Abstract

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#CityWalks: Another Perspective for Narrating the History of the City. Cairo, Egypt

Legacy is a critical component of narrating urban heritage. It refers to something left behind, which lingers on the remembrance of a person, an experience something extraordinary which remains... a memory worth taking with you. The work and lifestyles of those who came before are appreciated through architecture, monuments, sites, streets and alleyways. These urban legacies connect us to the food, music, religion, literature and traditional crafts in our communities. They are the images, words, expressions, and stories of the past. Legacy holds together past and present, present and future, and sometimes, all three together. Within the context of tourism, the ability to create a meaningful connection to the past is vital to developing future interest in cultural heritage. In Cairo, as in many cities, tourism is organized as an industry seldom the focus is on cultural tourism at the local level. However, since the year 2000, grassroots initiatives in Cairo have gained popularity among Egyptians and foreign residence in the form of “city walks.” Interest in pedestrian exploration—as an informal activity, an experience, and a meaningful personal connection—is matched by an increasing range of organizers utilizing city walks as a program to encourage local tourism around a revolving interest in Cairo’s heritage. This study is concerned with local cultural heritage awareness project—the city walk. The framework of the initiatives in this study are not government initiatives but rather they are grass-roots “bottom up” “center out” initiatives. Individuals and groups have organized these approaches to fill a vacuum in response to the need to connect to the city. These grass-roots initiatives seek to integrate urban, arts, heritage, and cultural development at a local level — in Cairo and lesser so in Alexandria and Port Said. This article reflects upon the study conducted by the authors that charts the development of city walks as an activity that individuals, groups and organizations use in their programs from 1970 to 2016. As visibility of the citywalk increased over the years, so has the range of methods and techniques used to explore communities. By tracing the development of the walks, this article identifies and discusses a number of key issues relating to language, place, theme, communication, interpretive brochures, and desired objectives that emerged during interviewing over forty grassroots initiatives.