

Architectural Solutions to "Street Vendors" in Cairo

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Abstract

In Egypt and according to recent statistics, the poor represent about 48% of the total population, which is an indication of the low standard of living and high poverty rates of a wide range of the people of Egypt. This makes the presence of street vendors important to provide goods or some services to large groups of people as the cost of these goods or services might be much lower to match the financial ability of the poor. Not allowing street vendors to work for safety or aesthetic reasons might lead to a bigger problem. In this way, street vendors will become unemployed which paves the way for crime and many illegal practices such as robbery or even drug trafficking—something that governments, for sure, would like to avoid. This means that the negative effects of prohibiting street vendors from work are much more than those of allowing them to work. Therefore, it is really important to provide the environment required for street vendors with a full understanding of their needs in order to reach to the aim of integrating the street vendors outcome into the national production system. This research paper deals with the problem of street vendors and proposes a solution for organizing street vendors in a way that is compatible with their communities. This will help in raising the financial income, and as a result, improve the living standard of the poor.

Keywords: Poverty, Street Vendors, National Production, Living Standard

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1. Introduction

In Egypt, most of the poor people tend to work as street vendors as it is the easiest way that could help them to earn money. Street vending is an occupation that does not require any educational or huge financial background. Street vendors usually provide a lot of the items that a person might need such as clothing, food and even household utensils. Street vendors could easily spread in many places such as markets, near governmental buildings and residential areas, just to name a few. This is why the Egyptian government has started to search for solutions to make work easier and legal for those simple business people by creating laws to protect them (El-Kadi 2013) (Figure 1).



Figure 1. A picture shows the Street Vendors in Egypt

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1.1. Research Problem

It is estimated that the total number of street vendors in Egypt exceeds six million (Report on Poor People's Status in Egypt, 2010). Street vendors spread all over the cities of Egypt especially in overcrowded areas. Unfortunately, the majority of street vendors do not meet beauty and safety conditions because they are unorganized and do not follow the hygiene requirements in case, they serve food. This is what creates a serious problem in Egypt.

1.2. Research Objective

The research aims to solve the problem of Egypt's Street Vendors, by:

- Determining the impact of street vendors on society.
- Highlighting the latest experiences of different countries to solve the phenomenon of street vendors.
- Shading light on the Egyptian experience to solve and evaluate this phenomenon.
- Proposing solutions to deal with the phenomenon of street vendors.

1.3. Research Hypothesis

The presence of street vendors is highly attached and vital to the people of low financial capacity, and this is what justifies their presence in almost every city in the world. Reducing street vendors' numbers is not the way to solve this problem; however, they should be well employed and organized in a way that would enrich their surrounding environment.

2. The Impact of Street Vendors' Activities

2.1. Economic Impact

Street vendors have become an important part of any local economy worldwide as they are able to satisfy the various needs of the urban community. This could be achieved by providing a wide range of services with low prices like food, clothes, electronics and even building materials, etc. Moreover, the developing world, including Egypt, highly depends on agriculture and the outcome of agriculture. In poor agricultural communities, where farmers struggle to sell their products, street vendors come as a way out for both the farmer and the customer (Terraviva, 2006). In this way, the prices of the agricultural products would be acceptable for both the farmer and the customer, which in a way or another, plays a helpful role in achieving food security for the low-income communities (Gogte; Talnikar; Patil, 2019).

2.2. Social Impact

Most of the time, the relationship between street vendors and the government is not that romantic one. Street vendors feel insecure because the government with the help of the police tries to close their businesses. When chased by the police, most street vendors react and try to express their anger by using inappropriate words and/or behavior. This has its negative impact on the society and is not a feature of a civilized community. This is why organizing street vending might improve street vendors' feeling of security within their communities which will have its positive impacts on the members of the society (El-Kadi 2013).

2.3. Health Impact

One of the challenges that the Egyptian government faces when trying to transform unorganized street vending into an organized system is the installation of an infrastructure to the system of street vending. This is due to the fact that most street vendors are usually located in overcrowded places because this increases the chances of more sales and more financial income and profits to those small business people. However, being placed in overcrowded locations in which the possibility of physical distancing is very low results in ignoring following the basics of hygiene, and the simplest example is hand washing. Moreover, it seems that following the health regulations during the COVID-19 lockdown all over the world, including Egypt, was not in favour of street vendors in which their businesses and financial income were negatively and dramatically affected, and as a result, severely affected street vendors' families and their standards of living (Figure 2 [Skinner, n. d.] [Sepadi1; Nkosi, 2022]).



Figure 2. A woman making food in the street without following any health requirements
©<https://thumbs.dreamstime.com/b/local-thailand-market-sellers-traditional-street-food-shop-mar-uthaithani-thailand-local-thailand-market-sellers-111783760.jpg>

2.4. Urban Impact

Urban and architecture planning does not take into account planning for street vending as presented in the following:

a- Aesthetic impact

Street Vendors depend on simplicity and basic factors to protect their products. They display their products on simple carts placed under umbrellas for protecting their goods, which most of the time is not accepted neither by passers-by nor by customers who usually do their shopping at nearby malls (Figure 3 a) (El-Kadi, 2013).

b- The traffic impact

As mentioned above, street vendors target crowded places to display their products such as city centers. Thus, they occupy sidewalks and sometimes streets causing traffic jams and street blockages (Figure 3 b) (Taye, 2020).

c- Walking pauses impact

It is very important to provide a period and a place for rest for pedestrians. The presence of street vendors may be of benefit in this case and may act as an attraction factor; however, street vendors might also be a factor of tension and discomfort for pedestrians. This is mainly because street vendors are randomly located in the areas where pedestrians are supposed to walk safely. In this way, pedestrians find themselves forced to walk on the driving roads which is really dangerous and violates pedestrians' safety procedures (Figure 3 c) (Hagos; Adnan; Yasar, 2019).



Figure 3. a- Aesthetic problem of street vendors

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Figure 3. b- The traffic problem of street vendors

public/styles/2400/public/media/image/2019/10/lagos-nigeria.jpg?itok=uHOKL4Ro



Figure 3. c- Walking pauses impact of street vendors, there are no place for pedestrians to walk

©<https://media.interaksyon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/street-vendors-manila.jpg>

Depending on what is mentioned previously, the presence of street vendors is not completely negative; nonetheless, the presence of street vendors had a number of positive aspects that may help in leading to the best way to deal with this phenomenon. There is no need to consider street vendors as a problem or a "cancerous spot" that should be removed forever as stated by Dr. Atef Sedky, the Prime Minister of Egypt in the nineties of the last century (Al-Kadi, 2013). On the contrary it is very important to take into consideration that removing them is not the way to solve the problem because they will simply continue to appear over and over again as long as the problem of poverty still exists.

3. Street Vendors in Egypt

When it comes to their place, street Vendors do not stick to one place, but rather they are usually scattered and can be seen everywhere in city centers. However, most of street vendors do not have the permission to be located on the streets or the sidewalks to sell their merchandise. According to Arafa (a Professor of Local Administration), it is estimated that the number of random markets in Egypt exceeds 3,425 in which five million street vendors work in 27 governorates. On average, sales of those street vendors in total reach about 1.5 million Egyptian pounds per month, i.e., the sales of one street vendor are about 300 Egyptian pounds per day.

The Egyptian government places restrictions and sometimes prohibits the activities of street vendors who do not have licenses, do not pay taxes, and/or illegally occupy sidewalks and streets and other public places. As a result, the local authorities with the help of the police deal with such violations and remove all the street vendors' carts that do not apply the government's rule concerning street vending (Figure 4). It is worth mentioning that most street vendors, after police raids, do not give up and return to their illegal places. This means that the huge problem they create is still there—a problem that threatens the security of street users, traffic, and public places (Ali, 2010).



Figure 4. A part of the confiscation of the goods of street vendors
 ©<https://www.mobtada.com/uploads/images/2021/12/16395146851.jpeg>

3.1. Street Vending Law No. 105 of 2012

If street vendors violate the regulations of street vending stated by the government for the first time, they may face imprisonment for a month and pay a fine of five hundred Egyptian pounds. If the violation is repeated, street vendors face imprisonment for six months and pay a fine of five thousand Egyptian pounds. Unfortunately, the law has been applied to less than 1% of street vendors which means more side effects such as theft of electricity, traffic congestion, obstructing pedestrians, and many other aspects including the social and psychological side effects (Hamed, 2019).

4. An International Experience to Deal with Street Vendors (Jakarta's Street Vendors Experience)

Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia, and street vendors are literally occupying every single spot of the city including streets and sidewalks (Figure 5 a-b). Ahok, the governor of Jakarta, stated that "dealing with street vendors is like watching Tom and Jerry. It never seems to end" (Tichelaar, 2016).

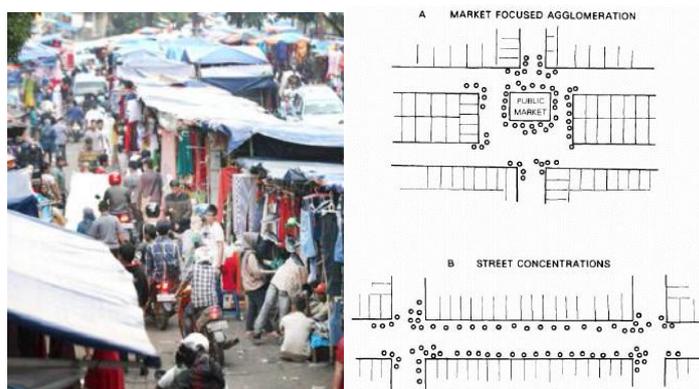


Figure 5. a- Jakarta's street vendors- b- Places where street vendors exist in Jakarta (Tichelaar, 2016)

The experiment is based on the principle of assembling street vendors in the city center where they already exist. It is through an urban and architectural solution by rebuilding the damaged part of a building that was damaged in 2015, renovating the whole building, and providing an

environmentally friendly roofing for the central yard that contains various activities as follows (Tichelaar, 2016):

- Street food & informal trade
- Restaurants
- Shops
- Offices
- Entertainment (an open-air festival, and movie theater) (Figure 6-7)

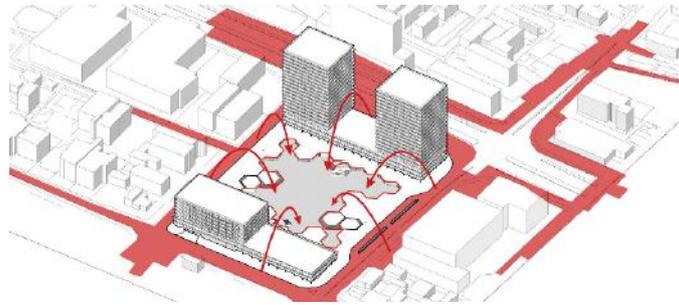


Figure 6. Assembling street vendors from streets around the new market (Tichelaar, 2016)



Figure 7. A perspective showing the design of the new market (Tichelaar, 2016)

5. Proposed Solutions to Reduce Poverty Problems in Egypt

5.1. Make New Markets

Civilized and modern markets have been set up in several cities in Egypt to eliminate the random popular markets and their negative effects, and to reduce unemployment.

A number of these markets were set up in Cairo (Al-Tuwnusi [figure 8a], Dir Al-Naahia, Zawiya Al-Jadid [figure 8 b], Al-Mawaridi, Al-Khamis Bialmatria). More modern markets have also been established in Port Said (El-Bazaar Market - Souk Al-Asr 1-2 [figure 9]).

These markets meet the civil protection and security requirements and take the preventive and precautionary measures. They provide all the services and the friendly designs that both the vendors and the customers may need including the stalls, booths, stands, warehouses and may other facilities (Nasser, 2021).



Figure 8. a- Al-Tuwnusi market in Ezbet Al-Nasr in Al-Basateen neighborhood
 ©<https://images.akhbarelyom.com/Images/images/GalleryImages//20201125/20201125005427225.jpg>



Figure 8. b- Zawiya Al-Jadid Market in Cairo
 ©https://mediaaws.almasyalyoum.com/news/large/2019/01/21/886798_0.jpg



Figure 9. Souk Al-Asr 2
 ©<http://bitly.ws/ugWS>

6. Evaluation of the Experience of Setting up New Markets for the Street Vendor

The previous projects presented in (figures 8-9) are new ideas to solve the problem of street vendors. However, with their presence, new problems have emerged. Firstly, the location of the new markets is far from the street vendors' past crowded working places where they preferred to sell their merchandise. Secondly, their past working places were close to where they live, while the new markets are exactly the opposite. The same idea can be applied to the customers—something that cannot be ignored as it has its negative effects on the street vendors' sales. This is why these new markets have become unusual and uncomfortable for both the workers and the public.

In addition, there are differences between the street vending experience of Jakarta and that of Egypt. Jakarta's Street Vending experience is a successful one in which the Indonesian government worked on assembling street vendors from the streets around the new market, while the Egyptian experience with the new markets, as mentioned before, are far from the past working places of the street vendors. In Jakarta, the location of the new market is in the city center, while in Egypt this condition cannot be met because the cities are crowded, let alone their overcrowded city centers.

7. Analytical Study

As Jakarta, street vendors in Egypt spread on the sidewalks and streets, as shown in figure 10, but there are no open spaces to assembling them. Therefore, the most appropriate and possible places to improve street vendors are streets and sidewalks.

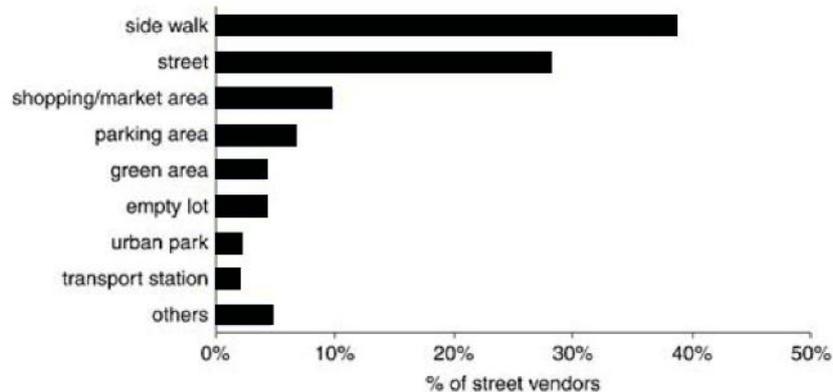


Figure 10. Places where street vendors are located [Tichelaar, 2016]

7.1. Suggested Solutions

There are two types of streets:

- Wide streets as Port Said Street in Cairo
- Narrow streets as Qasr al-Nil, Sherif Fouad, Talaat Harb, and Abbas El Akkad

Thus, two solutions have been proposed to organize street vendors in the middle of cities in a modern civilized manner.

7.1.1. First Suggestion: Proposing collective markets on the wide streets

Port Saeed Street in Cairo was chosen, and the proposal was to use the street by establishing a market for street vendors on top of it (figure 11 a-b) through the construction of a lightweight building containing shops, stores and green spaces that can be used as food court, sittings, etc. (Figure 12 a-b). The building entrance is just elevators that spread over the sidewalks (Figure 13).



Figure 11. a- The chosen site plan

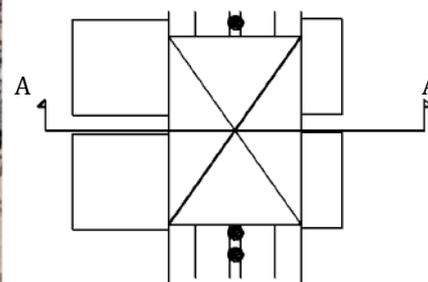


Figure 11. b- Market's site plan

(Source: The researcher)

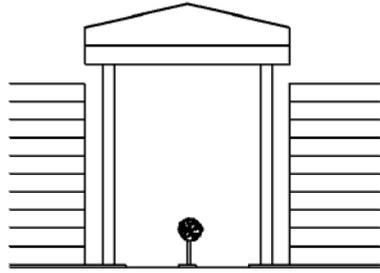


Figure 12. a- The proposal façade

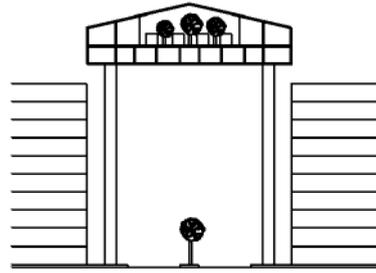


Figure 12. b- The proposal section AA

(Source: The researcher)

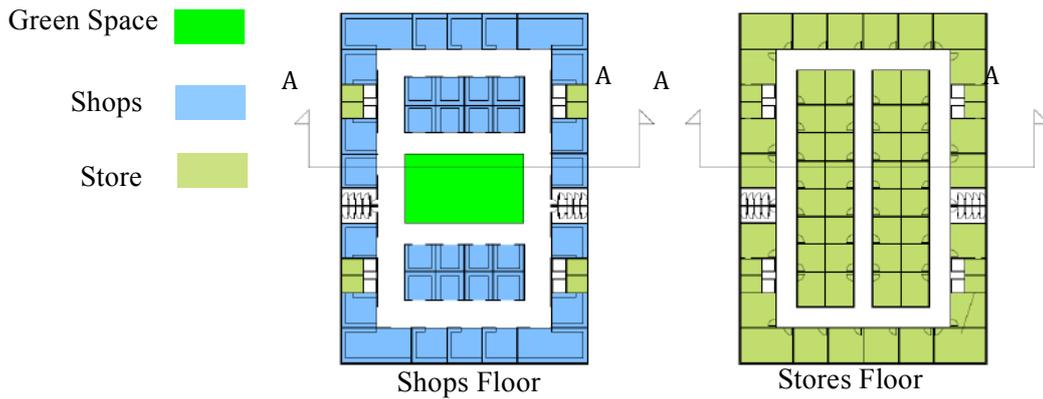


Figure 13. The Collective market's floors (Source: The researcher)

In the following figures, it is suggested that the roof of the market have a tent structure that is usually made from a light material like canvas (as figure 14 a). Elevators can also be in the center of the market and can be accessed across refuge islands, through stairs, or underground level (as figure 14 b).

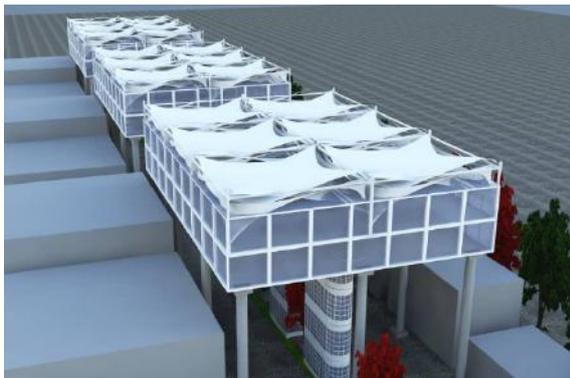


Figure 14. a- A perspective with canopies tents for the market.



Figure 14. b- Proposal to place elevators in the middle of the market.

(Source: The researcher)

7.1.2. Second Suggestion: Suggesting civilized kiosks in narrow streets

Qasr El-Nile Street in Cairo was chosen. (Figure 15 a). The proposed kiosks are scattered along the street or liner within the location of the street vendors on the sidewalks (figure 15 b). The design of the kiosks is simple, lightweight and removable. The use of alternating kiosks enhances the walking pauses and reduces crowding. It also gives an aesthetic value

which is achieved by studying the sidewalk in a way that creates rhythm in the design. (Figure 16 a-b-c).



Figure 15. a- The chosen site plan.

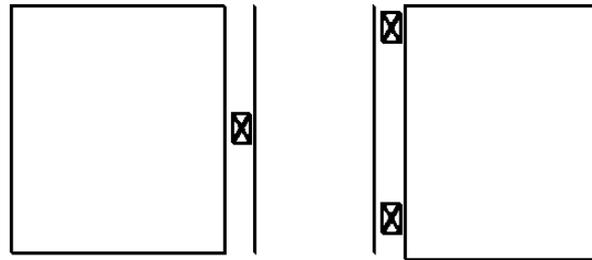


Figure 15. b- The kiosk's site plan

(Source: The researcher)



Figure 16. a- The plan

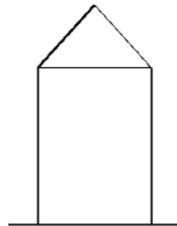


Figure 16. b- The kiosk's side Façade

(Source: The researcher)

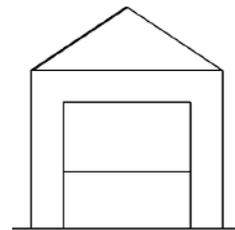


Figure 16. c- Kiosk's main Façade

8. Conclusion

- Though considered informal, street vendors play a significant role in enhancing the economy of the developing countries.
- The presence of street vendors is not all negative, and prohibiting their businesses is not the right choice because they play positive roles regarding the economy, attraction and society.
- The Egyptian Government has been dealing with and trying to find solutions for poverty. Yet, when it comes to street vendors, the Egyptian government does not seem to take their needs into consideration. This study has presented ways to improve and formalize the businesses of street vendors instead of eliminating them.
- Establishing small and medium enterprises to support street vendors would be the way to the best solution. Carrying out such initiatives by the government would help to improve the community.
- Dealing with street vendors depends on improving their environment, their location, and not moving them to remote and isolated places (industrial for example). The research has proposed the possibility of exploiting street vendors' gathering places, which are the streets and the sidewalks, and developing these places in environmental and civilized ways that enhance the strengths of street vendors and limit their negative points.
- The government should support street vendors by providing a good environment and securing it for them in installments in which they pay comfortably and in symbolic amounts.

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