

Latest Street Food Vending Organization Attempts in Cairo: An Evaluation of the “Street 306” Model

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Abstract

Street vending plays an important role in the urban retail economy and often contributes to the liveliness of the urban environment. Unfortunately, such activity is usually informal and thus it often affects the quality of urban public spaces. In Egypt, most governmental solutions to organize street vending have relied on eviction and/or relocation to formal markets. Recently, several “Street 306” projects have been initiated as a novel attempt to organize and legalize street food vending in Cairo. Through a case study approach, this study evaluates one of these new projects, namely Street 306 Dokki. More specifically the study investigates opinions of both customers and vendors and assesses the project in terms of quality attributes of successful urban public spaces extracted from the urban design literature. The qualitative case study relies on multiple methods of data collection including field physical documentation, behavioral observation sessions, and semi-structured interviews. Findings suggest that Street 306 Dokki creates what could be considered a successful urban public space. Accordingly, the Street 306 model could be an interesting approach to address the issue of under-used and poorly maintained urban residual spaces. The model of Street 306 projects also appears to provide good opportunities for young middle-class entrepreneurs to start a small food vending business. However, the Street 306 model does not really appear to address the problems faced and caused by typical traditional street food vendors in Cairo.

Keywords: Street food vending, outdoor food courts, successful urban public space, Cairo, Egypt

1. Introduction

In the past few years, Cairo has witnessed fast political and urban transformations which have led to the increase of various informal practices, including street vending, which have affected urban public spaces (Abaza, 2014; Nagati & Stryker,

2017; Tadamun, 2014). Most governmental solutions to organize mobile vending have relied on eviction and/or relocation to formal markets. However, in recent years, a new type of urban public space emerged as a novel solution to legalize street food vending. According to the official website of “Street 306” (Street306), the new official food courts are aiming to cluster and help young entrepreneurs in the street food business.

2. Research Problem and Objective

There is a gap in the literature concerning the implementation of organized street vending in urban public spaces, particularly as it relates to the Egyptian context. Indeed, little research has been conducted to document the impact of these solutions on organizing street food vending. The objective of this study is to assess the street 306 model. Through a case study approach, it evaluates one of the Street 306 new official food courts in relation to qualities of successful urban public spaces and investigates opinions of vendors and customers about the project.

3. Literature Review

Street vending plays an important role in the urban retail economy, particularly in developing countries with few opportunities for formal employment (S. Bhowmik, 2012). Available statistics show that street vending accounts for 15 to 25% of total informal employment in Africa and that the street food industry is a major employer of women (Skinner, 2008; Tinker, 1997). Bromley (2000) documented how street vending is practiced in many different ways and how street vendors vary in terms of scale, commodity type, location, and mobility. In addition, he presented different arguments for and against the presence of street vending. Kusakabe (2006) classified the literature on street vending into four groups. These groups examine the relationship between street vending and each of urban economy, political economy, policy issues, and relation to urban public space.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), “street foods are ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and/or sold by vendors and hawkers especially in streets and other similar places”. Street food vendors provide convenient foods that are affordable to eat, contributing to food security for the urban poor (Tinker, 1997). Moreover, the influence of street food on popular culture is a factor that increases local demand for street food (L. L. Newman & Burnett, 2013). Street food vending has positive impacts on urban vitality and neighborhood life (Kapell et al., 2008; Whyte, 1980). Whyte (1980) found that food vending carts are one of the main elements that attract people to an urban public space. Describing street food vendors, he stated that “vendors have become the caterers of the city’s outdoor life”. Alexander (1977) described the street vending scene saying “the more they smell the better”. For Montanari (2006), food is culture when produced, when prepared, and when eaten. Food is an experience that each of us lives on a daily

basis. Moreover, when we think of a place, it is because of the food we have eaten and the people we have shared it with.

3.1. Street Food Vending in Cairo

In Egypt, street vending is one of the key components of the informal sector, which comprises 30% of the national economy. There is no precise statistics about street vendors in Egypt, but some studies suggest that their number could exceed six million. Cairo, in particular, as one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world with a population of more than 10 million (CAPMAS, 2021), is currently suffering from the expansion of this phenomenon. Sims (2012) described Cairo as a city where informality is overwhelmingly the norm rather than the exception. In the aftermath of the 2011 events, Cairo has witnessed a sharp increase in informal practices affecting the nature of urban public space. These practices ranged from graffiti art and street vending to illegal construction on state land (Abdelrahman, 2013; Brown et al., 2017; ElKouny, 2012; Kafafy, 2017; Nagati & Stryker, 2017). Several studies about Cairo mentioned a relationship between street vending and spatial transformations, raising questions about public space control and right to the city (Attia, 2011; El Faioumy, 2017; El Shater, 2014).

Street food vending is one of the notable culture-based informal practices which has always been an essential part of Cairo's streets. Although it is often seen as a problem that contributes to notions of congestion and disorder, there is a food cart on nearly every street corner in Cairo, from the traditional ones selling beans, sweet potatoes, and chickpeas, to the newer ones selling burgers and sushi. Street food vending has traditionally been considered as an occupation for lower social classes. However, recently, a significant number of educated young people of the middle class have started street food vending businesses with much public encouragement and governmental support (Deyaa, 2016; El-Sheikh, 2017).

3.2. Attempts to Organize Street Vending in Cairo

In the past few years, the government has conducted several attempts for the eviction and relocation of vendors from Cairo's streets. One of these was the relocation of downtown vendors to Al-Turjuman regional bus terminal in 2014 with the aim of providing them with a modern well-designed market in which to operate. At the time, there was much debate about the project in the popular media (Abo Alabbas, 2014; Nagati & Stryker, 2017; Tadamun, 2014). However, the project did not succeed as vendors ultimately abandoned the new market (Nagati & Stryker, 2017).

In this context, a video showing the Cairo Municipality confiscating the burger cart of a 32-year-old woman went viral in April 2017. Following this incident, food cart owners initiated a social media campaign against confiscation and demanding legalization. Four months later, street vendors operating in the area of the incident

were invited to join “Masr Street”. Masr Street was set-up as an outdoor food court and was the first legalized venue for the operation of street food carts. That project was equipped with electricity outlets, toilets, sitting areas for customers, a performance stage, trash bins, and security cameras. Locations for 14 street carts were rented out with one-year renewable contracts. The model of Masr Street was soon replicated in other locations (Hashish, 2017; Hassan, 2018; Nour Eldin, 2019).

These venues are under the supervision of Aswaq Misr Express, a company that was established by the Tahya Misr Holding Company for Investment and Development. According to their official website (Street306), these new venues, named “Street 306”, are aiming to cluster and help young entrepreneurs in the street food business and control unemployment and unregulated businesses. These venues have been opened successively in three different locations: 306 Almaza in Heliopolis, 306 Sheraton in El Nozha, and 306 Dokki in Dokki. Facing major problems, both Masr Street and Street 306 Almaza had to end operation and close in 2019 (EgyptToday, 2019).

As previously mentioned, the objective of this study is to evaluate these attempts to organize street food vending in Cairo, particularly in terms of the quality of the urban public spaces created. They are assessed in relation to qualities of successful urban public spaces extracted from the urban design literature and discussed in the following section.

3.3. The Qualities of Successful Urban Public Space

In the urban design literature, successful urban public spaces are typically described as public spaces that are lively (Appleyard, 1981; Carmona, 2010; Mehta, 2006), promote social interaction among urban residents, help achieve social cohesion (Gehl, 2002; Project for Public Spaces, 2009; Whyte, 1980), and contribute to the urban vitality of cities (J. Jacobs, 1961; Lynch, 1984). Authors identify a number of quality attributes for the design of successful urban public spaces. They include in particular: (1) Proximity and Accessibility, (2) Diversity of Activities, (3) Comfort and Environmental Aspects, (4) Imageability and Aesthetic Attractiveness, and (5) Safety and Security.

3.3.1. Proximity and Accessibility

One of the main attributes linked to the quality of urban public spaces is the issue of proximity and accessibility. The proximity and ease of access to a public space will directly impact its success (Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992; Project for Public Spaces, 2009). The design of a good plaza starts with a busy corner or busy node (Moughtin, 2003; Whyte, 1980). Physical accessibility, in addition to proximity, involves good location and ease of access to pedestrians or with different modes of transportation. Thus, walkability is an important issue that is related to public space quality. Designs that provide a comfortable and safe environment for pedestrians to

move in and around are linked to increased public space quality (Carmona, 2010; Gehl, 2002; Moughtin, 2003). Visual accessibility or visibility into and out from the space is important too. This can help increase awareness of the space and provide views to observe urban life or attractive views (Whyte, 1980). This can also help increase sense of security (Carr et al., 1992; J. Jacobs, 1961; O. Newman, 1972).

3.3.2. Diversity of Activities

The literature on public space quality also stresses the importance of diversity of activities to attract more people to come to a place. Successful urban public spaces need to be designed to promote a diverse range of activities such as walking, sitting, people watching, relaxing, reading, socializing, eating, shopping, and playing (Gehl, 2002; Project for Public Spaces, 2009; Whyte, 1980). The concept of inclusiveness is also important. Successful urban public spaces should attract different groups. They need to promote gender diversity, age diversity, and social diversity and be handicapped accessible (Carmona, 2010). On the urban macro scale, land use diversity is one of the main aspects that influence the quality of public spaces. Proximity to places of residence, commercial areas, and recreational activities as well as accessibility with a variety of means of transportation can contribute to the success of a public space (Carmona, 2010; Gehl, 1987; J. Jacobs, 1961). Thus, the presence of restaurants and cafes is especially important. Montgomery (1995) mentioned cafes and restaurants as significant public spaces supporting optional (see also Gehl, 1987; Oldenburg, 1989). Some activities such as street food vending and other forms of culture-based activities act as magnets that attract different users to a public space and tend to significantly contribute to its success as an arena of commercial exchange and social interaction between users (A. Jacobs, 1993; Project for Public Spaces, 2009; Whyte, 1980)

3.3.3. Comfort and Environmental Aspects

Comfort is one of the main factors that have a direct impact on place satisfaction (Carr et al., 1992). Issues of comfort are important to support different users' activities (Gehl, 1987). Urban public spaces need to have comfortable sitting areas and to provide people with various sitting options. Thus, movable chairs are much preferable by users (A. Jacobs, 1993; Project for Public Spaces, 2009; Whyte, 1980). The quality and organization of different urban furniture elements help enhance the space vitality and identity (Carmona, 2010). In addition, environmental aspects are one of the factors that affect the quality of any public space. The micro-climate in an urban open space will impact thermal comfort. Protection from rain, solar exposure and protection from wind in winter, and/or the presence of shaded areas and a cool breeze in summer will promote increased presence in a public space (Carmona, 2010; Whyte, 1980). Trees are useful for treating climatic issues and make the space a delightful place to stay (A. Jacobs, 1993; Whyte, 1980).

3.3.4. Imageability and Aesthetic Attractiveness

The literature links certain visual qualities and imageability to the quality of public spaces. Well-defined open spaces with clear boundaries are attractive to people. They provide a sense of enclosure and provide people with the comfort and confidence to engage in different activities (A. Jacobs, 1993; Moughtin, 2003). The perceived aesthetic attractiveness of public spaces is another factor that has been linked to their quality (Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992). The presence of a well-maintained landscape increases perceived attractiveness and sense of security. The presence of street art, water features, the good design of urban furniture (benches, lights, garbage bins, ...), the quality of paving materials, and the aesthetic quality of surrounding buildings can also help enhance perceived attractiveness (Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992; A. Jacobs, 1993).

3.3.5. Safety and Security

This aspect refers to the protection of users against crime and accidents. The concept of “eyes on the street” (J. Jacobs, 1961) refers to the presence of other people and visibility from surrounding buildings. Increased presence in public spaces has been shown to be directly related to a perceived sense of safety and security (Carr et al., 1992; O. Newman, 1972). Nasar and Jones (1997) set criteria of perception of safety in public spaces. They referred to lighting of the place, natural surveillance, and integration of public spaces with the surrounding land uses. The perceived safety within public spaces depends on perceived security, maintenance of the area, the presence of greenery, the presence of water, space lighting, the number of people visiting the area, and time of day (Mehta, 2014).

Table 1 summarizes the quality attributes for successful urban public spaces that were extracted from the urban design literature and presented above.

Table 1: Quality attributes of successful urban public spaces (Source: Authors)

Proximity and Accessibility	Diversity of Activities	Comfort and Environmental Aspects	Imageability and Aesthetic Attractiveness	Safety and Security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Visual accessibility • Physical accessibility • Walkability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land uses and Surrounding activities • Diversity of activities in the space • Inclusiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of public facilities and amenities • Comfortable sitting areas • Arrangement of furniture • Environmental solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of enclosure • Visual pleasure • Landscape • Cleanliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural surveillance • Safety and security measures • Adequate lighting • Maintenance management

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The study relies on a qualitative case study approach (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It investigates one of the Street 306 projects established by Aswaq Misr Express as a novel attempt to organize and legalize street food vending in Cairo. The project selected for the study is Street 306 Dokki. The objective is to evaluate the project in terms of the quality attributes for successful urban public spaces extracted from the urban design literature and outlined above as well as in terms of opinions of both vendors and customers about the project.

Data collection relied on multiple methods to achieve triangulation (Groat & Wang, 2013) and included field physical documentation, behavioral observation sessions, and semi-structured interviews with vendors and customers. An interview was also conducted with a supply chain director at Aswaq Misr Express and responsible for the project at the time of data collection who kindly made available some archival data about the project.

4.2. Description of the Case Study

Street 306 Dokki was one of only two of the projects established by Aswaq Misr Express still in operation at the time the study was conducted. Figure 1 shows the status of each of the four projects in relation to the period of data collection, from February to December 2020.

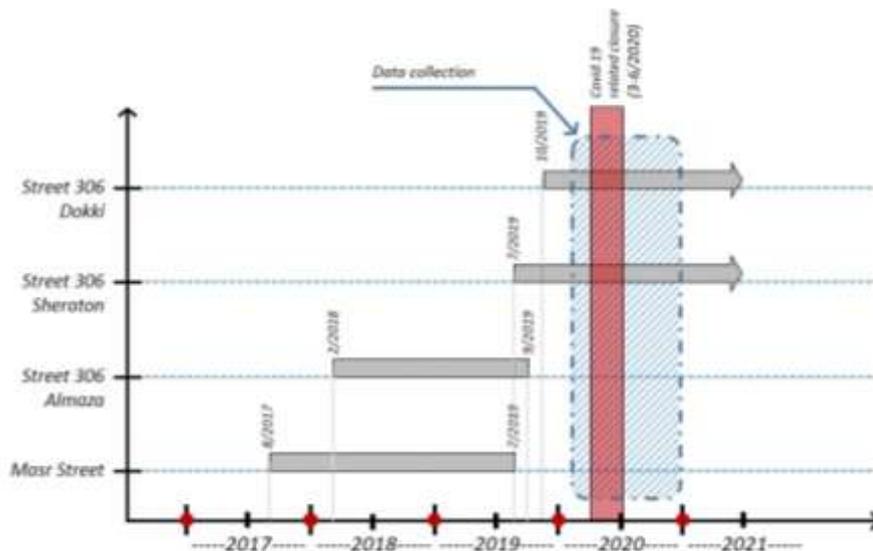


Figure 1. Status of the four Street 306 projects in relation to the period of data collection, 2-12/2020 (Source: Authors)

Street 306 Dokki is located in front of the Agricultural Museum in El Dokki district. It is about a 15-minute walk from the Dokki metro station. It was established on a site that was a neglected green area where taxi drivers used to gather to relax, drink tea, and wash their cars. The project started operation in October 2019.

Street 306 Dokki is an open-air food court occupying an area of 2160 m² and featuring 28 selling units most of which are rented out to food and beverage outlets. The site is rectangular in shape with a width of about 18 meters and a length of 120 meters. It is surrounded by a short brick and steel fence that permits visibility of the interior of the project from the outside. The project uses steel shipping containers to house the selling units in addition to some small wooden kiosks. The containers are arranged on the periphery of the site and define a central open public space (Figure 2). The project features two entrances at opposing sides of the site. The container placed above the main entrance houses the administration office (Figure 3).

Two containers by the main entrance are equipped as public toilets. The other containers on the site are dedicated to the selling units (Figure 4). The containers are 2.4 meter wide by 6.0 meter long and are subdivided into two units. For food and beverage outlets, the unit is arranged as a fully equipped kitchen (Figure 5). From the outside, containers are painted with bright colors artwork and representations of food items. The project also features a controlled children play area. The central space is a linear plaza equipped with movable multi-colored wooden tables and chairs. The central plaza features a number of large trees that were preserved during the implementation of the project.



Figure 2. The central space (Source: Foodcourt306, 2019)



Figure 3. The main entrance (Source: وهبة، 2020)

The project is provided with security guards, security cameras, TV screens, directional signage, and trash bins. At the time of the study, the selling units were occupied by a mobile accessories vendor and food and beverage outlets selling fast food (pizzas, burgers, crepes, ...), local traditional food (fatta, hawawshi, ...), ice cream, fresh juices, and hot drinks. Prices of Menu items ranged from 20 LE to 160 LE. While there were no fees to enter the project, access to the children play area was charged 35 LE per hour. Payment of purchases within the project relied on a digital cashless system. Operating hours were from 12 pm to 12 am.



Figure 4. Project Spatial organization (Source: Authors)

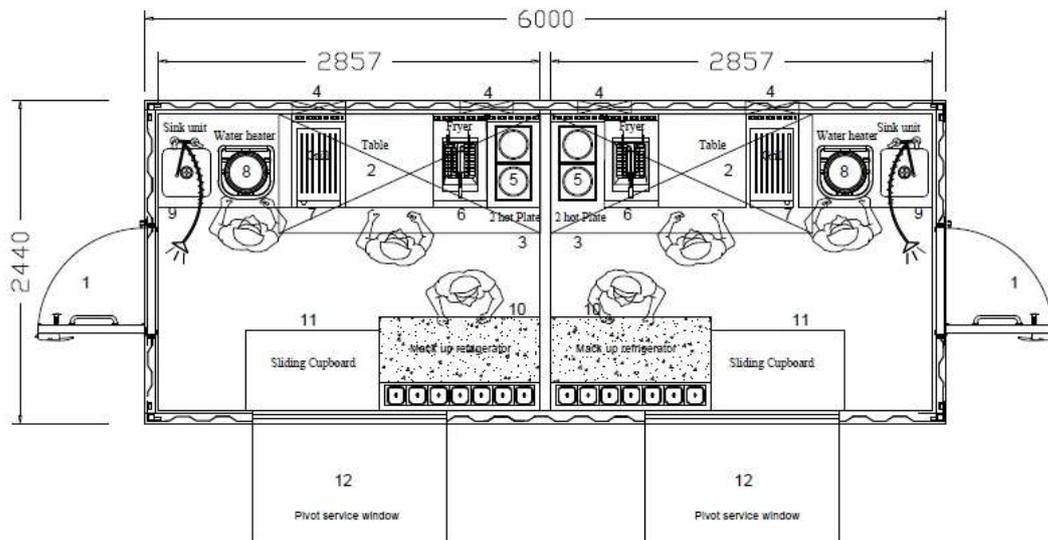


Figure 5. Container arrangement for two food and beverage units (Provided by project director).

4.3. Data Collection:

As previously mentioned, data collection took place between February and December 2020. However, it was interrupted from March to June 2020 as the project had to close in accordance with the Covid-19 related restrictions imposed by the government. Field documentation was conducted to document the physical

characteristics of the project which were recorded through photographs, sketches, and notes on base maps. Sessions of behavioral observation were conducted on different days of the week and at different times of the day throughout the period of the data collection. The purpose of observations was mainly to assess numbers and characteristics of customers at different times as well as to document patterns of activities and interactions. Observational data was recorded through photographs and notes on a base map of the project. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with vendors and customers to investigate their opinions and perceptions about the project. In total, 8 vendors and 15 customers were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. They were recorded after permission from the interviewees and later transcribed for analysis. Interview quotes appearing in this article were translated from the Arabic interview transcripts. An interview was also conducted with the director of the project. This interview permitted to obtain useful information about the project and its operation as well as information about other street 306 projects and the problems faced by some of them in addition to strategies, policies, and procedures established by Aswaq Misr Express.

5. Findings

Customer satisfaction is an important issue for food and beverage businesses. Customer satisfaction is considered as a key indicator of a business performance and whether customers will return to a restaurant again (Hanaysha, 2016; Oliver, 1999). Interviews conducted revealed that customers were generally satisfied with the food and services offered in Street 306 Dokki. Customers tended to describe vendor appearance and dealings with clients as “*nice*”, “*friendly*”, and “*acceptable*”. Customers interviewed also tended to express satisfaction with food quality. However, most were particularly satisfied by the variety of food offered. One of them explained:

“Food variety is good. It is nice when we come as a group that everyone can choose from many options what he would prefer to eat.”

On the other hand, several of the interviewees suggested that the project should open earlier in the day and offer more food choices appropriate for breakfast. For example, a young man working in the area indicated:

“This could be a nice place for me to have breakfast, but they only open at 12 pm.”

Another one suggested:

“I wish there were more options for breakfast. Things like beans, falafel, or bakery items.”

There was also an interviewee who suggested that the project should remain open until later at night:

“I have late working hours and the problem for me is that they close too early.”

In relation to prices, opinions appeared quite evenly divided. For some, prices were seen as reasonable. A woman indicated:

“There is good food variety here and prices are better than in cafes and shopping malls.”

But, for others, prices were considered to be somewhat too high. A man who was with his family complained:

“Prices are too high for a family of five to have dinner and dessert.”

Similarly, a student thought that prices were not affordable for a student budget. Also, a parent complained about the fees for the children play area:

“The fees for the kids’ area are too high. I come here with my two children almost every week, but I really think the fees for the kids’ area should be reduced.”

The data collected was analyzed to evaluate the Street 306 Dokki project in terms of the qualities of successful urban public spaces that were extracted from the urban design literature. Findings are presented in the following sections.

5.1. Proximity and Accessibility

Street 306 Dokki is located in a lively residential and commercial neighborhood. It is on a street off Dokki Street which is a main and vital spine that connects the neighborhood facilities together. Many participants mentioned that proximity of Dokki metro station and public bus lines have increased accessibility to the project (Figure 6). For example, one of the customers interviewed pointed to the ease of access from her university campus:

“We often come here as we are students at Cairo University. Means of transportation from our campus to here are very convenient.”

The proximity of a large number of facilities and businesses helped attract users working within walking distance of the project. The heavy pedestrian traffic around the site also helped attract customers. One of the interviewees recalled:

“The first time I came here I was walking by and I wondered what those colored containers were.”

His comments stress the importance of visual accessibility from the outside. The high land use diversity around the project (Figure 7), including residential, commercial, educational, and institutional uses, in addition to a wide variety of cafes and restaurants, certainly contributed to the diversity in customers observed. Customers included both male and females, different age groups, and different socio-economic groups. As for vendors, most of those interviewed expressed real satisfaction about the location of the project. One of them indicated:

“I am very happy with the location of the project. This is a very lively area.”

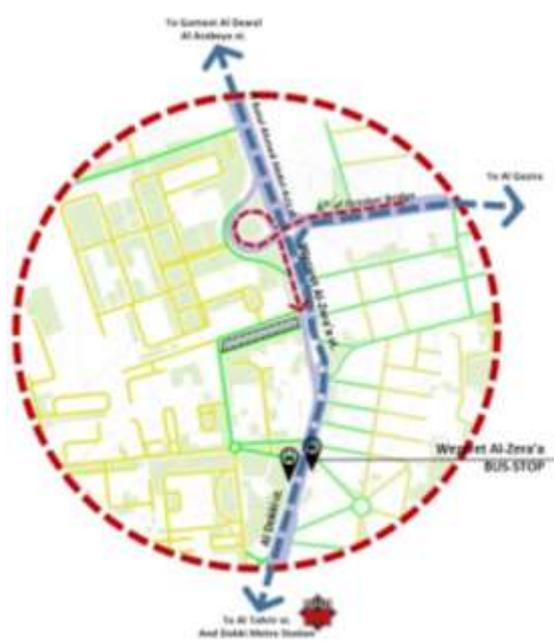


Figure 6. Accessibility to the project (Source: Authors)

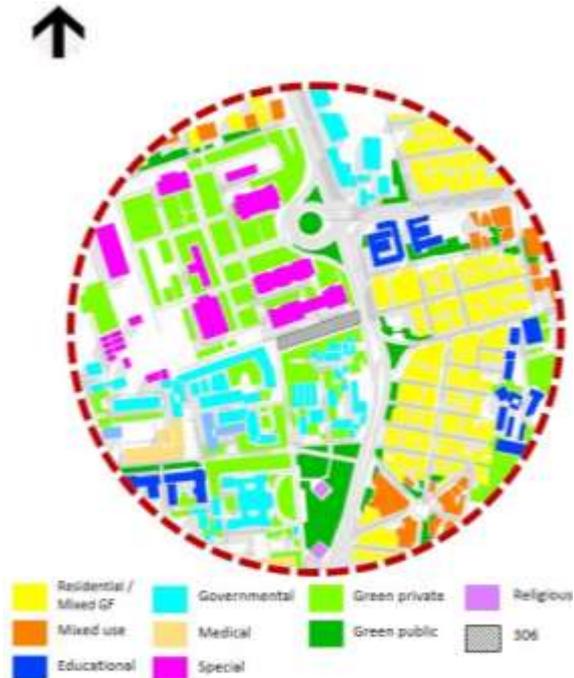


Figure 7. Land uses around the project (Source: Authors)

5.2. Diversity of Activities

A wide range of activities was observed within the project. Obviously, the main activities observed were selling and buying food, eating, and drinking. However, the central open space was also an arena for many other activities such as sitting, standing, strolling around, socializing in groups, and children playing and running around. Of course, much children playing also occurred in the children play area. Many customers were seen taking photographs. One of them explained:

“We like to take photos here. All the colors make for a very nice background.”

In addition, some of the customers interviewed expressed liking the idea of seeing their food being prepared and taking part in informal conversations with vendors. One of the customers commented:

“I like watching the chefs preparing our meals and talking with them.”

Vendors took their breaks in the areas behind the containers. There, they were observed standing, sitting, eating, drinking, and smoking either individually or in small groups. Very few of the customers interviewed made negative comments about the absence of specific activities. A middle-aged man who was in the company of his family indicated:

“I like to come here with my family from time to time. Not very frequently. But I do not come here when I am out with my friends. It is not our type of gathering space. There is no shisha here.”

Another man commented on the lack of activities that could be appropriate for his 10-year-old son:

“The children play area is only appropriate for very young children. For older children, other activities should be offered, board games, video games, etc...”

The diversity in customers mentioned above contributed to the diversity of activities taking place within the project. Customers were observed to be of different genders, age groups, socio-economic status, and even physical abilities. While customers tended to be in groups, families, groups of friends, or couples, some came alone. The most frequently observed age groups included adults, youth, adolescents, and children. Elderly customers were much less frequent. On weekdays, the numbers of customers tended to increase gradually after 2 pm. On weekends, the affluence of customers tended to begin earlier, at around 1 pm. It was also observed that the numbers of customers were much greater at night-time than during daytime. However, during daytime the numbers of females were generally greater than the numbers of males.

5.3. Comfort and Environmental Aspects

Most of the customers interviewed were satisfied with the range of services and amenities provided within the project such as the toilets and the children play area. For example, a mother commented:

“It is good that there is a kids’ area. It is pleasant, very nice for the kids. I like the idea that it is well controlled and that parents can see their children while they are playing.”

One of the interviewees commented on the toilets:

“The presence of toilets is really important. They are not bad. Of course, it would be better if there were more toilets and if they were better maintained.”

Few of the interviewees pointed to a parking problem. One of them indicated:

“Parking is very limited, particularly on weekends. More parking spaces should be provided.”

Most comments about the comfort in the central space were rather negative. Interviewees tended to complain that the space was too narrow to allow for comfortable movement around and that the wooden chairs provided were not very comfortable. For example, one of the interviewees commented:

“The sitting area needs some changes. It needs to be more comfortable.”

Another one explained:

“Chairs in the sitting area are not comfortable and there is a need for some space to permit better circulation.”

Regarding environmental aspects, interviewees tended to indicate that they were quite comfortable both in summer and winter. With the presence of trees and movable umbrellas in addition to the height of surrounding buildings, the project is well shaded during summer days (Figure 8 and 9). In winter, the central space is equipped with outdoor heaters.



Figure 8. Surrounding building heights (Source: Authors)

Figure 9. Shading analysis (Source: Authors)

5.4. Imageability and Aesthetic Attractiveness

The central plaza, the main space of the project, is a well-defined space. The surrounding containers provide it with a real sense of enclosure and, as expressed by some interviewees, “*a feeling of coziness*”. Interviewees’ comments about the aesthetic attractiveness of the project tended to be very positive. Words they used to describe their opinions about the aesthetic quality of the project included: “*amazing*”, “*impressive*”, “*colorful*”, “*cheerful*”, “*trendy*” and “*cool*”. One of them commented on the use of containers as providing “*a nice industrial look*”. The colors and designs used for the painting of the containers were particularly appreciated: “*lovely cheerful colors*”, “*beautiful drawings*”. Cleanliness within the project was also thought to be an important factor contributing to aesthetic attractiveness. Customers interviewed tended to think that the general appearance of the project along with the music played created “*a nice atmosphere*”, “*a mood changing atmosphere*”. It should be pointed out, however, that a few of them indicated that they felt that the project was too crowded and too noisy during the evening and on weekends. Many of the customers indicated that they were pleased with the presence of trees within the project and with the idea that the pre-existing trees were preserved when the project was established. One of them commented:

“I am happy that the old trees are still here and were not removed.”

5.5. Safety and Security

Comments of both customers and vendors interviewed about sense of security were very positive. In their comments, they tended to emphasize the presence of controlled entrances, security personnel, and security cameras as well as the

cleanliness and good maintenance in the project and the liveliness of the area within which the project is located. The project is also well lit at night. One of the customers commented:

“It is very safe here. It is an outdoor place but there are controlled gates and security guards.”

Another one stated:

“I feel safe because this is a lively area.”

One of the customers compared safety perceived before and after the implementation of the project:

“I used to be afraid to walk by the neglected green area before. But now I feel safe around here.”

A vendor commented:

“I feel much safer working here than when I used to operate on the streets. Here it is legal. On the streets I was always afraid to have my equipment confiscated by the municipal authorities.”

When the project reopened after the Covid 19 lockdown closure (from March to June 2020), a sanitization gate was added to the main entrance along with temperature check procedures. To ensure appropriate social distancing, the seating capacity of the main space was reduced to 25% for a while and then gradually increased in accordance with governmental measures. One of the customers commented:

“With the current situation, this is a great place to go out with family or friends. It is outdoor and there is appropriate social distancing.”

6. Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

Through a case study approach, this study evaluated Street 306 Dokki as one of the projects established by Aswaq Misr Express to organize and legalize street food vending in Cairo. Findings show that, in general, customers are satisfied with the range of services as well as with the food quality and the food variety offered within the project. In relation to prices, opinions appear to be more divided. While some of the customers interviewed thought that prices for food items and services were quite reasonable, others thought that they were somewhat too high. A number of customers also commented on the operating hours of the project, suggesting that the project should open earlier in the morning or that it should close later at night.

The study also assessed Street 306 Dokki in terms of the quality attributes of successful urban public spaces that were extracted from the urban design literature

(Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992; Gehl, 1987; J. Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980). Based on these quality attributes, the findings presented above strongly suggest that Street 306 Dokki creates what could be considered a successful urban public space. First, the project is located within a lively district of high land use diversity, in an area with high pedestrian traffic and that is well serviced by different modes of public transportations. Accordingly, the project is easily accessible for a large number of potential customers of different ages and different walks of life (Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992; Project for Public Spaces, 2009). Second, in addition to food selling and buying and food consumption, observations conducted documented other types of activities taking place within the project including strolling around, socializing, and children playing. Such diversity of activities is an important factor contributing to the liveliness of urban public spaces (Gehl, 1987; Montgomery, 1995; Whyte, 1980). Third, findings confirm that Street 306 Dokki creates a relatively comfortable outdoor environment for customers to spend time in at different times of the day and different times of the year. In addition, according to the interviews of customers, the project is viewed as aesthetically attractive. And finally, the project was found to provide both customers and vendors with a high sense of security. These issues of comfort (A. Jacobs, 1993; Project for Public Spaces, 2009; Whyte, 1980), aesthetic attractiveness (Carmona, 2010; Carr et al., 1992; A. Jacobs, 1993), and safety and security (J. Jacobs, 1961; O. Newman, 1972) are also emphasized in the literature addressing the quality of open urban spaces.

Certain aspects taken in consideration in the establishment of Street 306 Dokki permitted this project to avoid problems faced by other projects of Aswaq Misr Express. In particular, according to the project manager interviewed, the problems faced by the Street 306 Almaza project and that ultimately led to its closure were mainly related to the location and dimensions of the site selected for that project. Street 306 Almaza was established in an area of relatively low land use diversity and low pedestrian traffic, on a site of low accessibility. This contributed to the low numbers of customers attracted to the project. In addition, the site selected was too narrow (only six meters in width). As a result, it was not possible to create a comfortable space for customers to move around, eat and spend time.

The model of the Street 306 projects could be an interesting approach to address the issue of abandoned, under-used, poorly maintained urban residual spaces that do not contribute to the liveliness of the areas within which they are located and tend to negatively impact sense of security (Carmona, 2010; Trancik, 1991; Winterbottom, 2000). However, the contrasting fortunes of Street 306 Dokki and Street 306 Almaza clearly show that specific location and dimensions of a site need to be carefully considered before a project is established.

One of the main declared objectives of the projects established by Aswaq Misr Express is to contribute to the solution of the problems faced and caused by informal and unlicensed street food vending in Cairo. The projects are presented as a novel approach to organize and legalize the activities of street food vendors. However, among the conditions that the company lists on its website, vendors who

wish to apply for the renting of a selling unit need to have a certain level of education. It is difficult to imagine that such conditions along with the rates of rental fees required (up to 12,000 LE/ month for a selling unit) are suitable for many of the modest traditional food vendors operating in the streets of Cairo. In fact, all of the vendors interviewed in Street 306 Dokki indicated that they had a university degree. Most of them also indicated that they have never been in the street vending activity before starting their business in Street 306 Dokki. The only one who said to be a previous street food vendor revealed that he continued his street vending activity in parallel with his business in Street 306.

The model of Street 306 projects may provide good opportunities for young middle-class entrepreneurs to start a small food vending business. However, the projects do not appear to really address the issue of typical traditional street food vending in Cairo. It is also clear that the projects do not target the same customers that tend to patronize traditional street food carts. This was confirmed by the customers interviewed in Street 306 Dokki. For them, both in terms of types of food sold and prices, Street 306 and traditional street food carts are completely different food vending categories.

6.2. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could perhaps replicate the current study in other areas of Cairo to confirm and complete the findings presented here. Such research could include interviews with residents and nearby store owners to investigate their opinions about this new type of projects. It could also be interesting to compare findings of studies conducted in the Egyptian context with findings of similar research conducted in other countries.

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