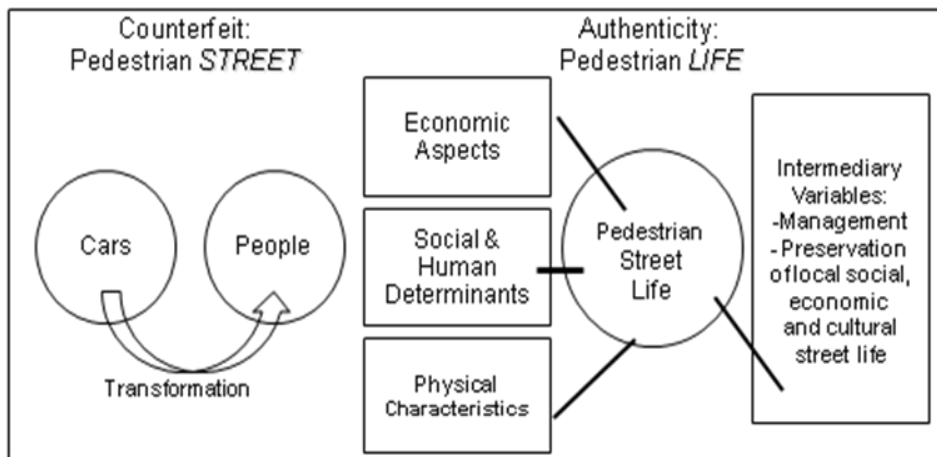
	Al-Muizz Street	Al-Alfi Street
Direct Correlation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Density of tourists and regional visitors and loading activities in the street. ○ Density of tourists and sense of security. ○ Sense of security and density of visitors and social gatherings. ○ Sense of security and senses of identity and privacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intensity of regular visitors and sense of belonging to the street. ○ Density of tourists and sense of security. ○ Density of visitors and loading activities and pollution. ○ Density of regional visitors and youth in the street.
Inverse Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Density of regional visitors and quietness in the street. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Density of visitors and the feeling of privacy in the street. ○ Density of regional visitors and residents in the street. ○ Density of tourists and loading activities.

The direct correlations and inverse relationships as indicated in the above table reflect important outcomes that could be related to the physical characteristics and the cultural image of each street. They relate some economic and socio-cultural aspects (senses of belonging, privacy, security and safety). These correlations prove that there are intermediary variables involved in designing successful pedestrian life such as security, quietness, privacy, types of users, and, social gathering.

Discussion & Conclusion

Authenticity and Counterfeit:

Examining authenticity and counterfeit in revitalising pedestrian life in Historic Cairo proved to rely on the approach through which we handle and conceive the subject matter. Dealing with the issue throughout this paper, it can be concluded that the examined cases are **counterfeited**, as a result of the one-way dimensional approach to the problem; prohibiting cars from moving in certain routes, with pedestrian areas left improvised. Meanwhile, the objective of the paper addressed **authenticity** as an integrative process that comprises physical characteristics, economic aspects and social and human determinants, together with intermediary variables, such as management and the preservation of the local socio-economic and cultural life of the street (fig. 3).



*Fig. 3 – The two diagrams elaborate the researchers' view that aspects of authenticity of Historic Cairo (medieval and Khedivian), reveal the complexity of the process of revitalising a whole pedestrian "life"
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Rethinking Street Life in Historic Cairo – Design Key Factors:

Assessing two pedestrian streets in Historic Cairo revealed a mismatch between the physical characteristics introduced with streets transformation and the local demands for usability, cultural identity and the use of street space for income-generating activities. Such a result affirmed the argument of the paper, and proved the urge for considering intermediary variables to ensure the success of the process. **Concluding, and with respect to the main objective of the study, three main design key factors were elected: design goals, design program, and, procedure. Such proposed factors are regarded as initiatives for a comprehensive design check list that will be developed in future research.**

Table 2- proposes three main key factors involved in transforming Historic Cairo into Pedestrians

Key Factors	Goals	Considerations
Design Goals	-Economic revitalisation	Types of income generating activities Relationship between activities provision of retail trade attracting new investors Introducing programmed events Introducing day and night activities
	-Environmental improvements	Reduction of pollution Maintaining quietness Climatic response Provision of shelter Protection from sun
	-Social benefits – behavioural approach	Safety, security, visibility Enabling social interaction Containment, protection, enclosure Comfort, ease of walk, relaxation Sufficient places to sit Introducing social and human activities
	- Traffic management	Accessibility Ample parking spaces Connection to public and transportation systems Introducing pedestrian and cycling routes
Design Program	- Outcome of further research studies on design goals issues - Integration of 'Research' and 'Design'	Post occupancy evaluation of pedestrian street case studies Prioritizing needs/context and form design imperatives
Procedure	- Streets should be studied within their context 'the district' - Trans-disciplinary and collaborative efforts of several	Street transformation within a larger strategic historic preservation plan Collaboration between historians, decision makers, legislators, governmental and local authorities, researchers, designers, the local community and other stake holders
Design	- Improving physical conditions and overall contextual image	Pavement, lighting, street furniture, vistas and views Landscaping, conservation and maintenance of building conditions

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