

Reimagining Cairo through its passageways

By CLUSTER (https://www.urbanafrica.net/?taxonomy_author=cluster) on 8 July 2015 Urban design (<https://www.urbanafrica.net/theme/built-environment/urban-design/>) | Cairo (<https://www.urbanafrica.net/region/egypt/cairo/>)



Downtown Cairo was partially modeled after European cities in the late nineteenth century, including Paris and Vienna. The commercial arcade was one of the key urban typologies inserted within, or between many buildings Downtown. Having undergone periods of prosperity, deterioration, and decay over the past decades, many Downtown passageways serve today as sites for rich and diverse uses and activities. These activities extend to the gaps between buildings, setbacks, courtyards, and a number of side streets that were either officially or de facto pedestrianized.

Uses of these spaces range from food places and coffee shops, to sites for trade and retail, including stationeries and bookstores, bars and restaurants, galleries and art spaces. Being off the main channels of traffic, they operate as hubs for competing interests and claims to space. Viewed together, they offer an opportunity to re-envision Downtown as a network of pathways housing commerce and entertainment. They also offer a counter-point to the traffic and street grid, and may serve as a stage for periodic artistic and cultural programs, such as book fairs, children's festivals, flea markets, and even bike ways and greenways.

CLUSTER's *Cairo Downtown Passages* (<http://clustercairo.org/cluster/design/cairo-downtown-passages-philips-passage>) project falls within the context of our broader research endeavor exploring the network of Cairo's Downtown passages. These passageways offer an alternative framework for the development and revitalization of Downtown.

Cairo Downtown Passages aimed to develop a pilot urban design and art project in the northern part of downtown Cairo, highlighting existing and emerging initiatives and activating underutilized public spaces. This passageway redevelopment project emerged from a design workshop held in April 2014, organized collaboratively by CLUSTER with DEDI and CKU, exploring art and design interventions in two passageways in Downtown Cairo: the **Kodak** (<http://clustercairo.org/cluster/design/cairo-downtown-passages-kodak-passage>) and **Phillips** (<http://clustercairo.org/cluster/design/cairo-downtown-passages-philips-passage>) Passageways. CLUSTER has been working in the two passages over an extended period, undertaking mapping, interviews and outreach as part of our larger project on Downtown passageways as an alternative framework for development. This pilot project seeks to promote a more diverse, inclusive, and accessible public space downtown.

The outcome of the four-day design workshop selected by a juried review were two concepts: the "Green Oasis" project for the Kodak Passage, and the "Light Oasis" for the Philips Passage. CLUSTER undertook the design development and implementation of the concepts, further adapting them to the needs of the local community and various stakeholders. CLUSTER's designs emphasize a more diverse, safer, and environmentally enhanced experience in the passageways. The "Green Oasis" transforms Kodak into a pedestrian park, while the "Light Oasis" in Philips brings marquee lighting and the possibility for film screenings to a previously dark and decaying space. The implementation was completed and the newly designed passages were inaugurated on January 17, 2015.



(<https://www.urbanafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Reimagining-Cairo-1-.jpg>)

CLUSTER's Philips Passage Re-design, The Light Oasis.

CLUSTER (<http://clustercairo.org/>) — Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research — aims at establishing a critical space for urban discourse. CLUSTER engages critical theorization while being grounded in professional practice, negotiating the blurred boundaries between formal/institutional regulations and everyday urban informality

Main image: CLUSTER's Kodak Passage Re-design, The Green Oasis.

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[...] The Cairo Laboratory for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research is redesigning city passageways to activate underused public spaces downtown. [...]

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