

The “Open Cities” Approach:

A Prospect for Improving the Quality of Life in
Alexandria City, Egypt

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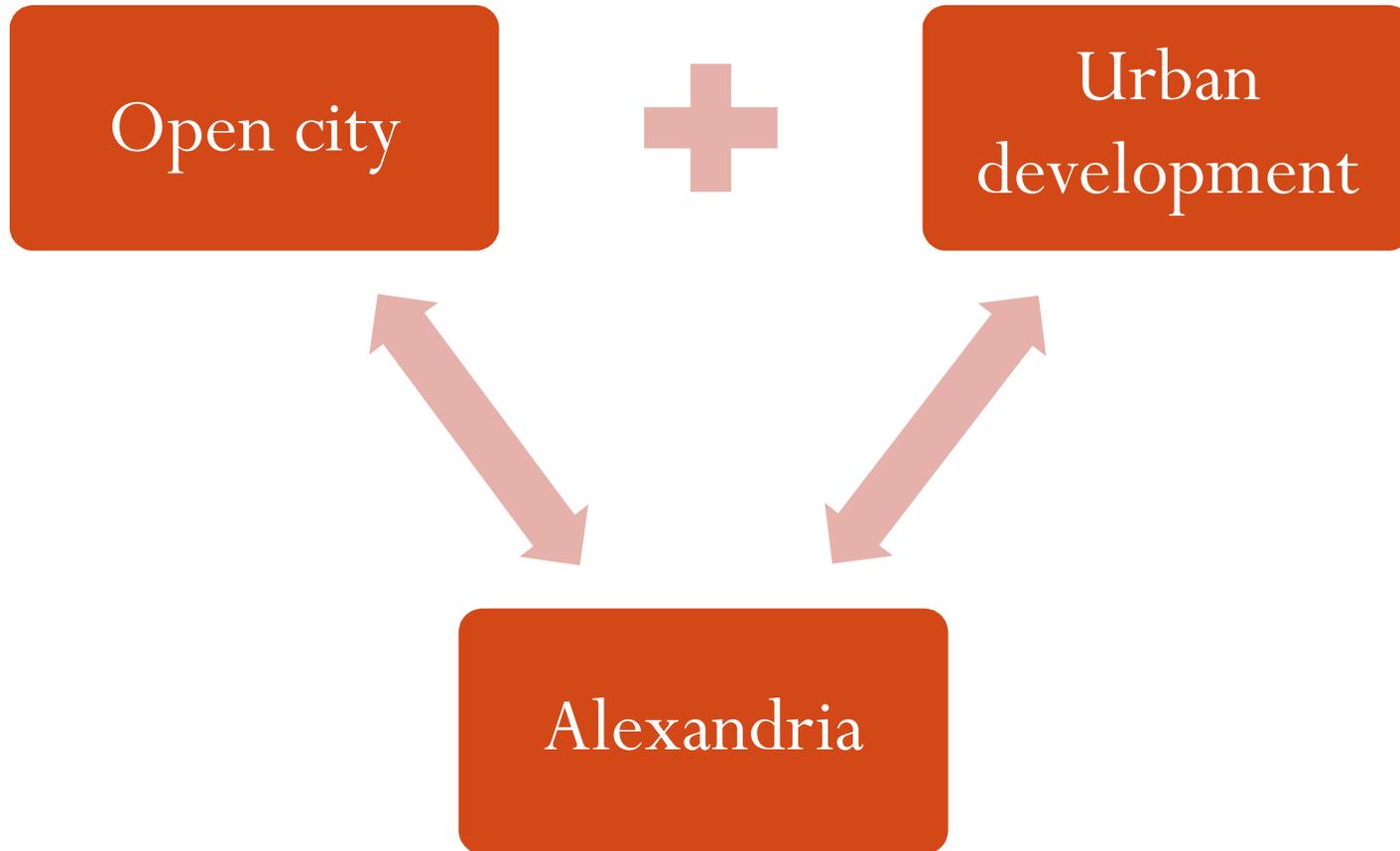
Introduction

“Open Cities” have become an international trend that could be applied to cities all over the world. An Open City is one that is open to new ideas and innovation; welcoming to a diversity of people and cultures. It is a city of equal opportunities for all, a city that is open for the combination of lifestyle, creativity, scale, population, cultural and commercial diversity that enables it to become a ‘magnet’ city alongside cities. “Open Cities” require an open approach by city planners.

The paper focuses on the research’s case study of applying the methodology of combining the factors that affect both Sustainable Urban Development and those of “Open Cities” to be used in Alexandria urban development.

Finally, the research suggests guidelines on how to incorporate the approach in the city planning and management processes in order to improve its quality of life and increasing its openness.

The concept



What are open cities?

In 2009 feasibility study for the British Council and URBACT modified the initial definition to: "Openness is the capacity of a city to attract international populations and to enable them to contribute to the future success of the city".

Kees Christaanse in Places Journal, Sep 2009, defined "Open city" as a somewhat utopian term: it refers to efforts by architects and urban designers to translate the ideals of an "open society" — a society with a tolerant and inclusive government, where diverse groups develop flexible mechanisms for resolving inevitable differences — into physical spaces. It refers to places where people of different backgrounds can coexist, where interaction leads to cultural enrichment and innovation, and where the market flourishes.

Goals and Objectives

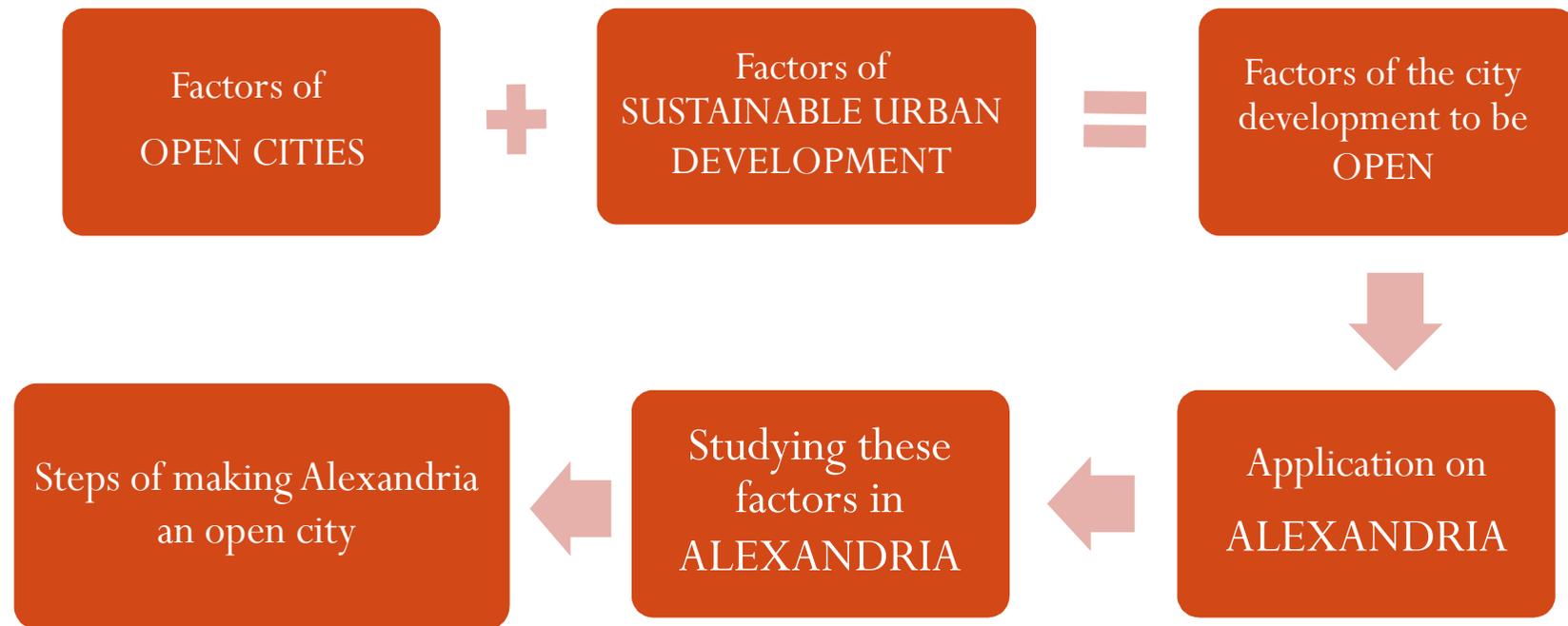
It aims at developing a plan that targets most of the problems facing cities, be it on the demographic, climatic, residential, commercial, social or political levels. And also, exploring the “Open Cities” approach in achieving a sustainable urban development with analyzing the spatial, socio-economic and administrative opportunities that could assist in the regaining of Alexandria cosmopolitan role in the 21st century.

Methodology

Through the analysis of “Open Cities” factors and combining them to the factors of Sustainable Urban Development we will reach the factors that should be taken into consideration in planning the city of Alexandria to make it an Open City.

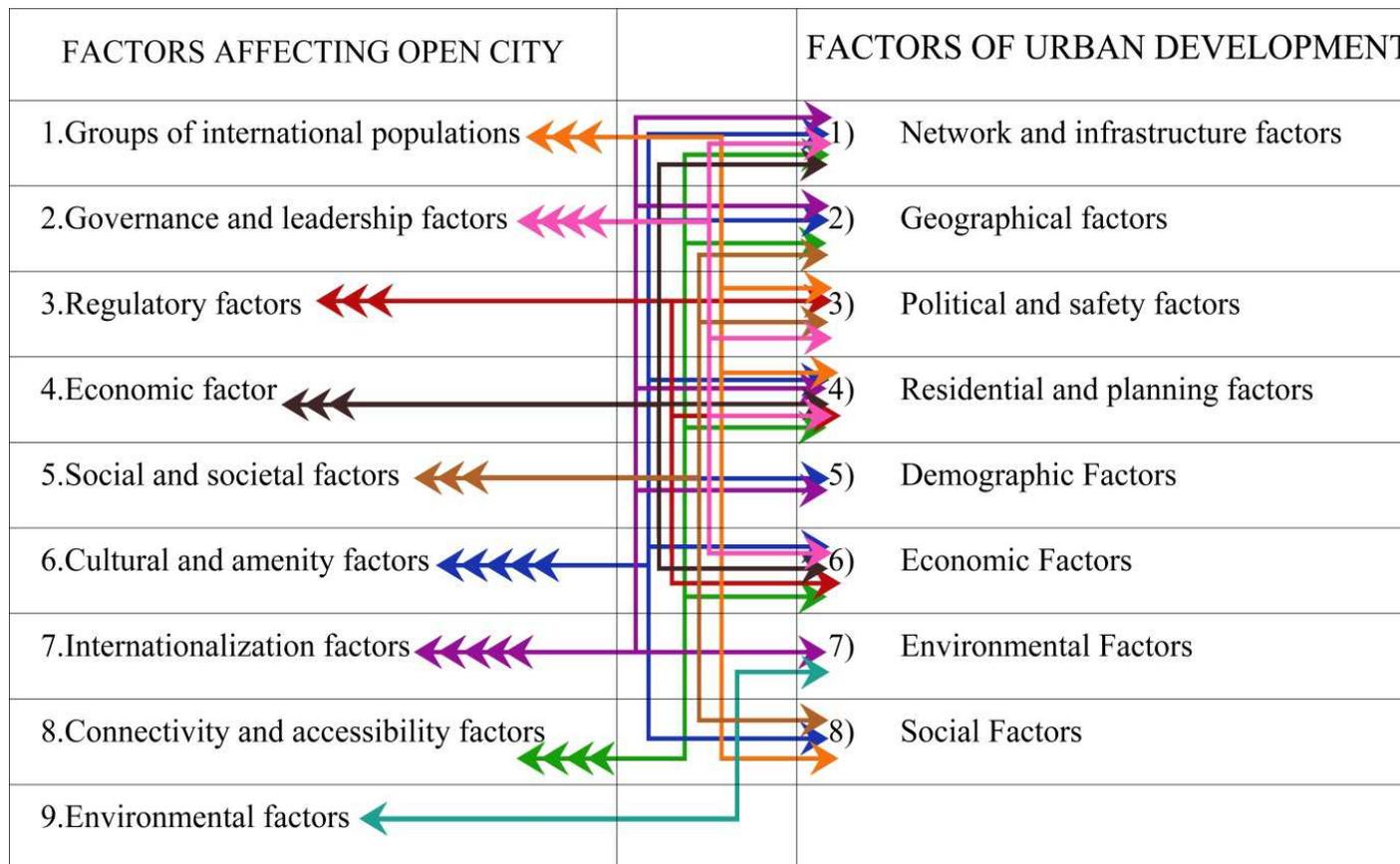
Moreover, with analyzing the current state of the city planning and the challenges that face the city’s sustainable development, we could suggest certain steps that could be applied on the city to make it open and improve the quality of life of the city’s inhabitants.

The paper structure



Factors affecting open cities and factors of urban development relation's chart:

Both “Open Cities” and Sustainable Urban Development are delimited by several factors that describe their physical and socioeconomic characteristics; by the analysis of these factors we will attempt to find/analyze the relation between both types of factors, in order to use sustainable urban development to achieve the concept of “Open Cities”.



Urban Development & Open Cities

Network and infrastructure

Cultural and Amenity

Connectivity and Accessibility

Internationalization

Geographical factors

Connectivity and Accessibility

Internationalization

Environmental

Political and safety

Governance and Leadership

Regulatory

Economic

Social and societal

Internationalization

Residential and planning

Groups of international populations

Economic

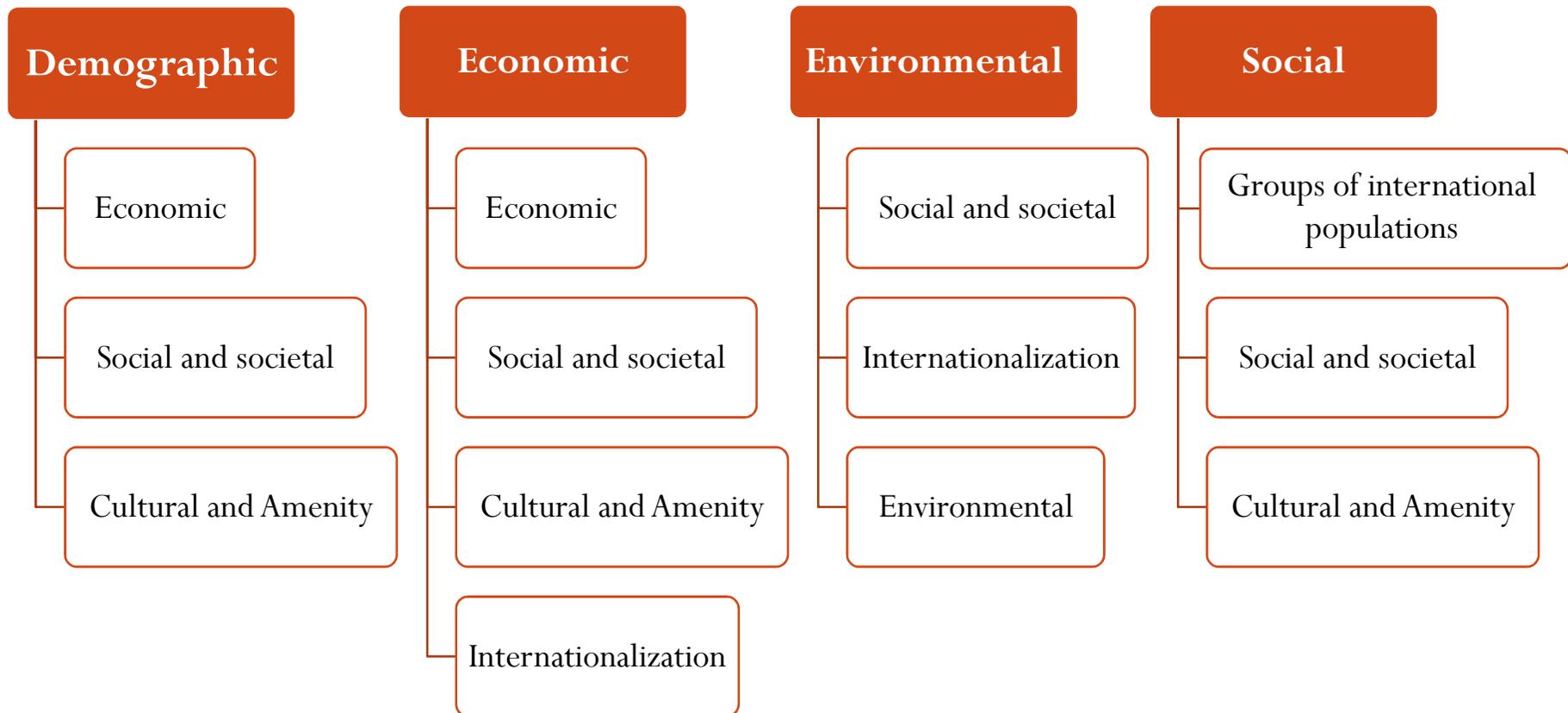
Social and societal

Cultural and Amenity

Connectivity and Accessibility

Internationalization

Urban Development & Open Cities



Conclusion of the chart:

From the previous relation's chart we found that each of the urban development factors affects some of the factors of open cities which reveals that we should improve the urban development of the city in order to make it an OPEN CITY. So in the case study of Alexandria we started studying its urban development factors and how we can improve it to make Alexandria Open and improve its quality of life.

ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria, with a population of about 4.1 million, is the second-largest city in Egypt, and is the country's largest seaport, serving about 80 % of Egypt's imports and exports. Alexandria is also an important tourist resort. The city extends about 32 km along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in north-central Egypt.



Guideline to make Alexandria an Open City

1. Making Alexandria a green city as the residential quality is closely linked to the availability of nearby green open spaces for leisure and recreation, to fulfill important micro-climatic functions.
2. Avoiding conflicts between residential and industrial land uses and limit the environmental impact of new developments.
3. Providing a well-balanced offer on the rental and ownership housing market for the city residents and foreigners as well.
4. Extending the city to be redirected away from the already overcrowded core area of Alexandria to new settlement centers either on Alexandrian territory or in the Alexandria Urban Region to absorb the increase in Alexandrian citizens, but will result in a massive expansion of the city's built-up area.
5. The railway line operating between Borg El Arab and Alexandria city centre has to play a pivotal role in this respect. Each new urban centre will have to be fitted with an efficient and affordable internal circulation and transportation network structure.
6. The political and safety factors are affected a lot with the post revolution in 2011 and this should be solved very fast to make Alexandria be a safe and friendly city to all its visitors as it was.

Steps to make Alexandria an Open City

6. Making it economically active and decrease this huge rate of unemployment, that could be reached easily when the city becomes more open. Also, we should work on increasing the FDI rate in Egypt as that will help in providing extra spaces for Egyptian employment and by increasing the city openness and attractiveness we could easily solve the problem of unemployment and to attract FDI, Alexandria needs to examine what investors want.
7. As far as tourism is concerned, Alexandria has to take advantage of its natural topographic properties, the most prominent of which are certainly the Mediterranean Sea shore and its inland water bodies like the canals and lakes. Especially the Corniche bears a significant potential for further upgrading and adding new points of touristic or commercial activities.
8. The strong positioning of Alexandria as a physical hub on the Mediterranean remains and shall be further reinforced by expanding logistics infrastructures like ports, airports, road and rail networks.
9. Urban upgrading will be the key to improving the quality of life for the majority of Alexandrians in the coming two decades. This encompasses ensuring electricity supply, potable water supply and sanitation by extending and upgrading the networks, investing in healthcare, social and educational services, as well as offering better and more connections in public transportation.

Conclusion

These development steps would help Alexandria to reach the concept of being Open City in-order to achieve the city vision and goals. Alexandria could be successful Open City by limiting the average gross residential density, redirecting urban growth to the west, linking urban nodes efficiently and providing utility infrastructure, improving quality of life and environmental quality, making Alexandria a greener city, reducing visual as well as noise and air pollution, stimulating successful socio-economic development, providing sufficient building land for economic growth, increasing alexandria's touristic attractiveness and establishing alexandria as a euro-mideastern hub for logistics, trade and business.

“Open Cities” is a perfect trend that will help Alexandria greatly to reach its future development vision by using Sustainable Urban Development ways of planning. The deficiencies in the urban and socioeconomic structure of Alexandria would need to be solved by the city decision makers and planners in order to reach the city openness. Improving the quality of life in Alexandria is not only key to the well-being of Alexandrians, but will also support the city's positioning as an important economic and touristic hub in Egypt and on the Mediterranean.

Thank you...