

# New Cairo's Urban Paradox

## All-Inclusive Urbanism vs. Social Exclusion

**Mahmoud. R. A.<sup>1</sup>, Rashed. R.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Ain Shams University, Department of Urban Planning and Design  
 Cairo, Egypt

UFE Université Française d'Égypte, Département d'Architecture  
 Cairo, Egypt

e-mail: [randaabdelaziz@yahoo.fr](mailto:randaabdelaziz@yahoo.fr)  
[randaabdelaziz@eng.asu.edu.eg](mailto:randaabdelaziz@eng.asu.edu.eg)

<sup>2</sup> Ain Shams University, Department of Urban Planning and Design  
 Cairo, Egypt

e-mail: [rowaida.rashed@oekoplan.com](mailto:rowaida.rashed@oekoplan.com)  
[rowaida\\_rashed@eng.asu.edu.eg](mailto:rowaida_rashed@eng.asu.edu.eg)

**Abstract:** The rapid urbanization of the Egyptian capital and the disappearance of the thin line separating between urban and rural areas, pushed different categories of the population to seek other places to reside. In the 90s, the new settlement of New Cairo appeared as a breakthrough. Its all-inclusive urbanism and planning trends integrated social, economic and physical aspects.

On the one hand, New Cairo was originally designed to include a wide variety of citizens and activities all assimilated together and well-defined in one plan. On the other hand, today New Cairo is a developed city where gated communities seem to outnumber free residential areas. An example of all-inclusive built environment where social exclusion is prevailing!

This paper aims at scrutinizing, as well as tracing this paradigm shift in the urban evolution of New Cairo. It starts with a thoroughly inductive analysis of the urban concepts involved originally in its planning, compared to the actual urban situation. Subsequently, we might be able to understand the emergence of a "*ghettoisation*" phenomenon.

**Keywords:** All-inclusive urbanism- Gated-communities- "*Ghettoisation*"- New Cairo- Social exclusion

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Historical preview

Cairo's urban dynamics obliged decision makers, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to always stumble on new solutions for the capital's problems and the population growth. Heliopolis was the first attempt in 1905 to seek a viable way out into the desert, 10 km away from Cairo's center. Since its realization, especially with the existence of a transportation system,

Heliopolis acted as a magnet attracting urbanization to the empty desert space that was separating it from the capital. The result was a succession of new settlements that bound Heliopolis with Cairo while transforming it from a garden city, in the middle of the desert, into an urban district (Mahmoud, 2010). Until the early 1960s Cairo had already expanded largely with considerable governmental investments in the economic/public housing domain, especially within a socialist regime installed deeply by Nasser after the 1952 revolution (Rashed, 2014). The uncontrolled rapid demographic growth (natural increase and rural migration to Cairo) has resulted in urban expansions of the capital, which varied from urban-planned settlements like Nasr City or Mohandessin, which was founded on agricultural land-to informal settlements as *Mansheyat Nasser* or *Hagganah*. Cairo's expansions continued substantially under Sadat's regime to the extent of suggesting the creation of new cities and new urban communities in the desert around Cairo, to be able to face the rapid pace of population growth.

After the mid-eighties, Cairo entered a new era, as the population growth started to slow down whilst the expansion of the informal areas increased, basically because of the governmental inability to face the economic housing demand. In the nineties, new urban communities started to be well-established, especially with the development of road networks. New Cairo, the object of our research, was one of the most important among the new urban settlements.

## **1.2. New Settlement, New Perspective**

New Cairo was a new attempt to get out of the Egyptian capital with all its troubles. In 1993, the nucleus of New Cairo was already existing to the east of Cairo: the first, the third and the fifth settlements. Simultaneously, these new spots were attracting lots of developers, investors and construction activities. Consequently, the government decided to increase the areas designated for these new urban settlements and to include them in one larger settlement that will hold the name of New Cairo. Thus, the remaining spaces between the first three settlements were divided and offered in the market to be sold for investment. Moreover, extra residential areas were added to the east of the first three settlements to enlarge, even more, the surface area of the new urban settlement of New Cairo (El Khorazaty, 2006).

Not only was New Cairo a new attempt to get out of the capital with all its troubles, but it was also a new vision of a city of all-inclusive urbanism. Basically, the intention was to address different social classes and the increasing divide between rich and poor; as well as to minimize the lack of affordable housing and to enhance the enforcement of urban laws. The way New Cairo developed was unfortunately the dichotomy of all-inclusive urbanism. It actually represents a setup for another process of social exclusion, due to several reasons: the appearance of walled gated communities, whether residential, business, educational or commercial, which eventually led to urban fragmentation. This shift in the urban planning intentions of New Cairo confronted us, thus constituting the object of this research.

### **1.3. Paper's Interests and Objectives**

Today, the new settlement of New Cairo is tightly linked to the extensive existence of residential compounds. These compounds are simultaneously gated in order to control accessibility for security and cultural reasons. This phenomenon, that had started back in the mid-nineties and has been accelerating since, threatens, in our opinion, the social morphology of this new community. Especially that New Cairo was originally an attempt to integrate all social classes in one urban fabric.

Based on both theoretical and empirical research, this paper aims at demonstrating how the proliferation of this type of urbanization in a new settlement- originally designed to follow all-inclusive urbanism rules or thoughts- eventually promoted a social exclusion phenomenon. More explicitly, this research is an attempt to scrutinize the phenomenon of the sprawl of gated communities in a new society and its linkage to the turning point "in New Cairo's urban evolution" from all-inclusive urbanism to social exclusion

## **2. Research Outlines**

### **2.1. Research Approach**

The research approach is structured at different levels. Firstly, for us to be able to understand New Cairo's paradox, the research will be fed by a literature review that encompasses several urban sociological phenomena such as social exclusion *and ghettoisation*, etc. Secondly, a field survey will be conducted in parallel with context appreciation to help us with relating different phenomena to the real urban environment. Finally, our research will be fed with interviews, especially with decision makers and planners, as well as cartographic and data analysis. By comparing the master plans of New Cairo, starting by its initial planning idea till today, we expect to elucidate the shift and the paradox in the urbanization process of this new settlement.

### **2.2. Literature review**

New Cairo's Paradox requires the understanding of some urban sociology terms and phenomena. Despite the fact that New Cairo was originally planned according to all-inclusive urbanism concept, nowadays it is a living example of social exclusion, due to the uncontrolled sprawl of gated communities that will eventually lead to a *ghettoisation* phenomenon.

**All-inclusive Urbanism** means an urbanism for all. The new concept of all-inclusive urbanism appeared recently to be applied in the urban design field. It is more about the need to create an urban environment that will accommodate a wide variety of social classes and include several activities (Eren, 2004). These all-inclusive urban environments should be able to subsist by avoiding marginalization. It can also be achieved through applying sensitive policies that allow all community individuals to grow economically as the physical urban environment evolves. This trend of planning takes into consideration the wide variety of abilities of each individual, it basically reinforces the involvement of each community member in the physical built environment. This active participation will encourage different individuals to reshape their built environment according to their needs.

**Social Exclusion:** the term of "social exclusion or marginalization" is used when a group of individuals or communities are systematically excluded or blocked from accessing certain services or practicing certain rights. The term "exclusion" embodies the opposite of "inclusion". This process of being deprived from certain opportunities or resources that are available to other individuals or groups of people might be connected to the individual's social class, economic status, skin colour or race. On the one hand, this process could happen naturally by the inability of some community members to access certain places or to benefit from certain services due to lack of money or social status. On the other hand, the same process could be reinforced physically by adding gates or barriers that cannot be crossed unless being a member or a part of that gated community.

Social exclusion of a group of individuals from a certain community eventually affects the social morphology of this community. As Emile Durkheim states, "Social life rests upon a substratum determinate in both size and form. It is made up of the mass of individuals, who constitute society, the manner in which they have settled upon the earth, the nature and configuration of those things of all kinds which affect collective relationships." (Durkheim, 1895:241). He also underlined the opposition between the two phenomena, social exclusion versus social cohesion and their consequences on the community. These two phenomena can either tie all the groups of a certain community together by blending them into a complex relationship or tearing this community apart with weak social bonds that will eventually affect the relationship between these society members and their nation (Durkheim, 1895). It will eventually lead to social segregation, inaccessibility to living resources and inequalities in living conditions (Wirth, 1938).

**Gated communities** are walled protected enclaves. Besides, they are privatized, monitored and secured spaces for residence, leisure, work, education, etc. (Caldera, 1996). The main justification of their existence is the feeling of insecurity, the fear of the other and of what he is capable of, the fear of violence! The necessity of belonging to a homogeneous community. It is the need of living without being criticized by others because of different social practices or habits, especially with the lack of liberty in a fake urban environment. An urban environment that welcomed long ago rural practices, the antithesis of city life. It is a whole new perspective of an urban environment that promoted social segregation to subsist. These walled communities are the secretion of an urban evolution that got out of control, the fight for the right to the city and the dream of "*le bien être*". They are the opposite of what we call an "urban process" as a collective social action. They represent another culture that abandons the wellbeing of a collective inclusive society for the welfare of individuals.

The expanding scale of gated communities, surrounded by high walls, whether residential or not, redefined the role and the image of essential constituents of the urban fabric. Streets, public spaces and squares take a whole new aspect where gated communities prevail. The spread of gated communities over the urban tissue, puts the remaining spaces in a critical framework. These remaining spaces will be automatically labelled as the residuals of that urban fabric. Thus, they will be treated and will be lived-in differently. Consequently, the type of activities practiced in these spaces will be limited or constrained as well as their identity. This will lead us to a contextual dichotomy between what happens inside versus outside the gates. Most of the urban maladies that people escape from, to find their perfect life inside the walls, will eventually and progressively be formed in the residual spaces outside the fences.

Especially, when it comes to high fences/walls as in the case of New Cairo. Gated communities illustrate the image of islands of wealth and wellbeing in oceans of poverty; it's relatively a continuous representation of social exclusion rather than lack of resources (Sardar, 2010).

**Ghettoisation** is a French term used to describe the process of creating ghettos. A **ghetto** is a word used to describe a place in the city where a group of minority citizens live. Originally the term ghetto was first used in Venice, when back in 1527, the Jews were ordered by a decree to move to *Cannaregio* area in which the old cannon-melting process was carried out. This is how the word "**ghetto**" that means melting in Italian language was originally born to signify a part of the city where the minority of Jews were restricted and segregated to live.

Progressively the term surpassed its original use to signify any part of a city, where an excluded minority of individuals live together while forming a homogeneous community. At the beginning, this term was strongly related to exclude poor communities, where disadvantaged residential areas, usually troubled with high crime rates, struggle to subsist. Nowadays, this term has largely surpassed its original and trendy meaning to symbolize most of the socially-segregated or self-excluded groups of people in an enclave in the city, *vis-à-vis* the rest of population.

Hence, the **Ghettoisation** is a process that promotes the creation of enclaves -sometimes walled which aggravates the process- in the urban fabric in order to shelter minorities of social groups for them to be able to form a homogeneous community. Thus, this process is actually a masked action of social segregation that will fragmentize eventually the urban tissue of a city.

### **3. Paradigm shift: Governmental Urban Politics vs. Private Sector's Interest**

In order to understand the turning point in New Cairo's urban evolution from all-inclusive urbanism to social exclusion, we chose to analyse its master plan since 1993 till today (Fig.1). We will also scrutinize all the phases of its extension, as well as the deviations from the original master plan. These analyses, along with the context appreciation and the data we managed to obtain, will permit us to successfully understand the shift in New Cairo's urban evolution process



### 3.1. New Cairo as a Governmental Endeavour of All-inclusive Urbanism

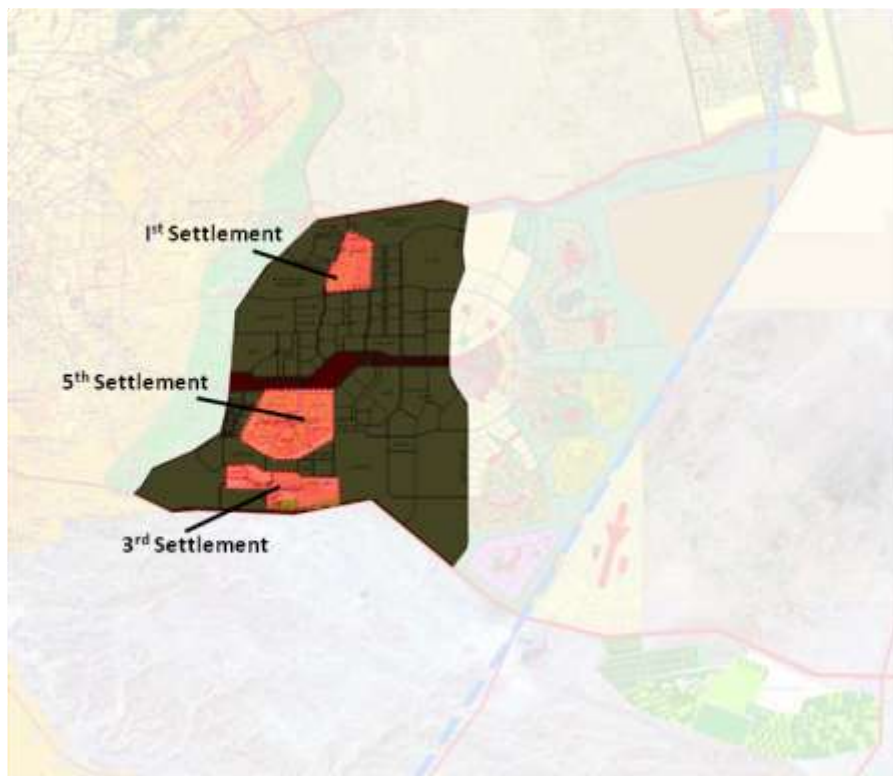
#### 3.1.1. Phase 1: 1993-1997 (Fig. 2&3)

The previous existence of the three settlements: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, promoted the governmental vision of creating a new settlement based on all-inclusive urbanism ideas. These three new settlements enclosed different types of economic, low-income housing and were planned to contain neighborhoods with greenery and service centers. Consequently, the settlement of New Cairo was planned with an approximate area of 115 km<sup>2</sup> (approximately 27,000 feddans) targeting a population of 1 million inhabitants (El Khorazaty, T., 2006).



Figure 1: Economic housing that existed in the 5<sup>th</sup> settlement since the start of New Cairo (Author, 2016)

Figure1 by the researcher



**Figure 2: 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> settlements included in New Cairo master plan 1993 (Oekoplan Engineering Consultations, (1997), New Cairo City Report)**

### **3.1.2. Phase 2: 1997 (Fig. 4&5)**

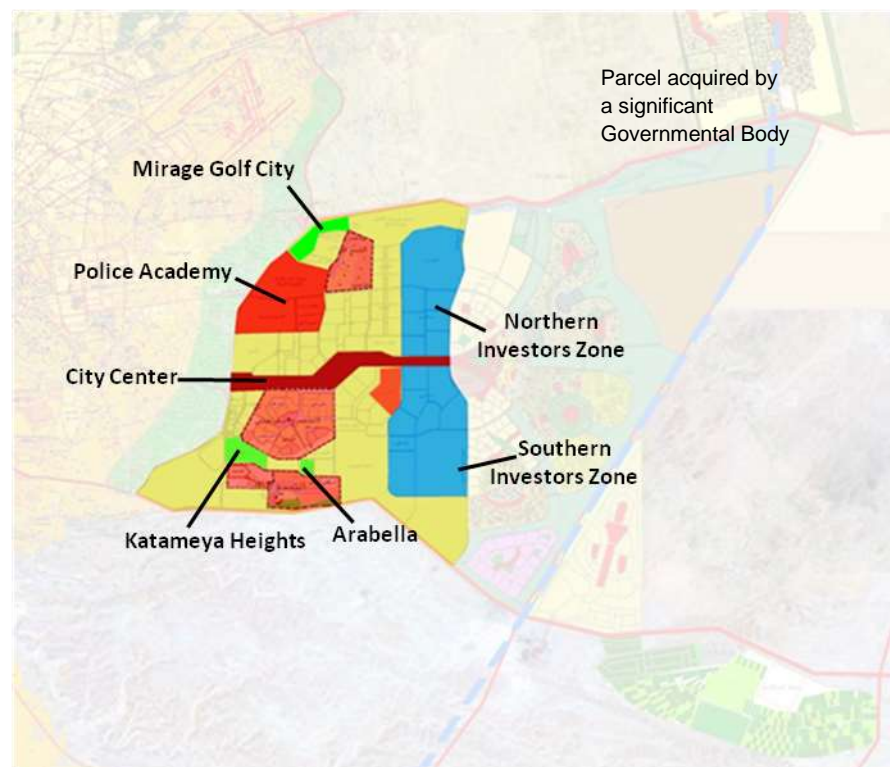
New Cairo City was initially created by developing and filling up the areas between the existing settlements with planned neighbourhoods, containing individual residential plots (each with an approximate area of 600 m<sup>2</sup> and building heights ranging from G+3 till G+5). Simultaneously, large-scale parcels have been offered to investors for development: the most prominent of which were Katameya Heights (350 feddans), Arabella (100 feddans), Mirage Golf City (400 feddans), and Al-Rehab (1500 feddans); in addition to other smaller scale parcels in the northern and southern investors' zones, with areas ranging from 15 to 100 feddans. It is worth pointing out that offering such parcels to investors to develop gated communities has been meant to facilitate their management and maintenance, which relieved the government greatly in this respect and was meant to accelerate the development of the city itself.





**Figure 3: Katameya Heights, 5<sup>th</sup> Settlement Service Center, in addition to Neighbourhoods that existed back in 1997 (Author, 2016)**

The linear city center with a length of approximately 13 km and a width ranging from 300 to 600m, linking New Cairo from the east to the west, has been planned to accommodate the general services of the city, in addition to mixed uses: retail, entertainment, offices, hotels and sports clubs, with building heights ranging from G+3 till G+7. Furthermore, the Police Academy acquired a land parcel along the ring road, covering an area of approximately 1500 feddans, and another significant governmental body acquired a land parcel of 400 feddans within the city.



**Figure 4: New Cairo City master plan in 1997 including the three settlements, first gated communities, the City Center, the Northern and the Southern Investors Zones (Oekoplan Engineering Consultations, (1997), New Cairo City Report)**



Despite the fact that some gated communities had started to appear at the time, they were not totally separated from their surroundings due to the fact that the design of their fences was controlled by the law: a 40-cm brick base and a 160-cm metal fence, allowing for adequate visual integration with the city.

### **3.1.3. Phase 3: 1997-1999 (Fig. 6&7)**



**Figure 6 : Development of New Cairo: Al-Rehab City, Individual Housing and the 90 Street at the 5<sup>th</sup> Settlement that started to develop massively back in 1999. (Author, 2016)**



**Figure 5: The winning proposal for New Cairo's extension in 1997 (Oekoplan Engineering Consultations, (1997), New Cairo City Report)**

At this time, the city had developed quickly, including the individual plots within the neighbourhoods, the neighbourhood and district services, the first gated communities, and the city center with some offices. Accordingly, the government announced a competition for the extension of New Cairo City to reach a total area of 45,000 feddans and to house 3 million inhabitants. The winning proposal had suggested the development of five oases, amid green, open spaces. Each oasis contained neighbourhoods and districts that were mainly planned to

accommodate individual plots and very few gated communities to continue following the concept of all-inclusive urbanism. However, the winning proposal wasn't implemented, except for the main structure of the city extension and part of the land use: The city center had been extended and some large parcels for universities and other amenities had been designated. It is worth pointing out that the large-scale parcel in the north-eastern corner of the city shows that, at the time of the competition, there had already been ideas to offer mega-scale parcels to investors.

### **3.2. Private Residential Compounds, *Ghettoisation* and Social Exclusion**

#### **3.2.1. Phase 4: 1999-2010 (Fig. 8&9)**

The real shift in the urban environment had happened at this point in time: after abandoning the winning proposal for the extension and due to lack of governmental resources, the government had started offering even larger parcels to investors (more than 1000 feddans), especially after the success of Al-Rehab City, as a self-sufficient community.

This era is marked by massive investments in the real estate market promoted in the media and encouraged by the US Dollar unstable exchange rate. The master plan implemented between 1999 and 2010 (Fig.8) elucidates the difference between urban policies or targets in the original master plan and those of the extension. The yellow colour indicates the parcels sold to private investors, which imbalances the urban idea of all-inclusive urbanism intended previously in the original master plan. Nevertheless, the original master plan wasn't exempted either from the investors' invasion. In addition to the first gated communities of New Cairo (Mirage Golf City, Katameya Heights and Arabella) and the Northern and Southern Investors' zones (the majority developed into gated communities behind high walls), a part of the Police academy was sold and transformed into walled enclaves as well (Katameya Residence, Porto Cairo, Montagaa Al-Nakhiel and Swan Lake). By the end of this phase, living in private residential compounds started to symbolize everyone's ultimate dream. The promoted image of being different and socially high-ranked because of living in an isolated green compound within a homogenous community slipped overwhelmingly into Egyptians' heads.

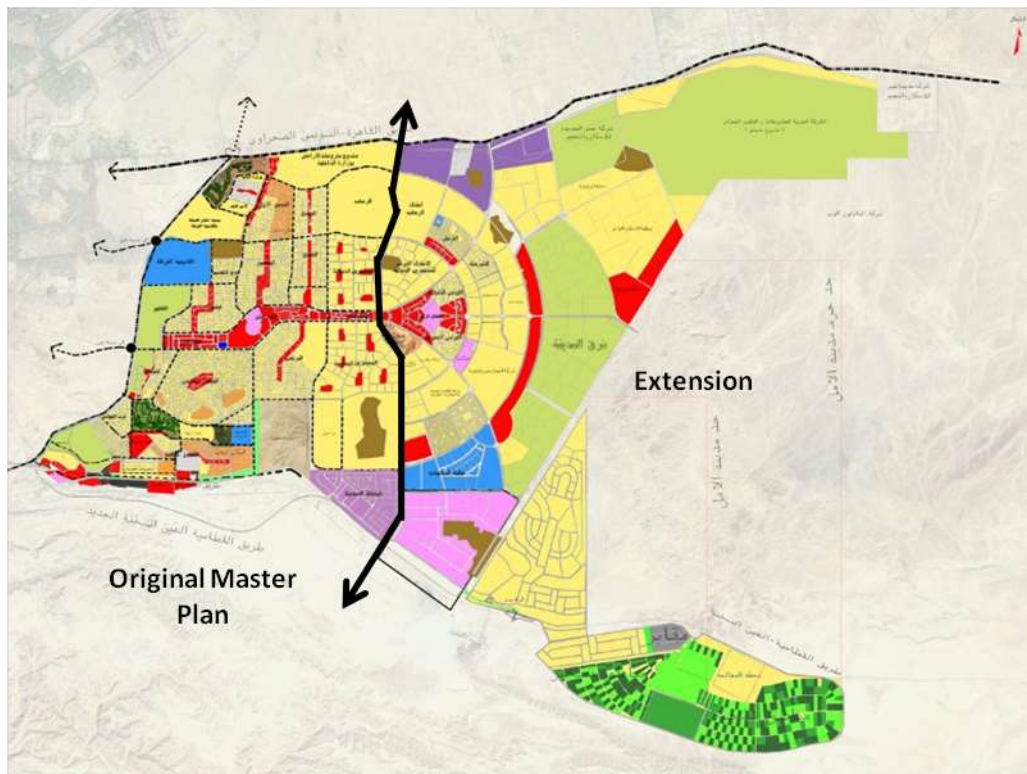


Figure 7: Master Plan of New Cairo between 1999 and 2010 (GOPP and NUCA, 2014; modified by Author)



Figure 8: Gated Communities in the Northern and Southern Zones that started to outline a privileged social image since the year 2000. (Author, 2016)

### 3.2.2. Phase 5: 2010 to present (Fig. 10&11)



Figure 9: Different Gated Communities in New Cairo's extension. (Author, 2016)

This phase has been struck by the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and the instability of the economic situation in Egypt. The only market that kept its value was the real estate market. This alone was a catalyst for investing even more in that market. Consequently, the number of gated communities augmented to be able to face the demand. Nowadays the extended part of New Cairo consists mainly of gated communities, residential, educational, etc. (Fig.11), many of which are developed by large investment companies, developing large scale parcels, with areas more than 1000 feddans. Moreover, due to security and cultural needs, as well as the continuous media promotion for the social image of living in a gated community, some areas were walled to isolate houses from the rest of the settlement like in the case of The West of the Golf area adjacent to Katameya Heights, the housing of Public Security and the Ministry of Interior in Front of Mirage Golf City. The result is the appearance of a **Ghettoisation** phenomenon that will lead in our opinion to a certain social exclusion.



Figure 10: Latest Master Plan of New Cairo with its extensions, in which the investors' yellow colour prevails. (GOPP &

### 3.3. Outcomes and Remarks

New Cairo's urban paradox is incredibly noticeable when the original master plan- *with all-inclusive intentions*- and the implemented extension plan- *in which investors' parcels outnumber the remaining uses*- are compared. This paradox is clearly legible through the widely spread high-walled enclaves in the city, especially in the newly-developed eastern part. The existence of gated communities at this rate will residualize road networks and ungated public spaces; thus all the remaining parts of the urban fabric will be looked at or treated as left-over areas. This marginalization is very well perceived if we compare the same brands of outdoor retail, existing, for example, in Downtown commercial center and CFC (Cairo Festival City). Before the inauguration of CFC different social classes used to go to Downtown, while after The Village opening in CFC (open-air area with a huge food court



and dancing fountains), the same social classes now prefer to go there because they feel more secure and unseen in a gated area. Moreover, "exacerbation of social cleavages existing already is promoted by the proliferation of gated communities" (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). The need to be or to live in a gated area will eventually lead to social exclusion and a **Ghettoisation** phenomenon, because at the end of the day, these gated communities will only be reserved for certain social classes, where the rest of the population will be prohibited. Moreover, there is also that social hierarchy between different residential compounds. Furthermore, within the same compound there is a competition between different residences; and due to cultural beliefs and lack of the sense of security, houses are also gated inside the gated communities.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The world-wide proliferation of Gated Communities over the past twenty years is a clear manifestation of the need for self-segregation. It represents the individuals' dreams of living "*la belle vie*", of being secured and protected in a self-made cocoon. There is also the marketed vision of living in a bubble, escaping from all city problems: traffic, garbage and sexual harassment (Cairo Observer, 2013). As Le Goix pointed in his research gated communities are considered "as symptoms of urban pathologies, among them social exclusion is considered to be preeminent." (Le Goix, 2005).

New Cairo was a new attempt of all-inclusive urbanism that ended up with a **Ghettoisation** phenomenon and social exclusion due to several factors. Firstly, for a settlement to be socially sustainable, marginalization and segregation should be avoided among its population (Bagaeen & Uduku, 2010). However, from the very beginning, there were seeds of social segregation represented by the very first lavish gated communities as Katameya heights, Mirage Golf City and Arabella. These communities were the igniters of an imbalanced urbanization process. They have set certain models of housing types, lifestyles and qualities that most of the middle to upper social classes were eager or dreaming to have. Secondly, this paradoxical urbanization process was also promoted by the instability of the Egyptian economic situation, as well as the Egyptian pound inflation over the past few years that made the real estate market *appear* to be the most stable to invest in. Finally, the withdrawal of governmental intentions in creating an all-inclusive urbanism settlement for the benefit of the private sector, which greatly helped the government with developing and managing large parcels in the city, thus alleviating a lot of the pressure off its shoulders, and consequently facilitating the continuity and the aggravation of the process of building gated communities behind "*uncontrolled*" high walls. Consequently, the heterogeneous sprawl of gated communities in New Cairo will eventually result in social exclusion, **Ghettoisation** and lack of public spaces. City streets will be treated as leftover areas that take the user from point A to point B without any urban interaction; for that reason walking in the city street will be alienated from urban activities, especially at night, streets will be deserted.

New Cairo's urban paradoxical process will redefine city components in urban studies, thus it needs to be scrutinized to be aware of its causes, catalysts and origins. As a living example of urban paradox, its analysis might help prevent similar actions in further urban developments.

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