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**Plans and Projects for Alexandria,
1952 to the present day²**



**A satellite image of a map showing the contemporary city with its current urban geographic features.
Source: Google earth**

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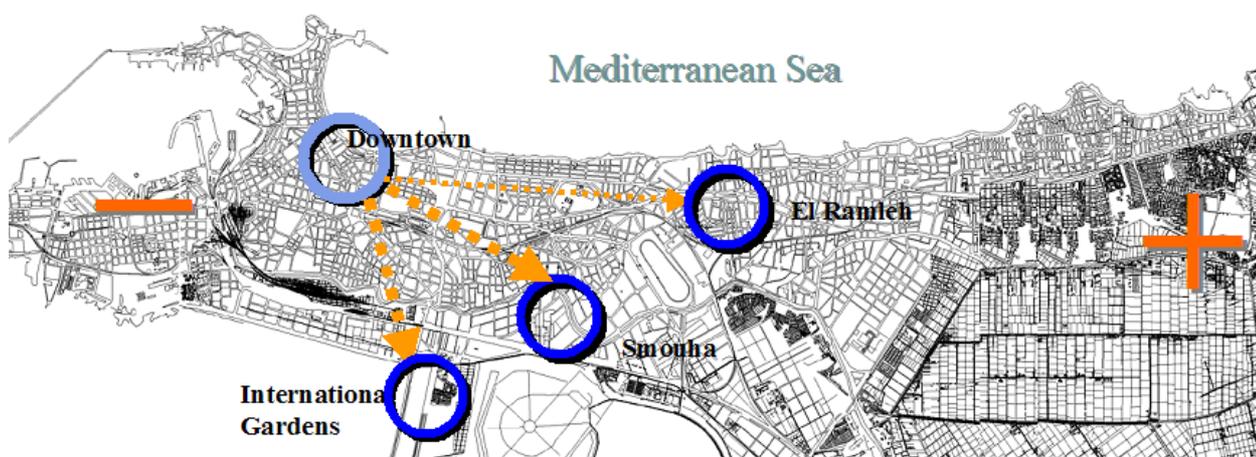
² This paper was published in: *Alessandria d'Egitto oltre il mito, architettura archeologia trasformazioni urbane*, a cura di Liusa Ferro Cristina Pallini, ArabFinise, 2009.
The views displayed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official view of Bibliotheca Alexandrina nor Menofeya University

Alexandria was established in 331 B.C.E by Alexander the great and is the second largest city in Egypt as well as a major port on the Mediterranean. Alexandria is a linear city comprising of a strip of land enclosed between the Mediterranean to the North and Lake Mariout to the South, agricultural land to the East and desert to the West. As a consequence very little land is suitable for housing, population increase and urban expansion. The rapid increase of population as a result of rural immigration and constant increase in population led to a very dense urban agglomeration with phenomena such as the scarcity of housing units, and informal housing. According to the results of a 2006 census hit slightly over than 4 million persons in Alexandria alone which put more pressure on the development and future plans of the city. This study presents the grand urban and architectural projects that took place over the past 50 years and which had great impact on the city as well as future plans and projects for its development.

I – Accomplished projects

1- New Shopping Centers

Faced with tough competition from new suburban shopping options and confronted with profound and constant changes in consumer lifestyles, geographic mobility and shoppers' expectations, downtown Alexandria is poorly equipped to compete with these new economic threats. New shopping malls with facilitated transportation has steered business to the downtown outskirts spreading to other newly developed suburbs. Consequently, many downtown enterprises are faced with a rapid decline in sales, competition from shopping malls, and finally, a potential loss of their role in shaping the identity of community throughout the history of the city. Over the past decade many businesses relocated from downtown Alexandria to the suburbs. This phenomenon will negatively affect the city center and the fringes of the city with the new and increasing commercial demands.¹



A map of Alexandria illustrating the direction of shift and the location of activities outside the downtown area

Source: the author



Example of modern fancy shopping facilities at the fringes of the city attracts costumers away off the down town. Alexandria green plaza, designed by Essam Qassem & Ancestors 2004
Source: the author



Alexandria City Center, main building and extension, by A. Moez & Mohamed El Hegazy, 2002
Source: the author

2 The new Alexandria Corniche

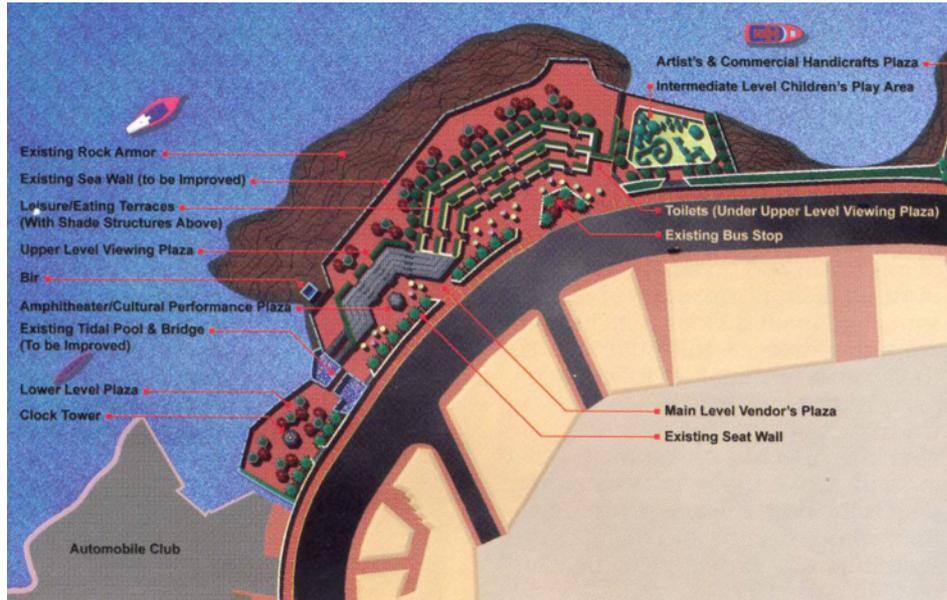
To improve the image of the city and to solve transportation problems, the Alexandria Corniche was expanded in 1999 reaching its completion in 2005. The plan aimed at providing 5 traffic lanes in each direction, with a length of 12 km and costing 252 million Egyptian pounds. The project included a pedestrian promenade and walkway along the seaside with several seaside related activities such as cafeterias, hotels and clubs and plazas, new bus stops kiosks, fishing platforms, seating areas, and an amphitheatre with a capacity of 200-300 people. Vast areas of the sea were reclaimed for development. Apart from the ecological and environmental impacts of infilling the sea, some of the fine public beaches were destroyed as the renowned Stanley beach ~~shore~~. The wide Corniche created a physical and visual barrier between the urban waterfront and the sea not to mention the suffering of pedestrians to cross the wide Corniche in the absence of traffic lights or underground passageways. Other than playing a role in facilitating traffic for vehicles the project is also dramatically changing the image and character of the waterfront.



Stanley bay new bridge, completed 2001 with a cost of 75 million Egyptian pounds
Source: www.arabcont.com



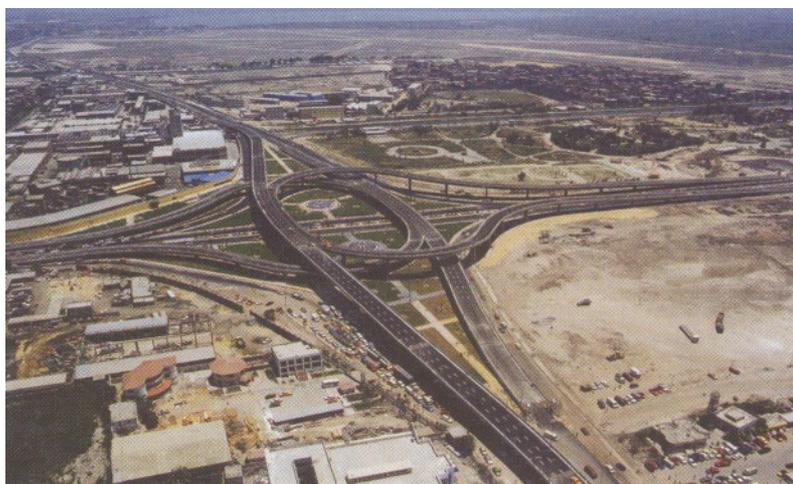
The new Corniche with the sea infill creating new urban spaces while at the same time obstruct view of the waterfront. Source: the author



Plan of pedestrians' areas, by Dar El Handasah LTD, Egypt
Source: Medina Magazine, issue 6, Feb-Mar 1999, p. 28

3 -Transportation network

Among a wide series of strategies to connect the city with interregional transportation networks, a number of major roads were constructed to achieve this goal. This network included a major ring road to connect the port of Alexandria and industrial zones at the west of the city directly to the major regional highways eliminating inner city trespassing of trucks. Another project is Moharem Bey Bridge with an estimated total cost of about 80 millions Egyptian pounds, and is 2 km in length. The bridge facilitated access to and from the city as well as connecting the city center and major regional transportation networks. The implementation of the bridge facilitated the suburbanization and the expansion of the city towards the south east in the form of up-scale shopping malls and other commercial and recreational facilities.



Moharem Bey Bridge

Source: Mubarak and urbanization, accomplishments of the present to building a future, booklet published by the Ministry of Housing and Public Utilities and New Urban Communities, p. 133, undated

4 - The renovation of the passenger terminal and the port of Alexandria

The Alexandria seaport is the largest port in Egypt in terms of transferred goods. It is estimated that 60% of Egypt's trade goes through this port. In 2000 a plan was put to renovate the port and its various components. To revive the role of Alexandria as a major tourist destination for sea cruisers, the passenger terminal was completely renovated in 2007 to be an international terminal ready to receive giant cruisers. The building consists of two floors with a total area of about 15000 m². The terminal is equipped with facilities such as reception areas, information desks, customs offices, etc. The terminal contains recreational and commercial faculties.ⁱⁱ The project was designed by the Engineering Center, Faculty of Engineering, Alexandria University.ⁱⁱⁱ



The exterior and interior of the new renovated passengers' terminal port of Alexandria
Source: the author

5 - The Library of Alexandria 2002

The new Library of Alexandria which was inaugurated of in October 2002 is one of the grand projects that dramatically changed the city. The Library has become a major city destination. It attracts more than one million visitors a year.^{iv} In addition to the apparent cultural benefits as a library and a place for dialogue and understanding between different cultures, it also has a wider impact upon the city and its residents. The simple form of the building is outstanding along the skyline of the cornice. The building was a recipient of the Agha Khan architectural Award in 2004.



The new Library of Alexandria within its larger urban context

Source: The Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina



The main plaza of the new Library of Alexandria acts as a place for cultural interaction

Source: The Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, Bibliotheca Alexandrina

The inertia of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has encouraged many agencies to participate in the overall development plan of the city. The multiplier effect of the Library is far more than just being a single building that only has a micro effect on its surrounding. The effect of the building is a major one. In that sense, the building has affected the whole city and has contributed effectively to enhancing the image of the city and has become a major tourist destination, in the same way that Balboa museum has affected the city of Balboa and Sidney Opera House has affected Sidney. The urban-architectural relationship is very clear in the previous stated examples. The building jumps from being influential on its near surrounding to a larger scale of being the city's main attraction and meeting point of interests. The new Library is turning out to be a symbol of the city and a catalyst of the whole development of the city.

Once again the city has regained its old reputation as a local and international tourist destination. According to statistics, Alexandria attracted about 309000 foreign tourists, in 2002^v. Though the number is still meagre and far from the city's potentials.

6 - The New Borg El Arab Airport

The airport is located about 43 km west of Alexandria, close to Borg El Arab New City^{vi}, on a site of 18km². The new airport consists of a passenger terminal of over an area of 22000m² with a capacity of 1.5 million passengers per year. The building includes many passengers' services such as banks, travel agencies, cafeterias, and shops. The project includes 4 new runways and a cargo terminal with a capacity of 10000 ton/year. In addition to parking lots, a bus terminal, fire station, observation tower and a weather station. The vicinity of the project is expected to be developed and enhance the links between the city and the new Borg El Arab city.



General view of the passengers' terminal.
Consultants: JAC Japan, ECG Egypt, NACO Holland
Source: New Borg El Arab Airport Administration Authority



The exterior and the interior of the passengers' terminal.
Source: the author

II Future Projects

With growing international competition among cities to attract more visitors, each city is trying to create more attractions. Alexandria, joining this competition, is also planning for some major future urban projects. These planned projects will certainly have a grand impact on the city's urban image and functions.

1 - The Alexandria Aquarium

There are plans for a new aquarium that will be constructed in Anfoushi area. The proposed aquarium will be an environmental center focusing mainly on species from the Mediterranean and the Nile. The complex will contain a 4 star hotel, conference center, retail shops, restaurants and a Marine Research Institute.^{vii}



The new Alexandria Aquarium and marine life institute, designed by C&P, Chermayef & Poole Inc
Source: www.cp-architects.com

2 - The Alexandria Underwater Archeological Museum

Due to the latest discoveries of underwater archeology in the Eastern Harbor of Alexandria, such as Cleopatra's palace and remains of the Pharos Lighthouse, an Underwater Archeological Museum is planned to be constructed in front of the Library of Alexandria to house these findings. The preliminary design is by Jacque Roguerie. The project consists of two parts, exhibition halls and an interpretation center above sea level, and exhibition tanks underwater displaying the sunken archaeology. The museum's design is such that it would be both an inland and submarine structure. The building will comprise four tall structures shaped like the sails of the traditional sailboats used in the Nile. From the inland building, underwater fiberglass tunnels will take visitors to structures where they can view antiquities still lying on the seabed.^{viii}



Images of the proposed underwater archaeological museum in Alexandria
Source: www.rougerie.com

3 - Development of the Eastern Harbor

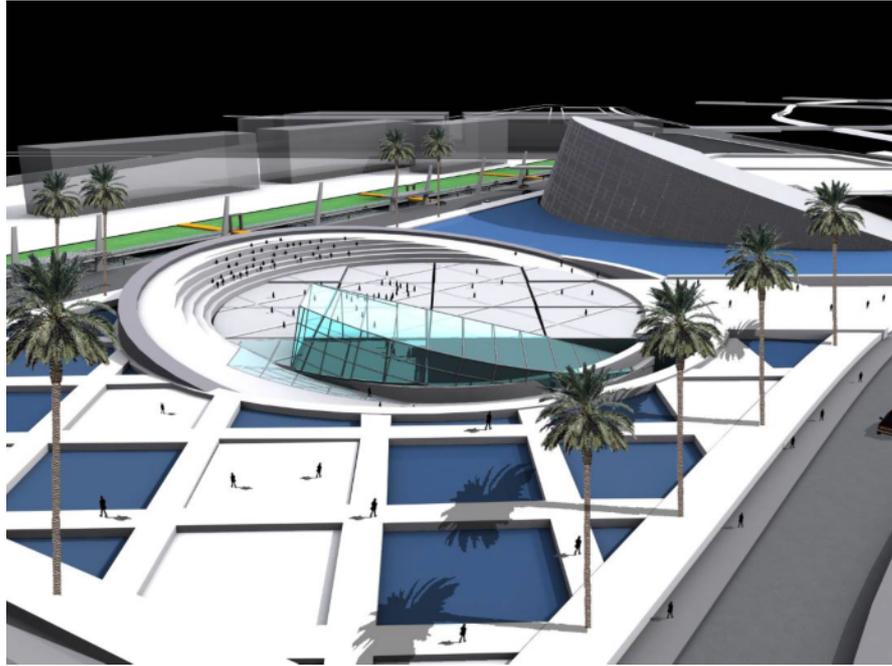
In 2004 The Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Centre in collaboration with studio Bertocchini and Ruggiero presented a futuristic project for the development of the waterfront of Alexandria. The proposal included many development projects such as the Pharos hotel, underwater archaeological museum and an extension of the library of Alexandria's cultural facilities. The project was exhibited at the Biennale of Venice; Cities on Water section in September 2004. The proposed vision aimed the following:^{ix}

1. Enhancing the tourist experiences and foster tourism development as well as protecting heritage.
2. Creating new pedestrian experiences and establishing a relationship with the water edge while promoting leisure activities such as bathing, yachting, and fishing.
3. Economic sustainability while preserving traditional activities (e.g. fishing or boat building) is promoted with the creation of new facilities such as fishing port, yachting marinas, etc. the proposal also includes a Euro Mediterranean Bank and stock exchange.
4. The renovation of the cosmopolitan heritage of the 19th and the early 20th century waterfront while creating the Pharos hotel at the edge of the Silsileh and the forum convention centre with its hotel facilities.
5. Preserving the environment is another feature of the proposal based on the creation of an aquarium and marine life institute and an environmentally controlled botanical garden.



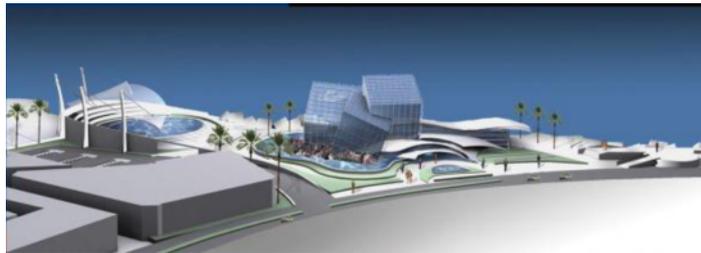
General overview of the proposed development

Source: Med Cities, *The Mediterranean City: dialogue among cultures*, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Press. 2005, p. 100



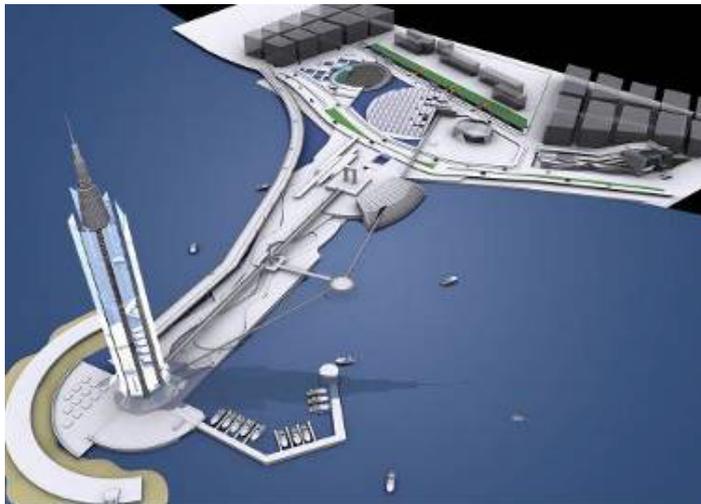
Bibliotheca plaza

Source: Med Cities, *The Mediterranean City: dialogue among cultures*, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Press. 2005, p.104



Aquarium and marine life institute

source: Med Cities, *The Mediterranean City: dialogue among cultures*, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Press. 2005, p.100



The Pharos Hotel and the Underwater Archaeological Museum

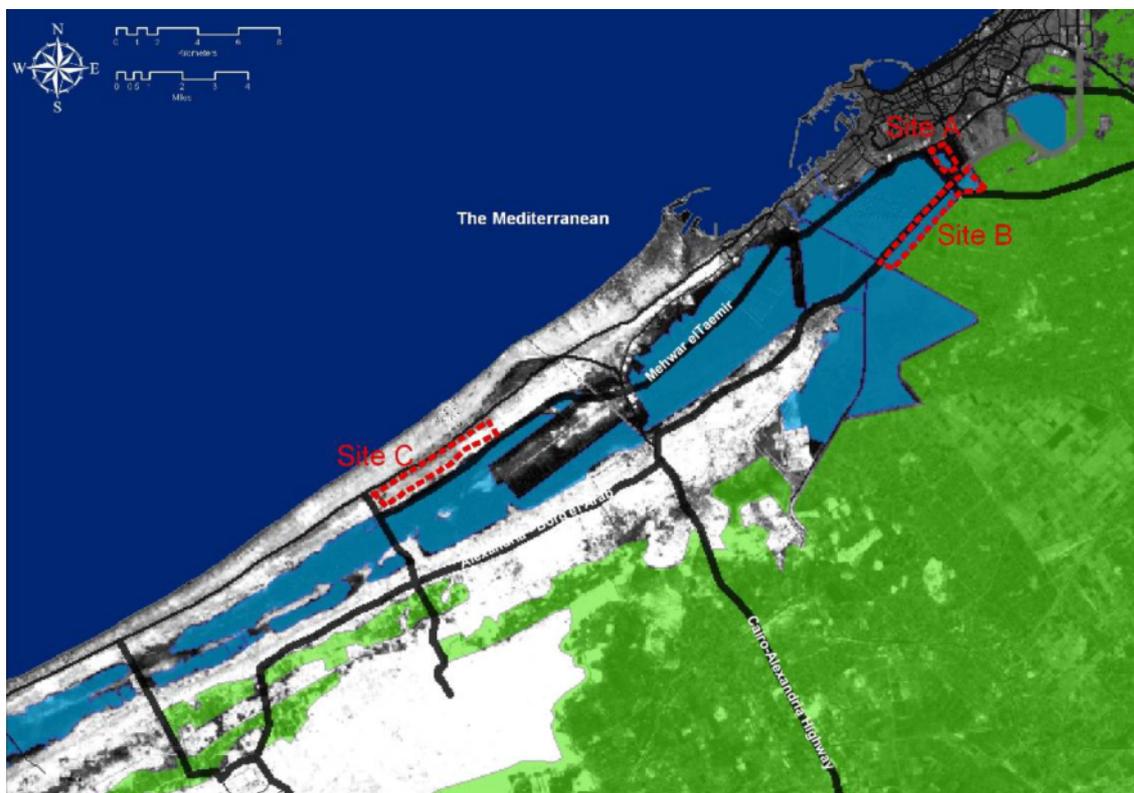
Source: Med Cities, *The Mediterranean City: dialogue among cultures*, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Press. 2005, p. 103

In order to widen the scope of vision and gather more ideas, an architectural competition for the development of the Eastern Harbor was organized. The competition was organized by the Alexandria Governorate and the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center in December 2004. The aim of the competition was to establish an overall development strategy for the development of the Eastern Harbor and to propose a number of mega projects that would develop the city and help it to regain its prominent posture as a leading city in the Mediterranean basin. 49 participants' applied and only 33 contenders supplied their visions.

Moreover, in 2005 the Bibliotheca Alexandria and the Governorate of Alexandria reorganized another local and an international competition to regenerate the Eastern Harbor to help establish the city's position as one of the leading cultural centers in the Mediterranean. The idea was to put the newly planned projects within a wider urban planning concept, reenergize the waterfront environment, improve transport and pedestrian accessibility and enhance civic destinations as well as create investment opportunities by the integration of existing historic sites and new developments.^x

The New Alexandria

An architectural design competition was announced in 2007 by Alexandria Governorate to develop three areas around and in Lake Mariout. The project was named "New Alexandria" and was recently approved by the Egyptian Prime Minister.^{xi}



The location of the 3 proposed areas for development by the Government of Alexandria.

source: Yasser G. Aref, Mohamed M. Mehaina, *Urban Natural Forms, Lake Mariout Scenarios of Deterioration Or Prospects of Sustainability*, GreenLink Mediterranean seminar, "Respecting Nature and Environment In Urban Extensions", Seminar co-financed by Interreg IIIBMedocc, Firenze, 30 May 2008.

The aim of the project was to provide new areas for housing, commercial and mixed use developments to de-clutter the city. The competitors presented new urban planning and architectural concepts, which if realized would be a turning point in the transformation of the city. The following figures illustrate some the trends that are intended for the expansion of the city rendering a sleek ultra modern style of architecture and a western planning scheme.

The projects developed by planners are:

- Site A: Named “Alex Gate”.
- Site B: The 1000 feddans fishery basin - named “Smart Village”.
- Site C: Located at the Northern banks of Lake Mariout.

Land uses proposed in these mixed use developments such as cultural, entertainment, commercial, business, and residential uses.





General view of the proposed developments

source: Extracted from a CD published by The Governorate of Alexandria, The future vision of Alexandria Governorate, 2008

Conclusion:

It is hoped that the future projects which are planned for Alexandria be achieved for these projects will improve the quality of the urban environment and add to the cultural and urban assets of the city, making it a regional destination and a tourist hub. However, the new projects must also incorporate and respect the historic worth of the city and put into consideration the conservation of its surrounding environment and preserving the city's urban character.

Endnotes

ⁱ For detailed account of this phenomena refer to Yasser G. Aref, Rediscovering Downtown Alexandria, Egypt International Seminar on the Management of the Shared Mediterranean Heritage, Ismarmed, 5th Conference on the Modern Heritage, March 29-31, 2005, Alexandria, Egypt

ⁱⁱ Alexandria the Pearl of Egyptians ports. Booklet published by Alexandria Port Authority, Ministry of Transportation, Undated

ⁱⁱⁱ The Engineering Center was established at the Faculty of Engineering in 1996 as a special unit to give services to the community in different engineering fields, in addition to this it participates in enhancing the environment. These services are given through highly qualified experienced personnel along with very highly equipped labs.

^{iv} According to the Visits Department, Library of Alexandria statistics.

^v Alexandria City Profile 2005, a project funded by European Commission, Government of Italy, Government of Belgium, Government of Netherlands, and designed and implemented by un_ Habitat, initial report.

^{vi} Borg El Arab New city is a satellite city, founded by presidential decree no 506/1979, about 60 km west of Alexandria and 7 km south of the Mediterranean. It was established to absorb some of the population of Alexandria. The city has weak transportation links with Alexandria. www.urban-comm.gov.eg

^{vii} The project is now pending due to the lack of funds to pursue with its development. For more information about the project refer to <http://www.csp-architects.com>

^{viii} Andrew Bossone, Underwater Museum Planned for Egypt's Alexandria, for National Geographic News, September 16, 2008

^{ix} Med Cities, The Mediterranean City: dialogue among cultures, Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina Press.2005, p.100

^x www.som.com

^{xi} According to the official website of the governorate of Alexandria www.alexandria.gov.eg