

## **REBRANDING CAIRO'S DOWNTOWN CINEMAS: CAN PERFORMANCES RESURRECT ABUNDANT HERITAGE?**

S. S. ASHOUR<sup>1</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

Cairo's Downtown cinemas were once masterpieces of architecture, screening golden age movies plus witnessing important events. Nowadays, few are still working, while many are ready to be demolished. The best conservation for historic buildings is managing change caused by time. One way to make this happen is smart engaging re-use, thus continue to retain value to current and future generations. Local government and private companies have tried to resuscitate Cairo's silver screens. This revitalization started with simple face lifting, then developed to rebranding with creative re-use introducing new functions. A key to this creative re-use is across disciplines; new forms of art, music, and media performances. This paper aims to explore four re-use performances bringing the insight of art and media into the field of heritage management. First, "Nassim El Raqs" organized "When dance meets heritage" in Theatre Cinema Eldorado. Second, Radio Theatre re-used to host live-shows; "Al-Bernameg" and "AblaFahita". Third, Zawya - located in cinema Odeon - launched as the first art-house cinema in Egypt. Last, Teatro Independent Theatre opened their interactive performance "The Metamorphosis" at cinema Elkahira. This paper ends with a framework for rebranding cinemas; comprises both the challenges facing the re-use and proposing community-oriented marketing strategy.

**KEYWORDS:** Cairo's Downtown, Re-use, Rebranding, Performance, Media.

### **1. THE OPENING SCENE; FROM THE GLORY OF THE PAST TO THE DETORIERATION OF THE PRESENT**

Cairo's Downtown cinemas were once masterpieces of architecture, screening golden age movies from around the world plus witnessing important historical events.

Most cinema theatres in Cairo were built in the Art Deco architectural style with its sleek forms, geometric patterns and strong lines. Many were built between

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Architecture Department, Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport, shaimaa.ashour@gmail.com

1935 and 1945. Usually, the plans and blueprints are sent from Hollywood. Often there is a foreigner architect in partnership with a local architect or local firms. Many names from the first party like Gaston Rossi, Thomas

Lamb, Garo Balyon, and Leonard Allen on the other side, examples of the national part like the local firm of architects Dominiononi, Rossi & Salama or Max Edrei. Some of them were open-air theatres with no roof operating during summer months, while others were closed movie theatres [1].

All those cinemas and movie theatres once were prestigious, only screening first-run movies especially well known American films. They were the premiering films at the same time as in the United States. Metro cinema was the showcase for Metro Goldwyn Mayer MGM movies in Cairo where the opening movie was “Gone with the Wind”, and showed only American films until the 1960s. Cairo Palace cinema was the exclusive home to first run Twentieth Century Fox films in Cairo, and in 1953, the first film released in widescreen Cinemascope “The Robe” was placed there. Diana Palace witnessed the birth of the first musical film: “Song of the Heart” (*translated Onshoudat el fouad in Arabic*).

On the other hand, cinemas beheld many great important political events, as well as small intimate memories. For instance, Metro cinema witnessed two significant incidents; the first the explosion of a bomb by the Muslim brothers in 1947, then in 1952 it was totally destroyed during the Cairo fire, known as Black Saturday. Before any film projection, cinemas used to play the royal anthem till the mid 1950s, and then it was replaced by the national anthem of the Republic [1]. Sometimes in the intermission in the movie, a piano player played as classical entertainment. In 1980s, Metro Cinema hosted festivals for children every Friday.

Reputations take time to build but can be shattered in seconds. The deterioration of cinemas started with the appearance of Television in the 1970s then Internet in 1990s, which led gradually to the disappearance of the theatre industry. Moreover, cinemas in shopping malls were attracting more audience with the latest technology and new seating, while some well-known cinemas either ate up in an accidental fire, an incendiary bomb or witnessed harassment incidents, especially in

feasts. This deterioration was accelerated when municipalities prohibited the demotion of any cinema except when building another cinema on the same plot. Thus, some purchased those cinemas and stopped screening movies in them to change activity into much needed services or get them demolished. For instance, the demolition of Faten Hamama cinema started July 2018 despite being closed with for sale sign since 2015.

Nowadays, few are still working, while many are crumbling or abundant to get ready to be demolished. The remaining walls struggle to keep standing; their walls are hidden behind shops for cars spare parts, street vendors, advertising billboards, not to mention garbage and leaking sewage systems. Many were totally demolished and replaced by multi-story residential or office building. Some cinemas have been converted into garages, shops, and storage for car repairs or ceramic companies as shown in Fig.1.

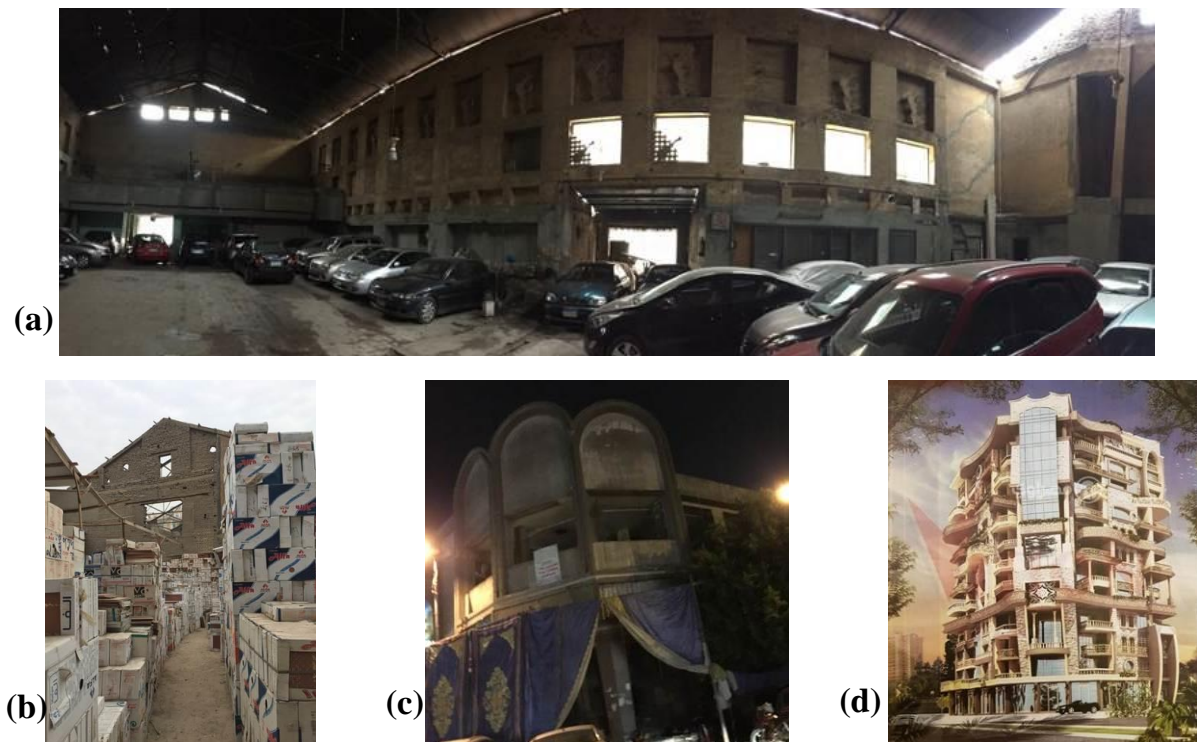


Fig. 1. (a): Al-Ahram Cinema, then Sherif Cinema, then Al-Zahir Club turned into a garage. (b): Rialto open-air cinema turned into a store for cinema parts. (c) The demolition of Faten Hamama cinema. (d): The proposal of the appartement building to replace the cinema.

Those still working downgraded to the category of second-class or even third-class cinemas, screening only Egyptian movies, often double features to sometimes absent audience. In addition, they had their façades or interior or both completely changed like The Cosmos and Le Pigale – commonly known as Pigeal - at Emad Eldin Street. Others had a complete make over in the design of spaces by following the multiplex model; dividing the main auditorium into a number of smaller auditoria with smaller screens with the latest technology and seating arrangements. Moreover, deterioration extended to infect the furniture, the luxuries seating, and the light fixture.

## **2. SMART STRATEGIES FOR CREATIVE RE-USE OF ABUNDANT CINEMAS**

Cinemas were the affordable leisure attractions and Downtown Cairo used to be one of the most important hubs for Egyptian cinema-goers especially between the 1930s and the 1970s. It was said that the Greek brothers Ra'is - as a kind of monopoly - owned most Downtown Cinemas in the 1930s [2]. Worth mentioning the effective role of the establishment of Egyptian financial institutions such as Bank Misr and its companies including Misr Studio (for film production). In the 1960s, many cinemas were nationalized under the auspices of Egyptian General Organization for Cinema. It is believed that this was the beginning of the deterioration of many cinemas due to mismanagement and corruption inside the industry. The cinema houses were incorporated to Misr Film Production and Distribution Company by a direct decision from President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and then transferred to Misr Company for Sound, Light and cinema in 2002. However, some cinemas were completely renewed and were given to investors with contracts that provide managing the cinema in the system of usufruct for a long period. Many Arab investors appeared in the scene, some cinemas flourished while other well-known cinemas closed silently starting the mid 1980s; it was the more profit-driven and commercial period. Nowadays, large entrepreneurs or the government owns most of the cinemas in Downtown Cairo.

Youssef Shazli - the Managing Director of cinema Zawya – and Alia Ayman – the Head Curator –summarized the difficulties facing any new start-up willing to

collaborate with those two owners “*the former have not been receptive to the idea of a potential collaboration, while the later is very difficult to access.*” [3]. Two more reasons can be added; the legitimate and financial issue. Legitimate comprises legal municipal issues, while financial issue here is two-fold; first money to cover the space renovation and the financial plan to manage the new activities with stability self-reliance without compromise on the content. Moreover, Mohamed Elshahed adds three more points that the adaptive reuse of old buildings needs; “*1. An interested investor who sees the value in salvaging an old factory, warehouse, apartment block or department store. 2. Laws and regulations, municipal oversight that guarantees the transformation of buildings into their new functions without compromising safety or historic value. 3. Professionals, contractors, and designers who have the needed skills to do the job. Of course all of the involved parties in this process need to have a little imagination.*” [4].

Here comes the main challenge of this paper; proposing innovative functions to transform those abundant cinemas into valuable assets thus attract investors and save existing buildings under the process of urban sprawl. In addition, the abundant cinemas can be transformed into vibrant urban catalysts for urban renewal strategies of Downtown Cairo. Entrepreneurs, developers and architects should see those assets as opportunities rather than eyesores.

Generally speaking, the best preservation for historic buildings is managing change caused by time, not preventing them. One way to make this happen is smart engaging re-use to be enjoyed by more people, thus continue to retain value and remain relevant to current and future generations. Australian government's department of the environment and heritage points out four benefits of adaptively reusing heritage buildings: environmental, social, economic and prompting innovation. First, reusing heritage buildings retain their embodied energy thus guarantee environmental sustainability than entirely new construction. Second, reusing those buildings provides the community with new property with needed prospects for the community and developers as well. Moreover, even historical tales need physical evidence, “*Restoring buildings goes along with restoring memories. Thus, our selectivity as a society in choosing whether or not to acknowledge, celebrate and later preserve a memory (and*

*a reality as well) is reflected in the architectural preservation.*" [5]. Third, economic can be seen in various aspects from saving energy consumption to profits costs. Last, those buildings are challenge to promoting innovation [6].

Good reuse of historic buildings is revitalization. Revitalization isn't static. It's smart, relevant and engaging. Smart is used nowadays to indicate high technologies, but generally smart means utilizing resources more efficiently. Smart in the field of heritage management and urban conservation means to manage heritage assets effectively so that these continue to retain value and remain relevant to current and future generations, in other words enhancing the urban experience with a creative future activity. Managing abundant buildings by using smart tools to maintain not only their existence but also being urban catalysts. This helps city centres to become interactive attractive, more sustainable, and acknowledging the role of culture in sustainable urban development. Local government and private companies have tried to resuscitate Cairo's silver screens. This revitalization started with simple face lifting with maintaining the same function, then developed to rebranding with creative re-use introducing new functions/activities. All tried to engage the public in this realm, some succeeded while others didn't sustain.

This paper will not discuss the technical information of the adaptive reuse; the physical refurbishment, the level of intervention and types of changes. It will focus on extending the life of old cinemas with a sustainable use. In other words, a functioning process to open old buildings to a new contemporary use.

### **3. COMMUNITY-ORIENTED HERITAGE MANAGEMENT; BRINGING ARCHITECTURE TO PEOPLE THROUGH MASS MEDIA**

Mass media is a composite term comprises advertising and informative means through which ideas and opinions are transmitted orally or visually, or both together to a large number of individuals who are receptive and dispersed in distant and scattered places. The term includes two aspects: the first connected to the technical means of communication, and the second connected to the public. Media in all its forms quickly reaches a vast mass at the same moment and very quickly across the world, spreading

across time and space, and hangs in mind for a long time. It also provides the masses with a culture different from that gained from school and academic, and plays an important role in the simulation of reality or the promotion of ideas and opinions and traded extensively. In short, mass media is used for educational, cultural and propaganda purposes and is considered art, science, industry and commodity at the same time [7].

The mass media can be divided into three main channels: 1. Printed or written media includes newspapers, magazines and books. 2. Audio media includes radio, tapes and CDs. 3. Audio-visual means, which are the most complex means of using the language of words, visual and sound images and generating impressions, includes theatre, television and cinema. Every mean of the mass media is unique in its uses and advantages because each differs from the other in terms of the audience, whether it is addressing or carrying a special type of message. Television, for instance, suits the educated and uneducated public, kids and adults, because it combines the word and the image, and it can be used more than one medium, such as the satellite and newspapers.

Architecture is an art correlated to all other arts, including the mass media. This is clearly obvious in media where places; homes and streets are represented either as narrative, novelist, cinematic and photographic. This bond between architecture and mass media can be classified into five channels; performative art shows, music & singing, cinema, newspapers, magazines, books & television, and advertising that is a common factor with all other channels [7, 8].

In 2011, author had an inquiry about how to tackle important architectural issues in cultural hubs especially governmental ones, and at the same time encourage the public to attend these cultural events. Thus, initiated an online questionnaire is initiated. It was entitled “Bringing architecture to people” asking: How can we inform the public concerning the value of the architecture in particular and the heritage in general? The answers were short and long essay-like replies, proposing a group of methods to increase local cultural heritage awareness about Downtown and other districts around Cairo. All answers proposed diverse channels, as shown in Fig.2. Then in 2012, deeper analyses on the main channels proposed and published the results in a paper entitled “The communication channels disseminating architectural culture” [9], see Table 1.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How can we inform the public concerning the value of the architecture in particular and the heritage in general?</b> | Non-governmental organizations NGO                |
|   | Printed publications                              |
|   | <b>Media</b>                                      |
|   | Blogs   |
|   | Change Legals                                     |
|   | Education   |
|   | <b>Re-use abundant buildings</b>                  |
|   | <b>New approaches for preservation strategies</b> |
|   | Workshops   |
|   | Expertise advices                                 |
|   | Awareness sessions                                |
|   | Citywalks   |

Fig. 2. The results of the online questionnaire “Bringing architecture to people” asking: How can we inform the public concerning the value of the architecture in particular and the heritage in general?

Table 1. The communication channels disseminating architectural culture [9].

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Printed Publication</b>      | <b>Newspapers (Daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, Non-specialized magazines, Magazines with a section on architecture and urbanization, Inserts in daily newspapers with ads)</b> |
|                                 | Specialized magazines   |
|                                 | Periodicals of the departments of architecture in Universities  |
| <b>Non-official Publication</b> | Wall magazines in Universities  |
|                                 | Newsletter  |
|                                 | Cards postal  |
| <b>Electronic Publishing</b>    | Blogs, Facebook and Twitter   |
|                                 | Publishing on the websites of companies and offices   |
|                                 | Email and mailing groups interested in culture / architecture   |
| <b>Real Communication</b>       | Workshops   |
|                                 | Seminars and events   |
|                                 | Cultural salons   |
|                                 | Forum   |
|                                 | Informal cultural institutions i.e. Contemporary Image Collective, The Townhouse Gallery...etc  |
|                                 | Non-governmental organizations i.e. Al Khalifa Community Center – Megawra, ...etc   |
|                                 | Movements / Initiatives   |
| <b>Field visits</b>             | Visit the distinguished projects and archaeological sites   |
|                                 | Slum/informal areas visits  |
|                                 | Public spaces   |
|                                 | Get off the street/people: street events, cafes   |
|                                 | Festivals (Heliopolis, Fan Midan, ...etc)   |
| <b>Exhibitions</b>              | Street and field exhibitions  |



|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Media</b>        | Radio, Egyptian TV and Satellite channels                          |
|                     | YouTube  |
|                     | Cultural channels (with programs on architecture and urbanization) |
|                     | Films (Short, Fiction, Independent)                                |
| <b>Institutions</b> | General Authority for Cultural Palaces                             |
|                     | Youth centres and Social Clubs                                     |
|                     | Travel agencies  |
|                     | Museums  |
|                     | Independent cultural centres                                       |
|                     | Research centres (Academic, Independent)                           |

*"In general, people make sense of places or construct places in their minds through three processes. These are first, through planned interventions such as planning, urban design and so on; second, through the way in which they or others use specific places; and third, through various forms of place representations such as films, novels, paintings, news reports and so on. It is generally acknowledged that people encounter places through perceptions and images. [...] Interactions with places may be 'through direct experience or the environment or indirectly through media representations.'* [10].

Media plays a very influential role in promoting the culture of certain cities. Many songs paved the way to make places to become favorite destinations for tourists; 2012 K-pop song "Gangnam Style" and Gangnam District, Despacito and "Puerto Rico". Taking one of those examples in depth. Starting from 2004, The Turkish melodrama dubbed in Syrian slang and with the elegance of actors and actresses created a fictional environment and held the first lucrative deal. Turkey began to increase its tourism groups and spread to the economy and trade with the opening of many Turkish delights and the extensive importation of Turkish products. This was not limited to Egypt but also includes many Arab countries and some Mediterranean countries. The Turkish series expand the tourist attractions in turkey - that was restricted to religious tourism - and to visit historical places to include the houses where the series were filmed and dining in one of the restaurants they saw on television and then visit the shopping centres. One of the owners of a travel agency specializing in the Arab market describes this change by saying that tourists in Turkey were visiting the mosques of Istanbul and the Turkish baths in the Northwest Stock Exchange. Today, they are following the footsteps of Noor and Muhannad, starting with the family of the Shadoglu family, where Nur and Muhanad lived in Istanbul.

#### **4. ART AND MEDIA PERFORMANCES AS CREATIVE COMMUNITY-ORIENTED RE-BRANDING METHODS.**

*“A place needs to be differentiated through unique brand identity if it wants to be first, recognized as existing, second, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors, and third, consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place.” [10].*

Place branding deals with mental images, if we changed this mental image, we can not only shape the present conditions related to a certain building but change its future as well. Place branding uses the same strategies as commodity branding; starting from attractive name, jingle slogan, to catchy visuals. Downtown cinema gained this mental image years ago, their deterioration distorted this image; thus, we need a new rebranding method to regain not only their previous position but guarantee better future. In this process, place branding is a communication tool that can change the way people perceive those cinemas by place management. In other words, managing places using “events branding” is one of the techniques that connect end users to places. Kavaratzis differentiate between three different sorts of place branding; geographical nomenclature, product-place co-branding and branding as place management. The third is the main approach of this paper to rebrand Downtown cinemas [10].

Those vacant buildings must be treated as breeding grounds or laboratory for experimenting diverse of new cultures, economies, thus developing creative ideas that may steam into initiatives, start-ups or well-established companies. The success and failure of those strategies can be measured by proposing alternative models that can transform those cinemas into urban catalysts upraising the surrounding context, or successful prototypes full of memories. “By providing a variety of leisure and cultural activities, it can also attract other external users such as young artists’ venues, middle class entertainment and tourist hubs.” [5] One important factor to guarantee the success of the reuses is the social media branding; marketing step-by-step transformation as well as the updates of upcoming events using social media platforms.

A key to this creative re-use is across disciplines; new forms of art, music, and pop culture, especially with start-up companies. Art and media performances open spaces for an unpredictable work environment, especially if tackling topics related to contemporary context either political or social. Thus, engages the present audience and guarantee sustainable heritage conservation to those invaluable assets. Art and media performance are one of those channels that stem from “events branding” techniques; it reaches wide public as well as can inspire new functions, add new dimension making those places venues for additive value, thus increasing the awareness of their value. Those vacant cinemas can be venues hosting various events; (like modern Tahtib group) dance performance, alternative art performance, and festivals. Moreover, they can be retrofit to a particular purpose; city cultural centre, studio for filmmakers and photo shooting, exhibit, Adventures gaming spaces, modern and contemporary art museum, photography museum, collection displays, or even a roller-skating hall.

Creativity has no boundaries; the following precedents can give a clearer image on creative adaptive reuse for many cinemas around the world. The Old Market Hall in Shrewsbury, United Kingdom was transformed into a film and digital media center. Scotland's oldest purpose-built cinema, the Hippodrome cinema in Bo'ness was restored and re-opened to home an annual and growing silent film festival [11]. Bastard Store in Milan is a 1940s cinema converted into office space, showroom, and skateboarding bowl [12]. The old United Methodist church at Philadelphia was transformed into 3580 Indian Queen Lane. It is a collaborative workspace for local businesses attracting artists, photographers and interior designers. The Sunday school that once occupied the ground floor is now the place for therapists and a Pilates studio, while business professionals and tech start-ups use the second floor [13]. A Theatre was converted into Bookshop: *“El Ateneo Grand Splendid in Buenos Aires, Argentina is frequently cited as one of the most beautiful bookshops in the world. It originally opened its doors as the glamorous Teatro Grand Splendid in 1919. Some 10 years later it was converted into a cinema and became the first in Argentina to screen sound films. Thankfully, it was saved from demolition and today still retains its nostalgic elegance and most of its original frescoed ceilings, ornate carvings and rounded*

*balconies. Find a book and take some quiet time in one of the old theatre boxes, or head behind the crimson curtains and listen to live piano music at the café sprawled out on the former stage.*” [14].

In 1965, the Lebanese modernist architect Joseph Philippe Karam designed the Beirut City Centre's cinema, which is commonly known with many names; the bubble cinema, the egg, the Salha or the Samadi building. In 2004, Bernard Khoury collaborating with Solidere proposed a rehabilitation project to be restored as a cinema, converted into a cultural centre or transformed into a museum. But till 2012 nothing happened [15-18], see Fig. 3.

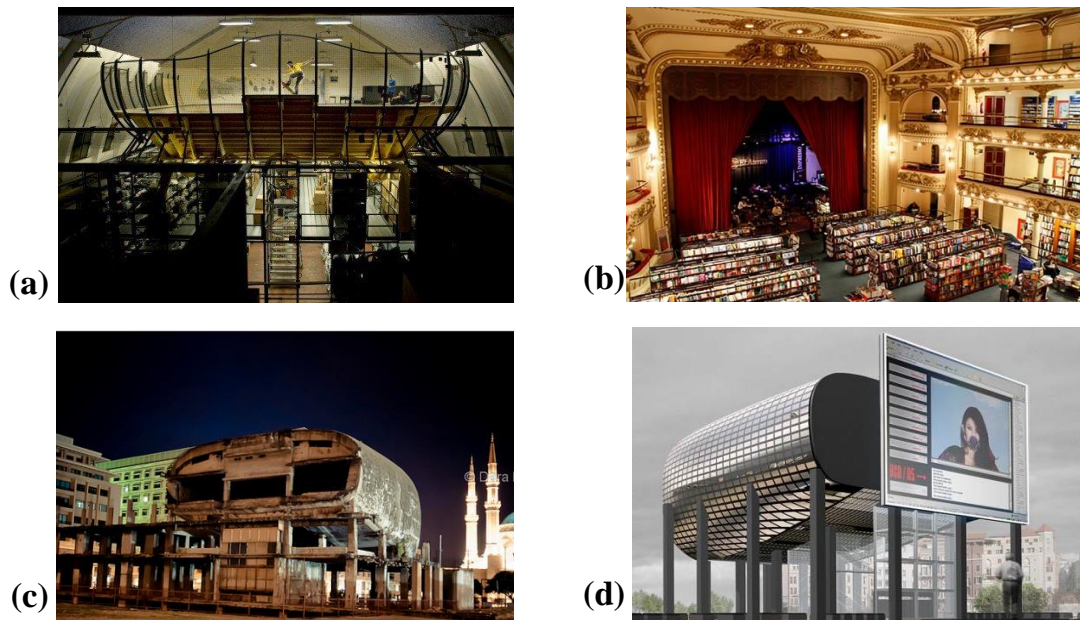


Fig. 3. (a) Studiometro’s Bastard Store. (b) El Ateneo Grand Splendid-Buenos Aires, Argentina. (c) and (d) Beirut Central District, Lebanon [14, 17, 18].

In Egypt, Al Ismaelia For Real Estate Investment used this artistic rebranding approach in many vacant places in Downtown Cairo. Al Ismaelia For Real Estate Investment is a local investment company that acquired a number of properties in Downtown Cairo aiming to dust off many abandoned or underutilized properties. Karim Shafei - Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the company - states “*In 2008, the company’s for-profit vision for a “Downtown for all” sought to capitalize on two trends (...): the Egyptianization of Egypt, and on a move by the contemporary art scene back into Downtown.*” [19]. They supported the flourish of art in the

regeneration scene of Downtown Cairo by providing free or low-cost spaces to artists, long-term spaces to institutions not to mention the direct funding. They refurbish some reckless spaces, introduce new entertainment venues and partnered with various groups to support in the booming of the local art scene in Downtown Cairo.

They started with small experimental projects and exhibits till they moved to larger ones. The art exhibit “Le Caire Mon Amour” was a collection of painting, performance and installation in an abandoned apartment on Champillion Street. The exhibit was a brainchild of French born, Cairo-based painter Anne du Boistesselin. They worked on the revitalization of the 1930s downtown’s cinema-house, Cinema Radio and the leading passage. They established Dakhli West El Balad (*translated interior/internal Downtown in English*) as the first specialized locations platform, offering rental spaces for filming purposes in the buildings they acquired. This re-introduces buildings and apartments in the area as venues for filming and other works of photography, and the project succeeded in re-eye Downtown Cairo as an area full of resources for media workers or creative in general. La Viennoise was the site for many art and photography exhibit. “*The first art event in La Viennoise took place in 2001 as part of al-Nitaq Art Festival when artist Lara Baladi welcomed the public to view her photographic installations, which were shot and shown in La Viennoise.*”[20]. In 2014, it hosted a Contemporary Arts Festival event “Art of Movement,” video above, “a 30 minute dance work choreographed by Billy Cowie incorporating live and virtual 3D dancers. Also, it was the location for a workshop by the Baladi Lab, part of their “Take a coffee with your heritage” series of meetings. In addition, it hosted art events as part of D-CAF (Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival). D-CAF is a seven years old festival that created an artistic season contributing to the revival of Downtown Cairo as an incubator for the cultural and artistic movement [20].

## 5. PRECEDENTS

In the previous text, this research traced what went wrong to those valuable assets ending with international and national precedents bringing the insight of art and media into the field of heritage management in general and rebranding cinemas in particular. In

the coming ones, four national trials to gain the reminiscences of those cinemas will be reviewed. Those rebranding trials took place between 2011 and 2018, aiming to connect public with heritage and consequently preserving them from demolish. They are applications for branding place image using a community-oriented brand marketing strategy.

### **5.1 Al-Bernameg and AblaFahita in Radio Theatre, 2011-Till Present**

Radio Theatre was named after the famous Radio City Music Hall in New York. Max Edrei designed it with participation of Garo Balyan. It consists of a large office block fronting the street, and the cinema recessed to the back. An axial passageway connects both parts with retail spaces lined on either side. One significant feature is the original neon ornamented vertical sign tower and marquee. The visitor passing down the passageway is confronted by the cinema entrance to which is surmounted by another marquee reader board. It was originally one large cinema hall with Cairo's largest screen which was later split into two separate levels. Now, it hosts a cinema and a theater, each 1,500 m<sup>2</sup>. The cinema was opened 1948, closed by the mid 2000s. [21, 22]

The building deteriorated and was later occupied by new tenants who tried to use the space in ways that accommodated their needs. The theatre depended totally on the private sector to develop new functions away from the normal governmental regeneration plans. Al Ismaelia For Real Estate Investment was able to reach deals with former tenants and purchased the property. The vast scale of the cinema hall was challenging as it is impossible to be filled for film screenings everyday, thus it will be difficult to be financially sustainable. Here came the idea of hosting weekly live television shows. Those shows attracted people to Downtown and tapped the theatre as a venue into the art scene. Hassan Abouseda created preliminary proposals for revitalization of the theatre, he explains: "*This intervention should be the first step in a longer process of renovation and revitalization that will utilize the office building as well as the commercial spaces in the passageway leading to the cinema*" [21, 23]. For three years starting 2011 turned into a live television studio hosting the popular TV program Al-Bernameg (*translated program in English*); an Egyptian news satire program

by Bassem Youssef. Live audience packed the theater space. Starting 2012, hosted Abla Fahita; a puppet character from the duplex. Invitations are disseminated on selected audience. Moreover, frequent art exhibits take place in Radio Cinema passageway, for instance the exhibit Weltformat in Cairo: Contemporary Swiss - Posters from Lucerne. Most recently, the passage was used as the locale for one of the dreamy performances from this year's D-CAF event titled In The Shadow of the Waves [24], see Fig. 4.



Fig. 4. (a) Advertisement for Radio Theatre. (b) Hassan Abousseda created preliminary proposals for revitalization of the theatre. (c) Advertisement for Al-Barnamg live show and the neon sign of the Radio Theatre. (d) AblaFahita live TV show [23, 25].

## 5.2 Nassim El Raqs in Theatre Cinema Eldorado, 2012

In 1896, Above the Mekadou shops, Gregoarsulides - a Greek businessman - established the Teatro El Dorado Theater in Port Said. The complex was an opera house then in 1922 a cinema was added to make the complex a cinema and a theatre at the same time. Both functioned till the 1960s. After the declaration of Port Said as a free zone in 1970s, the building was included as a top floor for Omar Effendi department store and was completely forgotten. Nowadays, it is no longer used by Omar Effendi department store.



“Nassim El Raqs” (*translated dance breath in English*) is an experimental project between artists with various backgrounds to study the effect of different spaces on performance. It took the shape of a contemporary dance event and trans-disciplinary creation festival within the urban space since 2010. They propose and produce on-site creations in the city, seeking to push back the frontiers of what is possible in the city, for artists, cultural and artistic operators, the audience, citizens, and passers-by as well as connecting artists with various locations, situations, and Mediterranean environments. Nassim El Raqs started in Alexandria. A first edition was organized in 2011 in the aftermath of the revolution, and the second edition in 2012, then a 3rd edition comes with an aim to “[open] new spaces for creation and production for artists in Alexandria; in giving them the opportunity to take over a ‘piece’ of our city to enable them to question their practice, their demands, their desires, their physical language, within an unpredictable and innovative work environment.” [26].

In May 2012, Nassim el Raqs explored new Mediterranean territories Port Said with the French contemporary dance company Ex-Nihilo in collaboration between Theatre fluxus and dance Companies (Merce Cunningham). This edition of Nassim Elraqs took place during “When dance meets heritage”, that is part of the heritage days annual event in Port Said. Heritage days was sponsored by the Egyptian Society for the Development of French Culture in Port Said with the aim of reviving the heritage of abandoned historical places. Four dancers improvised solo dance performance to revive Port Said heritage in the old department store Simon Arzt (1923), the former Theatre Cinema Eldorado (1896), the Port Said Railway station (1955) and the workers' Residence of Port-Fouad (1926). Corinne Puntana - from Ex-Nihilo band - performed a solo show in the Theatre cinema, where she danced with "dust" trying to draw a beam of light into the dark place that once was a centre of artistic and cultural radiation, see Fig. 5.





Fig. 5. Cinema Eldorado between opening, deterioration and during “When dance meets heritage”.

#### 4.2 Art House Cinema Zawya in Cinema Odeon, 2014

The Odeon Cinema was opened before 1950s and at the beginning specialized in Russian and Italian films. It is located on a narrow side street in Downtown Cairo. In recent years, it has been triplexed [27].

In 2014, Misr International Films (MIF) launched Zawya as the first art-house cinema in Egypt. It is located in the smallest hall of the three screens of Downtown's Cinema Odeon with a separate entrance. Late Egyptian director Youssef Chahine founded MIF and still run by his family. Zawya was set up in the smallest hall of the three screens of Cinema Odeon with a separate entrance. Youssef Shazli explains, “Zawya was conceived as an initiative that aims for financial sustainability while minimizing compromise on content, rather than being a non-profit or non-governmental organization.” [3] Moreover, four reasons behind choosing Downtown: centrality, accessibility and affordability and close to art spaces and cultural institutes. As for the affordability reason, they were interested in two perspectives; affordable to all and the existence of affordable cafes, restaurants and bars to make sure that audience can stick around before and after the movie [3].

Zawya’s program focuses on local independent films to promote the work of young Egyptian and Arab filmmakers. It was a venue for alternative movie lovers and industry professionals. Their slogans can tell a lot; “cinema for movies that are not screened in cinemas”, “cinema from a different angle.” With a program split between theatrical releases and special events, Zawya has screened an alternative selection of films from different parts of the world, including short films, documentaries, feature films and experimental work. They screen movies that are marginalized by the dictated

market, misperceived as non-profitable. It started by screening a Saudi-German co-production, *Wadjda* and continued to host large diversity of films plus continuing to organize the Panorama of the European film in Cairo. After six months of operation, Zawya set box office records with the release of documentary *Jews of Egypt* and a weeklong retrospective in memory of Egyptian director Youssef Shahin. Their continuous success transformed the visions of the cinema owners from not renewing the contract to offering to sign a one-year contract. Moreover, Zawya was doing better than the cinema's other two commercial screens combined. Zawya also gives special attention to the concept of Education and Cinema, developing a strong educational program in collaboration with schools and universities in Egypt. [3, 28]

Now, Zawya grows into a series of cinema screens across the country outside the capital. Lately, they moved to a larger venue, which is Cinema Karim. The new place is more exposed, the first location with more like a hidden gem. Mostly, this will guarantee more audience and properly will revive the old glory of Emad Eldin Street, see Fig. 6.



Fig. 6. The Odeon Cinema and The Art house Cinema Zawya [27].

#### 5.4 The Metamorphosis in Cinema Elkahira, 2018

Cinema Elkahira (*translated Cairo in English*) is one of East Films company cinemas. In the 1970s, the Lebanese filmmaker Ahmed Ahmed El Haroufy opened Cinema Elkahira in Emad El Din Street, which was once the hub of Downtown Cairo's entertainment business. The cinema entrance features a façade of wooden trees with monkeys sculpture climbing over them. Mustafa Mahmoud, the owner of the juice shop named "Lebanon for Juice" next to the cinema, narrates about the history of the cinema:

“ El Haroufy was films and parties sponsor for many especially Um Kulthum and Abdel Halim Hafez. When he bought the cinema, he decided to build a Cabaret. After few years, he transformed it into a cinema consisting of one large hall. The cinema was known for screening Indian and action films. [...] The cinema stopped after the death of El Haroufy and the building deteriorated to the extent that some letters fell from the sign. After few years, a group of investors rented the cinema and turned it into “Jungle” coffee shop that lasted only two months. [Then] El Haroufy 's heirs sold the cinema to a group of people who are now trying to turn it into shops and offices [29].

In 2003, the Egyptian director Omar El-Moutaz Bel'lah founded “Teatro Independent Theatre”. It is a progressive arts ensemble that seeks to push the boundaries of what Egyptian theatre can do. They use art performances to focus on narratives related to existential questions about choice and humanity in a post dramatic theatre form. They succeeded in achieving worldwide recognition [30,31].

In mid-April 2018, Teatro Independent Theatre opened their interactive performance of "The Metamorphosis" (*translated relative quietness in Arabic*) at Cinema Elkahira rather than typical theatres. The cinema provided a creative stage fitting the theme of the story; nightmarish new world. Teatro has constructed an interactive setting in the reckless theatre to allow audiences became part of the Kafka's original tale.

Unfortunately, it was a night summer dream. Passing by the cinema after five months, it was found out that the façade of the cinema was painted with the removal of its significant feature; the name protruded on the vertical tower. Moreover, the café on the ground floor is reopened again with cheap jungle interior and plastic chairs, see Fig. 7.





Fig. 7. Cinema Elkahira before and after painting with the removal of the name protruded on the vertical tower.

## 6. LESSONS LEARNED

In this paper, author highlighted the effective role that artistic interventions can play in revitalizing lavish cinemas. Also, presented national and international precedents of how to make such space profitable and iconic again after years of abandonment and deterioration. Art performances venues can be a sustainable approach providing new creative functions resurrecting Downtown Cairo cinemas. All this creates a renewed interest in Downtown and raises the flag of “The Right to Artistic City”. Figure 8 is a framework for rebranding cinemas stemmed from the theoretical part and developed from the applied part of national and international precedents. This framework comprises both the challenges facing the re-use and proposing community-oriented marketing strategy.

Cinemas located in the heart of Downtown Cairo are in very attractive spots. Regenerating them not only activate their role as urban catalysts, but also attract the public to the heart and consequently revitalize the whole area. The bigger picture contaminated one more aspect, which is marketing identity by involving the public discourse. Moreover, Media and Cultural management strategies play a crucial role in highlighting those examples as a prototype to be replicated, as well as providing enough operational cost. The real estate developers, new start-ups, small businesses and civil society organization played a very influential role in this regeneration process. Leaving everything to be solved by the government is not a feasible solution anymore. Those independent arts require a committed financial investment. They can't rely totally on local donations or foreign funding, as both are temporary. For a

permanent change, we need constant commitment financial alternatives and promising models to attract business interested in arts and culture.

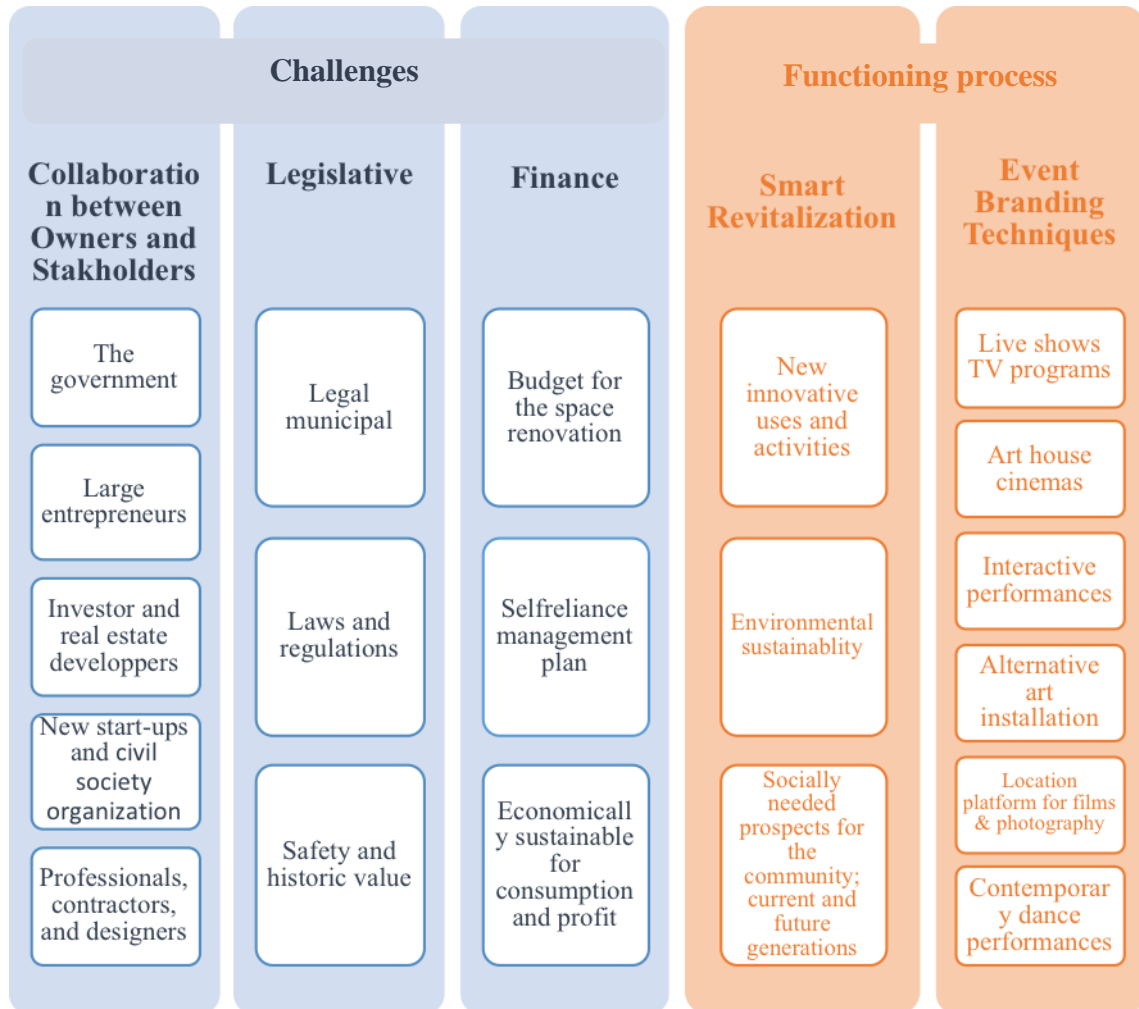


Fig. 8. A framework for rebranding cinemas; comprises both the challenges facing the re-use and proposing community-oriented marketing strategy.

The success of both Radio and Zawya has proven the commercial potential of artistic interventions in Downtown Cairo. Both are models that transformed urban assets using creative sustainable activities targeting different economic groups. Both are sponsored business models still can't depend totally on box-office revenues. Karim Shafei explains more *“to guarantee sustainability, the refurbishment of Downtown Cairo had to be a profit-seeking and economic initiative.”*[3] On the contrary, the Metamorphosis in Cinema Elkahira and Nassim El Raqs in Theatre Cinema Eldorado succeeded in challenging the Cinemas as is in their current deteriorated condition. In



Cinema Odean one important factor worth mentioning, which is the positive effect on the surrounding society by offering opportunities to the community i.e. next-door café.

Facing many challenges, this paper presented creative reuse but still those cinemas facing more barriers to growth for new alternatives; Governmental party with regulations willing to accept new alternative model for adaptive reuse; outdoor cinemas, converting old buildings into movie screening studios, ... so forth. More challenges are: *“Pushing this issue into the local management agenda and convincing the local authorities to adopt it, is an opportunity that has been dismissed over and over. On the other hand, if one reaches out to the private sector, investors need well-studied business plans showing how they can financially benefit from a costly restoration and reuse of existing buildings”* [5].

One proposed solution is in the collaboration between legislative, financial and media. This trinity will develop; will help bring larger audiences back to downtown Cairo’s movie houses. We also need to provide an online database recording everything related to Downtown Cinemas; photographic and historical record, tangible and nontangible heritage as well as architecture. Then make this database available for people interested, fully searchable and constantly expanding and updated with new material and news. Also, welcoming contributions of information, photographs, and memories. Moreover, providing photographic references for the current state of these buildings, highlighting how they have been adapted for other uses. The Scottish Cinemas Database is a good example to follow [33].

Rundown cinemas across downtown are opportunities, not problems. Art initiatives can give the kiss of life to Downtown Cairo cinemas.

## REFERENCES

1. Dadrian, E., "The Golden Age of Cairo's Silver Screens", Al Rawi Egypt's Heritage review, No. 2, pp. 42-48, 2011.
2. Capresi, V., and Pampe, B., "Discovering Downtown Cairo: Architecture and Stories", Berlin: Jovis, 2015.
3. Shazli, Y., and Ayman, A., "Zawya: Alternative Films and the Struggle Over Space", In Ed. Nagati, O., Stryker, B., "Creative Cities: Reframing Downtown Cairo",

- CLUSTER (Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research), Egypt, pp. 69 – 73, 2016.
4. Elshahed, M., “Buildings Are Not Disposable”, 2012a <http://cairoobserver.com/post/24683592453/buildings-are-not-disposable> [Accessed: September 22, 2015]
  5. “Al- Zāhir”, [http://www.tadamun.info/?post\\_type=city&p=8475&lang=en&lang=en#.WAKqXDJh1PO](http://www.tadamun.info/?post_type=city&p=8475&lang=en&lang=en#.WAKqXDJh1PO) [Accessed: October 20, 2016]
  6. “Adaptive Reuse: Preserving our past, building our future”, 2004. <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/adaptive-reuse> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
  7. Ashour, S., “Architecture and Mass Media”, 2012a. <http://shaimaa-keep huntingphotos.blogspot.com/2012/11/2424-2-6-architecture-and-mass-media.html> [Accessed: October 24, 2018] (in Arabic).
  8. Ashour, S., “Linking the Architecture with the Mass Media through the Art Performances”, 2012b. <http://shaimaa-keep huntingphotos.blogspot.com/2012/11/2.html> [Accessed: October 24, 2018] (in Arabic)
  9. Ashour, S., Safy Eldin, H., and Dessoki, A., “Disseminating The Architectural Culture And Activating The Communication And Electronic Publishing; Framework, Work Axes And Outputs”, 2012. <https://thearchitecturalcommittee.wordpress.com>, [Accessed: February 1, 2019] (in Arabic)
  10. Kavaratzis, M., and Ashworth, G., “City Branding: An Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Market Trick?”, *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, Vol 96, No. 5, pp 506-514, 2005.
  11. Barr, G., “New Life in Scotland”, 2014. <https://newlifeforoldbuildings.wordpress.com/2014/06/17/new-life-in-Scotland/> [Accessed: October 21, 2018]
  12. “Refurbishment in Architecture: Bastard Store / studiometrico”, 2009. [https://www.archdaily.com/category/refurbishment?ad\\_medium=single](https://www.archdaily.com/category/refurbishment?ad_medium=single) [Accessed: October 27, 2018]
  13. Pinto, J., “Entrepreneurs, Developers and Architects Find A Secular Future for Sacred Spaces”, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juansebastianpinto/2018/05/11/entrepreneurs-developers-and-architects-find-a-secular-future-for-sacred-spaces/#325b47fbf5ba> [Accessed: October 21, 2018]
  14. “7 Abandoned Buildings That Were Given Second Lives”, 2015. <https://www.momondo.com/discover/article/7-abandoned-buildings-second-lives> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
  15. Wilson-Goldie, K., 2004. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2004/Mar-20/176-time-for-finding-culture-outside-of-the-survival-machine-of-a-museum.ashx> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
  16. Khoury, M., “The Egg: Memory and Visual Structures Within Representations of an Iconic Lebanese Ruin, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 24:1, 3-

- 14, DOI: 10.1080/15551393.2016.1272417, 2017.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15551393.2016.1272417> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
17. Khoury, B., <https://www.bernardkhoury.com/project.php?id=102> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
18. Quirk, V., "Why Skateboarding Matters to Architecture", 2012.  
[https://www.archdaily.com/246526/why-skateboarding-matters-to-architecture?ad\\_medium=gallery](https://www.archdaily.com/246526/why-skateboarding-matters-to-architecture?ad_medium=gallery) [Accessed: October 28, 2018]
19. Shafei, K., "Restoring Downtown ... Restoring hope", In Ed. Nagati, O., Stryker, B., "Creative Cities: Reframing Downtown Cairo", CLUSTER (Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research), Egypt, pp. 63 – 67, 2016.
20. Elshahed, M., "La Viennoise Hotel: Art from Sandouk El Dounia to DCAF", 2014.  
<http://caiobserver.com/post/81918872405/la-viennoise-hotel-art-from-sandouk-el-dounia-to#.W8sba6eB1o5> [Accessed: May 1, 2018]
21. Elshahed, M., "Cinema Radio Comes Back to Life", 2012b,  
<http://caiobserver.com/post/35982679960/cinema-radio-comes-back-to-life#.W8tQv6eB1o4> [Accessed: October 20, 2018]
22. "Radio Cinema", (n.d.), <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/14154> [Date of accessibility: October 28, 2018]
23. "Radio Downtown Restoration", n.d., <https://www.hassanabouseda.com/radio-downtown-restoration> [Accessed: October 20, 2018].
24. Cairosceen Team, "11 of Cairo's Vintage Theatres That Showcase a City of Wonder, 2016. <http://cairosceen.com/ArtsAndCulture/11-Of-Cairo-s-Vintage-Theatres-That-Showcase-A-City-of-Wonder> [Accessed: July 10, 2018 12:39pm].
25. Al-Emara wa Elfenon magazine (translated Architecture and Art in English), issue 4-5, Al-E'temad publishing house, Cairo (in Arabic), 1949.
26. "Nassim el Raqs #3", n.d. <https://de.ulule.com/ner-3/> [Accessed: April 29, 2018 at 1:41PM]
27. "Odeon Cinema", n.d.. <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/14152> [Accessed: October 28, 2018 9:40 AM]
28. Zawyacinema, n.d., <http://www.zawyacinema.com/about/index> [Accessed: October 28, 2018 2:12pm]
29. Alshenawy, H., "The Rise and Fall of Downtown cinemas", 2018.  
<https://mantiqti.cairolive.com/> [Accessed: September 20, 2018 11:00am] (in Arabic)
30. Teatro Independent Theatre, n.d..  
[https://www.facebook.com/pg/TeatroOnStage/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/TeatroOnStage/about/?ref=page_internal) [Accessed: September 23, 2018 11:00AM]
31. Egypt Today staff, "Teatro's 'The Metamorphosis' to open on April 14", 2018.  
[www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/47077/Teatro-s-The-Metamorphosis-to-open-on-April-14](http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/47077/Teatro-s-The-Metamorphosis-to-open-on-April-14) [Accessed: September 23, 2018 at 11:00 AM]
32. "Scottish Cinemas and Theatres Project", n.d..  
<http://www.scottishcinemas.org.uk/index.html> [Accessed: October 21, 2018 7:12PM]



## إعادة تقديم سينمات وسط القاهرة للعرض الجماهيري

### هل يمكن استخدام الفن والوسائط الإعلامية لإحياء التراث المهجور؟

دور سينما وسط القاهرة التي كانت من روائع الفن المعماري ولا يزال عدد قليل يعمل حالياً، بينما يستعد العديد للهدم.و يؤكد البحث أن أفضل حفاظ للمباني التاريخية هو إدارة التغيير الناجم عن مرور الزمن.و أن أحد الطرق لتحقيق ذلك هو إعادة الاستخدام الذكي وبالتالي مواصلة الحفاظ على تلك القيمة وقد حاولت الدولة والشركات الخاصة إحياء شاشات القاهرة الفضية. بداية بتجديدات للواجهات، ثم إعادة التقديم للعرض الجماهيري من خلال إعادة استخدام مبدعة باستحداث وظائف جديدة. لمد الجسور بين مختلف التخصصات خاصة الأشكال الجديدة من العروض الفنية والموسيقية و الوسائط الإعلامية . ويهدف البحث إلى استكشاف أربعة عروض إعادة استخدام تجلب رؤية الفن والإعلام في مجال إدارة التراث، أولاً، عروض الفن و التراث في مسرح سينما الدورادو.وثانياً، إعادة استخدام مسرح راديو لإستضافة عروض حية أسبوعية، ثالثاً، زاوية - أول بيت فن سينمائي في مصر بسينما اوديون. أخيراً، افتتح تياترو للمسرح المستقل في سينما القاهرة. وينتهي البحث بتقديم إطار لإعادة تقديم دور السينما للعرض الجماهيري؛ يشمل التحديات التي تواجه إعادة الاستخدام واقتراح استراتيجية تسويق مجتمعية.