

A Study on the Surroundings of Sednaoui El-Khazendar Historical Building in Khedival Cairo and Proposals for Improvement and Development

Ahmed Elyamani¹, Nourhan Mohamed Ali¹, Naglaa Abdel-Maksoud¹ and Aya Adel¹

Abstract

This research is a part of an integrated study of Sednaoui El-Khazendar building in Khedival Cairo dating back to 1913. In the first part of this study, presented in another paper, the building was inspected, the causes and symptoms of damage were identified and proposals for conservation and re-use were developed. In this paper, the studies carried out on the building's surroundings are presented. This area suffers from the random spread of street vendors, traffic overcrowding, high pollution, lack of appropriate road signs and many neglected or misused historical buildings. Among the proposals given to solve these problems and improve the situation are: the reorganization of the existence of street vendors imitating similar cases in other countries such as France and Italy; the reuse of the neglected historical buildings in an integrated way that goes along with the proposal of reusing Sednaoui building itself and adding sufficient traffic signs in streets.

Keywords

Sednaoui El-Khazendar, Khedival Cairo, Historical Buildings, Street Vendors, Development.

Introduction

Egypt has a unique architectural heritage, and the governorate of Cairo, being the capital, has acquired the lion's share of this heritage. Specifically, Cairo down-town, known as Khedival Cairo, owns a large number of historical buildings dating back to the end of the 19th c. and the beginning of the 20th c. The Khedive Ismail who ruled Egypt from 1863 to 1879 dreamt to convert Cairo to "Paris of the East". He studied in Paris and admired it so much, thus, he asked the French planner and architect Haussmann, the planner of Paris, to achieve his dream², and he had what he wanted where Cairo was in his time and many years after one of the most beautiful and well organized cities in the world. Architects from France, Italy, Greece and other European countries designed its buildings following the latest architectural styles. These buildings are still vibrant in the center of Cairo, but facing neglect, misuse and lack of maintenance³.

Unfortunately, the lack of maintenance is one of the main causes of deterioration of a large part of the Egyptian architectural heritage⁴.

This research deals with an important part of khedival Cairo, the surroundings of one of the most beautiful commercial buildings at the time, the building of Sednaoui El-Khazendar, which dates back to the early 20th century. This building was one of the most important commercial centers in Cairo until the revolution of 1952 and the nationalization of many foreign buildings in Egypt. In a previous detailed study⁵, the building was inspected and proposals for conservation and reuse were developed. The

¹ Cairo University, Faculty of Archaeology, Archaeological Conservation Department.

² Soheir Zaki Hawas, *Khedival Cairo* (Cairo: Architectural Design Center, 2002), 14-15.

³ Ahmed Elyamani et al., "A Contribution to The Conservation of 20th Century Architectural Heritage in Khedival Cairo" International Journal of Conservation Science 9, no. 1 (March 2018): 55-56.

⁴ Salwa Moustafa et al. 2015. "The Tomb of the High Priest of Aton in the Regime of King Akhenaten: Description, Damage and Restoration Works." In 4th International Conference of Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University: Egypt and Mediterranean Countries Through Ages, Cairo, 2015; Ahmed Elyamani., "Re-use Proposals and Structural Analysis of Historical Palaces in Egypt: the Case of Baron Empain Palace in Cairo." Scientific Culture 4, no. 1 (January 2018): 53-73; Abdou A. O. D. El-Derby, and Ahmed Elyamani, "The Adobe Barrel Vaulted Structures in Ancient Egypt: A Study of Two Case Studies for Conservation Purposes," Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry 16, no. 1 (April 2016): 295; Ahmed Elyamani, and Salwa Moustafa. 2017. "Typical Reasons of the Degradation of Islamic Historical Structures and Its Surroundings and Proposals for Intervention: The Case of Queen Safiyya Mosque in Cairo." In Proceedings of the 20th International Conference of Arab Archaeologists, Fayoum, 2017, 1572-1573.

⁵ Aya Adel et al., "On the Conservation and Re-use of Sednaoui El-Khazendar Historical Building in Attaba". In The First Arab Conference for Restoration and Reconstruction, Cairo, 2017.

current study focuses on the surroundings of the building. This building is located near one of Cairo's most crowded squares nowadays, Attaba Square. The building's surroundings are currently suffering from a number of problems. The most noticed ones are the heavy spread of street vendors around it and the high levels of noise pollution and traffic. The study was based on site visits, as well as a survey investigating the opinion of street vendors, the residents, and the visitors in order to identify the real problems and find practical solutions to achieve the desired improvement for the surroundings of this important historical building.

Sednaoui El-Khazendar History and Description

Samaan Sednaoui was the owner of a small shop in El-Azhar area. After his elder brother, Salem, had arrived to Egypt and participated in the shop, their trade expanded more. Therefore, they decided to transform the small shop into a large building with architectural design similar to 'Galeries Lafayette' in Paris and called it after their family name: Sednaoui, and because it was located in El-Khazendar square, it was known as Sednaoui El-Khazendar^{6,7} Figure 1.

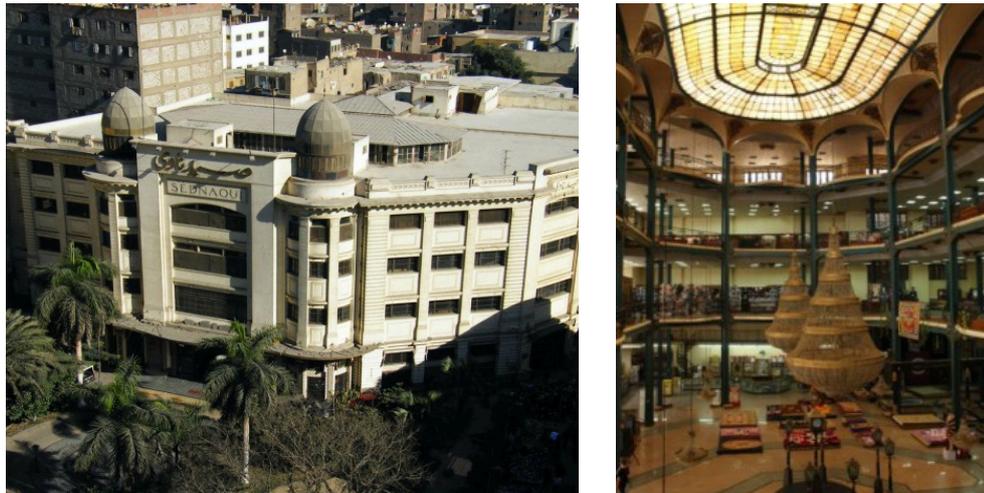


Figure 1. Sednaoui El-khazendar from outside showing main entrance (left) and from inside showing entrance hall, upper floors and central skylight (right).

⁶ Amira El-Noshokaty, "Remembering Sednaoui," *Ahram Online*, April 30, 2015.

⁷ Samir Raafat, "Sednaoui," *Cairo Times*, May 29, 1997.

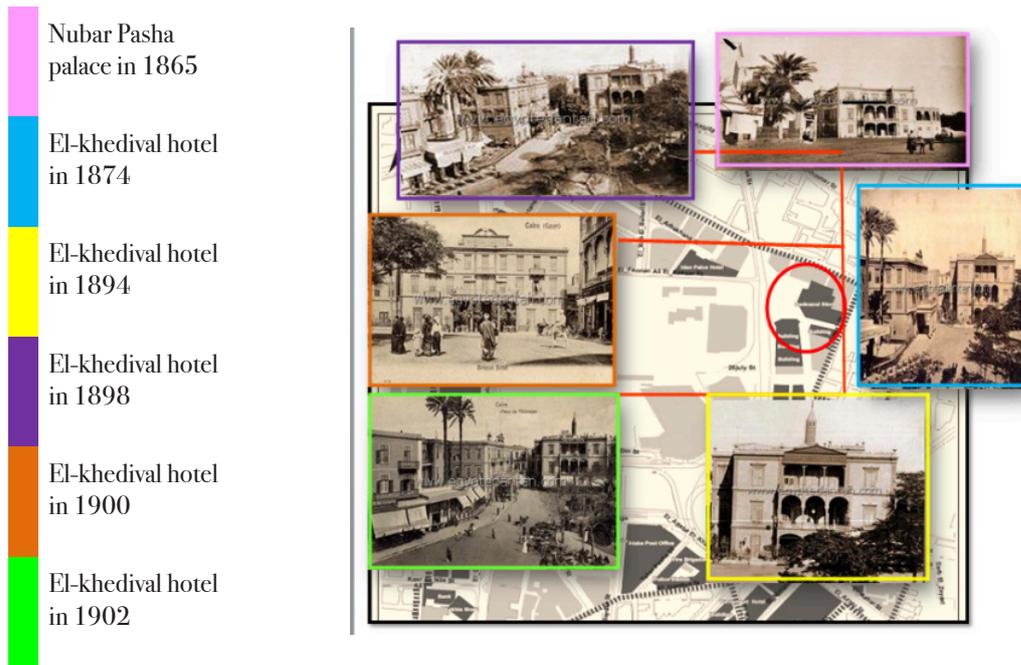


Figure 2. Construction development of the area of Sednaoui El-kazendar structure (surrounded by red circle) since 1865 to 1902.



Figure 3. Development of Liverpool hotel (surrounded by red circle) since 1903 to 1907.

It was officially opened in 1913, and afterwards, its branches in Alexandria, Mansoura, Tanta and all the governorates of Egypt were opened until it reached 72 branches in 1961. After the 1952 revolution, all the branches were transformed into the ownership and management of the public sector in what was called nationalization⁸.

⁸ Samir Raafat, "Sednaoui," *Cairo Times*, May 29, 1997.

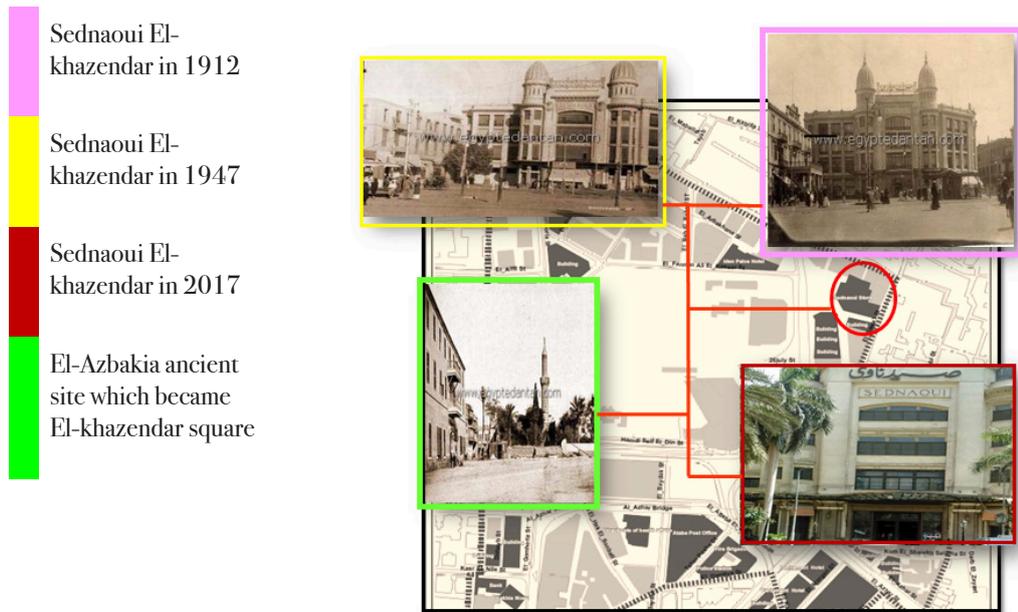


Figure 4. Development of El-khazendar square and Sednaoui El-khazendar (surrounded by red circle)

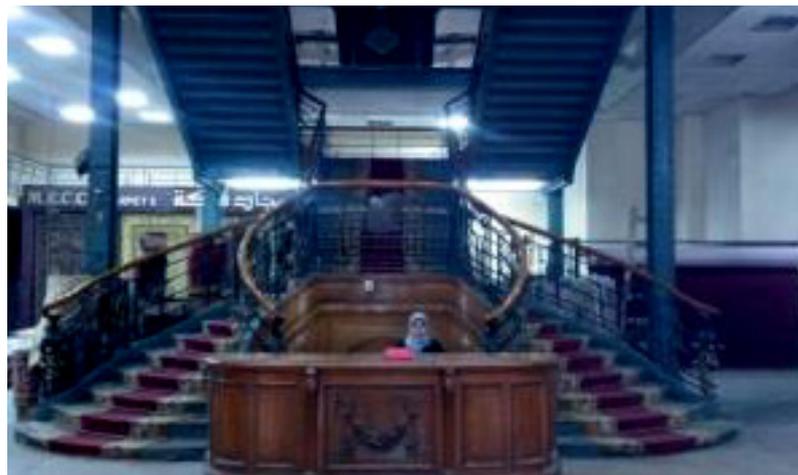


Figure5. Honorary stair in ground floor.

The area on which Sednaoui building was built has undergone many changes. The palace of Nubar Basha (Minister of Finance of Khedive Ismail) was built in this area, which was later turned into the Khedivial Hotel and evolved over the years to become Liverpool hotel which was demolished in 1911 and Sednaoui El-Khazendar was built instead of it, Figures 2-4⁹. The building which was considered an architectural and commercial landmark in the 1920s is located in the heart of the commercial city around Al-Azbekiya Park. The building's architecture belongs to the Baroque style which was employed in many other commercial buildings in Paris at that time.

Sednaoui consists of a basement, a ground floor and three typical floors (first to third). It is composed of steel beams rested on steel columns. The floors are made of reinforced concrete. The outer walls are made from stone masonry. Its spacious courtyard, located at the building's middle (Figure 1, left) is distinguished by its magnificent design making Sednaoui one of

⁹ Samir Raafat, "Sednaoui," *Cairo Times*, May 29, 1997.

the most beautiful shops of the 20th century. It was designed by the famous French architect George Parcq who made Sednaoui as a replica, although slightly larger; of the famous French center 'Galeries Lafayette'. Sednaoui El-Khazendar was opened on November 3, 1913. Sednaoui can be considered as one of the best models of European architecture in Khedival Cairo and due to its unique architectural design, the Egyptian government, represented in The National Organization for the Urban Harmony, registered it in accordance with law No. 144 of 2006 as a building of distinct value with No. 03220000021¹⁰.

It is worth mentioning that in 1952, Sednaoui was exposed to fire with many other buildings that were burned in the famous accident of Cairo fires¹¹. Perhaps this is why the two famous masonry domes that were on the facade of the building were destroyed. The pictures of the building in the 1970s show their absence, while they appear in the images of the 1930s and 1940s. The two domes were rebuilt in 1989, when the building was conserved and renovated, but this time they were built with stainless steel neglecting the authenticity of historical construction materials. More recently, on May 3, 2016, more than half of its facade was burned in a series of fires in the Attaba commercial zone¹².

It has four facades; two of them are visible, the main (west) overlooks El-Khazendar Square and the other overlooks El-Qatawi Street. The two others are not visible because of the construction of new buildings around Sednaoui. The total height of the building is 28 m and its area is about 1900 m². The central part of the building is covered with a skylight that adds natural beauty to it when the sun passes through the colored glass (Figure 1, left). There is a small garden in front of the building which makes a buffer zone around it. The ground floor has an honorary stair that reaches the entire upper floors and is a highly emblematic architectural element, Figure 5.

The current function of the building is the same as the original since its establishment; the sale of various goods such as clothing, shoes and household items. But it seems that this is no longer the optimal use of the building at the present time and over the past years because the type and the models of the presented goods are old, and the prices are high compared to those of the street vendors who are spreading around the building. Thus, this led to the total loss of the commercial value of the building, causing customers to abandon the building which became more like a museum of exhibits rather than a commercial place.

Description and problems of the Surroundings of Sednaoui El-Khazendar

The surroundings of Sednaoui building (Figure 6) includes the streets of El-Kassar, 26th July, El-Gomhorya, Hamdi Seif El-Din, and El-Ruwayi. As can be noticed, the building's location is distinct as it is the meeting point between El-Muski and Al-Azhar regions (on one hand) and Cairo downtown (on the other). The first two areas are characterized by their old and popular character, and their style is dominated by the old Islamic style; while the downtown is distinguished by its modern European-style buildings.

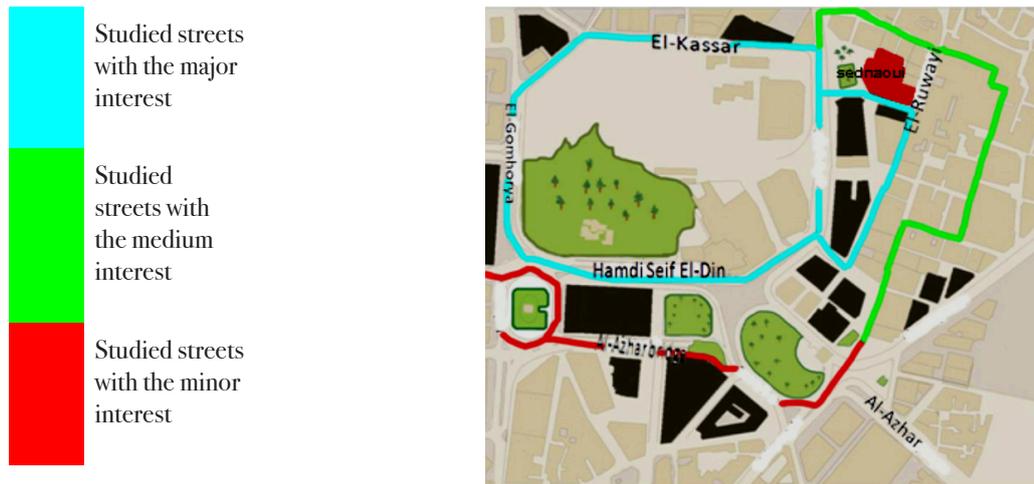
There are various activities in this area (Figures 7-8) including: the commercial ones in several streets (such as Mohammed Ali Street, Al Ruwayi Street, and others); the cultural ones represented in many theaters (such as the National Theater, the Puppet Theater, and Al-Tale'aa Theater) and many bookshops (spread along Al-Azbakeya wall selling many books in various fields and languages). This is considered one of the important destinations for Egyptian intellectuals. Also, there are many heritage buildings (such as the Eden Hotel), administrative buildings (such as the Tax Authority and Cairo Governorate buildings) and modern service buildings (such as the Egyptian Post Office and Central of Al-Attaba), Figure 9. The area is easy to access as it's close to Al-Attaba Square as well as the Cairo Metro and the public transport station of Al-Attaba.

The area is currently suffering from the spread of street vendors, causing problems such as the difficulty of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, high levels of noise pollution, the disappearance of many facades of historic buildings in the area, the theft of electricity from light poles and the spread of garbage. The region also suffers from air pollution from exhausts gases. The lack of slopes that facilitate mobility for people with special needs are also noticed.

¹⁰ "Listed Buildings," Urban Harmony, accessed October 30, 2018, <http://urbanharmony.org/placedetails.asp?id=19>.

¹¹ Mohamed Anis, *Cairo fire* (Beirut: Arabian Association for Studies and Publishing, 1972), 29-36.

¹² Hanan Hagag, "Being fired for the second time: Sednoui was badly affected by neglect and random markets," *Ahram newspaper*, May 17, 2016, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsPrint/514228.aspx>.



(a)



(b)

Figure 6. (a) Map of the borders of the zone under study, and (b) Aerial photo of the zone under study (adopted from Google maps).



Figure 7. The extensive commercial activities and the spreading of street vendors and overcrowding in the surroundings of Sednaoui.

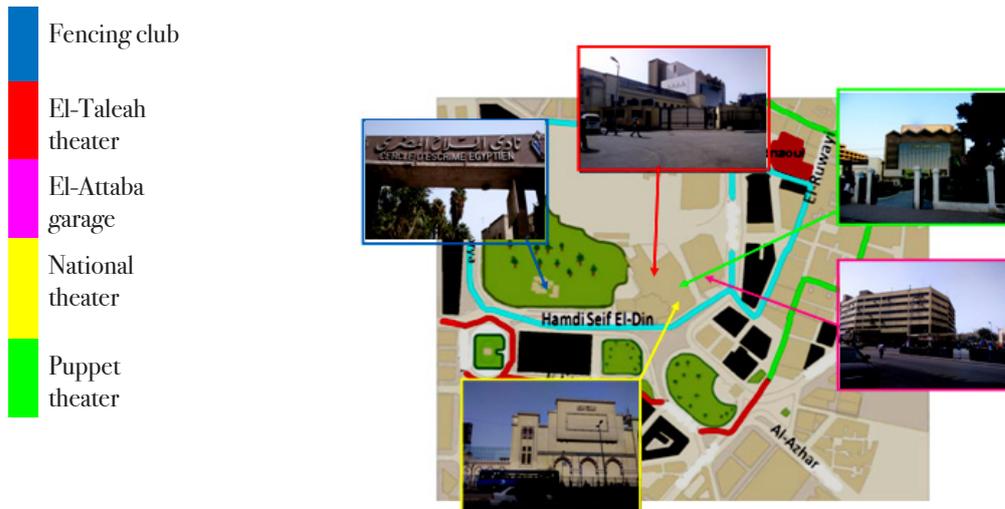


Figure 8. Some culture and service buildings within the borders of the zone under study.

In order to propose improvement for the region, a study of its condition was carried out. Since the problem of street vendors is the most influential one on the Sednaoui building, a survey was carried out in May 2017 for the number of street vendors in the area and the types of goods they sell and its presentation as shown in Table 1. It is clear from the widespread of street vendors in all streets around the building of Sednaoui that the goods are clothing, shoes, bags, electrical appliances, etc. The vendors' presentation of goods relies on floor mattresses on the ground directly or hanging them on the walls of the gardens in the area or inside small kiosks.

In addition, a survey was done for the opinion of the residents of the region, visitors and street vendors to identify their point of view concerning their problems and their suggestions for improvement. The results are summarized in Table 2. The table shows the important role of street vendors in explaining the various problems related to the region. In addition, a set of initial suggestions were presented to solve these problems and through the survey with the people of the region, as shown in Table 3, the criticisms to these proposals were obtained.

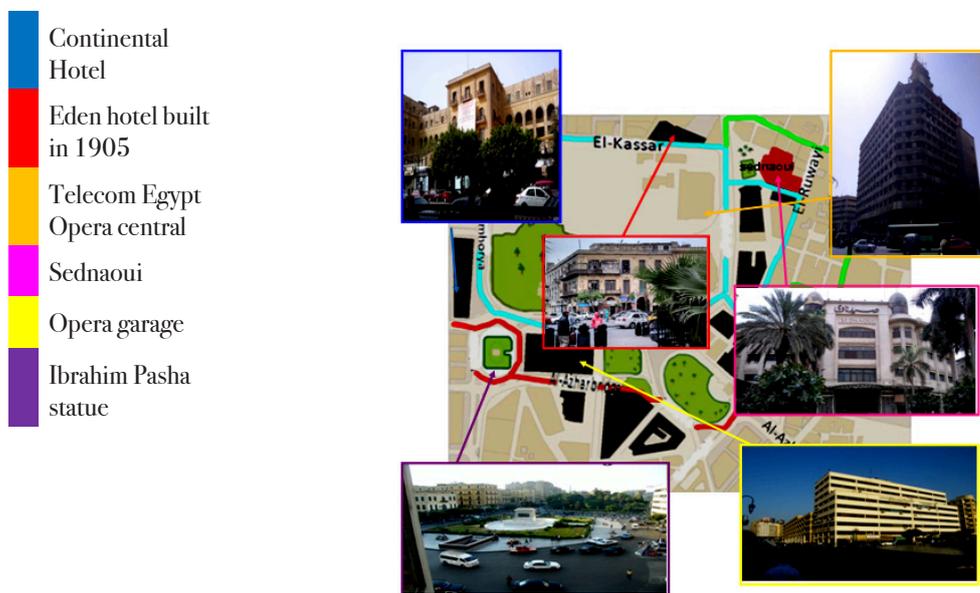


Figure 9. Historical and modern structures and squares in the surroundings of Sednaoui.

Table 1. Survey of the number of street vendors, the areas they occupy, types of goods and the way of presentation.

The area occupied	Number of street vendors	Goods	Presentation
Hamdi Scif El-din st.	88	Various small products (sweets, wallets...)	On the wall of the pedestrian tunnel in one direction
The garden in front of the Opera garage	45	Clothes	Hanging on the metal fence of the garden
El-Gesh st.	36	Small kiosks to sell drinks and fast food	Kiosks inside the pedestrian area
From Tiring building to Bank Misr	27	Shoes and bags	Floor mattresses
From Bank Misr to Al-Andalus hotel	175	Shoes and bags	Floor mattresses
Between Al-Attaba garage and Sednaoui	113	Shoes and bags	Floor mattresses
El-Kuttawist.	75	Shoes	Tables on the right and left of the street

Table 2. Survey of the opinions of the street vendors, the residents, the visitors and the shops' sellers about the region's problems and reasons

Problem	Possible reasons
Overcrowding and road block	Heavy existence of street vendors
Bad traffic	Miss-organization of street vendors
Refrain about buying from shops	Low prices of goods of street vendors
Absence of water and electricity for street vendors	Absence of permits for street vendors
The presence of garbage in the streets	Lack of effective garbage collection system in the region

Table 3. Survey of the opinions of the street vendors, the residents, the visitors and the shops’ sellers in the proposal to solve the problems of the region

Proposal	Criticism
Setting up kiosks for street vendors	Block the vision of shops and they need large areas
Allocating street vendors in Sednaoui building	The building cannot accommodate them due to their great number
Buying shops for street vendors	Shops’ prices are very high
Removing the fence of Sednaoui and creating new places for street vendors	Disfiguration of the external facades of the building
Demolishing some new (non-historical) buildings to enlarge the streets	Difficulty in obtaining demolition permits and high cost of compensation for the owners
Relocating street vendors to another location	The presence of manufacturing workshops in Bab Al-Shariya near the area, and the consumers will not prefer to go the new places far from the area

A Proposal for the improvement of the surroundings of Sednaoui

The surroundings of Sednaoui have main strength and weakness points. The core objective of upgrading the surroundings of Sednaoui is to improve its condition by exploiting its strength points to the extent possible to overcome the weaknesses. Thus, this will be reflected in an improvement of the environmental and the social conditions of the region’s residents and visitors. In addition, the economic returns of region’s residents will increase. The outlines of the proposal for improvement are shown schematically in Figure 10. In the following paragraphs, a more detailed explanation of these outlines is given.

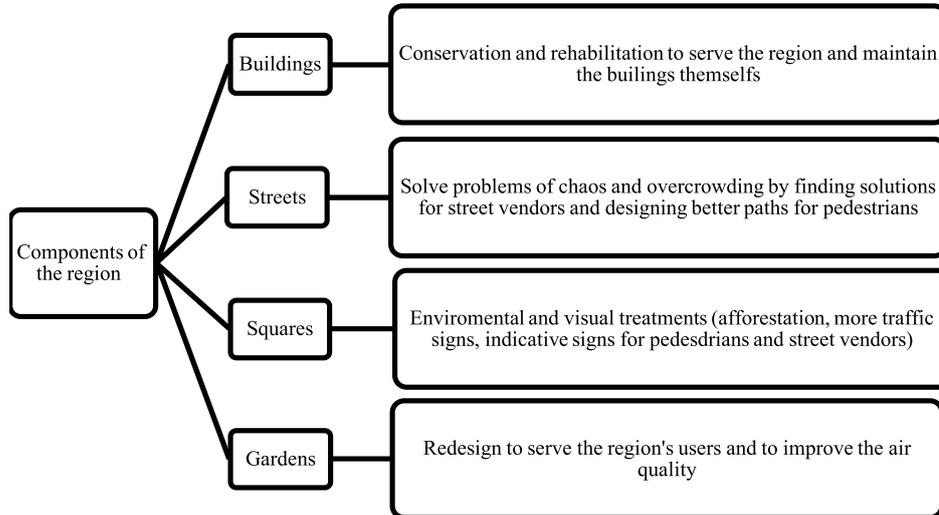


Figure10. Outlines of the proposals for improvement and development of Sednaoui’s surroundings.

Street vendors solution

To find a suitable solution to the presence of street vendors in the surroundings of Sednaoui and to avoid problems resulting from them, as mentioned before, we have been guided by what has been achieved in several countries that had the same problem. In Paris and in the Latin Quarter, one of the most crowded neighborhoods, the municipality has allocated several ways to display the products of the vendors (Figure 11). There are iron boxes to display, store books and protect them from sun and rain. These boxes are arranged on the side of the sidewalk so as not to hinder the movement of pedestrians. In addition, some of the side streets have been allocated for pedestrian traffic only and open tables with beautiful truss roof to display the goods in an organized way, spaced apart enough to allow movement while shopping¹³.

In Italy¹⁴ and Turkey, we find that the idea of mobile carts for street vendors contributed to solving their problems, Figure 12. This proved to be a good idea to the street vendor who can move freely with his goods and increase selling opportunities. These carts are suitable for selling food and drinks. Unifying the shape, color, and size of these carts is essential in order for it to act as a landmark of the city and a tourist attraction. In Brussels¹⁵, the capital of Belgium, the Grand Place is dedicated on Saturdays to be the weekly market for various products such as flowers, clothes, household items and many other things. The idea of assigning one day per week for sale activities is a very good commercial idea. On one hand, the customers wait for this one-day market which increases the selling opportunities for street vendors. On the other hand, these markets are open on weekends only. Hence, closing one street for allocating the market does not affect much the traffic that is already less dense on weekends than on weekdays.



Figure 11. Several models of street vendors' goods in the Latin Quarter of Paris. (a) and (b) the way to sell and store books; (c), (d) and (e) the way to sell manual products.

¹³ "The Latin Quarter: cheap eats in Paris, France ," Food Punk, accessed October 30, 2018, <http://foodpunk.ca/2011/10/10/the-latin-quarter-cheap-eats-in-paris-france/>.

¹⁴ "Our trip to Italy ," Silogic Systems, accessed October 30, 2018, <http://www.silogic.com/Italy2004/Italy2004-4.html>.

¹⁵ "Grand-Place of Brussels ," Brussels, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.brussels.be/grand-place-brussels>.

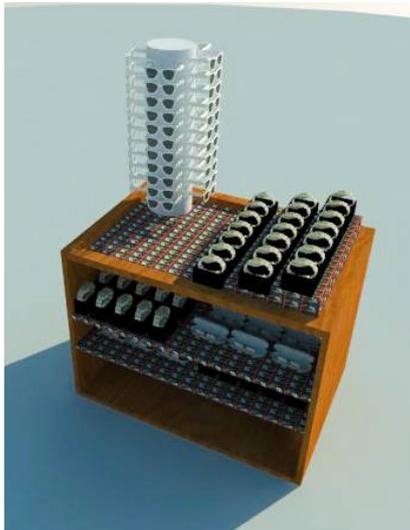


(a)

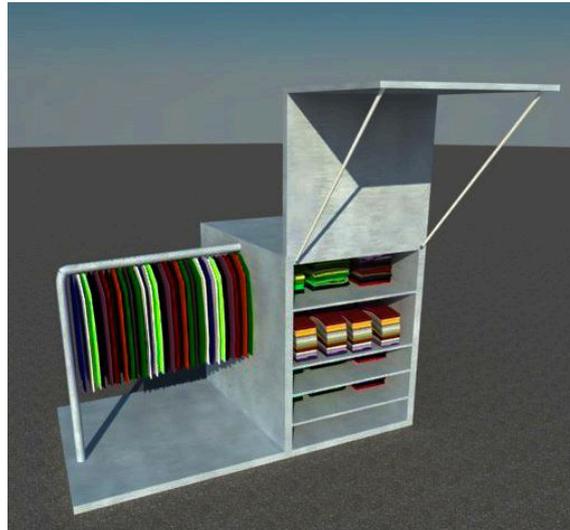


(b)

Figure 12. mobile carts (a) in Turkey and (b) in Italy.



(a)



(b)

Fig.13. Two proposals to display and store of street vendors' goods(a) Sunglasses, watches and the like(b) Clothing and textiles

In this context, two proposals for presenting the goods of the street vendors are shown in Figure 13. One design is for presenting clothes and textiles and the other for goods like shoes, sunglasses, watches, and similar goods. The designs are suitable for both presenting and storing goods, since they do not require large spaces. Some buildings in the region can also be used after rehabilitation as commercial centers that can accommodate a large number of street vendors as will be mentioned in detail in the next section.

Buildings

There are many buildings in the surroundings of Sednaoui which if rehabilitated and reused, could contribute significantly to solve the problems previously mentioned. Most of these buildings are in good condition and do not require much effort or a large budget to be repaired. However, they suffer from neglect and are not good employed and some are completely abandoned. Their reuse has many benefits for the region and for the buildings themselves, as well as for the people who live in or visit. Also, it allows maintaining the building and raising its value and prolonged its life time. A suitable use was made for each building based on its previous function and the needs of the region to reach the main objective of turning the region into a rich integrated urban area with its various services.

The ideas for the reuse of any of these buildings are based on the international conventions governing the restoration,

rehabilitation, and reuse of archaeological buildings such as the Charters of Athens (1931)¹⁶ and Venice (1964)¹⁷, Nairobi (1976)¹⁸. Some of these buildings have large areas and can be reused as an educational and cultural center for the habitants of the region. Others are characterized by their several floors and large areas. The floors could be reorganized using light weight partitions into small shops and they could accommodate a large number of street vendors, Figure 14.



Fig. 14. Numbering of buildings in the region that can be rehabilitated and reused

Streets

There are many streets in the area under study and each street contains many important buildings in addition to various activities, green areas and residential buildings. Since those streets are the link between all of these components, their style and appearance must be maintained through the control of traffic, the placement of suitable signs, the visibility of street name tags, the presence of traffic lights, the availability of parking areas, putting the necessary ramps and paths on all sidewalks to take into account the movement of handicapped people (Figure 15), and the placement of mobile public toilet cabins with a concern to clean them daily.



Fig. 15. Partition of the floor to small shops using light weight to help solve the problem of street vendors.

¹⁶ Le Corbusier, The Athens charter (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973).

¹⁷ Matthew The Hardy, The Venice Charter revisited: modernism, conservation and tradition in the 21st century (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008).



Figure 16. Add an earlier ramp to the pavement (on the left) and adjust the slope of the pavement after its collapse (on the right).

Conclusion

Sednaoui El-Khazendar building is a unique architectural heritage piece in Khedival Cairo. The building and its surroundings are suffering from several problems. This paper discusses the problems of the surroundings. The main faced problem is the heavy existence of street vendors around the building. For this reason, surveys were carried out to identify the number of street vendors and the types of goods they sell. By studying how other countries like Italy and France have solved this issue, suggestions were determined to the case of Sednaoui surroundings. The existence of several neglected buildings around Sednaoui could contribute significantly to solve this issue too. The buildings floors could be divided into small shops to accommodate a large number of street vendors. Finally, the streets in the surroundings can be improved mainly by adding sufficient traffic signs and ramps for handicapped people. The current study represents the main framework of improvement of Sednaoui's surroundings, more specific and detailed studies should be carried out in the future.

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