

# Visual pollution caused by banners and signage installed on buildings facades

## Case study: Alexandria versus Moscow city

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**Abstract**—Visual pollution represents a kind of sensual pollution that is sometimes less sharply defined as chemical pollution, but it harms and degrades urban environment with a similar -if not bigger- magnitude. Visual pollution caused by buildings sector has become recently a main source of visual pollution in congested cities. It has harmful impact on the human psychology and their quality of life. Overcrowding, absence of aesthetics morals, excessive advertising on building facades and fails of the government to control building laws and regulations are all causes of buildings visual pollution. This type of pollution can be controlled through a serious implementation of laws. Many cities worldwide have taken various measures to minimize this undesirable pollution. In this paper, the aspect of visual pollution is selected and analyzed. It also focuses on the high density of banners and signages installed on building facades as a major contributor of visual pollution especially at the city center. A comparison will be done in this paper between the efforts made by Egyptian and Russian governments in order to eliminate this prevalence of visual pollution for urban unison.

**Index Terms**—Visual pollution, aesthetic-moral, psychological-health, commercial and administrative banners on building facades, Egyptian government, Visual pollution in Moscow.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Our first impression of a community is its visual environment, which is reflected from the pretty integration of the built and natural forms. Visual pollution is defined as the whole of irregular formations that are unattractive and affects people's ability to enjoy or appreciate the view and vista. Anything that interferes with the "pretty scenes" and other distortion may become a cause of visual pollution. With the rapid increase of population worldwide building sector became the major source of visual pollution especially in the city center. Most of the eye-catching architecture features in old and historical buildings or even of new construction went unseen because of the unorganized excessive number of projected commercial, administrative and advertising banners hanged up on their facades.

This paper will focus on displaying two experiences of visual pollution in the center of two congested cities, the first is the city of Alexandria in Egypt and the second is the city of Moscow in Russia. It also explores the reaction taken by the government to tackle and eliminated the spreading of this problem.

### 2 THE EFFECT OF VISUAL POLLUTION ON HUMAN HEALTH

The effects of pupil exposure to visual pollution may be wide and penetrating causing an overall loss of quality of life in the residing community. They can also include: distraction, decreases in opinion diversity, loss of identity, loss of sense of hygiene and aesthetics, psychological disturbances accompanied with major concern of general health hazards of different dimensions such as eye fatigue.

Children who grew in a visual polluted neighborhood from their childhood are generally suffering from aesthetics morals disruption. With the decline of aesthetic sense in the community, people get used to these unsightly surroundings and lose their natural desire to correct it. [1]

### 3 MAIN CAUSES OF BUILDINGS VISUAL POLLUTION

There are many aspects that could represent a serious visual menace in our society and urban community. They are subjective and literally, depend on the eye of the beholder. But this eye, that is, the senses gets modified on exposure to such pollutants for long. Between these aspects are:

- The unsightly presence of advertising banners hanged up on buildings facades.
- Unorganized shops facades designs.
- Old dilapidated buildings.
- Unhidden air conditioner compressors and power lines.
- Bare skeletons of buildings.
- Poor building materials.
- Unpleasant building designs and colors.
- Buildings that do not respect the urban fabric of the city.

The area of study in this paper will focus only on the first two points.

### 3 THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO TACKLE BUILDINGS VISUAL POLLUTION PROBLEMS

This problem has grown mainly because that the local public administration loses control over what is built or assembled in public spaces. It does not know what and where banners and

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signages are displayed, does not solve the problem of buildings in ruin as well. The larger part of the society are not aware about the effect of this kind of pollution on the public health and how does that can affect their psychology. That is why people in our Egyptian community don't care about the the overall vision of the urban space and they only care about their own benefits from installing their business and commercial banners to promote their service to the community.

There have been many efforts from the Egyptian government to eliminate the aggravation of this issue. One of these efforts was in 2008 when Cairo governorate council of trustees has launched a campaign to remove all advertising banners and posters from façades of old buildings in downtown Cairo. The campaign targets at this time were the Tahrir Square, Gomhouria Street, Ramses Square, Opera Square, Abdeen Square as well as Al-Azhar Street, Salah Salem Road, the Citadel and Port Said Street. The Abdeen district has removed all adverts and banners plastered on buildings in Qasr El-Nil Street in 2008. In 2010, the Supreme Council for Planning and Urban Development in Egypt has formed a committee from experts and staff members specialized in the field of urban planning. The role of this committee was to set some standards that lead to a high level of aesthetically built environment with no banners and signages on their façades. [2]

The Committee has established their guidelines from two main sources: [3]

- The study of the foundations and global standards
- The study of the problems and the possibilities of Egyptian architecture in its field.

And issued guidelines for each of the areas referred to above in two volumes: [3]

- A. A folder contains a study of the problems, the goals and possibilities as well as giving recommendations, supported by practical examples from home and abroad.
- B. Indicative applied to the principles and standards of urban planning sector.

The council has also approved the law number 119 in 2008 that regulates the standards of urban planning for ads and banners. These standards aim at regulating the size, shape and placement of advertising banners and billboards in general according to certain criteria that correct the optical image of the urban district and preserve the aesthetics values of the city. These standards have also set some definitions to help regulating the situation. They have also classified the advertising banners into three categories: [3]

1. The billboards: it is a visual product that carries a message that has a commercial intend in sort of design element which is placed for a specific period (Medium-Term) of time to be agreed upon, such as commercials and similar.
2. Banner media: it is a visual product that carries a news or promotional or informational message and it is not for business profit. It is temporary elected such as festival banners and similar.
3. Sign indicative: it is a visual product that carries a guidance message to road users or in the urban space

es both in order to identify the place or its urban and architecture features, such as banners titles, administrative and professional activities banners and traffic indicative banners.

### 3.1 General Conditions

These requirements and rules aimed at laying the foundations as a substrate, which can be represented by the principles and criteria. This in turn will manage the regulation of advertisements and signs in all its forms and patterns to improve the visual and aesthetic image of the Egyptian cities, as well as preserving infringements on the buildings façades. [3]

These general conditions include many requirements that deal with ads and banners in all its forms. The following will concern only with the quality of ads and banners applied on buildings façades. [3]

- The need to respect public decency and good taste and prevent everything that is not consistent with the values and ethics, and it is committed to the advertiser to remove objectionable banners and bears the value of damage to any public or private property resulting from installation or removing of the advertising.
- It is forbidden to install banners that obscure vision, air or sun for buildings and facilities.
- It is forbidden to install banners on historic and archaeological buildings or buildings that have historical or architectural value.
- Also, prohibits placing banners on religious and governmental buildings, cemeteries and other facilities, which received in the Article three of Law No. 66 of 1956 concerning the regulation of advertising.
- It is forbidden to install all kinds of ads and banners on existing buildings façades and on the top of the building roof.
- It is forbidden to install all kinds of ads and banners whether it is temporary or permanent commercials or informational ads and banners, or others, on the main frontal or side or rear façades of new constructed buildings.

They also set some detailed standards for professional and administrative banners, as well as for commercial activities banners. [3]

- It is forbidden to add any commercial and professional banners or other on all façades, windows and balconies of existing or new constructed buildings.
- If it is needed from the architect of the building to provide a suitable place at the entrance of the building to install billboards or professional banners. These ads should follow standard sizes organized by rules

and principles, as each sign should not exceed 30\*45 cm.

- It is allowed only for shops at the ground floor of any building to add banners to identify their names or commercial activities. The local authorities should have the role of the coordination with the urban planner of the government to standardize the format and types of signs within a building.
- It is prohibited to add or change the names of the signs for commercial or construction activities or professional banners without a license from the Local authorities.
- It is important to consider the homogeneity between the signs for the names of business activities in terms of distribution and height, sizes, colors and designs in order to maintain the aesthetic and visual layout of the city.
- The density of commercial banners should not be very high for not causing distraction to the driver's concentration or interfere with pedestrian traffic and ease.

#### 4 ALEXANDRIA CITY CENTER (MEDAN EL RAML STATION – THE TRAM LINE) FIELD SURVEYING IN AUGUST 2016

Although all the governmental efforts mentioned above to save the visual beauty of Egyptian cities, these conditions and restriction are not followed by the society and there are a continuous and sever visual pollution caused by the addition of banners and ads in a very informal way especially in the city center.

The following photos show the actual vision (situation) of buildings along the tram railway at el raml station district situated at the city centre of Alexandria city.



Fig 1. An old residential building that have a unique architecture style at midan el raml station disfigured with signage of clinics on its façades. Source: photo taken by the researcher 22-8-2016

The previous figure illustrates that the Egyptian laws and regulations approved by the Egyptian council for urban planning that organize the installation of professional signs are not really applied. Despite the installation of the professional signage at the entrance of the building, doctors look at their own benefit



and also install huge banner on balconies and windows that to obscure vision, air or sun for buildings and facilities.

Fig 2. Show the installation of professional ads on buildings facades, as well as at the entrance in a chaotic order. Source: photo taken by the researcher 22-8-2016

Professional banners installed at the entrance do not follow the standard sizes organized by rules and principles of the urban



planning council, which state that each sign should not exceed 30\*45 cm. they are also set in an unorganized order.

Fig. 3 Shows undesigned shop facades that don't match with the design of the original building facades. Source: photo taken by the researcher 22-8-2016



not be seen. Such chaos was unacceptable either to the city



or to its residents because there were no coherent standards for the placement and design of these banners. [4]

Fig.6 The elite fitness center «Dr. Loder» in place of historical building of XVII century (Strastnoy Boulevard, 10) shows how was the situation of historic building before moving all banners from the building facades.



Source: [http://www.zagraevsky.com/moscow\\_engl.htm](http://www.zagraevsky.com/moscow_engl.htm)

Fig. 7 shows how was the situation before the movement of 2012. Banners are placed in front of windows and different design of shops banners. [5]

Fig. 4 shows that Using of modern material and colors in shop facades may break the sense of time and the historical urban environment. Source: photo taken by the researcher 22-8-2016

Fig. 5 The visual pollution caused by the chaotic installation of ads and banners on building facades. Source: photo taken by the researcher 22-8-2016

## 5 MOSCOW AS ONE OF THE FIVE LARGEST CITIES IN ADVERTISING MARKET

As far as 2010, Moscow's public space was clearly overcrowded with outdoor advertising. Many streets were loaded with advertising boards and projected banners on building facades, so much so that sometimes the building facades could

The situation changed in 2012 following the implementation of new rules by the government to regulate the placement of the advertising board on the buildings facades. These rules were based on several principles. First, the use of primitive formats was prevented such as advertising on building construction fences and the rags that were hung up over Moscow's roads. Secondly, the projected banners were removed from the facades of building in the center of Moscow. The shops titles were hanged up flashing on the building screen and were regulated according to a certain design to be integrated together without changing the identity of the building. [4]

In accordance with the new rules, the total area of advertising constructions in Moscow has dropped eight times. There is far



less advertising in the historical centre, while further away from the centre, the rules are more liberal.[4]

Fig. 8 The ensemble of 1st Tverskaya-Yamskaya Street though consisted mainly of "Stalin houses".[5]

The previous figure illustrates the image of the city centre of Moscow after moving projected banners from buildings facades. Shops banners are also installed at the ground floor with a unified design that match with the original building façade.

At present, Moscow is doing little effort to improve public



space. Work is underway to restore historic buildings in the centre of Moscow. About 300 historic buildings are restored every year and thousands of facades are renovated. The public space is being generally improved. Advertising no longer makes the city look ugly, but rather makes it beautiful. [4]

Fig. 9 Renovated historic building at the city centre of Moscow. Source: photo taken by the researcher 25-4-2016

## 6 CONCLUSION

By illustrating the two case studies and comparing between the actual implementation of rules and regulations, one can benefit from the Moscow experience and put it as a role model when thinking about a real solution of this problem in Egypt. The Egyptian government should do more effort to control the implementation of the standards and conditions approved by the Egyptian council of urban planning. Imposing high fees on violators of laws could regulate the situation and eliminate the chaotic growth of this problem.

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