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Master thesis:

**THE MULTICULTURAL PENDULUM OF PAR EXCELLENCE
COSMOPOLITAN ALEXANDRIA**

*The oscillation between conviviality and interaction during the Ptolemaic age
and the modern cosmopolitan era – The intercultural challenge of the future*

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Abstract

The overarching notion of this master thesis is to use Alexandria as an exemplary case of how multilayered urban cultural politics can influence both city's image and quality of cultural experiences. The springboard for this mental endeavor is the scrutiny and appreciation of the phenomenal Alexandrian multiculturalism through a comparative identification of the impact that different forces and factors had on the city during the Ptolemaic age (331 – 30 BC) and the modern cosmopolitan era (1805 – 1956). Using as starting point the multifaceted oscillating mobility between the cultural schemes of conviviality and interaction, as regards the relations developed among Alexandria's diverse populations, the thesis shows that a sui generis yet functional cultural identity was configured, inextricably related to urban space. The thesis goes on analysing the mechanisms that enabled city's transition from multiculturalism to monoculturalism after the 1952 nationalist revolution. Taking under consideration the limitations of the past extraterritorial identity and the historical necessitation of the nationalist policies, it is pinpointed that the premeditated policy of discrediting Alexandrian cosmopolitanism and fragmenting urban collective memory had detrimental effects on city's cultural vitality.

Coming to the present day Alexandria, the thesis diagnoses that identification and evaluation of economic, political, social or ideological distractions are essential prerequisites for creating an efficient urban cultural policy. Particular emphasis is being laid on the fact that the difficult yet necessitated attainment of balance between development and heritage will be a decisive factor for urban sustainability, which has been up to a certain degree promoted by cultural tourism and the operation of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Taking into account the future urban prospective, the thesis ends up in drafting the guidelines of a strategic proposal concerning future urban policies. Considering complementarity and interoperability of different city's administrative sectors as the indispensable conceptual framework of such a strategy, it is made obvious that the redefinition of urban identity, through reevaluating urban collective memory and animating urban cultural heritage, can provide the base for developing initiatives, which will facilitate the improvement of Alexandria's internal quality of life and external positioning.

French Résumé

L'objectif général de la thèse est double. D'un côté, Alexandrie est utilisée comme l'exemple expliquant comment les multiples politiques urbaines et culturelles peuvent influencer en même temps diachroniquement et synchroniquement sur l'image de la ville et sur la qualité de la vie. De l'autre côté, on a précisément examiné comment l'adoption du plan stratégique culturel, malgré de différents obstacles, peut changer de potentiel urbain, surtout maintenant lorsque les villes ont la priorité comme les générateurs culturels dans notre monde globalisé.

Le tremplin de la thèse est l'exploration et le respect du multiculturalisme extraordinaire et du cosmopolitisme d'Alexandrie à l'époque de Ptolémée et à l'époque moderne cosmopolite. Au cours de toutes les deux périodes, Alexandrie a réussi à dépasser le cliché du conglomérat hétérogène des populations diverses et à cultiver un fort sentiment de la loyauté urbaine parmi les habitants sans égard pour les relations culturelles dictées par les origines individuelles et collectives. Ce schéma fonctionnel de la symbiose culturelle oscillant librement entre la sociabilité et l'interaction, a été situé à Alexandrie. Se trouvant sur le joint des mondes différents, elle ressemblait à un pont liant les cultures et les idées et à un endroit de toutes les rencontres possibles. De plus, ex nihilo créé autour du noyau peu peuplé où les fortes structures traditionnelles étaient absentes, Alexandrie avait la possibilité de développer le sentiment de son existence comme un ensemble culturel indépendant, un terrain neutre.

Sa position était adroitement utilisée par les dynasties de Ptolémée I et de Méhémet Ali pour leurs projets concernant le renouvellement des liens entre l'Égypte et la Méditerranée, en donnant à Alexandrie le rôle d'un grand centre maritime. Cette ambition politique a été aidée par l'attraction des flux migratoires qui, en dépassant les frontières territoriales conventionnelles, sont allés dans la ville d'occasion. La politique intentionnelle des «portes ouvertes» a fait d'Alexandrie un «radeau de vie» pour les peuples méditerranéens qui avaient dû s'enfuir de la débâcle économique et de l'incertitude croissante intensifiées par la faillite du système d'État et du système municipal et par le déclin de l'Empire ottoman. Par conséquent le multiculturalisme d'Alexandrie a fait un grand progrès à cause du patrimoine idéologique de l'Empire fugace d'Alexandre, concernant la modification du schéma monoculturel de la supériorité grecque à la vision oecuménique culturelle. Par ailleurs, les clichés ottomans des organisations communautaires et les capitulations ont permis l'intégration des immigrants dans le cadre de la ville qui, de façon ambiguë, n'était ni originalement ottomane ni vraiment étrangère-égyptienne.

Avec les circonstances qui lui convenaient, la réussite de l'expérience multiculturelle d'Alexandrie a été également facilitée par les conditions intérieures. Parmi eux, le progrès économique séparé comme un catalyseur, comme un rapport social dans les échanges financiers, en visant le bonheur individuel et collectif, a promu une interaction entre les races urbaines, les langues, les religions, les coutumes. Le cadre des croyances urbaines collectives et le sentiment profondément enraciné du destin urbain collectif présentaient le tissu conjonctif social en formant ainsi une société séparée des sociétés coloniales, considérée pour la plupart comme la base de l'exploitation avec un sentiment exprimé de l'enracinement. Alexandrie est arrivée jusqu'à un haut degré du pluralisme en acceptant l'autonomie communautaire et en plus, elle était le siège de l'interaction à travers la proximité poreuse ordinaire et la mobilité de la population. L'élasticité du matériau social d'Alexandrie a été considérablement facilitée par un fort sentiment profondément enraciné de la tolérance religieuse en gagnant la forme du syncrétisme ptolémaïque – avec le culte de Sérapis en tête – et de la laïcité moderne. Dans tous les deux cas, les Alexandrins non seulement qu'ils possédaient la liberté concernant la religion, mais aussi ils permettaient toutes les autres expressions religieuses.

Ces traits économiques, sociaux et religieux ont contribué à la formation d'une autre caractéristique importante pour les Alexandrins; c'est la compréhension qu'ils étaient les titulaires sui generis de l'identité culturelle qui les séparait de leurs contemporains et qui était fortement liée à l'espace urbain. Quant à la période ptolémaïque, Giursenar l'a décrite comme le patriotisme culturel au lieu du patriotisme racial, et le meilleur exemple a été donné avec le travail de la Bibliothèque et du Musée (Mouseion); toutes les deux institutions culturelles ont placé l'interaction de l'idée hellénique humaniste avec la sagesse des civilisations orientales dans le cadre de l'expérience intellectuelle des dimensions globales. Concernant la période cosmopolite moderne, Ilbert l'a décrite comme l'identité territoriale, l'expression de la culture hybride pro-européenne, toujours aimable envers le modernisme et ouverte pour de nouvelles expériences dans le cadre du milieu de la liberté intellectuelle.

Cependant, tandis que le multiculturalisme ptolémaïque observait la culture d'Égypte antique comme un corps de sagesse sans limites duquel il fallait s'approcher, l'interpréter et l'envisager, le multiculturalisme moderne d'Alexandrie a été caractérisé par l'incapacité inflexible de comprendre et d'englober organiquement la culture égyptienne arabe-musulmane. Cet échec a été crucial lorsque cette culture a été identifiée avec l'identité égyptienne nationale. Malgré le fait que la conception initiale de la nationalité égyptienne était assez pluraliste et inclusive, en donnant l'occasion à toutes les minorités de participer dans le futur égyptien, la venue de l'arabisme a emmené Alexandrie dans le centre du cyclone

nationaliste. Son idéal multiculturel des cultures coexistantes se liant et influant l'une sur l'autre a été considéré incompatible avec l'unité nationale promue de langue, de culture et de religion de masse du peuple égyptien.

La révolution nationaliste égyptienne qui a culminé avec la nationalisation du Canal de Suez et les mesures générales de la confiscation, a secoué Alexandrie au moment où ses habitants divers se sont trouvés dans une position inhabituelle de prendre des décisions juste avant la rupture avec le passé urbain cosmopolite. L'arabisation expansionniste et le patriotisme exclusiviste d'Etat n'ont offert ni point de départ ni destination aux Alexandrins d'origines étrangères mais le futur avec les barrières discriminatoires à cause de leur descendance, leur religion et leur culture ou leur langue. Alexandrie est devenue non seulement le symbole d'une époque exceptionnelle et radicalement changée mais aussi la preuve des souvenirs vivants et le point de départ pour le rétablissement de l'ordre des choses supposément régulier. A peine assimilée dans un nouveau cadre particulier qui manifestait des tendances pour l'homogénéisation au compte de la diversité, elle est devenue le sujet de l'indifférence politique, économique et culturelle et de la distanciation. La ville multiculturelle était remplacée par une autre ville complètement différente, largement et intentionnellement oublieuse concernant son prédécesseur pluraliste.

Une moitié de siècle après cette rupture culturelle, Alexandrie comme un noyau commercial, transporteur et industriel, ne montre pas une structure cosmopolite de population; les communautés étrangères sont les mémoires et la diversité devient impossible. Pourtant, elle retient sa personnalité culturelle qui est plus méditerranéenne qu'égyptienne ou moyen-orientale. Dans cette métropole méditerranéenne, l'identification et l'évaluation des obstacles économiques, politiques, sociaux ou idéologiques sont des tâches conditionnelles pour adopter une efficace politique urbaine et culturelle.

La qualité de la vie est sérieusement affectée par l'explosion démographique, l'expansion urbaine et la pauvreté économique. Le pourcentage des revenus disponibles dépensé pour les activités culturelles est considérablement bas, le marché culturel est resté au niveau fondamental et l'accès aux institutions culturelles ainsi que les participations dans les activités culturelles reflètent des abîmes sociaux. Les dépenses culturelles publiques sont presque exclusivement réduites à une mission de conservation du patrimoine culturel dans ses manifestations différentes, mais cependant plutôt du patrimoine du Caire que des autres régions ou bien plutôt du patrimoine de la période des pharaons que de celui des autres périodes (gréco-romaine, byzantine etc.).

La pauvreté économique est renforcée avec le mécontentement de la population à cause de la situation politique qui est caractérisée par un fort dogme dictatorial, qui n'est pas intéressée à la société civile de prolétariat et qui est fondée sur une bureaucratie inefficace et sur une omniprésence de l'intelligence et des forces de sécurité. Dans la culture, la politique dictatoriale a trouvé son expression dans un système largement individualisé qui mène une politique hautement centralisée, y compris la prise des décisions, le budget et la répartition des ressources. La procédure de prise des décisions contrôlée de centrale est extrêmement inflexible et longue en rendant les institutions locales très dépendantes du soutien d'Etat et en laissant très peu de liberté pour le manœuvre des systèmes régionaux. Par conséquent la culture urbaine présente presque exclusivement la planification d'un système administratif, verticalement organisé et basé sur la dépense publique, et non le résultat de l'énergie individuelle ou de l'investissement privé.

Au niveau social, l'échec concernant l'apport de la prospérité et du pluralisme politique perd la loyauté civile en pratiquant la logique que «rien ne fonctionne» et en créant une incertitude idéologique. Il semble que deux tendances générales idéologiques totalement opposées sont en compétition en faisant une confusion idéologique; l'islamisme et l'«occidentalisation». Ces deux tendances découvrent l'absence de la vision originale comment la renaissance culturelle d'Egypte pourrait se développer et la confusion idéologique entre deux points de vue extrêmement différents; d'un côté un retour aveugle aux origines traditionnelles sans égard aux exigences du modernisme, et de l'autre côté l'adoption aveugle des innovations occidentales. Cette confusion de l'identité exprimée dans le cadre de la définition des relations entre le patrimoine du passé et les besoins actuels devient plus profonde à Alexandrie puisque la ville n'a pas encore réussi à intégrer en harmonie son passé et son identité.

Le manque de la conscience civile et de la valorisation convenable du passé urbain explique jusqu'à un point la lutte entre le développement et le patrimoine; la lutte pour la vie entre la protection du patrimoine et les besoins de l'espace de la population croissante ainsi que l'envie des constructeurs du profit. Cette lutte entre les archéologues ou les conservateurs et les initiateurs du développement a jugé en faveur de ceux derniers, non seulement comme le résultat de l'indifférence publique ou de l'inertie, mais aussi à cause de l'absence de la machinerie législative adroitement structurées. Par conséquent, il est possible qu'Alexandrie reste sans son offre culturelle, son apparence physique, son esprit mystérieux et son atmosphère.

Malheureusement, ce sentiment de l'authenticité a été éternellement perdu lorsque les traces de l'histoire ont été éliminées par un concept malheureusement contextualisé du modernisme qui, au nom du «progrès» n'a pas respecté les principes du développement durable en mettant à côté les paysages estimés à long terme, bâtis ou naturels, et en sabotant le flux du tourisme culturel. Depuis toujours les touristes culturels étaient très attirés par le mythe alexandrin se dirigeant pour la plupart vers la splendeur antique et la culture urbaine cosmopolite et se trouvant conservé dans la littérature et glorifié dans la mémoire. Sauf la compréhension de la réalité, les touristes alexandrins errants doivent faire face à la qualité mauvaise de la présentation de la ville en ligne, aux sites et à la documentation de musée problématiques et à l'intégration insuffisante des monuments dans leurs alentours les plus proches.

Cependant, ce qui ressemblait au catalyseur concernant le rétablissement d'Alexandrie sur la carte culturelle et touristique de Méditerranée c'est, comme le phénix, la Bibliotheca Alexandrina fonctionnant comme la déclaration marquante de l'importance du siège urbaine symbolique globalement reconnu. Après six ans de travail, cet investissement culturel de marque a efficacement accompli ses missions concernant le développement de la haute capacité institutionnelle et la prestation de services culturels de qualité dans le cadre du génie civil de haute technologie contenant les mémoires historiques. Mais Alexandrie et sa nouvelle Bibliothèque présentant le principal moyen culturel d'exercice d'une influence stimulante sur la régénération urbaine ne peut pas être utilisée comme l'exemple de la théorie de réhabilitation dirigée par la culture. Le projet reste plus ou moins séparé de la cohésion sociale, des initiatives culturelles moins brillantes et de la population locale, de la solidarité locale, et il a ouvert des postes de travail dont le nombre était très petit pour le développement urbain ou social.

Cette révision des obstacles explique que la politique urbaine, afin d'être efficace, doit être située dans le cadre politique qui est démocratique; qui est fondé sur la société où les gens épargnent assez de leurs revenus pour pouvoir faire plus que de survivre; où les gouvernements respectent les conventions des droits de l'homme, la liberté d'expression, la conservation du patrimoine, l'intégrité administrative et la protection de l'environnement. En outre, toute stratégie de la régénération urbaine devrait chercher un équilibre délicat entre les intérêts de l'intervention dirigée par le marché et la nécessité de la conservation du patrimoine architecturale, sociale et culturelle pour unir la réhabilitation physique et la cohésion sociale.

Ce processus de la régénération urbaine devrait commencer par la redéfinition de l'identité territoriale dans le but de mettre en relief la spécificité de l'identité urbaine projetée. Dans ce

cadre conceptuel, l'avantage concurrent et comparatif et par suite la valeur spécifique de marque d'Alexandrie, doit être le mythe d'utopie de sa création et sa tradition urbaine de la diversité authentique multiculturelle et de l'hybridité exceptionnelle cosmopolite ensemble avec sa personnalité moderne vivante. Deux étapes sont nécessaires afin que ce processus de marquage soit efficace. La première est la revalorisation et la réévaluation de la mémoire collective urbaine et complexe; des histoires culturelles qui ont été gravées et qui ont donné une caractéristique à Alexandrie; des espaces qui ont compris de différentes significations et qui portent un grand potentiel représentatif.

La deuxième étape exige la qualité des espaces publics, non seulement par le «face-lift» total, mais par le développement réel, par la qualité de l'infrastructure culturelle, amusante, sportive et touristique et l'inclusion sociale par la participation et le développement du public. En outre, l'élargissement culturel au moyen de petits programmes innovateurs et des actions culturelles présente l'exigence et le soutien pour le développement de la planification culturelle locale à court terme. Les projets locaux étant en rapport avec les participants locaux et développant ses propres ressources d'Alexandrie devraient être stimulés. Dans ce cadre, les industries créatives locales devraient être capables de présenter leurs connaissances et leurs talents et d'ajouter leurs histoires et leur imagination innovatrice à la perception territoriale.

L'efficacité du processus de redéfinition de l'identité urbaine serait considérablement agrandie si les fonctions culturelles administratives étaient décentralisées. On pourrait y arriver au moyen de l'élargissement du cadre local administratif pour le gouvernement local en soutenant la participation des habitants dans le processus de prise des décisions et en remplaçant les hiérarchies par le système des relations mobiles. Le rôle principal dans le cadre du nouveau système décentralisé concernant le processus de prise des décisions devrait être donné au conseil municipal autonome qui gérerait les pouvoirs économiques réels et appliquerait les principes démocratiques de la gestion. Ce conseil devrait employer l'approche holistique et interdisciplinaire et développer une stratégie combinée en intégrant les objectifs des politiques différentes, en renforçant la collaboration entre les différents départements, disciplines et secteurs et en utilisant les ressources diversifiées.

Quant à l'importance du patrimoine dans la définition de l'identité urbaine, la gestion du patrimoine devrait être également décentralisée et promue afin de répondre aux besoins et de faire face aux défis posés par le paysage urbain rapidement changeant. Il est très urgent de créer un corps professionnel qui réglerait et contrôlerait les niveaux de conservation, la gestion et l'approche publique aux sites du patrimoine. Ce gouvernement devrait jouer un rôle principal dans la réévaluation et la revalorisation de la périodisation et la classification

historique; dans le progrès de la machinerie législative concernant le patrimoine; dans la régulation pratique avec les zones urbaines; et dans la croissance de la conscience de l'opinion publique sur le fait que la conservation et l'enrichissement du patrimoine de la ville peuvent considérablement augmenter les revenus touristiques et contribuer à la mobilisation économique urbaine.

Certainement, la politique culturelle urbaine viable ne devrait pas être concentrée seulement sur la conservation et la présentation du patrimoine, mais aussi sur la recherche et le développement de nouveaux champs d'excellence. Il faudrait le mettre en relief après avoir pris en considération le rapport préférentiel d'Alexandrie avec la Méditerranée, son identité territoriale redéfinie, l'élan reçu à cause du travail de la Bibliotheca Alexandrina, son contexte régional et global constamment changeant, le partenariat particulier entre l'Égypte et l'Union européenne, les perspectives de U-Med et l'aspiration à la stabilité au Moyen Orient. Alors, Alexandrie devrait participer activement dans la promotion du programme d'intégration qui mettrait en valeur la création de l'espace culturel pan-méditerranéen et la formation de l'identité culturelle collective post-nationale suivant la carte géographique de la Méditerranée des interactions productives. Cela exige l'évaluation de l'influence politique, économique, sociale et culturelle que le phénomène moderne du trafic transméditerranéen migratoire a sur les sociétés exportant et important la main d'œuvre. En plus, elle devrait être adressée à l'équilibre fragile (à cause des menaces du terrorisme) entre les droits civils et la sécurité sociale ainsi que les problèmes de tolérance religieuse au compte du fanatisme sectaire.

L'attention devrait être également attirée sur l'influence que la dégradation écologique a sur le tourisme, qui présente l'industrie fondamentale de croissance pour la région dans la nouvelle économie postindustrielle de services. Quant au tourisme culturel d'Alexandrie, les mesures devraient être prises pour conserver l'individualité culturelle essentielle du centre de la ville, son charme et son envie des touristes culturels. Cela comprend un fort développement d'infrastructure urbaine en protégeant les itinéraires fonctionnels de la mémoire à travers les guides, les cartes géographique, les sites web et en entraînant les guides interprètes. De plus, il faudrait arriver au progrès concernant la qualité de services et de produits et la main d'œuvre locale ainsi que les petites entreprises devraient devenir l'appui du développement touristique.

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Introduction

“You said: I will go to another land, go to another sea,/ I will find another city much better than this.../ Other lands you will not find, you will find no other seas./ This city your firm companion is.../ Always in this city you will end.”

*Constantine Cavafy*¹

If multiculturalism is to be identified as a state of racial, cultural and ethnic diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, and within the demographics of a specified frame of place and time, then the Alexandrian urban space deserves to be approached as a preferential place for scrutinizing and appreciating the development of such a pattern of cultural symbiosis. Besides the case of Alexandria becomes more intriguing, since there the virtues of multiculturalism were combined with a distinctive sense of cosmopolitanism. Thus it is worth analyzing how and up to what extent this combination enabled on the one side Alexandria to overcome the simple pattern of a heterogeneously populated conglomeration and on the other side her residents to develop a strong sense of loyalty to the city, regardless of cultural references dictated by individual or collective origin.

Today Alexandria may have become largely uniform in culture. Nonetheless it is challenging to think through how the elaboration of past Alexandrian diversity could prove a valuable precedent for designing city's future development, as well as her intercultural competence on international level. Especially now that urban identity is gradually gaining precedence over national identity in our times of globalised limitless mobility and minimised borders significance. Within this conceptual frame it is appealing to examine the potentials of rediscovering Alexandria's authentic territorial identity not only regarding the eventually beneficial asset of distinctiveness in our highly uniform world. Actually it is tempting to outline how, among past choices and achievements, past practices and experiences, modern Alexandrians will be able on the one hand to elaborate more effectively their urban policies; on the other hand to retrace the way that leads to the acquisition of an inherent openness to be exposed to elements of different cultures, and a capacity to build bridges and understand the culture of the other.

Within this justification structure and following the broad anthropological concept of culture introduced by the Article 2 of the Preamble to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on

¹ Keeley, E. – Sherrard, P. *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, Princeton 1992, p. 28

Cultural Diversity (2001)², the thesis debates in the first chapter the nature of Alexandrian multiculturalism, through detecting the influence that a wide spectrum of geographical, economical, political, social, or cultural factors has exercised on the development of urban multicultural schemes during the Ptolemaic age (331 – 30 BC) and the modern cosmopolitan era (1805 – 1956). The first period, opening with the city's foundation by Alexander the Great and finishing with the suicide of last Ptolemaic dynasty's descendant, Cleopatra VII, is stamped by Alexandria's development as the unquestionable intellectual and cultural capital of the known world. The second one, starting with the advent of Mohammed Ali and ending with the nationalization of Suez Canal by Gamal Abdel Nasser, is characterized by Alexandria's formation into a diverse yet inclusive Mediterranean metropolis, which was flourished within the interstices of the international system of imperial government and colonial control.

The choice of reviewing comparatively these two periods, tracing points of convergence or divergence, is grounded on the existence of certain common shared traits, which sometimes may have led to different directions, influenced by the particularities of each historical period. Nevertheless in both cases they contributed in creating a hybrid territorial identity that stood beyond any other identity defined by the virtues of nationality, ethnic origin, or religious sect. Among these common traits the most striking are:

- The openness of Alexandria to outside influence as a vehicle in turning Alexandria into a cosmopolitan and tolerant city.
- The economic policy as a strong link between Alexandria and the rest of the world.
- The considerable attention in financing and supporting cultural life and cultural institutions as a tangible sign of Alexandria's prosperity.

Moreover in the first chapter it is disputed how and on which levels urban multicultural schemes have enabled the combination of former homeland cultural orientations with host-city cultural experiences. And further in which way they created an overall openness towards on the one hand to the configuration of a sui generis Alexandrian culture, and on the other hand to the crystallization of a solid sense of belonging to the city. The final objective of this chapter is to trace the limits and the sustainability of Alexandrian multiculturalism; especially in relation to the incompatibility between the ever growing sense of Alexandrian

² "Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group and includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (http://www.unesco.org/culture/laws/mexico/html_eng/page1.shtml#CULTURAL%20IDENTITY)

extraterritoriality and the gradually prevailing, in the wake of 20th century, Egyptian national identity.

The second chapter questions the inescapability of the shift from multiculturalism to cultural uniformity and deterioration after the 1952 nationalist revolution. This question is being approached through evaluating the reverberations that internal and external distractions alike had on the cosmopolitan multicultural structure of Alexandria. Particular attention is being granted on the way that city's symbolical capital was managed and incorporated (or not) within the urban collective memory.

The third chapter, having set as indicator for urban sustainable development the four pillar model: economic health, social equity, environmental responsibility and cultural vitality³, has the objective to check the feasibility of an effective urban cultural policy in Alexandria today. This issue is being dealt through analyzing the impact that both national and urban structural problems have on city's image. Great emphasis is being placed upon the interaction of poverty, civil society restrictions, ideological confusion and unmanageable urbanization. Moreover the crucial for city's future struggle of development versus heritage is being weighed, and the entrance into the urban proscenium of a new dynamic factor – the phoenix-like Bibliotheca Alexandrina – is being evaluated on institutional and wider social grounds.

The final chapter, outlining the challenges posed by the global intercultural patchwork and stressing the necessitation of an overall sociopolitical reform, offers the strategic framework for the design of an urban cultural policy. This proposal is based on the following hypothesis: despite the fact that the struggle between modernization and heritage is proved often unequal, reassessment of urban collective memory and revitalization of city's dormant and periodically revived heritage can provide a precious new resource for redefining urban identity and attaining sustainable development. This prospective is being debated through the eventual application of policies promoting social cohesion, decentralization, international networking and upgrade of city's tourist potential.

³ According to the Government of Canada's New Deal for Cities and Communities (<http://www.fin.gc.ca/budget05/pamph/pacome.htm>)

Chapter 1: The Multicultural Phenomenon of Alexandria

1.1 Choosing the location for creating ex nihilo an extraterritorial city to be

“Did Alexander know that he was building not just a city to immortalize his name, but a whole world and a whole history? Probably: he was concerned not just with immortality, but with changing the world.”
Ibrahim Abdel Mequid⁴

When, early on 331 BC, Alexander the Great chose the strip of limestone land between the Mediterranean and Lake Mareotis on the threshold of Egypt, so as to found Alexandria, he could not have imagined that the city, bearing his name, was bounded to become the capital of an empire and the bearer of his tomb. Until then the village of Rhakotis, “*a little lump of Egypt*”⁵, had been standing at a close distance as a fort, a garrison and an outpost in the north-westerly extremity of the Nile Delta, inspecting sea visitors and repulsing intruders. Beyond the distant reverberations of Homeric narrative⁶ and the transcendental description of Plutarch⁷, benefiting from hindsight and aiming at structuring Alexander’s posthumous myth, Alexander most probably appreciated the spot’s strategic, climatic and commercial advantages.

This closed universe between lake and sea was easily defended, as it was reached by the narrow strip of land between the sea and the lake. Situated on the western edge of the dangerous, for its shallow waters, its adverse north summer winds and its lack of safe harbors, Nile Delta, Alexandria had five harbors. Furthermore she provided security to the seafarers, as she was not affected by the Nile floods and her main harbor was not silt up by the Nile deposits due to the beneficial direction of the sea currents. Moreover she was gifted with a delightful climate, especially because of the breezing Etesian wind, which, according to Forster⁸, is the real tutelary god of Alexandria and still today makes summer heat as well as air pollution bearable; a positive effect multiplied by the parallelogram city grid.

Being as close as practicable to the Nile – some 20 miles from the mouth of the river’s Canopic branch, reachable by means of canals from Lake Mareotis – Alexandria was in no

⁴ Mequid, I. A. *No one sleeps in Alexandria*, Cairo 2006, p. 44

⁵ Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 18

⁶ Homer, *Odyseia*, IV, 354-359

⁷ Plutarch, *Lives: Alexander*, XXVI

⁸ Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 21

danger of drinking or irrigation water shortage. Moreover Nile, being one of the greatest trading arteries of the world with access to innumerable resources, offered connection between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea through a canal starting from Memphis. Consequently Alexandria stood in the position of Port Said today as the maritime gate-way to India and the remoter East.

This preferential relation of Alexandria with the Nile was also particularly appreciated by Mohammed Ali, when he chose the sleepy fishing hamlet of some 6,000 inhabitants, as Alexandria was at the beginning of the 19th century, in order to create, once more substantially ex nihilo, a great Mediterranean city. It is not coincidental that the revival of Alexandria is directly connected with the digging of the 45-mile-long Mahmoudieh Canal (completed between 1818 and 1820), which once again connected Alexandria with the Nile and put an end to her isolation, caused mainly by the neglect on carrying out the necessary dredging work in the canal since the 14th century. Thus Alexandria was bestowed with the developmental possibilities of being reestablished as a great exportation port, as a strategic base on the Mediterranean, and moreover as the world's window on Egypt and Egypt's window on the world.

In both cases the weak initial inhabited nucleus, along with the absence of solid traditional structures, has significantly facilitated the opening policy of Ptolemies and Mohammed Ali alike. It is hard to imagine a firmly established Greek urban center, like Athens, becoming the place of a gradual yet radical sociopolitical transition; that from the scheme of city-state, filtered by the ideology of Greek racial superiority, to the scheme of "*supranational kingship*"⁹, where the identities of citizen and subject got fused. It is equally hard to imagine the Pharaohs' capital in Lower Egypt, Memphis, accepting easily crossbreed cults; or her descendant Cairo accepting without reactions the reinforcement of Christian communities, as a prerequisite for urban economic development or the formation of an exceptional new aristocracy, as a consequence of the prosperous Alexandrian trade. Such evolutions were much more easily integrated in a city that was largely considered as a charming addition to predominantly Pharaonic or Arab and Muslim Egypt respectively.

The choice of location, on the conjunction of different worlds – Africa and Europe, Egypt and the Mediterranean, Orient and Occident – has been proved crucial for the multicultural character of the city and her ability to act as a bridge between cultures and ideas, as a place of all possible encounters. Moreover it contributed in developing a sense of Alexandria as being

⁹ Hölbl, G. *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, London 2001, p. 90

a culturally independent entity of her own, a neutral land, and a place different from other parts of Egypt; as Ilbert put it: “*an ecosystem, with its own rules, contradictions, and weaknesses*”¹⁰. Yet geographic position cannot be an adequate condition for a city to develop multicultural potentials, if political planning and ambition are not invested in this city.

1.2 Shift towards the Mediterranean

“*Alexandria may not be Europe, but it’s not Africa either. It’s the Levant. It’s one of the ports of the Levant, and a gateway to the Mediterranean.*”

*Janie Sinano Horwitz*¹¹

Alexander’s initiative to create a maritime port, aiming in the short term at consolidating his eastern Mediterranean conquest and in the long term at facilitating the exchanges between the Egyptian and the Greek world as well as at revitalizing the transcontinental trade, constitutes a drastic shift in focus to the Mediterranean. Far from the traditional Pharaonic custom of indifferently turning the back on the sea ports and rather establishing interior ports along the Nile, he tried to make a fruitful combination out of Egyptian and Greek civilizations; the former being largely agrarian and the latter mostly marine. This urban experiment, intending to render Alexandria into a revolving door to Egypt, took place on the Mediterranean shores, which, despite the high Pharaonic centralization, had never been organically integrated within the country. Meeks doubts the very existence of Alexandria, in case the Pharaohs had established a port directly on the sea front of the Delta¹².

Nonetheless Alexandria would have remained just a considerable, yet off-centered port of Alexander’s empire, if his untimely death did not cause the rapid fragmentation of his imperial unity. It was through Ptolemy I that Alexandria assumed the role not only of the royal capital of a new state under a new dynasty, but moreover the role of a universal metropolis; a metropolis functioning not as the base of reinstating Alexander’s empire, but rather as the maritime center of exercising a policy of “*defensive imperialism*”¹³ in Mediterranean’s eastern basin.

¹⁰ Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d’ une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 735 (Both here and in footnote 82 the translation attempt is my own)

¹¹ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *The Zoghebs: An Alexandrian Saga*, Alexandria 2005, p. 48

¹² Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 27

¹³ Pollard, J. – Reid, H. *Rise and Fall of Alexandria; Birthplace of the Modern World*, Penguin 2006, p. 340

The same desire to renew Egypt's link with the Mediterranean world, constitutes an integral part of Mohamed Ali's and his successors' reforming policy to overcome the Mamelouks' disorder and to rejuvenate Egypt. Given his experience as a merchant before coming to Egypt, that "*nomadic genius*"¹⁴ detected Alexandria's prospects of maritime trade; thus Alexandria in particular benefited from country's reorientation becoming a modern city within one generation. Her connection with the markets of Cairo and the villages of Upper Egypt and the Delta through Mahmoudieh Canal was restored. Her port was reactivated through the construction of shipyards and arsenals. The import and export trade was revitalized by the improved and expanded cotton production. The shaping of a genuine urban environment with a maritime façade was promoted through setting up the Ornato committee. Of quite symbolic value was the erection of Ras el Tin Palace on the western tip of the Pharos Island. As Forster¹⁵ remarked, the position of the palace indicated that Mohammed Ali's aspiration was to restore not an oriental monarchy, but a modern power with its face to the sea. Finally the customary annual transfer of the court to Alexandria for the summer has elevated the city to the status of the second Egyptian capital.

So Alexandria, during both periods, entered the tradition of maritime cities, which, attracting scores of immigrants, have functioned as the foundations of cosmopolitanism. Important flows of people, that transcended conventional territorial boundaries, flocked to Alexandria, the city of opportunities.

1.3 Opening the city of opportunities to the flocks of immigrants

"Suddenly birds from the river and the lagoon, infinite in number and of every sort and size, settled down on the place like clouds and devoured every particle of the barley-meal, so that even Alexander was troubled at the omen"

*Plutarch*¹⁶

Alexander himself laid down the plan of the great city that was to bear his name, using grains of barley to mark the ground due to chalk shortage. But suddenly huge flocks of birds appeared from Mareotis and the Nile and to Alexander's alarm devoured all the grain. The portent was interpreted by his diviners as a sign that Alexandria would be the nurse of men of

¹⁴ O' Grady, D. *My Alexandria: Poems and Prose*, Alexandria 2006, p. 42

¹⁵ Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 78

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Lives: Alexander*, XXVI

innumerable nations. This interpretation was actually to be verified in the years to come by the rushing scores of immigrants.

Lewis¹⁷ compares the end of competition among Alexander's generals to succeed him, with the opening of a floodgate. After more than a century of successive wars, economic decline and growing insecurity, swarms of people from the city-states, implanted all around the Mediterranean, rushed into the promised lands of Near East. Alexandria, having been created *ex nihilo*, offered immense business opportunities, as the Ptolemies wanted to consolidate their newly born city with the greatest number of qualified people; there were abundant shares of fertile land¹⁸, promising governmental positions, opportunities for rapid enrichment through trade and, for those who were wishing to participate in all the fields of arts and sciences, the luxuriant protection of royal patronage. So mercenaries, adventurers, merchants, men of letters gathered in Alexandria, creating a palimpsest of origins, ranging from the Black Sea and Marseilles to Palestine and Nubia.

The same 'open door' policy has been followed by Mohamed Ali and his successors, making Alexandria once again a life-raft for Mediterranean populations – mainly from various parts of the Ottoman Empire, who needed to escape from wars and poverty. The massive influx of immigrants was sparked off this time by the privileges granted by Mohammed Ali to skilful experts and technicians or simply adventurers around the Mediterranean – mainly Ottoman subjects – so as their contribution to accelerate Egyptian modernization. Immigrants' settlement in Alexandria was encouraged by land concession and the prospective of a lucrative trade. Moreover the strict social hierarchy, that was based on religious criteria and divided the population into Muslims and dhimmis, was considerably eased and many of the restrictions on the movement, comportment, and activities of Christians in Egypt were removed. So Alexandria offered to Ottoman subjects such guaranties that no where else could be found around the Mediterranean.

Nonetheless such migration mobility along with successful integration within the host-city – soon to become mother city, would not have been feasible, unless the international conditions were permissible for this kind of evolutions. During both periods Alexandria benefited considerably from the decline of two empires, the Alexander's one and the Ottoman respectively.

¹⁷ Lewis, N. *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, Oxford 1986, p. 14

¹⁸ As Tsirkas wrote: "*This land, you see, is a great juicy female, full of eggs, like those gray mullets we fish with a cast net when they come downstream in August...*" (Tsirkas, S. *Drifting Cities*, Athens 1995, p. 444)

1.4 Benefiting from the decline of two empires

“Alexandria was home to an exotic variety of people whose cosmopolitan families had long been rooted in the commerce and the culture of the entire Mediterranean world.”

Michael Haag¹⁹

Even though through a conquering campaign, Alexander managed to transform the known world into a unified space ideal for an international traffic and exchange of ideas. Among the ideologies tested and, more or less, modified, we can single out two of classical Hellenism’s fundamental – yet rather monocultural – ideals; the political system of the city-state and the rigid – pejorative – distinction between Greeks and barbarians. Both of these ideological transitions found their expression in Alexandria, as she was the first Greek inspired town to become the multicultural seat of a monarchy.

As Polignac²⁰ has showed, the mixture of traditional city-state patterns with these of an imperial town is traceable on the city grid. The agora, as the center of the citizens’ community, survived, but it was counterbalanced by the complex of royal residences. The tomb of Alexander was not placed on the agora but nearer to the palace, marking the transition from the civic cult of founder to the royal cult of tutelary god. The acropolis, dedicated to the syncretic divinity of Serapis, was unconventionally put off-centre, so as the city to incorporate the Egyptian enclave of Rhakotis. Thus Alexandria was designed so as to balance between the Greek political tradition and the emerging scheme of oriental monarchy²¹; a city open to approach non-Greeks in a differentiated way.

Having himself experienced the disdain of the ‘other Greeks’ that were considering Macedonians as second class Greeks²², Alexander seemed to have an ecumenical vision, which excluded in advance the idea of the Greek racial superiority²³. Leaving aside the

¹⁹ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, cover page

²⁰ Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 120-121

²¹ According to Bernand, the complexity of Alexandria’s status is mirrored by the fact that Alexandria was never named after the name of her citizens (*Ἀλεξανδρέων πόλις*), as was the custom with city-states in the past. (Bernand, A. *Alexandrie des Ptolémées*, Paris 1997, p. 32)

²² Rondeau compares this attitude with that usually showed towards uncouth cattle-breeders in modern Balkans. (Rondeau, D. *Alexandrie*, Paris 1997, p. 49)

²³ It is enlightening to quote from Strabo’s *Geography*, which echoes Eratosthenes’ lost works: “*Eratosthenes goes on to say that it would be better to make such divisions according to good qualities and bad qualities; for not only are many of the Greeks bad, but many of the Barbarians are refined – Indians and Arians, for example,*

interracial marriages organized by Alexander in Sousa at 324 BC²⁴, Alexander's intentions could be traced in the special attention he paid in respecting Egyptian customs and traditions. Of course it is arguable whether he showed such an attitude just in order to legitimize his power and present himself as a continuator of the deified Pharaohs' line. Nevertheless the symbolic gestures he attended show respect towards the indigenous population. He chose to coronate himself in the same fashion as the ancient pharaohs, taking the title of the 'Son of Ammon' at Memphis; he visited the temple of Ammon in the oasis of Siwa²⁵; he restored the Chapel of the Sacred Boat in the temple of Ammon at Luxor.

After Alexander's death Ptolemies seemed initially to be in favor of a more hellenocentric approach, based on ethnic and class divisions. Yet they soon realized that, in order to base their power on solid foundations, they needed the reception and incorporation of foreign contributions and they did not spare themselves from gestures displaying their devotion to a multicultural scheme. We can take as examples the deliberate stylistic fusion among Ptolemaic royal statuary or the extensive program of temples building and restoration²⁶.

If Ptolemaic Alexandria benefited largely from the ideological legacy of the short-lived empire of Alexander, modern cosmopolitan Alexandria took mainly advantage from the social pattern of communitarian organization (the millet system) and the financial scheme of Capitulations, both bequeathed by the long-drawn-out deteriorating Ottoman Empire. Although Mohammed Ali proved an accomplished strategist and, following an expansionist policy, led Egypt in military successes, creating a kingdom of Ptolemaic proportions, he was finally obliged to be quit of his imperial vision. The British were feeling that the weakening of the Ottoman Empire along with the emerging of a new considerable regional power would put in danger their imperial communication with India. Thus they forced Mohammed Ali to

and, further, Romans and Carthaginians, who carry on their governments so admirably. And this he says is the reason why Alexander, disregarding his advisers, welcomed as many as he could of the men of fair repute." (Strabo, *Geography*, 1, 49). This trend of discovering worthwhile elements in foreign works was later exemplified in the best way by the Library of Alexandria.

²⁴ Readers are referred to Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander* (VII, 4, 4-8) and Plutarch, *Lives: Alexander*, (LXX, 3).

²⁵ It was this pilgrimage that Napoleon, in his St Helena memoirs, considered as a political action of distinctive importance for the establishment of Alexander's power in Egypt. Regretting his quick withdrawal from the Orient at the beginning of 19th century, he was contemplating that an analogous pilgrimage to Mecca might have secured for him an empire analogous to that of Alexander.

²⁶ Actually many of the most impressive temples, which tourists visit today and assume to be of 'ancient' Egypt, were either constructed de novo or extensively embellished under the Ptolemies, like the temples of Edfu, Esna or Kom Ombo.

accept the hereditary rule of a substantially semi-independent state, yet typically under Ottoman suzerainty. This compromise created an ambiguous situation for Alexandria as she was neither a genuine Ottoman nor a really foreign – Egyptian city, yet under the powerful protection of the international imperialist system, which favored the weakening of khedivial power in the wake of time.

Thus it is understandable that migrant populations from the Ottoman Empire, who made up the bulk of Alexandria's 'foreign' population, were to find the same community organization and the same financial regime. The determining bond between the community members was the common religious belief, being followed later by a rather fluid sense of common ethnic origin. The community was functioning as a self-administered social cell with integration mechanisms, replacing the state in the regulation of daily affairs, such as educational matters, marriages, hereditary rights or internal conflicts. As there was no such thing as formal Egyptian nationality (dating only from 1926), when the Greek, Jews or Syro-Lebanese immigrants were arriving, they were inserted into a familiar religious and cultural environment. Their settlement was facilitated as a token of communitarian solidarity and they were granted with the recognizable identity of the local subject.

On the other hand they were also granted with the extra-territorial rights of Capitulations²⁷, meaning exemption from local taxation and native judicial control; they could address themselves to mixed courts with a European component. Thus in Alexandria the Ottoman subjects, beside the communitarian identity, they were easily acquiring in addition a European nationality as a form of protection for practical reasons. It was possible a single individual, according to circumstances, to bring into play this or that citizenship and it was not so rare that members of the same family were adopting different nationalities and used them as credit cards, as Ilbert²⁸ pointed out. Yet this feeling of extraterritoriality led sometimes to arrogant attitudes, which catered interethnic tensions and a feeling of social injustice, each time that legal immunity was misinterpreted as law transgression scot-free.

Though favored by the international environment, the success of Alexandrian multicultural experiment was equally facilitated by internal conditions; among them the economic prosperity singles out as a catalyst.

²⁷ In 19th and 20th century Egypt there were 14 Capitulatory powers: Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Greece, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United States, Austria, Germany and Russia – the last three losing their rights after the First World War.

²⁸ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 25

1.5 The interactive power of economic prosperity

“At the crossroads of the whole world, of even its most remote nations, as if [Alexandria] were a market serving a single city, bringing together all men into one place, displaying them to one another and, as far as possible, making them of the same race.”

*Dio Chrysostom*²⁹

The Alexandrian economic prosperity during both periods alike was based on two pillars. On the one side Alexandria was exercising efficient control over a land of inexhaustible prosperousness; the Nile land. The benefits from Egypt’s agricultural wealth were multiplied either through the imposition of state monopoly on important agricultural crops, like the Ptolemaic sesame, or through the introduction of profitable monocultures, like the cash crop of cotton. On the other side Alexandria, sitting at the crossroads of international commercial routes, took advantage from the reorientation³⁰ of Egypt’s foreign trade away from the south and towards Europe. She was controlling effectively both commerce by sea, on account of her good harbours, and commerce by land, because Nile was easily conveying and bringing together Egypt’s vast resources and African or Asian luxuries. Exports were always exceeding imports and the Cotton Stock Exchange Market – *“the most dangerous casino in Africa”*³¹ – became modern city’s symbol, disappointing the visitors that were arriving so as to live their Pharaonic or Orientalistic illusions.

The economic success of Alexandria played decisive role in financing her infrastructure. Forster³² doubts the revival of cosmopolitan Alexandria, should be out of the scene *“the lifeblood of Alexandria”*³³, cotton. Moreover prosperity contributed significantly in promoting interaction between such a variety of races, languages, religions and manners³⁴, since financial exchanges were broadly considered as a two-way process of social intercourse

²⁹ Dio Chrysostom, *Alexandria Oration*, 32-36 (Quoted from Hirst, A. – Silk, M. (ed.) *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, Cairo 2006, p. 118)

³⁰ This reorientation is echoed in Strabo: *“The earlier kings of Egyptians, being content with what they had and not wanting foreign imports at all and being against all who sailed the seas and particularly the Greeks, set guard over this region and ordered them to keep away any who should approach.”* (Strabo, *Geography*, 1, 6)

³¹ Bull, B. *Café on the Nile*, New York 1998, p. 14

³² Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 235

³³ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *The Zoghebs: An Alexandrian Saga*, Alexandria 2005, p. 60

³⁴ *“Turks with Jews, Arabs and Copts and Syrians with Armenians and Italians and Greeks; the shudders of monetary transactions ripple through and divide them... Where else on earth will you find such a mixture?”* (Durrell, L. *The Alexandria Quartet [Balthazar]*, London 1968, p. 314)

targeting at atomic and common happiness. It molded a strong sense of urban – yet not national – belonging and a firm civil conscience that common welfare should be kept away from racial hatred or ethnic prejudices. And if during the Ptolemaic period wealth circulation and reinvestment was subject of a rigidly centralized policy, this civil pride is more obvious during the modern cosmopolitan period. Benefiting from the weakening of the khedivial power and the imperialist penetration, “*a community of interest*”³⁵ was formed, which managed Alexandria as a city-state through the Municipal Council within a framework of common urban beliefs and purposes and a deeply felt sense of common urban destiny. This shows also the detachment of Alexandria from the corpus of colonial cities, which were usually considered as exploitation bases bearing a distinctive sense of rootedness.

The economic prosperity, either as a tangible reality or as a target to be attained, made up the connective tissue of Alexandrian urban society both across the vertical axis, where social segregation was based on the difference of financial means, and across the horizontal axis, where the equality of financial means brought together people with different cultural baggage.

1.6 Alexandrian society; a fragile unity

“Alexandria has shown that a pluralist society could in fact function if based upon the recognition of the autonomy of different groups.”

*Robert Ilbert*³⁶

The primacy of community attachment as a way of social definition was prevailed in Alexandrian society of both periods. Main guardian of each community’s cultural identity was the educational system. Additionally communitarian allegiance was verified through the exclusive belonging to the Hellenistic gymnasium, the synagogue or the church, as a common ground for sharing ancestral values and traditions, yet hardly exciting any return movement. This cultural identity defense by grouping together is the natural attitude of colonists, when they find themselves among a new environment, as, out of fear of cultural absorption, they need to surround themselves with a familiar scenery of life and to consolidate their own standards before the equally natural process of adaptation starts. And interaction, regardless

³⁵ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 18

³⁶ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 31

slow or fast, deep or superficial, is inevitable, since even residential division, initially applied in the Ptolemaic city, or simple communitarian contiguity, pursued in the modern city, are overturned by daily porous proximity and mobility. Characteristic is the example of Rhakotis district which, crowned by the Serapeum, was being frequented by Greeks and Egyptians alike, and its modern successor Karmus, home to modern city's lower classes of all origins.

Reviewing Ptolemaic society, at the eve of third century BC there were rigid exclusionary barriers, reserving for the exclusive group of Alexandrian Greeks the privileged status of the imperial ruling class over the second class, comprising Greeks from other cities (Hellenes) along with Hellenized and Greek-speaking ethnic groups, and the third class of Egyptians. Nevertheless one hundred years later these xenophobic barriers were gradually breached through the intermarriage with Egyptians, the upward mobility of native skilful professionals (e.g. administrators, translators or members of the priesthood) and the incorporation into the Ptolemaic army of native contingents, granted with the privilege of land concession as a reward for their services (especially after the Raphia battle at 217 BC). Yet another example of creative social fusion is the convergence between the, usually conservative, Jewish community and the Greeks, exemplified by the translation of the Jewish Bible and in particular of the Pentateuch (Septuagint).

In modern Alexandria the absence of strong central power – especially after the transition of Egypt to the status of British protectorate at 1882 – gave to communities the autonomy to function as “*micro societies implanted on a foreign soil*”³⁷. This autonomy is reflected in the promotion of solidarity among community members, regardless of financial status, through offering access to community general or technical schools³⁸, granting scholarships to the poorer and forming socialization patterns such as scouts, sports teams, choirs or amateur theatrical groups. Moreover they were running hospitals, orphanages, and old people's houses. All this social activity was being funded by the self made notables, who, having gained immense wealth from the city's liberal economy – mostly as merchants and industrialists, were investing a great part of their fortune in order to retain a minimum of social cohesion among their denizens. Still haunting Alexandria with their names³⁹, the

³⁷ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 18

³⁸ Community schools were popular with members of all communities, since at 1921 61 % of Alexandrian pupils were attending community schools according to Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d' une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 424.

³⁹ Take for example the Antoniadis gardens, the Averof schools or the Kotsikas hospital.

philanthropic activity of these benefactors detaches Alexandrian society from the body of colonial societies, where the profits of investment were directly repatriated to the countries of origin, and explains the strong feeling of urban belonging that made difficult the time of exile.

The autonomy of the communities was counterbalanced by the Municipal Council, which was formed so as to put an order in urban growth, through the undertaking and completion of public works⁴⁰, and to moderate the social inequalities, through granting services and infrastructure facilities to the poorer social strata. Established against the will of the European Powers, functioning almost independently from central control, and remaining far from political issues, the Municipal Council expressed the solidarity among city's bourgeoisie, irrespectively of origins, and remained the symbol of Alexandria's civil society, retaining for Alexandria a degree of self governance unprecedented for the Middle East milieu. Of course thinking on modern political terms and taking into account the limited electoral body, it could not be considered as a sign of democracy, but rather of oligarchy, bearing reminiscences of the Venetian Council. Nevertheless it expressed the decisive will of city's elites – forming the very community of interests – to maintain a functional balance in a city, which was constantly facing the challenge of fluidity caused by the external migratory currents and the internal rural demographic pressure, trying to find an outlet within the promising urban centre.

High population mobility along with an expanding 'proletariatization' explain the overturning of the initial contrasting urban dichotomy between the north eastern 'European' quarters and south western 'Arab' districts⁴¹. The former became home of Alexandrian upper classes, where they enjoyed a cloudless inter communal life. The latter witnessed the dynamic mixing of the lower classes, which, joining Alexandria, may "*change their skies, not their feelings*"⁴²; yet daily proximity in Attarin, Labban or Karmus neighborhoods and contact in public gardens and concerts, favored the interpenetration of cultural patterns and ways of life.

The viability of this fragile Alexandrian social fabric was considerably strengthened by a distinctive and deep-rooted sense of religious tolerance.

⁴⁰ The most important accomplished projects are: the landscaping of urban spaces and municipality parks, the Corniche creation, the Municipal Stadium construction, the drainage system, the foundation of the Greco-Roman Museum, the funding of archaeological excavations, the publishing of theatre and literary reviews etc.

⁴¹ This residential division is colourfully depicted by Mequid through referring to the absence of difference between 'pasta' and 'gateau'; yet it was customary for the poor people who were living in the south to use the word pasta and the rich who were living in the north to use the word gateau when in reality the two words were referring to the same kind of pastry. (Mequid, I. A. *Birds of Amber*, Cairo 2005, p. 128)

⁴² Horace, *Epistles*, I.II.27 (Quoted from Lewis, N. *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt*, Oxford 1986, p. 26)

1.7 From Ptolemaic syncretism to modern secularism

“All our friends were Egyptians, foreigners, Italians, Greeks. There was never a question of color or of creed.”

Zeinab Niazi-Badr⁴³

The promotion of syncretic religious practices constitutes one of the major political instruments used by the Ptolemies in order to bind together the Alexandria's highly heterogeneous population. Having joined together in themselves the twofold legal position of Pharaoh and Basileus, the Ptolemies had to face a double challenge. On the one hand the Greeks were not a unified group, but they had arrived from many different horizons, carrying in their luggage various religious practices; on the other hand the Egyptians had a long religious tradition. Taking advantage of the diminishing distance between the different populations, they followed a systematic policy of promoting the efficacy of local deities among the Greeks, as well as the identifications between the Greek and Egyptian gods. Additionally the ancestral Egyptian rituals, related to the obsessive care for body preservation in preparation for resurrection, were combined with Greek practices, reflecting the belief to an expected after death life in Hades.⁴⁴ Furthermore in daily life surviving oaths and prayers, stereotype wishes for good health and dreams interpretations witness the dynamic fluidity of religious groups.

Yet the most striking example of Ptolemaic endeavor to render worship into the bridge that would unify their peoples, remains the invention of Serapis cult. The efficiency of Ptolemaic religious politics was heavily grounded on the absence of the idea that one religion is false and another true. Alexandrians were not only enjoying a priori the freedom of religious belief and expression, but they did not also deny the right of existence to other religious expressions and moreover they were willing to incorporate other cultic elements, once they were not contradicting the foundations of their credos. This explains the success of the well elaborated

⁴³ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, Alexandria 2006, p. 75

⁴⁴ In Alexandria the necropolis of Kom-el-Shoqafa, even though dated in the Roman period, reverberates this convergence of beliefs through a bilingual iconography that incorporates Greek and Egyptian funerary motifs; the mummies along with the obol placed on the deceased's tongue or the scene of embalming Osiris along with the scene of abducting Persephone. More information is available within the paper of Guimier-Sorbets, A. M. – El-Din, M. S. 'Life after death: an original form of bilingual iconography in the necropolis of Kom- el-Shoqafa' (Hirst, A. – Silk, M. (ed.) *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, Cairo 2006, p. 133-142).

cross-religious Serapis cult, Egyptian in origin and title, yet Hellenized in appearance and attributes; a happy fusion of Osiris, Apis, Imhotep, Zeus, Asclepius, Pluto and Dionysus. Furthermore it is understandable why the religious strife, appeared during the third and fourth centuries AD with the spread of Christianity, contributed considerably to the deterioration of Alexandrian multiculturalism. The prevailing Christianity could not comply with Alexandrian spirit of religious coexistence and the murder of the philosopher and mathematician Hypatia by a mob of Christian fanatics at 415 AD offers a tangible yet tragic example.

In modern cosmopolitan Alexandria religious tolerance was to revive not in the form of syncretism – although as binding worship Haag⁴⁵ considers the modern deity of Mammon, but rather in the form of secularism as one of the tiers of modern cosmopolitan society. Exogamy was frowned upon⁴⁶, conversions from one religion to another were rare, religion was a taboo area, mosques and churches were standing at the very heart of the communitarian system; nevertheless Alexandria's morality was based on the reciprocal respect⁴⁷ between the various religious expressions and on the consistent refusal of establishing an official religion. This frame of peaceful religious coexistence had already been outlined by Mohammed Ali's initiative to realize his modernization project based on the expertise of people, regardless of their religious identity. Later on, as Ilbert⁴⁸ has pointed out, the effective function of the Municipal Council was not hindered by the plurality of religions or denominations shared by its members, while the success of the secular Victoria College, despite the confessional diversity among its schoolmates, offers another example, as Hamouda has shown⁴⁹.

Alexandrian religious tolerance is even more obvious among lower classes. Of course the cadences of everyday life in Alexandria were disarranged, when religious differences were exploited by nationalist fervor. Nevertheless the incessant intertwining of lives in a city where residential division became impossible, established firm bonds between Alexandria's denizens. One of them, Ahmed Abou Zeid, remembers: "*The foreigners respected the month*

⁴⁵ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 15

⁴⁶ This infrequency of intermarriage, as a sign of the segregation of ethnic communities on religious criteria, was coming in sharp contrast with the frequency of cases of illicit sex between members of different ethnicities, classes and neighborhoods.

⁴⁷ Such a relation of reciprocal respect constitutes the canvas on which Mequid masterfully depicts the story of the friendship between Sheikh Magd al-Din, a devout Muslim with peasant roots in northern Egypt, and Dimyan, a Copt with roots in southern Egypt, in his novel *No one sleeps in Alexandria* (Cairo 2006).

⁴⁸ Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d' une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 434

⁴⁹ Hamouda, S. – Clement, C. *Victoria College: A History Revealed*, Cairo 2004, p. 85

of Ramadan. They neither smoked nor ate in public. Ordinarily, their meals were discovered from their homes, during the work-day, in a kind of multi-layered or towered metal utensil or lunch-box. But these never seemed to appear in the month of Ramadan. This shows compassion and respect for our customs and traditions”⁵⁰. Another example of urban solidarity is the unanimous support of the boycott against the Italian products at 1939, as a strong demonstration of disapproval against Mussolini’s anti-Semitic race laws restricting Jewish human rights.

All these Alexandrian features – economical, social, and religious – have contributed towards the formation of yet another important binding feature of Alexandrians; the conscience that they were bearers of a cultural identity that distinguish them from their contemporaries. Regarding the Ptolemaic period, Giursenar⁵¹ has characterized it cultural patriotism in place of racial patriotism, echoing the principles of Isocrates. As for the modern cosmopolitan period, Ilbert has described it as territory identity⁵².

1.8 Alexandrian cosmopolitan identity

“And the Alexandrians thronged to the festival/ full of enthusiasm, and shouted acclamations/ in Greek, and Egyptian, and some in Hebrew,/ charmed by the lovely spectacle/ though they knew of course what all this worth,/ what empty words they really were, these kingships.”
Constantine Cavafy⁵³

Alexandrian cosmopolitanism during the Ptolemaic period found its best expression in the function of two cultural institutions; the Library and the Mouseion. Both of them have embodied the Ptolemaic cultural vision to project royal power through the encouragement of research conducted by a community of scholars with an international multicultural outlook. The main objective was to make of Alexandria a place of memory, where the ecumenical intellectual heritage would be gathered, elaborated and transmitted⁵⁴. The innovation stands on the fact that not only Greek tradition is survived, spread and augmented, yet there was a

⁵⁰ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, Alexandria 2006, p. 107-108

⁵¹ Giursenar, M. *Présentation Critique de Constantin Cavafy*, Paris 1978, p. 30

⁵² Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d’ une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 739

⁵³ Keeley, E. – Sherrard, P. *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, Princeton 1992, p. 42

⁵⁴ Macleod underlines that this achievement remained unsurpassable until the age of the key-hole satellite and the World Wide Web. (Macleod, R. (ed.) *The Library of Alexandria*, Cairo 2005, p. 9)

desire to understand what until then was considered as *'alien wisdom'*⁵⁵ (Egyptian, Jewish, Chaldean, Aramaic, Nabatean, Indian etc.). After Alexander the world was found on the threshold of an intellectual experience of global dimensions; the Hellenistic world – reminding intensely our modern world of globalization – was changing fast and the unprecedented mobility of people imposed the survival of threatening cultures. It was Alexandria's geographical and cultural position that facilitated the interaction of Hellenic humanistic ideas with the wisdom of oriental civilizations.

Whether or not the collection and translation of knowledge treasured in books was aiming at developing commercial and political intelligence, the result is that Alexandrians were the contributors to and beneficiaries from this cultural inheritance, having access to and understanding of a rich tradition of cultures. They mark the transition towards a validation of individual's place in the common culture far from the heroic ideal, nursed by the Greek classical culture. As it emerges from the existing body of historical or literary references, their character was marked by the fact that they found themselves in the context of a multicultural intensified contact and mutual interest. Prince and plebeian alike they were light-hearted, worldly, not easily impressed and fond of scoffing at others. They were enjoying getting into intellectual or physical scraps out of mere curiosity. Aesthetes and cynics, they were considering politics as an aesthetic spectacle, thus approaching public opinion of our times.

The same validation of individual success along with the membership in communitarian and civic schemes, as a prerequisite for urban prosperity, forms the base of modern sophisticated Alexandrian identity, which stood beyond any national or religious identity. Alexandria's gaze was firmly directed towards the other shores of the Mediterranean, always attentive to modernity and open to new experiences within a milieu of intellectual freedom. The city could boast Egypt's first secular school, first Arabic feminist newspaper *'Al Fatah'* (*The Young Girl*), first theater built to purpose (the Zizinia Theater), and even the initial screening of the first film by the Lumière brothers one year after its premiere in France. The statue of Mohamed Ali, placed in Manshieh Square, was the first equestrian statue to be put up on a public square of a Muslim country.

This sui-generis pro-European culture used French as its linguistic vehicle – or as Horwitz Sinano describes it *"more precisely 'Franquette', a language made up of borrowings,*

⁵⁵ Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 40

mediterraneanisms, with a lilting accent full of flavor"⁵⁶. Architecturally it was expressed through a fantasia of eclectic and revivalist trends. Professional publications reflect an intense cultural scene and the daily press of Alexandria forms a channel facilitating an extraordinary circulation of information, which was forming a vibrant public opinion and from which, although it seems contradictory, the Egyptian nationalism benefited considerably so as to build its theoretical structure. There was an explosion of literary activity in innumerable periodicals. Lectures were held to feed the image of Alexandria not as a colonial city without roots, but rather as directly linked with her Hellenistic predecessor. Museums, libraries, artistic societies and a public university were established. Fine arts exhibitions were catered to by several art schools. Theatres⁵⁷, cinemas⁵⁸, cafés, restaurants, clubs, dancing and masked balls were on the center of an outstanding social life – especially during summertime when the Egyptian government was moving to Alexandria – reaching a climax during WWII.

Yet modern cosmopolitan Alexandria has developed a sense of herself that she could not have been flourished nowhere than on this neutral territory, this strip of land between Egypt and the Mediterranean, being presented not as a gate to the Orient but rather as an extreme bulwark of the Occident. Jasper Yeates Brinton underlines that all this outstanding cultural life was introduced by those "*representing the old business firms which had built the city's prosperity and whose families brought to the city the culture and traditions of foreign lands*"⁵⁹. Here lies the inherent deficiency of modern Alexandrian multiculturalism that played a major part in its rapid deterioration.

Ptolemaic multiculturalism, after overcoming the arrogance emerging from the sense of ruler's superiority, viewed ancient Egyptian culture as a boundless body of wisdom that needed to be approached, interpreted and contained. On the contrary modern multiculturalism

⁵⁶ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *The Zoghebs: An Alexandrian Saga*, Alexandria 2005, p. 60. Naquib Mahfouz confessed to Rondeau that, every time he was visiting Alexandria, he had the impression of being abroad; he was talking exclusively in French or in English. (Rondeau, D. *Alexandrie*, Paris 1997, p. 32)

⁵⁷ Yannakakis remembers: "*The great theatre companies of Europe, the Comédie Française, La Scala of Milan, the National Theatre of Athens and celebrated opera singers all played to full houses.*" (Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 119)

⁵⁸ Josie Brinton remembers: "*The picture of course is in English but down at the bottom the conversation is shown in French and then they have a small screen on the side of the main one on which the conversation is shown in Greek and Arabic. Doesn't that sound cosmopolitan?*" (Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 164)

⁵⁹ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 137

has been characterized by an inflexible inability to understand and incorporate organically the Arab-Muslim Egyptian culture, which was largely essentialized as the irrecusably and congenitally unknown ‘Other’. This attitude is recapitulated in Forster’s appreciation of the Arab presence in Alexandria, reflecting the theory of historical gap between Byzantium and the Napoleonic invasion: “*And so though they had no intention of destroying her, they destroyed her, as a child might a watch. She never functioned again for over 1,000 years*”⁶⁰.

1.9 The limits of modern Alexandrian multiculturalism

“If it were not for the mosque of Qait Bey, where the Pharos ought to be, and a few minarets in the strip of old Alexandria between the two forts, you would not believe that you were in a city of Islam.”

*Michael Haag*⁶¹

The character of a city is often imparted by a minority. Nonetheless, since Egyptians remained far superior to the aggregate of all immigrants, the attitude on behalf of the, foreign and westernized Egyptian alike, ruling class towards the Arab-Muslim culture, ranging from indifference to contempt, indicates the limits of Alexandrian multiculturalism. This kind of attitude was also filtered to the foreign lower classes through the patterns of communitarian allegiance (mainly schools), thus impeding the interaction, which was being naturally developed in the popular quarters of the city. Even though they were rubbing shoulders with the local population, they were facing local culture through the lens of incomprehensibility, unfamiliarity and remoteness. Despite the long stays (over three or four generations), the majority of the immigrants – like a class apart – was proclaiming an Alexandrian identity that was defined by a negative characteristic; that of not being Egyptian.

This distinction of identities and the sense of otherness is mirrored on the form of address, as Mabro⁶² has showed; a non-Egyptian man is addressed as *ya khawaga* (an expression

⁶⁰ Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 54-55. This position is being largely reevaluated now as a result of recent excavations that have revealed an abundance of merchandise imported from all over the world until the 14th century; since then the damage inflicted by the 1356 Crusade and the recurring outbursts of bubonic plague proved to be fatal for the city.

⁶¹ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 18

⁶² Mabro adds that he does not know any other society where different words are used consistently to address foreigners and nationals, other than in situations where different languages are used. (Hirst, A. – Silk, M. (ed.) *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, Cairo 2006, p. 248-249)

largely identified with the meaning of foreigner), while Egyptian men are addressed differently with terms such as *sayyid*, *hag*, *afandi*, *bey* or *basha*. The foreign communities learned only enough “*kitchen Arabic*”⁶³ and Aciman presents his grandmother – quite ironically – saying that she had lived in Egypt for exactly fifty years and that in all these years she had never learned more than fifty words of Arabic; “*one for every year*”⁶⁴. The Arabic speaking population is out of the narrative that celebrates cosmopolitan Alexandria or it is portrayed dirty and dreary, being lumped under what is intended to be a pejorative label: Arab⁶⁵.

Of course the avalanche of Egyptian peasants that was incessantly overrunning Alexandria, as result of the cotton monoculture imposition and the high demographic pressure, was hardly manageable. The Municipality Council was actually quit of incorporating them into the urban fabric, leaving the city periphery to function as their fluid ‘landing’ area consisted of mushrooming disintegrated districts (the bidonvilles), whose outlook was bringing Alexandria closer to Third World cities. But even when these districts were being incorporated into the urban tissue, they were largely remaining a, rarely ventured, “*forbidden territory*”⁶⁶; another mysterious and unknown city far from the intoxicating vast blue of the Corniche, the bustling financial centre of Mohammed Ali square, the elegant Quartier Grec and the luxuriant villas of Ramleh.

These demographically growing and urbanizing sectors of the population were excluded by culturally European elite, which found herself desperately out of tune with the mindset of these people, as well as with purely Egyptian creativity. This failure of the modern multicultural scheme to incorporate facets of the Arab-Muslim culture was proved crucial for its future, when this very culture was identified with Egyptian national identity. Thus a distinctive segregating line was drawn between Egyptian Alexandrians, considered as the rightful city’s inhabitants, and the third or fourth generation immigrant Alexandrians, regarded as the undesirable guests, unless they would conform to the newly emerging – under the influence of various factors – uniform cultural pattern. The Alexandrian multicultural pendulum stood still in front of the dramatic dilemma between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

⁶³ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 17

⁶⁴ Aciman, A. *Out of Egypt*, New York 1994, p.135

⁶⁵ For example Cavafy seemed that he had never encountered a Muslim and Aciman has not a single positive portrayal of the locals, which were presented as mud moving by Forster or ghosts by Durrell.

⁶⁶ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 109

Chapter 2: From Multiculturalism to Cultural Uniformity

2.1 Nationalism(s) versus multiculturalism

“The noisy contentions of demagogues and illiterates had begun to fill the empty theatre of world affairs with the shrill waspish voice of the times – nationalism.”

Laurence Durrell⁶⁷

During 19th century the ideology of nationalism transformed the existing way of thinking about the state first in Europe and later around the world. Multilingual and multiethnic empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian or the Ottoman lost their legitimization, at a great extent due to their oppressiveness. The new nation-states, which sprang from their dissolution, were founded on the principle that each one’s sovereignty must be directly linked with its own unique culture and history. The base of this principle was unity; unity of descent, unity of culture, unity of language, and often unity of religion. Deeply appreciating the unity of the imagined national community as well as sustaining and reinforcing the significance of the common shared elements, was aiming at the formation of a culturally homogeneous society, with the possible recognition of some regional differences, yet with the exclusion of foreign cultural or social elements; thus emphasizing the demarcation of national culture from other cultures. Where cultural unity was insufficient, it was encouraged and enforced by the state through an array of policies, mostly of educational direction.

The multicultural ideal of co-existing cultures that interrelate and influence one another was largely considered as a structural drawback for the emerging type of nation-state. The advancement of European nationalistic ideologies had also impact on Alexandrian social fabric. The primacy of community identity was gradually giving way to national identity, diversifying the relationship between third or fourth generation immigrant Alexandrians and their homelands⁶⁸ and allowing national governments to intervene in their communities’ internal affairs. Nevertheless the sense of privileged belonging to the halcyon Alexandria was still prevailing. But soon Alexandrian multiculturalism was to be found on the eye of the nationalistic cyclone, whose gales were provoked by a multitude of nationalistic movements that were both external and internal.

⁶⁷ Durrell, L. *Bitter Lemons*, London 1959, p. 164

⁶⁸ For example before the Second World War the pupils of the Italian community schools were put into fascist black shirts and blue neckerchiefs and during the war the Greek community was violently split between progressivists and royalists.

Whereas elsewhere la belle époque ended in 1914, in Alexandria it lasted until the mid 1940's. Nevertheless the death knell of multiculturalism started tolling earlier. The rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe inevitably affected Alexandrians of Italian and German origins, especially after the outbreak of Second World War, when the majority of male adults were shut in internment camps as enemy aliens⁶⁹, since the semi-colonial regime of Egypt⁷⁰ was put on full alert so as the Axis advance to be checked. At the same time the spread of anti-Semitism sparked off the expansion of the Zionist movement, which was promoting the idea that Jewish culture and nationhood should find their expression within a Jewish national home in Palestine. Initially the Zionist question found no appeal among the Alexandrian Jews, who were enjoying freely all their religious rights. Yet the Palestinian issue complicated matters for Alexandrian Jewish community, as a new kind of militant nationalism was gaining ground from the 1930's on, largely determining national Egyptian identity; the Islamism and Arab nationalism.

Before the advent of Arabism, during the 1920's, the conception of Egyptian nationhood, which was expressed by the Wafd nationalist leader Saad Zaghloul, was rather territorial, secularist, pluralist and inclusive; religion and alternative cultural identities were neither a condition nor an impediment to opt for the Egyptian national identity. Zaghloul was certainly recognizing the uniqueness of the Egyptian character that, having its traces into the distant Pharaonic times, was to be glorified again by Mohammed Ali and his dynasty in the context of a meta-historic continuity. Nevertheless he declared that all minorities would have the chance to participate in the Egyptian future and integrate in the Egyptian society; he stated: "*The present movement in Egypt is not a religious movement, for Muslims and Copts demonstrate together, and neither is it a xenophobic movement or a movement calling for Arab unity*"⁷¹. It is not coincidental that Egyptian Jews had prominent roles in Zaghloul's nationalistic movement.

Many liberal-minded Egyptian intellectuals, like Taha Hussein, shared Zaghloul's views and, admiring European progress and education, they were recognizing the role of Egypt's

⁶⁹ The impact of WWII on Alexandrians that unintentionally found themselves on the enemies' side is depicted by Tzallas in his short story '*Frau Grete*' (Tzallas, H. *Farewell to Alexandria*, Cairo 2004, p. 39-59).

⁷⁰ Britain has unilaterally declared a rather falsified type of Egyptian independence at 1922, as the declaration was containing four reserved points: Egyptian foreign defense policy, the Suez Canal, the Sudan, and the rights of foreign nationals and minorities residing in Egypt.

⁷¹ Quoted from Krämer, G. *The Jews in Modern Egypt 1914 – 1952*, Seattle 1989, p. 125.

Jews, Greeks, Syro-Lebanese and other settlers as intermediaries between the Islamic and the European worlds. Certainly this intellectual and political discussion was not of theoretical value. When all would be said and done, those excluded from the definition of Egyptian national identity could lose their political rights and perhaps their property, their homes or even their country too. This undesirable prospective became probable when Egyptian nationalism began to merge with its Arab counterpart.

The Arabism took advantage from the persistence of British and French colonial policies that were favoring interference in the government of Middle Eastern countries. In Egypt's case it was British interventionism that was largely curtailing national independence, already from the time of Ahmed Orabi's revolt suppression at 1882. Arabism apologists were denouncing the bankruptcy and societal inattentiveness of the existing political regime, evidenced by the ever more gaping divide between the rich and the poor. They were also denouncing the lack of decisiveness and the rampant ineffectiveness of the old Egyptian political set of bickering parties to liberate the country from the de facto imperial control.

Thus they easily reached the wide urban audience of the Egyptian middle and lower classes that were feeling excluded and, at a great extent, were sharing a common belief that a strong hand was needed to obviate things. The rapid fall in infant mortality, combined with general improvements in public health and longevity had already contributed in retaining the birth rates high, yet in dropping the death rates. Rural environments could not absorb the population surplus, which was migrating to the urban centers (particularly Cairo and Alexandria), striving to find its feet. These demographic forces gave a new momentum to the Egyptians' claims on economic, social and urban space. However the potentials of Egyptian economy could not meet these claims, unless a radical redistribution of the roles among the social actors was attained. Such a process was including subsequent exclusions that were to be augured initially on the ideological field, as the debate over the definition of Egyptian authenticity was going on; the foreigners were soon to become the primary target.

The Arabism was stressing the shared language, culture and religion of the mass of the Egyptian people, as well as the sense of belonging to the enduring and unshaken world of Islam, containing all that was necessary for welfare in this life and salvation in the next. However the desired cohesion was being consolidating through rejecting the Greco-Roman and the Christian centuries that preceded the Arab conquest, while a blind eye was turned towards the subsequent multilingual and multiethnic Ottoman period and its heritage; among them the modern cosmopolitan Alexandria. This ideological exclusion, promoted by the Arabism, was to be combined – quite distractingly from the real social problems – with

religion and xenophobia by more radical nationalistic branches. The Society of the Muslim Brothers, a political force second only to Wafd party by the end of the 1930's, was promoting a reforming Muslim vision that had in store threatening discrimination and frustrating inequality for the social groups that would fail to get assimilated to the projected morality. Yet the emergency regulations, necessitated by WWII, put a check on the extremist voices⁷².

The end of Second World War signaled the rekindling of nationalistic agitations and the question of national self-determination was once again ushered in public proscenium, creating expectations of change. The Arabisation and Islamisation were accelerated by the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the rising chauvinist tide was quickly reaching maximum level, as the Egyptian army's trouncing by that of the newly declared state of Israel discredited significantly the ruling establishment. However the nationalistic helm was to be assumed neither by the liberal elites, nor by the extremist traditionalists. It was the Free Officers' coup d' état that succeeded in expressing the popular need for a strong regime aiming at restoring the vulnerable, due to imperialist interferences, national pride, and at promoting economic growth with social justice. Later movement's national platform was enriched with the ideology of pan-Arab unity and socialist reform. Coup's success, despite its limited forces, revealed the unwillingness of the Egyptians to defend the existing regime.

The Egyptian nationalist swift shook Alexandria to her very foundations, as her diversified population was found in the awkward position of having to face the new reality and take decisions in front of the oncoming challenges and breaks with the past, as the emergence of the exclusivist yet legitimate state patriotism did not seem compatible with cosmopolitanism.

2.2 Cutting the cosmopolitan umbilical cord of Alexandria

"I stayed for a long time at the stern watching the low coastline disappear below the horizon... I didn't know if I was leaving for my country or simply leaving my country."

George Phillip Pieridis⁷³

World War I may have shaken the imperial edifice but left it standing. On the contrary World War II brought incalculable change. Between the two wars Alexandria experienced a

⁷² Of course on 4 February 1942 demonstrators in Cairo did not restrain themselves from chanting "*Forward Rommel; long live Rommel!*" (Vatikiotis, P. J. *The History of Modern Egypt*, London 1985, p. 347), preferring – more or less justifiably – the enemy's advent, if it would mark the end of the unreserved British interventionism.

⁷³ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 121

carefree period of happiness and prosperity, unequal to the troubling situation of the European continent that was being tantalized by successive economical and political crises. Yet the Alexandrian cosmopolitanism was beginning to crack. The question of nationality choice was firstly put through the Egyptian nationality law of 26 May 1926 that dealt the question of Ottoman subjects, now that the term was invalid⁷⁴. Since the fictitious nationality of local subject was belonging to the past, the former Ottoman subjects were effectively stateless, neither Egyptian nor foreign. Everybody was above all citizen of Europe or of Egypt. Yet the choice of nationality was to be forced more vigorously later.

At 1937 the system of Capitulations was abolished by the Montreux Accords, which announced the end of mixed courts for 14 October 1949. The foreigners could no longer enjoy the privilege of immunity for free. The advantages of a foreign passport faded away and the fluidity of exchanging nationalities was going to be over. Arabic became the sole official language and foreigners had to chose their national definition, as the status of protégé was definitely stamped out. Thus the traditional millet system that favored social organization based on communitarian solidarity was being dissolved, as the national identity became the only determining criterion, being superposed over the other – usually multifaceted – identities.

Nevertheless most families of foreign origin had lived in Alexandria for three of four generations and were firmly anchored by a sense of belonging to the city, constituting what quite contradictorily could be described as indigenous foreign population. Although there was a sense of anxiety in the air, as they were not considered anymore as cosmopolitan Levantines but rather as simple minorities, very few thought that there would be no future for them in the country they called home. They trusted that equal treatment before the law would mean they would suffer no discrimination in employment or in the running of their businesses.

Moreover they put their hopes in the creation of a middle class that would include Egyptians and foreigners alike, and in which the place of foreigners would be assured by their expertise and by the proverbial animosity of their Egyptian denizens, which remained largely unaffected by the nationalistic turbulence⁷⁵. It is characteristic that the Greek press opened up

⁷⁴ Article 22 stated that “*each individual living within the territory of Egypt is considered to be Egyptian and treated as such until his nationality has been firmly established. At the same time, until Egyptian nationality has been established, he will not enjoy the exercise of political rights within Egypt*”. Citizenship meant Egyptian baccalaureate [*al-tawjihyya*] and compulsory military service.

⁷⁵ Evangelia Pastroudis remembers: “*We were 7 sisters and our Egyptian neighbors took care of us when there were demonstrations during and after the war. They would take us to sleep in their house which was on the safer*

a wide debate on the best way of getting adapted to the new situation arising from the abolition of Capitulations. Notables of the Greek community, which was always the dominating foreign component in the population of Alexandria, organized conferences to discuss this topic and publications of the period noted the community's hopes and concern about continuation of life in Egypt. This concern was to be verified later by the initiative of Greek Alexandrians to join Nasserist troops during the Suez crisis, helping considerably in retaining the Canal open and navigable for the passing ships after the withdrawal of the expertise British staff; a quite valuable contribution to the success of a risky move aiming at redeeming the past and claiming the future of Egypt.

However the intensive Arabization of the society along with primarily external issues yet with strong internal reverberations belied their hopes. Many Armenians left when the Soviet Union opened the doors for immigration to Armenia proper. The Italian and German communities were to a great extent dislocated before and during World War II. The British community, never particularly large, mostly Maltese in origin, and always bearing the stamp of occupier, gradually withdrew with the troops. The Jewish community of all different nationalities, Egyptian included, was increasingly becoming subject to harassment from the security services as a result of 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Although there may not have been any mass departures as yet, the vitality of cosmopolitan mix was little by little going.

The decisive blow was to be given by the nationalization of Suez Canal at 1956 and by what came to be known as the tripartite aggression. British, French and Jews Alexandrians in their capacity as enemy aliens were forced to expulsion at a few hours' notice, carrying nothing more than a suitcase and leaving all their other possessions behind. A long history of living in peace in a city in which tolerance was as natural as breathing was now evaporating in a flash, as the coerced uprooting created a frustrating atmosphere of loss⁷⁶. Nonetheless Alexandrian cosmopolitan spirit of animosity proved to be stronger than the nationalistic zeal. Cotton merchants helped the Jews smuggle their money by putting it inside bales of cotton exported abroad. There was also a lot of smuggling of foreign currencies inside boxes of tea packed in Egypt. Moreover Egyptians – both Muslims and Christians – felt compassion for

side of the street." (Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, Alexandria 2006, p. 58)

⁷⁶ Mequid's hero, Arabi, looking around Mansieh for a Jewish friend of him with the name Rachel, he is getting the answer: "*Which Rachel? Rachel Levy? Rachel Isaac or Rachel Simon? Rachel who went to Italy or who went to Brazil or the Rachel that no one knows where she went...?*" (Mequid, A. I. *Birds of Amber*, Cairo 2005, p. 108)

their Jewish neighbors' drama and tried to support them in adversity. Paul Balta remembers: "To avoid confiscation by customs, these neighbors would hold their jewels. I do not know of a single case where they were not returned, in one way or another, to their owners."⁷⁷

The members of the solidly structured Greek community as well as the Syro-Lebanese Alexandrians were forced into exile mostly by a volatile socialist legislation that promoted a rather authoritarian, populist, and narrow-minded process of nationalization, which suppressed private enterprise in the commercial sector. The Stock Exchange Market closed, to be set alight later during the food-riots of 1977, and only a few foreigner entrepreneurs held on. Mostly doctors, lawyers and journalists or owners of small businesses, like pensions⁷⁸, taverns or bookshops, escaped the wholesale nationalization measures of 1961. Even imported products disappeared from the shops. The same process took place in the agricultural sector. While some managed to avoid the agrarian reform of 1952 by parceling out property ownership to every member of the family, landlords could not escape the Decree No. 127 of 1961 that limited holdings to a maximum of one hundred feddans⁷⁹ to be followed in two years time by the sequestration of foreign landowners' possessions.

The liberal experience was left behind and the period of non-alignment Arab socialism was starting. The new regime aspired to promote political inclusion and economic development in a society that was viewing modernity exclusively through a Muslim Arab lens. Within this social environment it seemed that there was neither a starting point nor a destination for the Alexandrians of foreign origins which remained untouched by the nationalistic turmoil and managed to keep their roots. Integration seemed foreign to the deeply rooted community spirit and meaningless as their commercial and financial resources were usurped through the sequestration procedures. It also looked unattractive since they were feeling that their children, even if they conformed to the rapidly expanding Arabization of their surroundings, they would have no future in a nationalistic Egypt, having to face discriminatory barriers due to their descent, religion, culture or language. Additionally foreign Alexandrians gave way to the herd instinct, affected by the fear that life was not likely ever to flow in the same channels again.

⁷⁷ Ilbert, R. – Yannakakis, I. – Hassoun, J. (ed.) *Alexandria 1860 – 1960; the Brief Life of a Cosmopolitan Community*, Alexandria 1997, p. 109

⁷⁸ Like the Greek pension keeper Mme Mariana that in Mahfouz's *Miramar* is presented to say: "They've gone every one of them... I couldn't leave – where should I go? I was born here. I've never even seen Athens. And after all, who'd want to nationalize a little pension like this?" (Mahfouz, N. *Miramar*, Cairo 2005, p. 7-8)

⁷⁹ One feddan is approximately equal to one acre or 0,4 hectares.

The mass departure of foreign Alexandrians during the 1950's and the 1960's tolled the fast deterioration of the cosmopolitan city. This process is rather natural; otherwise empires, states or cities have been always risen and fallen in the wake of historical changes. Yet, on terms of cultural politics and especially as regards channeling and managing urban collective memory, it is quite interesting to see how a city not only becomes a symbol of an exceptional yet rapidly revised era, but also the vindication of vividly remembered memories and the starting point of restoring the supposedly rightful order of things. The multicultural city was soon to be replaced by a totally different city, largely oblivious of her pluralist predecessor; the Alexandria that was no more.

2.3 The symbolical power of a city

*“At the doors of Africa so many towns founded/
Upon a parting could become Alexandria,
like/ The wife of Lot – a metaphor for tears;/ ‘Alexandria’
Lawrence Durrell⁸⁰*

An expanding and finally dominating political power is usually evaluated by its awareness of the already underlying social and cultural patterns and its capacity to absorb them or its sensitivity to adapt to them. Of course as Forster wrote *“Old countries can’t learn their lesson, so how could new ones? Egypt for the Egyptians, Britain for the British, France for the French! No country has seen that nationalism leads to discomfort within and disaster without”*⁸¹. Benefiting from the hindsight, Alexandria’s cultural deterioration is now largely evaluated as the deplorable side effect of a dramatic sociopolitical change; yet in Nasser’s time this evolution seemed inevitable and quite comprehensible for a lot of reasons.

Egyptian Arab nationalism was seeking to heal the wounds of history and was standing for a socially attentive economic development with the rise of new classes to social and political leadership. Alexandria had been the hub of liberal economy, rather an urban enclave within Egypt, and her very existence was based on the European-style ideal of individual success, attained on the absence of state control and expressed in the best way through the socioeconomic activity of the city’s notables⁸². Thus she became a symbol of individual

⁸⁰ Durrell, L. *Collected Poems*, New York 1960

⁸¹ Quoted from Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 157

⁸² As Ilbert wrote *“The city was not existing before them, she was existing through them.”* (Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d’ une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 434)

success, to be derided later as a remnant of the decadent bourgeoisie. It was obvious that she was contradicting the socialist collective patterns, projected on the one hand to promote the mass mobilization ahead of the future tasks and on the other hand to facilitate the integration of peasants, urban artisans, retailers, and lower-grade professionals into what later became the regime's solid supporting base; thus offering a satisfying justification for the regime's longevity.

Being led by men of modest rural or small-town origin that were representing the second social stratum of broad middle class, the new regime was meaning to purify the existing sociopolitical system that for quite long had frustrated their ambitions. The targets of this assaulting purification were the dominant Turco-Circassian elites, the burden of a useless monarchy of foreign origin and the constitutional-parliamentarian politicians, whose factious political activity was largely being viewed as propelled exclusively by the attainment of personal interest. All this long established order had been condemned for being overly obedient to foreign political influence and instruction. Alexandria was identified as a sign of imperialist domination, bringing back to memory bitter reminiscences of the humiliating bombardment of 1882 as well as of the age-old governmental practice of spending the summer among the Europeanized elites.

Moreover the new regime was standing for cultural dynamism, which should be intensely committed to the Arab cause, and for cultural resistance that, remaining away from any foreign influence, had to search for pure expressions of Egyptian authenticity. Cosmopolitan Alexandria had been the cradle of a pro-European hybrid culture, mainly nursed by a progressive Levantine society that was sponsoring a multitude of cultural activities. She had always been open to modernity and external cultural inputs, from revolutionist political ideas to culinary habits and fashion styles. She had always welcomed and shared her prosperity with immigrants, whose tolerant religious observance has kept a strictly personal character⁸³. She housed a polyglot society⁸⁴ with a predominance of French; even the official, governmental newspaper was edited in French.

⁸³ Fouad Ghubril recalls from his school life in Victoria College: "*I had friends in my class whom I didn't know anything about. We didn't know who was a Muslim, who was a Christian, who was a Jew, who was a Greek... After '56 everybody knew. I had classmates who disappeared and I didn't know why they had disappeared and I realized they were Jews – I didn't even know they were Jews. We didn't care. Later we became very aware of religion.*" (Hamouda, S. – Clement, C. *Victoria College: A History Revealed*, Cairo 2004, p. 212)

⁸⁴ Christian Ayoub Sinano remembers of her grandparents: "*My great-grandfather Aristide, though Greek, spoke nothing but French as he had been sent to school in Marseilles and Paris. His wife, though French, spoke*

Beyond the influences of her latitudinal position, Alexandria was the heart and soul of Egypt's opening to the Mediterranean. Her urban identity was characterized by an innate familiarity with the foreigner that was reaching back to her Hellenistic founders. Her community schools were representing this pursued meeting between the Occident and the Orient. They had a profound appeal to pupils of different origins, thus daily school life was increasing familiarity with others, was liberating mentality from traditional conventions and was cultivating a growing interest for what was happening across the other shores of the Mediterranean.

Consequently Alexandria could hardly be assimilated within the new singularly coherent and unitary cultural framework, which was displaying homogenizing tendencies at the expense of diversity and difference. She was not just a colonial city that was liberated from the foreign yoke. She was rather a Mediterranean city that has managed to bring together people who were bearing different origins, religions or cultures, and were identifying themselves with the space they were living in together; a bygone anomalous setting for the new nation-state⁸⁵. What was consciously or unconsciously pursued was the political, economical and cultural neglect and distancing of Alexandria. History and symbolism suggested a number of possible goals to the new revisionist regime; high on the list, maybe second only to Suez Canal, was Alexandria.

With a movement of high political symbolism the Egyptian government abandoned the age-old practice of spending the summer in Alexandria and discredited her from the status of second capital city. Alexandria reverted to her former sleepy state of an ordinary provincial and uneventful city, reduced to the status of Cairo's port. Otherwise Cairo's proximity to the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis served better for cultivating the conviction of Egyptian grandeur that goes back to Pharaonic accomplishments.

Moreover the liberal financial status of Alexandrian foreign communities became a target whose hit was able to fire the enthusiasm of regime's sympathizers. Thus urban economic activity was intransigently nationalized despite the fact that the Greeks only had in their hands

nothing but Greek, being born and bred in Smyrna. So they spoke Italian to each other. That will not seem odd to anyone who knows Alexandria." (Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, Alexandria 2006, p. 120)

⁸⁵ The Alexandrian setting was totally different to the nationalist ideal, as this was described by Eriksen: "*Nationalist and other ethnic ideologies hold that social and cultural boundaries should be unambiguous, clear-cut and 'digital' or binary. They should also be congruous with spatial, political boundaries.*" (Eriksen, T. H. *Ethnicity & Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, London 1993, p. 114)

nearly half of the urban commerce and around one third of all the shares of the banks and limited companies around Egypt⁸⁶. Certainly reckless daring is common shared feature of all revolutionary periods in an attempt to cut the bonds with the rejected past. Yet a more prudent, step-by-step policy would be necessary for a city that could easily replace manual workers, but she was lacking of a well structured native bourgeoisie, which generally vitalizes national economies. Sudden loss of foreign expertise led the city to recession.

The rapid decomposition of urban economical tissue had major impact on city's cultural life. The famous Alexandrian writer Edwar al Kharrat, looking back on this period, he said: "*It was difficult for a writer or journalist writing within the boundaries of Alexandria, to reach a large audience or a large readership. Writers had to move to Cairo in order to be read, to become recognized by an audience and to gain recognition and popularity. Alexandria was a kind of exile*"⁸⁷. The same happened on the whole spectrum of cultural activities, as the exodus of foreign communities in combination with the adoption of a more or less deliberately uniform national culture, diluted the cosmopolitan stigma of Alexandria and marked the gravitation swift towards Cairo. Little by little old theatres, cinemas, clubs, billiard and dancing halls were deprived from the essence of their existence. The cultural rupture was serious. The functions of cultural management, decision making and funding became highly centralized.

Building work came to a stop and the exquisite architectural repository of cosmopolitan Alexandria was no longer maintained and repaired⁸⁸, as there was no legislation for a fair

⁸⁶ For example when Averof died, he granted through his will to donations the colossal sum of 10,300,000 francs that was more than two times the income of Alexandrian port for the year of his death (Ilbert, R. *Alexandrie, Histoire d' une communauté citadine*, Cairo 1996, p. 431). Moreover when Greece was facing Mussolini's attack and La Bourse égyptienne printed an appeal from Greece to all Hellenes living abroad, within a single night the Greeks of Egypt subscribed double the amount that Egypt was spending for the entire year on its own national defense (Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 182).

⁸⁷ Awad, M. – Hamouda, S. (ed.) *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, Alexandria 2006, p. 128

⁸⁸ Such an image is described by Tzallas in his short story 'Antinodoros and Iordanis': "*At the beginning of the 1950's, that was how things were with all the buildings in Alexandria. You could no longer make out what the original color of their walls had been. You looked at a surface and thought, 'Years ago, that wall must have been white or gray'. Now the colors were uncertain, grubby, grimy and dingy. The plaster was swollen with the dampness that enshrouded the city. There were cracks in the walls and yawning gaps where the plaster had flaked off, like unhealed wounds revealing great stones and bricks: the bowels of the building. The perceptive passer-by felt that the Great City, the famed Alexandria of Egypt, was gasping her dying breath.*" (Tzallas, H. *Farewell to Alexandria*, Cairo 2004, p. 94-96)

return on proper value, rents had been frozen in 1963 at contemptible levels and leases were transferable. Many European-style villas were abandoned and many of them have been pulled down, as there was no legislative machinery through which these remnants of an epoch, whose formal history had not yet been written, to be classified as protected historical monuments. A common scene until now inside the neoclassical apartment blocks is that of art deco lifts permanently stuck between the floors or resting out of use on the ground floor.

There was also an intentional attempt to modify city's collective memory, which has been proved vulnerable to manipulations and appropriations. In 1963 a committee was formed to get rid of all 'foreign' names of stations on the Ramleh line. Moreover the city was being officially egyptianized through the change of streets' names; Agamemnon Street, Achilles Street, Romulus Street and Philoctetes Street became Khalid ibn al-Jarrah Street, Muthanna ibn Haritha al-Shaybani Street, Musa ibn Nusayr Street, Tariq ibn Ziyad Street and so on⁸⁹. Any mention of the multicultural character of Alexandria was out of the question in the educational curricula⁹⁰, which were intended to promote national pride, anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism and socialism. Thus history writing and teaching, as the preferential domain of nation state educational policy that is prone to alteration, adjustment and demarcation, acquired the foremost priority of inculcating a present-oriented collective memory, in order national myths to be formulated and disseminated, current circumstances to be interpreted and morally justified, future political ends to be framed and legitimated. Authentic memory, as the timeless and unconscious history of the people that sometimes comes in conflict with official history, was being gradually fragmented and disjointed, nostalgia was prevailing and Alexandria was acquiring her own ghosts on her way to cultural uniformity.

⁸⁹ This process is described in Mequid's *Birds of Amber*. His hero, Arabi, found a job with the city as a worker in the planning department; his task was changing the streets' signs. Yet feeling choked, as all the old names had been, one way or another, connected with his own past, he decided to quit. But before doing so, he decided to 'arabize' the last street in his own way. Instead of replacing the Heracles Street with Antar ibn Shaddad Street, he bought a small brush and added an 'h' to the 's' at the end; "*The name of the street became Heracles Street and he said to himself that now the street had become an Arab street!*" (Mequid, A. I. *Birds of Amber*, Cairo 2005, p. 377) This fictitious story reflects that memory cannot change just nominally.

⁹⁰ Hala Halim comments on history teaching: "*History began with a cursory glance at ancient Egypt, proceeded down the ages to Bonaparte's expedition, disposed of the Muhammad Ali dynasty with a few damning sentences, brought into focus the British occupation of Egypt, and strung the independence movements into a sequence of precursors to the 1952 revolution; the history of the Arab world was also covered in-depth.*" (Hamouda, S. – Clement, C. *Victoria College: A History Revealed*, Cairo 2004, p. 213)

Chapter 3: Alexandria today; policy confusions and controversies

“Culture cannot do everything governments would like (and rarely as fast as they expect) but without cultural tools the task of improving the quality of life would be infinitely harder.”

*Simon Mundy*⁹¹

Alexandria of today, with an estimated population of 5 million, is the second largest city in Egypt; the leading port of the country, a throbbing with life commercial, transportation and industrial hub, and a main summer resort of Middle East. She does not display a cosmopolitan population structure, but rather an ethnically homogeneous one, with the usual kind of visible internal differences that may be considered as regional differences within Egypt. The foreign communities are now no more than a memory, as their members have practically disappeared from the city scene, and diversity seems no longer possible. There are foreigners working in Alexandria in different fields, but they do not constitute a part of Alexandria; they come and go.

Being promoted under labels such as *‘The Pearl’*, *‘The Bride’*, or *‘The Mermaid’* of the Mediterranean, Alexandria retains an atmosphere and a cultural personality that is more Mediterranean than Egyptian or Middle Eastern. Her ambience and cultural heritage distance her from Cairo and the rest of the country. Alexandria’s idiosyncrasy is also reflected on her citizens’ pride of being Alexandrians. More or less they feel different; different to the Egyptians, different to the Arabs. They feel apart in Cairo as Cairenes feel foreign to Alexandria.

If we take under consideration that planning, which aims at sustainable urban development, is based on the four pillar model: economic health, social equity, environmental responsibility and cultural vitality, then quality of life in Alexandria is seriously affected by the following factors:

3.1 Demographic explosion and economic poverty

As it has already been stated the excessive growth of Egyptian population is attributed to the high birth rates and to the large reduction in death rates (especially regarding child and maternal mortality), combined with general improvements in public health, sanitation and average life expectancy. But the real problem of the swelling overpopulation is not the number of people but how rapidly they have appeared on the scene. Alexandria has five

⁹¹ Mundy, S. *Cultural Policy: A Short Guide*, Strasbourg 2000, p. 9

million now against one million or so at the time of the Free Officers' coup d' état in 1952. During the same period Egyptian population on national level has been growing at a rate of some 1, 3 million a year and there is the compelling prospective of being doubled, reaching 160 million by 2050.

Furthermore, according to Issue No. 537 of Al Ahram weekly online⁹², over one in three of the current population lives in Alexandria's shanty areas, while population density in middle-class areas has reached 211 persons per feddan (by law each feddan should support no more than 150). This demographic outburst has been largely catered by the countryside that became jammed and could no longer provide any kind of living wage for agricultural workers. So the displaced peasants – landless wage-laborers or sharecroppers, at a great extent illiterate and utterly unskilled – have flowed into the major Egyptian urban centers of Cairo and Alexandria to find whatever work they can⁹³.

Although illiteracy is inversely correlated with poverty, at the same time, as a result of the rapid expansion in education and as a way of appeasing populace, universities have been producing far more graduates than the economy can find room for; and furthermore without a prior adaptation of academic curricula to the needs of the labor market, thus ignoring the advantages of a demand-driven vocational education⁹⁴. In a society where two-thirds of the population is less than twenty-five, a rapidly expanding labor force is striving to land too few jobs⁹⁵. The labor markets are flooded with young adults, increasingly well educated and equipped to participate in a modern economy, but also increasingly frustrated in their efforts

⁹² <http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/537/>

⁹³ The situation under which internal migratory routes poured into urban centers, is depicted by Amin who uses the example of the domestic servants of rural origins during the 1950's and the 1960's: "*For a boy or girl working in domestic service was often not paid any monetary reward at all, their family residing in the village being content to know that their son or daughter was provided with the necessary food, clothing and shelter which they were hard put to cater for in the village.*" (Amin, G. *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians? Changes in Egyptian Society from 1950 to the Present*, Cairo 2000, p. 60)

⁹⁴ As stated by Abdel-Karim Kebiri, senior specialist at the International Labour Organization, (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2008/905/>), Egypt ranks 130 out of 131 countries in the World Competitive Report 2008 where labour efficiency is concerned. In the same report, Egypt came at 108 with regards to the quality of the education system, the 106th in terms of the quality of school management, and ranked 80th in the availability of research and training services.

⁹⁵ According to EU's Country Strategy Paper for Egypt for 2007-2013 (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/enpi_csp_egypt_en.pdf), given population growth of 2% per year, more than half a million new job-seekers enter the labour market each year, while an estimated 44% of the Egyptian population is living on less than 1.7 euros per day (under the upper poverty line).

to get even a low-paying entry-level job or to enter into open or hidden underemployment patterns, disproportionately with their qualification and productivity. The level of economic frustration soars by the feeling that no education ensures even the hope of a decent job to educated youth and that the country's extraordinary disparities of wealth keep the polarization between 'haves' and 'have nots' unmitigated and shrink the middle class "*transitional belt*"⁹⁶.

The economic stagnation has created a dead end for young people in search for meaning for their lives and the conditions for alienation and exclusion from the rest of the society. The intensified preoccupation with the financial problems of everyday life has been fostering a general disillusionment with what had been promoted in the past as commitment to national progress and revival or an interest in Arab nationalism and solidarity. Hopes, promises and aspirations for freedom, prosperity, wealth redistribution, dignity, and cultural authenticity are largely considered to have been twisted, while a scheme of a confronting social dualism and polarization, partly analogous to that of the pre-revolutionary era, has begun to reassert itself⁹⁷.

On terms of cultural politics, demographic explosion and rapid urbanization has been exercising immense pressure on space, strangling urban harmony and threatening urban architectural heritage, as it will be shown further later. Economic poverty means on the one hand high social discrepancies in cultural practices and on the other hand that the proportion of disposable income spent on cultural activities, as well as access to cultural facilities and cultural market, have remained on roughly rudimentary levels. In fact, excluding the new Library which will be dealt separately, urban cultural infrastructure has been decreasing in a ratio inversely analogous to that of population growth, taking a heavy toll of the rapid deterioration of the pre-revolutionary cosmopolitan cultural scene.

Specifically if we attempt to map city's important cultural institutions, then we can include the Greco-Roman Museum, the Alexandria National Museum, the Fine Arts Museum, the Royal Jewellery Museum, the Mahmud Said Museum Centre, the Cavafy Museum, the Alexandria Opera House, the Music Conservatory of Alexandria, the Anfoushi Cultural Centre, the Horreya Cultural Centre, the Shatby Cultural Centre for Artistic and Literary

⁹⁶ Hourani, A. *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London 1991, p. 387

⁹⁷ Indicative is the public frustration provoked lately by the reduction of government interventionist policies for the protection of lower-income groups, such as the subsidizing bread price regulation. This tension – culminated with the last April's nationwide strike – was appeased with an unusually 30% rise in salaries, announced on 1 May; yet measures designed to finance the extra cost might unleash series of price hikes, evaporating the bonus.

Appreciation, the Atelier of Alexandria, the Jesuit Cultural Centre, and the Kasr El Tazawok Cultural Centre. University of Alexandria has the main educational role, while foreign cultural centres have their own distinctive role as promoters of their national cultural products and as facilitators of the intercultural dialogue with the Egyptian civilization. In Alexandria they have their branches the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the American Centre, the French Cultural Centre, the Hellenic Foundation for Culture, the Italian Cultural Centre 'Dante Alighieri', the Russian Centre for Science and Culture, the Spanish Cultural Centre 'Cervantes' and the Swedish Cultural Centre.

Private sector, including galleries, theatres, cinemas, music clubs, is heavily oriented towards mass culture, while the presence of free lancer artists is quite restricted. Animation and communication fields are underdeveloped without target groups' determination. Media space dedicated to promotion of provincial – as it is largely considered among Egyptians in comparison with the metropolis of 20 millions Cairo – Alexandria's cultural life is quite limited, particularly if it is not connected with the promotion of state policy. Moreover it should be taken into account that the overwhelming majority of Egyptian publishing and broadcasting media is located in Cairo and it is oriented towards the whole Arab world; since the Egyptian capital city is considered as a pan-Arabic cultural and informational beacon, supporting simultaneously the country's huge mass program-making industry (the 'Hollywood of the East').

Reviewing state financial policy, it has been characterized by an extraordinary rate of acquiring armaments and on expanding the machinery of administration, along with a soaring emphasis on government services. This financial prioritization has inevitably mortgaged the future, in that it has reduced the resources available for investment and long-term economic growth. At the same time it has confined cultural expenditure almost exclusively in the huge task of preserving, restoring, protecting and maintaining country's cultural heritage, in its various manifestations yet preferentially that of Cairo over that of other regions or Pharaonic and Islamic over those of other periods (Greco-Roman, Byzantine etc).

Untrammled population growth that generates overburdening of scarce resources (land, food, water) and economic poverty has augmented popular discontent with the rather Pharaonic-style features of current political situation, which Humphreys describes as bureaucratic authoritarianism⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ Humphreys, R. S. *Between Memory and Desire; the Middle East in a Troubled Age*, Cairo 2000, p. 46

3.2 Bureaucratic authoritarianism

In order to soak up the excess of graduates, Nasser had decreed that the government would be the employer of last resort. Thus the regime acquired a fairly broad and solid social base, which has formed a well articulated, yet inefficiently sclerotized and over-staffed bureaucratic regiment of officials. Actually a network of complicity and dependence has been developed, controlling the various sectors of society, and inclining to mismanagement as a result of modest salaries⁹⁹. At the same time all talk of democracy and free speech was suppressed by a vast secret police force, mobilized to stamp out dissent.

Though during the 1970's and the 1980's there was a gradual yet far-reaching reorientation from the limitations of state control over the economy towards open market liberalism and progressive privatizations (known as *Infitah* or policy of the open door¹⁰⁰); though foreign policy took some daring diplomatic initiatives (considering the ad infinitum turbulent Middle Eastern political environment¹⁰¹); internal governance has largely remained ossified into an authoritarian dogma, leaving little breathing room for a really democratic political life. Moreover grassroots participation remained largely compartmentalized – that is economic participation has been allowed without real sociopolitical participation. Of course this political atrophy has thrived on the absence of tradition as well as of capacity building in popular participation and control – that is, political culture.

Despite the fact that President Hosni Mubarak (now running his sixth term in office as head of state) has exercised a strategic – though rather neutral regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict – role in the efforts for peace and stability in the region and has restored a degree of democratic challenge and conflict, he seems to have frail confidence in where really participatory public space and multiparty democracy might lead the country; mainly out of fear that forging a new participatory social contract might expose the vulnerability of the state and topple ruling élite from power. Whatever democratic initiatives are introduced, they are considered as a top-down affair, scarcely generating enthusiasm among social forces. The fragile and sluggish response of the state to the demands of democratization advocacy groups

⁹⁹ Thus it is not difficult to understand what the famous Alexandrian director Youssef Chahine described as: “*disappointment at how the socialism we had longed for was turning out at the hands of the bureaucrats, making it into something stifling*”. (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2008/908/>)

¹⁰⁰ Alexandria benefited from imports' resumption and the development of her industrial area on the southern shore of Lake Mareotis (mainly food-processing, textile-manufacturing and refining industries). Now it is estimated that Alexandria houses nearly 40 per cent of the nation's industry.

¹⁰¹ For example the deadlock with Israel was broken and steady diplomatic relations with the West were restored.

is being grounded on the fact that Islamic militant extremism as a mode of – sporadically violent and bloody¹⁰² – protest and as a force to be contented with, has not yet been effectively quelled or accommodated. Thus modest political advances are often reversed, as soon as Islamic activism reasserts itself as the most salient opposition to the ruling regime and the soft underbelly of society.

Mubarak retains massive powers to govern by decree, to impose harsh security measures, and to rely on the ubiquitous presence of the intelligence and security services apparatus¹⁰³. He has not occasionally restrained himself from manipulating elections in various ways, like direct electoral fraud, falsification of vote counts, coercion of citizens to make them vote for the ruling party, control of the media by the ruling party, and manipulation of the Law of Political Parties, which makes the formation of new parties subject to the control of a committee dominated by members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP); thus in point of fact excluding opponent political movements and groupings from the political arena. Such tactics have significantly contributed to the deactivation of public opinion's political consciousness, expressed in the disappointing voters' turnout during elections (not more than 20-25% of the electoral body according to independent sources). The majority of the Egyptian people seem to regard their government as an alien entity that they have to endure. This feeling of political apathy and docility is being also enhanced by the fact that a clear and plausible alternative political proposal to the current situation has yet to appear.

In the cultural sector these authoritarian politics have found their expression in a largely personalized system that exercises a highly centralized policy, including decision making, budget and resource allocation. On the level of the city's cultural policy, the key actor in diffusing and coordinating the centrally formulated cultural policy and in having the general

¹⁰² The most horrific episode was the carefully targeted and swiftly carried out attack against a large group of tourists at a glorious archaeological site near the Upper Egyptian town of Luxor on November 17, 1997, killing sixty tourists, mostly Swiss, British and Japanese, along with a number of Egyptian guides.

¹⁰³ The draconian Law on the State of Emergency, introduced in 1981 after Sadat's assassination, is persisting (especially on the pretext of terrorism), giving ground for accusations of human rights abuses, since Egyptian citizens can be held indefinitely, without charge. This shows lack of appropriate legislation to address national security issues, serving as a legal substitute to the application of the emergency state that swallows up civil society, stifles protests, and muzzles freedoms of speech. An advance to the right direction is the creation of the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) under the chairmanship of the former UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, as a potential vehicle for reviewing national legislation, formulating a human rights strategy, proposing changes in the legal and administrative context, and promoting a culture of human rights in the country.

supervision of the city's cultural field is the Governorate of Alexandria. It plays the role of mediator between the central administration, located in Cairo, and the local cultural institutions, organizations, associations, artists and other cultural agents. The centrally controlled procedure of decision-making is rather inflexible and time-demanding, rendering local cultural institutions highly dependent on the state support and leaving little freedom of maneuver to regional setups.

Additionally there are no clear cut monitoring vehicles and performance standards for evaluating cultural life. Furthermore rigid functional specializations, without sufficient sharing and co-operation between different departments, disciplines and sectors (e.g. Ministries of Interior, Tourism, Education etc.), reflect lack of holistic thinking and render intersectorial activities ineffective. At the same time low level salaries and absence of reliable periodic programs, aiming at upgrading human resources qualifications, scarcely function as stimulation for innovativeness and advanced performance or as attraction for specialized managerial staff and entrepreneurs.

The existing political setup, along with the predominance of institutional logic and elite oriented public sector, is not only dismissive of independent actors and NGOs, but of grassroots civil society and cultural citizenship generally – with the exception of the rather controversial Islamic activism¹⁰⁴. This situation disables and discourages civilian groups to take responsibility and to voice their opinion, and consequently discourages non-institutional cultural production. Ideological debate over the cultural values that ought to drive political action and social policy is intensified. Nonetheless it is usually embittered by the regime's repressive character and canalized through monopolistic media mediation, which is largely intended to mobilize consent, to eradicate dissent, to create a politically controlled public space and to promote dissemination of the omnipotent ruler's personality cult¹⁰⁵. Nevertheless

¹⁰⁴ State-led scrutinized NGOs' appropriation through either repression or co-optation and heavy dependence on state bureaucracy for their mission and activities is mainly attributed to the fact that NGOs registered under the Ministry of Social Affairs are tightly controlled via Law 32 of 1964 and Law 153 of 1999 on associations, which gives the Ministry sweeping executive powers to licence, regulate, dissolve and merge NGOs, accept or reject their members and their boards of directors, veto any decision taken by them, judge certain acts by members of NGOs as criminal offences, and confiscate their assets. The Egyptian regime seems to be afraid of losing its exclusive status as protector of the public interest and its legitimacy before the citizens by conceding to civil society institutions the role of mediator between the state and the individual. State's vulnerability and NGOs' efficiency were revealed in an alarming for the regime way during the 1992 earthquake of Cairo.

¹⁰⁵ Indicative is the confiscation of El-Shafie's graphic novel *The Metro* on charges of obscenity and libelous references alleging corruption on the part of Egyptian politicians.

this media monopoly is being gradually yet efficiently breached by the extension on the one hand of the border-free flow of information through satellite television, which, overcoming geopolitical as well as geocultural boundaries, invalidates the idea of audio-visual sovereignty; and on the other hand of the direct citizen interaction through cyberspace activism, which introduces a transnational wired society whose virtual nature facilitates sociopolitical emancipation¹⁰⁶.

Little public discussion or dissent is permitted even on issues of lower cultural politics and the customary practice is the top-down dispensation of elitist cultural values. Additionally the bureaucratic ossification along with the intricate windings of Egyptian legislative labyrinth, which keep transparency, competition, enforcement of contracts, and anti-corruption practices in unsatisfactory levels, have driven back business community from developing, managing and subsidizing cultural projects. Thus urban culture is almost exclusively the planning of vertically organized and administrated officialdom, centered on public cultural expenditure and not the result of individual energy or investment of the private sector.

On social level, the failure of consecutive regime's policies to provide a modicum of prosperity and meet citizens' socioeconomic needs and the reluctance of the state to offer political pluralism and respond to civil political quest for democratic participation, forfeit the loyalty of citizens, reinforcing the sense among the people that 'nothing works' and generating ideological uncertainty. Two seemingly diametrically opposed ideological trends seem to compete creating an ideological confusion; Islamism and westernization.

3.3 Ideological confusion

Egyptian Islamism has quite effectively managed to combine a universalistic program with local tactics, promoting a cultural pan-Arabism, matched with a growing conservatism, and sidestepping or challenging the secular nature of Egyptian society. With reference to their universalistic appeal, apologists of Islamic revivalism took advantage from what Said has described "*schemes such as the imperialist philanthropy or ideas such as making the world safe for democracy*"¹⁰⁷. Hypocrisy and failure of such westerly-inspired policies, epitomized in G. W. Bush's words: "*you are either with us or against us*" and catered by illusions of

¹⁰⁶ Yet a new broadcasting charter, agreed on by Arab information ministers meeting in Cairo last February, has raised fears over freedom of information and expression. At the same time there are rumours over blocking Facebook due to its social networking capacity, proved by its effectiveness to instigate wide participation in last April's strike; blogger Karim Amer was already put on trial for his writings one year ago.

¹⁰⁷ Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1994, p. xx

righteousness, omnipotence, and falsified evidences, have strengthened the voice of Islamism movement, already favored by the internal failure of state-led models of development and disillusion with trickle down notions of growth.

Universities have always been the preferential place for Islamism penetration. Its impact could be daily traced on the hijab (veil) that the huge majority of women students have been more or less voluntarily adopted as an unquestionable proof of their virtue and a manifest sign of their excessive concern for ritualistic behavior; even though such a behavior seems practically irreconcilable with the trend towards greater movement of previously secluded women into the outside world. A cacophony of Quran chanting and religious harangues fills the air of Alexandria and blares in the streets, competing Umm Kulthum or modern popular singers. Moreover bookshops, radically reduced in comparison with the pre-revolutionary era, are overstuffed with Islamic tracts, containing sometimes uncompromising aphorisms against values and morality of the societies of jahiliyya (societies of ignorance of religious truth in contrast with the societies of Islamic law of sharia).

Though it seems paradoxical enough, a counter movement of low culture thrives fostering an increasing westernization of social life and a spread of materialistic as well as consumerist global culture values¹⁰⁸. This tendency is accompanied by a growing respect for whatever is foreign and an intensifying disdain for local cultural traditions. The Arab language is declining as a means of expression in the mass media. The Ramadan lantern is rapidly commercialized, just as the Christmas tree in the West. Americanized shopping malls are being developed in the suburban periphery, like autonomous space colonies, attracting massively consumers; although most of the articles for sale are viewed like pieces of art by the average by-passer Egyptian consumer. Ownership and thus dependency on private cars is largely considered as precious status symbol of success, social advancement, and modernity, often superior to the ownership of a house or of jewels; thus leading to rapid degradation of urban environment, not to mention that Egypt has one of the highest incidences of traffic fatalities on international level.

Although this ideological polarization does not fully reflect the complexity of the sociopolitical situation in Egypt and may seem rather oversimplified, yet both these trends lucidly reveal the absence of an original vision of how Egypt's cultural revival would develop

¹⁰⁸ Amin uses the example of the radically changed wedding celebrations; at five star hotels to the tunes of western dance music instead of the traditionally held celebrations in the homes of the couple's families. (Amin, G. *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians? Changes in Egyptian Society from 1950 to the Present*, Cairo 2000, p. 109-118)

and an ideological confusion between two extremely different attitudes; on the one hand the blind return to the traditional 'roots' regardless of modernity requirements, and on the other hand the blind adoption of western innovations. This confusion of identity, expressed in terms of defining the relationship between the heritage of the past and the needs of the present, becomes deeper in Alexandria, as the city has not yet managed to integrate harmonically her past within her identity ¹⁰⁹. Lack of civic awareness and proper valorization of urban past is explaining, up to a certain point, the struggle between development and heritage; a battle of survival between heritage conservation and growing population's demands for space as well as building contractors' drive for profit, sparked off by the high real-estate value.

3.4 Development versus heritage

The high demographic pressure on space along with the peacetime open door policy has triggered off a construction boom and an unprecedented real estate development in Alexandria. However this new phase of rapid urban development is affecting, frequently in a detrimental way, city's architectural heritage and the particular cosmopolitan atmosphere that Alexandria retained for so long. 19th century repository of baroque, art-deco and even neo-Pharaonic buildings and villas is being rapidly demolished and replaced by uniform and faceless high rise apartment blocks and office buildings. Their construction standards not only ignore the possibility of them becoming the potential heritage of next generations, but additionally eradicate the buried past of the city.

Although Alexandria is the sole big city in Egypt that lies atop her ancient predecessor, her archaeological leftovers have until now survived, as, being up to 12 meters deep, they remained undisrupted by the shallow foundations of 19th century buildings. But the concrete foundations of the fifteen-storey tower blocks, combined with their underground parking areas, reach the rocky substratum irreversibly wiping out all the intermediate levels, which bear testimonies from previous urban civilizations. This struggle between archaeologists or conservationists on the one side and developers on the other side is heavily weighed in favor of the latter not only as a consequence of public indifference and inertia, but furthermore due

¹⁰⁹ For example Mohamed Awad's idea to erect a bronze equestrian statue of Alexander the Great, a gift by various Greek associations to the Alexandrian municipality, generated a controversial debate over the initiative's legitimization. The opposing arguments ranged from a disapproval against statue's prominent position near the ancient Gate of the Sun to it's fully rejection as Alexander, although the founder of the city, is considered foreigner and did not belong.

to the absence of effectively structured legislative machinery. Empereur¹¹⁰ doubts the very existence of archeology in Alexandria, since knowledge of urban topography and monuments has slightly developed since the era of Mahmoud el-Falaki¹¹¹, the archaeological park of Kom el Dikka being rather the exception that verifies the rule.

Of course recently carried out explorations, both underground and underwater, have provided impressive results, improving our knowledge about city's past. Yet excavations are drawn back by the lack of systematic districts' classification according to their archeological sensitivity and merit. Moreover the building industry pressure is hardly confronted, as there is no specific legislation regarding urgent and salvage excavations, aiming at preserving and enhancing city's heritage. As heritage does not offer short term tangible profit, is usually put back in order modern needs to be met. Such was the case of the highway elevation, linking Alexandria's busy commercial port with the major motorway to Cairo, which may have led to the discovery of ancient city's western necropolis, but also have imposed its irretrievable destruction. Empereur¹¹² expresses his fears that the green open spaces of 19th century Latin cemeteries, bisected by Rue Anubis and extended over more than eighteen hectares, are also threatened by modern city's developmental fever.

Analogous legislative deficiencies seriously undermine the safeguard of modern cosmopolitan vestiges; the Marshal Law No 2-1998 prohibiting demolition of valuable property and organizing building codes and heights remains in point of fact ineffective, because it has already been contested as unconstitutional. Thus the street lines of modern cosmopolitan Alexandria are under the threat of losing their initial heights; illegal high rises on the expanding Corniche are preventing the sea breeze from cleaning the inner city air; licenses are given for extra floors, marring the beauty of old buildings; the city's centre is in danger of losing its human scale; architectural heritage is menaced by demolition¹¹³; the city

¹¹⁰ Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 189

¹¹¹ This engineer and astronomer were charged by Khedive Ismail in 1866 to draw up a map of the ancient city in order to help Napoleon III in his writing of a history of Julius Caesar.

¹¹² Empereur, J. Y. *Alexandria; Past, Present, Future*, London 2002, p. 148. If his fears are confirmed, then what Durrell wrote will be impossible: "*This was Alexandria, the unconsciously poetical mother-city exemplified in the names and faces which made up her history... names which the passer-by may one day read upon the tombs in the cemetery.*" (Durrell, L. *The Alexandria Quartet [Balthazar]*, London 1968, p. 234)

¹¹³ This sense of loss is expressed through Rondeau's ironic yet smart comment that Alexandria's wanderer has sometimes the impression of crossing a national park with species threatened with extinction. (Rondeau, D. *Alexandrie*, Paris 1997, p. 191)

as a whole is entering the slippery path of becoming a monotonous and indistinguishable corporate copy of other ill-developed cities. Such a depressing eventuality is brought nearer by the fact that there is no complete listing and documentation of city's architectural heritage so as to be effectively protected and restored¹¹⁴. Moreover such initiatives are being hindered by the overlapping responsibilities of different ministries and the low prioritization or even neglect of preserving 19th and early 20th heritage on behalf of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Alexandria's deprivation of her original character as a result of uncontrollable urban spread out is moreover aggravated by the ecological degradation of city's natural capital. Alexandria may have been endowed with a congenial climate, yet the ecological quality of life in the city is rapidly deteriorating due to increasing air, sea and coastal pollution, overcrowding, congestion, noise and the ineffective management of collecting and treating urban solid or water waste, mostly ending up in open dumps, if at all collected. Cars that throng the streets of Alexandria are much more than streets were initially designed to accommodate. Many of the city's factories have yet to comply with the environment laws. The areas of King Maryout, Khalig al-Max and Abu Qir have been identified as international 'hot spots' by the 1997 Barcelona report. The same report was also blaming the city for roughly 30 per cent of the Mediterranean's pollution, as a great part of daily sewage is released raw or only primarily treated into the sea. The ecosystem of Lake Mareotis, offering habitat to a profusion of wildflowers in spring and animal species like duck, geese, quail, in season, is under extinction. The lake is being rapidly polluted and large part of the shores is filled in and built to serve the growingly industrialized yet destroying the environment city¹¹⁵.

Alexandria's gradual dispossession of her cultural gifts and her physical layout and thus of her elusive spirit and atmosphere, can sabotage the influx of cultural tourism. Particularly if we follow Matarasso and Landry¹¹⁶ in view of cultural tourism as "*the art of participating in*

¹¹⁴ A good example of private initiative on this field is the work undertaken by the NGO Alexandria Preservation Trust (ATP) for the documentation and protection of Alexandria's architectural heritage, launching several successful campaigns to this end, and sensitizing public opinion to the building contractors' arbitrariness. (for more information <http://pharos.bu.edu/Alex/apt>)

¹¹⁵ Unfortunately Forster's fears that the landscape of Lake Mareotis will be someday overwhelmed by a solid crust of "*tins and barbed wire*" are confirmed. (Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. 242)

¹¹⁶ Matarasso, F. – Landry, C. *Balancing Act: Twenty-one Strategic Dilemmas in Cultural Policy*, Brussels 1999, p. 40

another culture” and cultural tourists as being “*attracted by the authentic feel of life in the places which they visit*”, searching for authentic experiences. And this sense of authenticity is irrevocably lost once the traces of history are eradicated by an ill-contextualized concept of modernity that in the name of ‘progress’ does not respect the principle of sustainable development, sweeping aside long-term valued landscapes, either built or natural.

3.5 The shortcomings of Alexandrian cultural tourism

Alexandria has always been in the shadow of Cairo, Luxor, Aswan and the Red Sea resorts, being, until recently, excluded from the majority of tourist offices’ offered packages, as she cannot compete with them in the grandeur of Pharaonic monuments or in the principal tourist attraction of sun, sea and sand¹¹⁷. For many tourists the inconsistency between Alexandria’s long history and the scarcity of identifiable leftovers, justifying this history, is disappointing. However at the same time this lack of historical artifacts and monuments – unlike her ancient rivals Rome and Athens with their monuments extant – contributes considerably in preserving Alexandria’s myth¹¹⁸.

Gravitated mainly to ancient splendor and urban cosmopolitan culture, enshrined in literature and magnified in recollection, the Alexandrian myth has always magnetized cultural tourists or better to use the expression culturally motivated visitors¹¹⁹. Primary wish of these visitors is to search for the dream-city, out of the reach of time, and overlaid by the modern rather commonplace Mediterranean port. They search for the still reachable shredded vestiges of the past which were familiar to Callimachus, Theocritus, and Strabo, or for the few unchanged places that knew Cavafy, Forster, Durrell, and Tsirkas; “*the spiritual city underlying the temporal one*”¹²⁰. During this literary pilgrimage some visitors find it difficult

¹¹⁷ This reality is reflected in Rondeau’s encounter in Alexandria with an Egyptian, who, hearing that Rondeau is interested just in Alexandria and not in Cairo or Aswan, he reacted as follows: “*You, very funny man, here there’s nothing to see, you hear me, nothing to see.*” (Rondeau, D. *Alexandrie*, Paris 1997, p. 8)

¹¹⁸ As Forster put it “*There is not much to see here, but there is very much to think about.*” (Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 80) or “*The city does nothing. You hear nothing but the noise of the sea and the echoes of an extraordinary history.*” (Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. xv)

¹¹⁹ As cultural tourists we can describe the sophisticated tourists in search of experiences in sharp contrast to mass tourists, attracted by typical tourist products (in present-day Alexandrian context this latter category is largely related either to tourists coming from Cairo, having purchased the one-day optionally offered trip to Alexandria, or to the ‘hit and run’ tourists disembarked from the cruisers calling Alexandria’s port).

¹²⁰ Durrell, L. *The Alexandria Quartet [Justine]*, London 1968, p. 81

coming to grips with current reality, which is regarded as disturbing their literary dreams and hampering their initiation into their own Alexandria that haunts their palpable imaginative memory¹²¹.

Yet beyond the unverified tourist illusions, Alexandrian wander¹²² is hindered by the fact that the city's visual online presentation on the governorate official website¹²³ is generally characterized of lacking good quality. The absence of critical reviews, on time feedback, practical navigation, interactive features or bulletin boards, shows disregard both for the effectiveness of cyber communication in upgrading the perception of a territory and for the fact that, in our post-industrial world, the strategic resource of information has been transformed into a commodity, just as any other saleable product. Besides that monuments and sites are not properly integrated with their immediate surroundings and are not sufficiently sign-posted (for example the Serapeum, the catacombs or the necropolises). Moreover sites documentation is problematic, mirrored by the deficient inventories and the meager information on infrastructure status and improvements, including visitors' programs and facilities (e.g. parking lots or public toilets).

On the other hand, if we reflect on museums as the institutions responsible for urban cultural sustainability and dedicated to accumulation, documentation and exposition of city's heritage, then the main tourist attractions¹²⁴ on this field are the Greco-Roman Museum and

¹²¹ For example Edmund Keeley writes: "*All conflict between illusion and reality vanishes in the filth and stench of narrow unwashed streets overflowing with the murky drift of the poor, pushed on by pajama-clad hawkers and ambitious urchins.*" (Keeley, E. *Cavafy's Alexandria; Study of a Myth in Progress*, London 1977, p. 4) Moreover it is not unworthy of attention the case of the American tourists group that wrote to Durrell demanding a refund on their voyage because they felt cheated, having rushed around the town, book in hand, searching for traces, clues, remains of *Alexandria Quartet*.

¹²² This purposeless wander is the best way to discover the city according to Tsirkas: "*I would need months on end, a whole string of empty days, to get to know a city like this. I would have to wander around purposelessly, turn into streets that led I knew not where, make my own discoveries: a blue-paved courtyard, the pattern on a dislocated wrought-iron gate, a small mosque striped yellow and pink like a football player's vest, and a tree growing nearby, its trunk glistening and leaves all astir with turtledoves. I would have to pause in front of old doorways, decipher dates engraved on stone or woodwork... I would have to enter those big old cafés full of mirrors advertising forgotten wines, brandies, and restorative beverages, to breathe in the smell of tobacco emanating from the sagging cane seats, the tattered felt of the billiard boards, the little cases containing chalk and scraps of sponge for marking the score.*" (Tsirkas, S. *Drifting Cities*, Athens 1995, p. 431)

¹²³ <http://www.alexandriaegypt.com>

¹²⁴ Along with these two principle city's museums, the Fine Arts Museum, the Royal Jewellery Museum, the Mahmud Said Museum Centre and the Cavafy Museum are available to city visitors.

the National Museum of Alexandria. The Creco-Roman Museum is for the time being under restoration and it is expected to reopen its premises to the public within this year. Close to the modern principles of museology, the National Museum of Alexandria is housed in a cosmopolitan villa at the beginning of Horreya Avenue. The artifacts are not stuffed in the glass cases and are properly presented through an atmospheric lighting system, though the informative tablets are a little bit obscured, whilst organizing temporary exhibitions as well as developing public awareness initiatives and educational programs remains largely a demand.

Yet, if we consider that this museum is the preferential vehicle of placing visitors in Alexandrian context, showing how and why history unfolded as it did, through the presentation and interpretation of past material remnants, then there is a striking disconnection in city's continuity. Visitors easily remark the total absence of any refers to the contribution of foreign communities to the revival of cosmopolitan Alexandria. The foreign communities are out of the scene also in the publication that is addressed to the visitors in the museum shop¹²⁵.

Nevertheless what functioned as catalyst, reestablishing Alexandria on the Mediterranean cultural and tourist map, is the phoenix-like iconic building of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new 'cathedral' of knowledge and a hard-branding visible statement on the importance of Alexandria's symbolic capital with global recognition.

3.6 The new city's icon; the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Being inaugurated at 2002, Bibliotheca Alexandrina has been developed under the auspices of UNESCO and the Egyptian government so as to be an icon on the one hand of the city's ties with the past. This intention is served by her promotion as the 'new beacon of knowledge', exemplified by the aptly chosen architectural type of the rising sun disc, and by her location. The building, like a cultural anchor on the exquisite curvature of Alexandria's Eastern harbor, occupies the site of the Ptolemaic palaces; presumably not far from the spot where the Great Library actually stood in antiquity. The ancient experiment of claiming universal knowledge, as a response to advanced intellectual needs, gives the impression to come full circle in our breaking down barriers globalized age that bears resemblances to the Hellenistic era.

Of course this endeavor of reviving an ancient ideal does not aspire to collect all the books in the world. Otherwise the challenge of digitalizing the gathered knowledge seems to take

¹²⁵ Soliman, H. M. (ed.) *The History and Civilization of Alexandria Across the Ages*, Alexandria 2000

precedence among modern librarians; Library's roof structure, reminiscent of the contemporary computer, echoes this challenge. The new Library rather focuses on reviving the ancient spirit of openness and scholarship and on becoming a meeting place for the cultures of the world; thus promoting dialogue, pursuit of knowledge and understanding of diverse cultural expressions at the expense of exclusion, intolerance, and discrimination. This is best exemplified by the fact that the Library hosts Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the dialogue between cultures, the first Euro-Med foundation based outside the European continent.

On the other hand the \$220 million project of the 11-story 31,000-square-foot Bibliotheca Alexandrina aspires to stand for an icon of city's renaissance as a modern Mediterranean metropolis and serve as the backbone of city's future prosperity. Housing a library for up to 8 million books, a conference center for some 3,000 persons, a planetarium, three museums, several exhibition galleries and a number of academic research centers, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina intends to become an international center of excellence in chosen fields; firstly in the subjects of Alexandria and Egypt and secondly in the areas of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and African studies. Responding to a broad definition of culture, a rich mosaic of events concerning art, music, science and literature is provided, involving both Egyptians and bearers of other nationalities.

After six years of operation, we can conclude that the hallmark cultural investment of the new Library has successfully fulfilled the tasks of developing an outstanding institutional capacity and of delivering high quality cultural services within a high-tech contemporary architectural building that has effectively incorporated historical memories. Bibliotheca Alexandrina has efficiently projected an image of the city that, without forgetting her cultural roots, looks to her future with confidence; thus proving that past should not be dwelt on for its own sake but rather as a creative spur and a triggering fuel towards the future. Moreover the new Library has dynamically reestablished Alexandria on the cultural and tourist map of the Mediterranean¹²⁶. This is largely attributed to the project's marketing, which has showed an extraordinary ability to develop attractive images and symbols and project these effectively; for example the projection of the futuristic rising sun's exterior, incised with random letters from roughly all seventy written world languages. The new Library has verified that "*indeed*

¹²⁶ The Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and former Vice President of the World Bank, Dr Ismail Serageldin, referred to some 500 separate events per year and to some 3,000,000 visitors during the first four years since inauguration, with an increasing flow per year. (Serageldin, I. *A Landmark Building: Reflections on the Architecture of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina*, Alexandria 2006, p. 23, 39)

the urban renewal process can itself become a spectacle, as aesthetics comes to replace ethics in contemporary urban planning"¹²⁷.

Nevertheless Alexandria and her new Library, as the main cultural vehicle to exert a knock on effect on urban regeneration, cannot be used as another example of the culture-led urban rehabilitation theory. This theory focuses on the use of culture as an effective tool for the conversion of the whole city's performance, like the benchmark cities of Glasgow or Bilbao have fruitfully done, taking advantage of the designation as European City of Culture (ECOC) and the construction of the Guggenheim Museum respectively. Bibliotheca Alexandrina, as a flagship project of cultural investment, has quite successfully gave precedence in communicating, repositioning and improving city's international image, attracting huge international attention.

Yet there is the impression that the very same project remains more or less isolated from social cohesion, from other less glamorous cultural initiatives and local inhabitants, from local solidarity, and has developed little vocation for the urban or generally the social development¹²⁸. For example the highly innovative for its sophisticated architectural lexicon, Library's building is unhappily squeezed in among shabby concrete apartment blocks that have not been developed with sufficient attention to an overall effect that links buildings to their surroundings, both natural and man-made. Therefore an acute contrast is created between external image and internal – often suppressing – reality; between new facilities and the image which local inhabitants have of their lives.

The modern incarnation of the ancient Library of Alexandria has rather verified what Miralles¹²⁹ wrote: "*cultural facilities can play a role as instruments for the generation of an organized cultural citizenship, but neither are the facilities the exclusive tool for the generation of an organized cultural citizenship, nor is the only function of cultural facilities to be close to the citizens*". The process of urban regeneration necessitates both capitalizing on and preserving cultural capital as well as provisioning facilities for the citizens to participate in future potentials.

¹²⁷ Landry, L. – Bianchini, F. *The Creative City*, London 1995, p. 5.

¹²⁸ As regards social impact, it is tempting to quote Harvey's critique on cultural investments: "*Concentration on spectacle and image rather than on the substance of economic and social problems can also prove deterring in the long-run, even though political benefit can all too easily be had.*" (Harvey, D. *From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance*, Geografiska Annaler 71 B, 1, 1989, p. 16)

¹²⁹ Pascual, J. – Dragojevic, S. *Guide to Citizen Participation in Local Cultural Policy Development for European Cities*, Amsterdam 2007, p. 62.

Chapter 4: Designing urban cultural policy - challenges of the new demands and realities

“The process of city creativity development is to identify, harness, promote and sustain city’s creative, cultural resources; moreover to create preconditions for decision makers at all levels to think, plan, and act with imagination and in an integrated way.”

Charles Landry¹³⁰

As Simon Mundy has pointed out¹³¹, any kind of cultural policy is to be set within a political framework that is democratic; that is based on a society in which people retain enough of their income to be able to do more than subsist; that governments adhere to the international conventions of human rights, freedom of expression, heritage conservation, administrative probity, and environmental sustainability. Such a conception of developing and implementing various schemes of cultural policy is a conditionality: on the one hand because collective benefits will only flow from cultural spending, if they are backed up by economic, political, social or educational measures; on the other hand for the reason that culture can bring added value to the work of other government agencies. Moreover because an inclusive cultural policy could not be considered as an activity apart from other administrative activities (education, tourism, economy, ecology); on the contrary it should be conceptualized as part of a long-term strategy of national, regional or local positioning and development that incorporates coordinating fields on the base of complementarity and interoperability.

Thus an effective cultural policy should be overarched by a sustainable economic policy, which is certainly not a sufficient condition for the resolution of every impasse. But in the long run it is a necessary one along with measures for inter-generational poverty alleviation and social security mechanisms, consequently preventing eventual radicalization. Furthermore the fragile legitimacy of political institutions, largely based on sheer longevity, should be modified through enforcing an internal political reform agenda in favour of democratic governance and through strengthening civil society’s capacity to contribute more effectively to the political process. Development of the domestic process of democratization is crucial not only for Egypt. Considering the country’s leading role, it will also have significant repercussions in the whole Middle East, where the democracy gap is comparatively high in global terms.

¹³⁰ Taken from <http://www.comedia.org.uk>

¹³¹ Mundy, S. *Cultural Policy: A Short Guide*, Strasbourg 2000, p. 11

What is most urgently needed is an authentic pluralism, in the form of a really uncompromised willingness to include many contradictory voices in a wide debate and the commitment to take them seriously; thus overcoming the conventional Middle Eastern equation of competitive politics and political pluralism with disunity and reinforcing the culture of respect for the fundamental principles of accountability, transparency and contestability. Such a process should also assert freedom of expression and operation of the media, as well as the leeway for artists to partake in societal roles. Or as Awad has stated in *The New York Times*: “*We must be able to have the tolerance, to be able to have people say what they want anytime they want*”¹³².

On urban level any strategy of sustainable regeneration should become more comprehensive, more inclusive, and search for a delicate balance between the interests of market-led intervention and the necessity of maintaining architectural, social and cultural heritage, in order to bring together physical rehabilitation and social cohesion; to put it in a nutshell, rendering Alexandria into a desirable place to live, consume, produce or visit accordingly. Regarding the incorporation of cultural practices in such an urban policy, this is grounded on the complex interaction of several rationalities – humanistic, sociological, and economic – that could function simultaneously, as Smidt-Jensen has pointed out¹³³.

Specifically cultural initiatives contribute to a feeling of well-being and satisfaction in the environment where city’s inhabitants are spending their lives through getting involved as cultural actors, or participating as audience. Moreover taking advantage of urban cultural capital could function as an important motive for higher managerial executives and entrepreneurs, and further as an alternative way of diversifying not only employment opportunities, but also the quality and the resources of urban economy. Finally urban external image could be considerably improved.

Taking into account these overarching remarks, Alexandria’s future cultural policy should be based on the following pillars:

4.1 (Re)-defining territorial identity

Territories are today in charge not only of the free flow of people, goods and services but also of the information in the process of attracting and diffusing knowledge in order urban identity to be effectively promoted, taking into account the aggregations of resources (both

¹³² <http://www.query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950CE2D9123DF931A35753C1A9679C8B63-48k->

¹³³ Smidt-Jensen, S. *The Roles of Culture and Creativity within Urban Development Strategies*, p.10

tangible and intangible¹³⁴). Of course this communication of values could not be made possible, unless an extensive mapping of territorial assets is accomplished, through a cognitive rather than a consumer oriented approach to territory. Such an approach of “*cultural literacy*”, as Dragicevic-Sesic put it¹³⁵, audits and deploys all the facets of urban cultural capital: from its physical layout and design, its architectural heritage, arts, to the public spaces, educational and cultural institutions, tourist attractions and images of the city which the interaction of myths, conventional wisdom, cultural and media representations produce. The objective of such a procedure is supposed to be the cultivation of the capacity to understand, to appropriate and to develop the meaning of the city structures, city icons and city elements.

This process of self-definition was practiced in the past within a framework of rhetoric, a set of occasions, authorities such as national feasts, and a sense of familiarity. Having its roots in the anxiety to confine citizens into an impermeable sphere, self-definition was finding its expression in ceremonies of belonging, a built-in chauvinism, and a limiting sense of security. Nevertheless in our globalized world, characterized as never before on the one hand by the exigencies of electronic communication, trade, travel, environmental and regional conflicts that can expand with tremendous speed, and on the other hand by the belief that knowledge, creativity and innovation are the driving forces for economic prosperity, the assertion of identity is by no means a mere ceremonial matter.

Now territorial management and marketing is advocated as a process of understanding the potentials and relationships within the territory. This process includes renewing urban identity, increasing the value of the territory and developing its recognizability on the competitive global market that produces and distributes ideas, services, and experiences within the interconnected international community of hyperlinks, hyper networks and

134 In a wide definition of urban intangible cultural heritage could be included myths, rites, rituals, language, as well as cultural representations, like images and narratives of the city in the arts and media (poems, movies, visual arts etc), even personalities linked to the city in history, and personal narratives, cuisine, behavior, ways of socializing (like gatherings or weddings), furniture, costumes, fashion and crafts. A fine example of safeguarding urban intangible heritage in the form of oral testimonies is the, largely quoted within the thesis, edition *Voices from Cosmopolitan Alexandria*, realized within the project ‘Mediterranean Voices: Oral History and Cultural Practice in Mediterranean Cities’, funded by the EU under its EuropAid / Euromed Heritage II program (for more information www.med-voices.org). This edition contributes in averting the danger that Nadia Kamel pointed out in her documentary film on the Jews of Egypt *Salata Baladi* (Country Salad): “*If these stories are not retold, they would die away.*”

¹³⁵ Djokic, N. (ed.) *The Creative City: Crossing Visions and New Realities in the Region*, Zagreb 2007, p. 39

multimedia in the cyberspace. In the long term, the city is being assisted to attract tourists and customers, and to stimulate internal and external investment communities. Such a remaking of urban *genus loci* has the intention of delineating the distinctiveness and difference of the projected urban identity as a response to globalization's expanding uniformity.

Within this conceptual framework the competitive and comparative advantage and thus the distinctive brand-value of Alexandria should be the utopian myth of her creation and her urban tradition of authentic multicultural diversity and exceptional cosmopolitan hybridity, coupled by her throbbing with life modern personality. In order such a branding process to be successful two steps are considered as indispensable. The first one, concerning the past dimension of Alexandrian identity, is the revalorization and reappraisal of the complex urban collective memory; of the cultural histories that have been pressed into and have been given landmark status to Alexandria; of the spaces, which, like a palimpsest, embedded in them different meanings and carry a huge signifying potential; essentially of the integrative whole that incorporates heritage, origins and identity of the city. Reassessment of urban past should capitalize on the fact that, after a long period of hibernation, there is now a new will to remember the cosmopolitan period of Egypt's modern history¹³⁶.

This will takes on the one hand the form of nostalgia of the Alexandria that is no more, largely catered by the love that the Diaspora of Alexandrian cosmopolitan families hold for the town of their birth and the town of their interrupted childhood. This nostalgia has fueled a growing rate of publishing memoirs, autobiographies or thinly veiled autobiographical novels. On the other hand the new will to remember is considered as an alternative way of belonging, now that defensive and reactive nationalism, as a form of community establishment, identity affirmation and political attitude, is gradually displaced by the new transnational realities of globalized economy and web communities. Nonetheless in order remembering to overcome the limited space of academic scholarship, or the abstract feeling of deeply felt yet poorly scrutinized Alexandrian myth of "*éternel retour*"¹³⁷, it is necessary a new inclusive conception of local history to be incorporated within school and university curricula as well as within the channels of public awareness, taking a fresh look at collective memories.

¹³⁶ Jacquemond characterizes this attitude as "*characteristic of the present Egyptian Zeitgeist*", proved by the phenomenal success of Alaa Al Aswany's novel *The Yacoubian Building*, which, capitalizing on the rich repository of cosmopolitan memory, became the best-selling Arabic novel ever published (Jacquemond, R. *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*, Cairo 2008, p. 232-233). Equally rocketing success met the serial about King Farouk's life, broadcasted during the Ramadan month of 2007.

¹³⁷ Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 290

Certainly “*the curricular gospel of nationalism*”¹³⁸ is invidiously woven into the very fabric of national educational systems, propagating the veneration and celebration of national tradition’s uniqueness. Nevertheless on local level and without abandoning the conception of nationality, it is better to explore and acquire a genuine historical understanding that will not be at odds with urban memory. This process of critical understanding should assist city’s inhabitants and visitors alike on the one side to develop a well-built sense of whom and where they are and on the other side to achieve solidarities, rather than to repress or deny the past or follow intellectual politics of blame. Consequently there is an urgent need to reinterpret, redeploy, invigorate, and finally repossess past experiences, and create an honest and clear picture of what was done and what was achieved¹³⁹. Moreover new and imaginative multilayered re-conceptions of Alexandrian culture should be formulated, as a culture that, according to Said’s norm of culture, was “*never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures*”¹⁴⁰.

Otherwise if a rationally conceived and pursued “*policy is in a sense the struggle of memory to control the future*”¹⁴¹ within a ceaseless dialectic of remembering and forgetting, then communication of renewed urban narratives, derived from a critical understanding of the past, can provide a road map to present and future conduct. And this because it is not what happens to us but what we – sometimes even fallibly – remember about it that is crucial in how the past shapes our understanding and our views of the present as well as our thinking and our creating about the future. In terms of urban consciousness this procedure of re-approaching and re-appreciating the past, and opting for the aspects of that past we want to recover and restore as guidelines towards the future, can make for respect of heritage and expression of new creativity forms, as nothing comes out of a vacuum. And it is one of the main challenges of democracies to give visibility and to legitimize the processes of

¹³⁸ Goldschmidt, A. – Johnson, A. – Salmoni, B. (ed.) *Re-Envisioning Egypt 1919 – 1952*, Cairo 2005, p. 164

¹³⁹ A fine example of fruitful activity in this field is the excellent work done by the Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center, including research, acquisition and archiving of material, organization of conferences and exhibitions, publications, projects and exchange programs (for more information <http://www.bibalex.org/English/researchers/Alexmed/alexmedcenter.htm>). This kind of activity can considerably contribute in healing social and cultural unawareness, depicted realistically by the following Haag’s words: “*almost all the citizens of cosmopolitan Alexandria have long since gone away, leaving a new people without memories to inhabit the carcass of others’ lives.*” (Haag, M. *Alexandria; City of Memory*, Cairo 2004, p. 330)

¹⁴⁰ Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism*, New York 1994, p. 261-262

¹⁴¹ Humphreys, R. S. *Between Memory and Desire; the Middle East in a Troubled Age*, Cairo 2000, p. 85

construction and reconstruction of the citizens' imaginaries, or narratives, as Pascual has underlined¹⁴².

The second step in the branding process, concerning this time the present and future dimensions of Alexandrian identity, should take into account that (re)-definition of territorial identity should bring together the need for comprehensible cultural roots with a vision for the future, gathering consensus among the main political agents and public opinion makers. This means that cultural legacy of the past, whether private or collective, is more or less a permanent asset of urban identity, yet contemporary cultural activity is rather a changeable asset, providing with incidental but important contributions to the urban welfare. And traditional notion of urban identity may be based on some key names (eminent historical figures, buildings or tourist attractions) yet effective city profiling should also be based on contemporary values and resources.

On practical terms redefined urban identity calls for quality of public spaces, through not sheer cosmetic face-lift but real development, quality of the cultural, entertainment, sport and tourist infrastructure, and social inclusion through participation and audience development¹⁴³. Moreover cultural diversification through small, innovative cultural programs and actions is a demand, as well as the support for development of local short term cultural planning, in accordance with priorities given by the national government. Local projects communicating with mostly local participants and developing Alexandria's own resources should be stimulated. Within this framework local creative industries¹⁴⁴ should be able to show their

¹⁴² Pascual, J. – Dragojevic, S. *Guide to Citizen Participation in Local Cultural Policy Development for European Cities*, Amsterdam 2007, p. 45.

¹⁴³ A rather good case in pointing the upgrade of public spaces' quality, for citizens and visitors alike, is Alexandria's coastal front linking the two former royal palaces of Ras el Tin and Montazah; the legendary Corniche, which is largely considered as one of the most important generators of urban identity of the entire population of Alexandria. It has recovered much of its past appeal and its pedestrian-friendly quality, as a result of an extensive developmental project, ranging from facades repainting to the construction of the impressive Stanley Bridge. Leaving aside the fact that, turning off the Corniche, situation becomes totally different, as a counterexample could serve the underdevelopment of cultural infrastructure. This is mainly traced on the absence or malfunction of minor local cultural centers, small libraries or educational programs, designed to meet the needs of districts or neighborhoods, thus undermining participatory processes of planning and implementation of cultural activities.

¹⁴⁴ According to http://www.culture.gov.uk/creative_industries/default.htm, creative industries are those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property, including a wider range of activities than simply cultural, such as: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design,

skills and talents and add their narratives, complex meanings and innovative imagination to the territorial perception and aura. As a consequence local creative actors will not only enter the noises, rhythms and dynamism of their contemporary surroundings into urban image, in a continuing process of pluralist hybridization, but they will potentially end up in mobilizing commercialized products or services, thus generating both direct employment and income.

Besides the increasing volume of production and services, facilitated by the operation of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, there is the need for development of small scale cultural activities that can be set up quickly and flexibly in response to local cultural needs and ideas. In this way it will be possible cultural planning to become “*the strategic and integral use of cultural resources of community development*”¹⁴⁵, combating social exclusion. Actually it is not enough to content ourselves with the success of prestige projects and remain rather limited within the sectoral conception of cultural policy that sees culture as high-culture. On the contrary greater attention should be paid to the practical civic engagement, socialization and cultural development, securing that all the segments of the millions of ordinary Alexandria’s inhabitants will be able to exercise their inherent right to be active agents in the making of the culture of which they are part, through satisfying either their own cultural needs as amateurs, or their own cultural interests as audience. This grassroots participation is based on the fact that people by and large know what is good for them and if offered the opportunities and the means they can do things better than institutional organizations. Towards this direction reasonable price of high quality cultural goods should be supplied, performing arts should be appreciated with low price, and a daily cultural connection to the whole world, as a new form of cosmopolitanism, should be fostered.

However the effectiveness of the urban identity (re)-definition process will be considerably enhanced by the extent that administrative cultural functions will be decentralized; this will be mainly indicated by the degree of municipal autonomy.

4.2 Fostering cultural decentralization

Taking as point of departure the general rule that decisions should be taken at the level closest to the point of delivery; the historical precedent that Alexandria exceptionally

designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer games, television and radio.

¹⁴⁵ Mercer, C. *Towards Cultural Citizenship: Tools for Cultural Policy and Development*, Stockholm 2002, p. 172

flourished when she was administered as an entity of her own; and the fact that the specificities of the Alexandrian ‘ecosystem’ are unparalleled in the Egyptian context, concerning the physical layout, the cultural heritage and the management of public spaces; then cultural decentralization seems mandatory. Decentralization, as a process of taking the lead responsibility for urban cultural life, deepens citizens’ sense of belonging as it allows effective participation in the decision-making process. It boosts democratic practices and improves the management and standards of public services.

Of course in order these results to be achieved, it is necessary the local administration system to be modernized and the powers of local authorities and their capacity for planning, managing and financing local development to be advanced. This could be attained through enhancing legal and administrative framework for local government, promoting greater participation of citizens in local decision-making processes, and replacing hierarchies with a new system of mobile relationships. Such a new system implies wider and active participation of different cultural actors, including institutions and research centres, NGOs, private entrepreneurship, foreign and international organizations, the financial involvement of business community etc.

Central role within the new decentralized system concerning the process of decision making, should have an autonomous municipal council, administering real economic powers and applying democratic principles of management. Leaving aside the rigid functional specializations of the past, this council should employ a holistic and interdisciplinary approach and develop an intertwined strategy, integrating the goals of different policies, boosting co-operation between different departments, disciplines and sectors and using diversified resources. Concurrently in the cultural field there should be formulated, out of experts in Alexandria, a strong ancillary advisory body with international appeal and with an independent legal basis.

This body should take care of anticipating the short and long term impact of cultural investment, estimating the value of cultural activity in the promotion of urban social and economical vitality and finding the delicate balance between the conception of “*culture as a tool of development*” (educational, economic and social) and the “*danger of culture instrumentalisation*”¹⁴⁶. At the same time this body should promote the attraction and engagement of globally mobile and skilled workers of the knowledge-economy, now

¹⁴⁶ Matarasso, F. – Landry, C. *Balancing act: twenty-one strategic dilemmas in cultural policy*, Brussels 1999, p. 37

employed only in flagship projects, in more down-to-earth assistance in technical and organizational upgrading of operational functions. Moreover within the scope of foreign missions, joint ventures with the active participation of local expertise, universities, technical schools and research institutes should be encouraged and coordinated.

Considering the importance of heritage in the formation of urban identity, heritage management should also be decentralized and upgraded in order to meet the needs and to face the dangers posed by the rapidly changing urban landscape.

4.3 Upgrading heritage management

If we take into consideration the particularities of Alexandrian heritage; the low prioritization on national level of preserving Greco-Roman and modern cosmopolitan heritage; and the threat of urban sprawl; then it is of urgent need the creation of a professional body that will regulate and monitor the standards of conservation, management and public access to urban heritage sites, according to an internationally agreed level. This body, expertise on Alexandrian idiosyncratic features, should function complementarily to the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Such an authority should play a crucial role in reviewing and revalorizing historic periodisation and classification; advancing the legislative machinery related to heritage issues; promoting a viable urban zoning regulation; and rising public awareness over the fact that preserving and enhancing city's heritage can considerably boost tourist income¹⁴⁷ and contribute to urban economic mobilization. The vision of such a body should be the verification of the conception that "*culture, like nature, uses its past to fuel its future*"¹⁴⁸. Moreover it should work towards the classification of Alexandria's historical centre as a World Heritage Site. Something like that can drive city's agents to the elaboration of a viable balance between development and heritage, and to the consciousness that heritage itself is as much a part of the history of other peoples as it is of its location; the result of diachronic migrations and all possible cultural encounters.

Actually a legally autonomous and untouched by corruption mediator is required between the determined developers and the archaeologists, now that the city is redeveloped and the construction boom along with the prospective of constructing a metro line offer many opportunities for discoveries through salvage excavations between the phases of destruction

¹⁴⁷ It is worth of our attention that this year's media promotion of Croatia's coastal tourism is based on the conception that visitor will get an experience of the Mediterranean as it once was.

¹⁴⁸ Mundy, S. *Cultural Policy: A Short Guide*, Strasbourg 2000, p. 10

and reconstruction. The hopeful prospect of renewing our knowledge of urban history could be opened, not only through the implementation of new techniques of geophysical surveying that just reveal the city's plan, but also through the legislative regulation of uncovering the buried city. Something like that is feasible through standardizing the checking process on the nature of those ruins that might be found in the foundations of a new building, leading either to dismantling them or integrating them into the new construction. Empereur comes to the extreme point of assuring that there would be no reason to halt the building process except in very special cases, like the absolute archaeological dream of discovering the tomb of Alexander the Great¹⁴⁹.

While the salvage excavations within the urban fabric lacks support, the exploration of Alexandria's coastline and submerged edges, undertaken by a host of archaeological expeditions, has media appeal and attracts a lot of interest. This interest can be attributed on the one hand to the discovery of the ancient statuary, which was once decorating the ancient Pharos, and of the palace complex¹⁵⁰. On the other hand there is the proposal for constructing the world's first underwater museum. If such an ambitious project becomes true, the display of Alexandrian heritage will acquire the strong asset of exclusivity and serious attention will be drawn upon implementing programs of waste biological treatment, thus upgrading sea water quality.

Concerning the management of the 19th and early 20th urban landscape, the primary requisite should be mapping and cataloguing the heritage and informing inventories available to scholars and policy makers alike. Next fine buildings must be allowed to be maintained, either as public attractions, or as places to live and work. A fine example of the former practice is the renovation of the National Museum, the Opera House and the Horreya Cultural Centre, offering atmospheric venues in which to enjoy contemporary cultural production and a visual stimulus on audience and performers alike, as well as a highly aesthetic sense of place and living education sites. Of the latter practice fine example is the renovation of the National Bank of Egypt and the Al Ahram buildings. All of them constitute part of the conservation project of Horreya Avenue subsidized by the Ministry of Culture. Nevertheless

¹⁴⁹ Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 190

¹⁵⁰ Findings of the archaeological surveys along Alexandria's waterfront have demonstrated the extent that subsidence has affected the town, calculated to the order of six to eight meters since the seventh century AD, as a consequence of the African tectonic plate movement below that of Europe. (Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 202)

the majority of architectural heritage is suffering from the absence of legislation ensuring a fair return on property value and promoting maintenance and repair, by effectively organizing the relation between tenants and owners.

Thus, beside the necessary amendments in legislation, additional motives should be offered – either through grants, compensation or tax relief – to owners so as to maintain the buildings and the environments themselves, in return for which they will have a duty of care and a requirement not to dispose of assets which are of public interest. Where this is impractical the formation of foundations for conserving and presenting the buildings should be considered perhaps with the backing of formal legislation so that the foundation is secure for the future and the heritage cannot be expropriated. Such foundations should then be at least federated so that a consistent urban outlook encompassing high standards of conservation work, management and marketing can be ensured. Within this concept of heritage continuing to live in the public interest, with many owners becoming stewards of their property, fine buildings and monuments are able to act as catalyst for the crafts which might otherwise die out (like artisans of fresco, plaster, stone, wood, marble etc)¹⁵¹. Moreover training in conserving the heritage can have excellent side-effects on the general prospects of employment.

However preservation of cultural heritage should not be limited to architectural reconstruction of buildings, although it is the most powerful and effective branding tool of urban image. Cultural heritage must also be maintained as a living part of the society. Therefore traditional local activities, social relationships and practices surviving in the contemporary context should be maintained as well, if the objective is the generation of sustainable urban rehabilitation. Such a policy will help in avoiding excessive sterilization of the past, or creating caricatures for tourist digestion.

Nevertheless a viable urban cultural policy should not be concentrated exclusively on preserving and displaying past heritage, but also elaborate and develop new areas of excellence.

¹⁵¹ A good example of this practice is the RehabiMed project, which, in the context of the EU's Euromed Heritage Programme, has chosen the Gammaliya neighborhood of Islamic Cairo in order to rebuild and rehabilitate the 18th century Wekala Al-Maghrabi as a work centre for artisans of different trades. The objective of this project is to show the real possibilities and effectiveness of rehabilitation initiatives in improving artisans' working conditions, environment and output, while at the same time recovering local architectural heritage. (http://www.rehabimed.net/www_ang/activi_rehabimed_caire_noticies_ang.asp)

4.4 Establishing new areas of excellence

The UNESCO's Creative Cities Network, created within the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity, defines Creative Cities as "*cities that share experiences, know-how, training in business skills and technology, cities that support other cities*"¹⁵². In such a scenario, the elements of synergies, co-production networking, and internationalization are becoming more and more important in the consumption of businesses, experiences or knowledge. It seems that, in the globalized market, cities become both good market places and skilful marketers, taking risks to follow different scenarios, no matter whether they are placed in virtual or physical reality.

Within this context Alexandria should on the one hand take advantage of her preferential relation with the Mediterranean, her redefined territorial identity, the gained momentum from the operation of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, and the ever changing regional and global context which is marked by:

1. The key partnership between Egypt and the European Union, which reaffirms their reciprocal commitment to deepen their political, economic and social relations. This partnership has been crystallized within a multilayered framework that contains: I) the Association Agreement which was signed in 2001 and entered into force in 2004, embodying the objectives and principles of the Barcelona Declaration, II) the European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan which aims at sharing the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighboring countries by strengthening stability, security and well-being, and III) the Action Programme for the Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations, as it was adopted by the Valencia Ministerial Meeting in April 2002.
2. The new prospects opened by the dynamic re-launch of the Barcelona Process: Union of the Mediterranean, renamed Union for the Mediterranean (U-Med) this time, by the French Presidency of the EU during the summit of 13 July 2008 in Paris. This ambitious concept aspires after establishing a strategically closer and more egalitarian partnership between the countries of the Mediterranean that would function as a promotion tool for peace, stability, security, growth, development and prosperity in the region. It includes co-operation for regional developmental projects¹⁵³ and

¹⁵² Quoted from <http://www.unesco.org/culture/alliance>

¹⁵³ As it was stated, precedence will be given to issues such as reducing pollution in the Mediterranean, encouraging solar energy projects, regulating fishing, fighting desertification, and resolving water shortages. These are all matters that concern Greece and Spain just as much as Egypt and Morocco.

exchange of information, experience, expertise, best practices and lessons learned in different fields; hopefully among them that of culture. Future will prove whether this controversial political initiative will have pursuance, success and durability, or it will remain just a flamboyant publicity coup of gigantic proportions. And furthermore whether its priorities will be compatible with the priorities of the Arab League or the African Union; not to mention the major incompatibility between the north and south Mediterranean when it comes to civil and political rights, individual freedoms, democratic, free and fair elections, independence of different branches of government and freedom of the press.

3. The perpetually constructed out of warring essences region of Middle East yet coupled by a deeply rooted longing for peace and stability.

On the other hand Alexandria should actively participate in the promotion of an integrationist agenda that will promote the following core issues:

1. The creation of a pan-Mediterranean cultural space and the formation of a common Mediterranean cultural identity and expression on the basis of the cosmopolitan map of productive interactions, caused diachronically and synchronically by important flows of commodities and people transcending the urban or national territorial boundaries in the region. Such a conceptualization should overcome the traditional notion of learning about other cultures – often grounded on a rhetorical separation of cultures – and focus on debating the seemingly contradictory image of unity and diversity on the Mediterranean cultural mosaic, with respect to regional idiosyncrasy and without exclusions, yet affirming the interdependence of various cultural histories on one another.
2. The evaluation of the political, economic, social, and cultural impact that the contemporary phenomenon of trans-Mediterranean migratory traffic – both legal and illegal – has for both the labour-exporting and the labour-importing societies. On inter-urban level it would be valuable a creative dialogue to be initiated and exchange of experiences to be facilitated over the actual management of the migrant transcultural capital on a day-by-day, and even minute-by-minute interactive basis among different groups and identities.
3. The impartial assessment of the nationalist triumph in the aftermath of colonial rule and the impact of nationalist politics of one single identity on society and culture, as well as the reflection of the possibility of realizing a post-national ecumenical-humanistic identity, grounded on the ever deepening consciousness of common global

sociopolitical values, needs and objectives; such an identity or unified collective could function complementarily to the – non exhaustive at any case – local or national identity, taking into consideration religious difference, ethnic and cultural identity issues, like the diversity of inherited languages, preferences, or sensibilities around the world.

4. The critical approach towards the terrorism threat and the fragile balance between the rights of citizens and the security of society. Within this framework there would be debatable the crude, reductionist and coarsely racist reciprocal misconceptions between the Western and the Arab world and the media power on dealing with caricature and sensation upon this separatist, fundamentalist, and Manichean ‘cultural war’, based on dehumanizing, ahistorical and demonological stereotypes and representations. Moreover the issue of religious tolerance at the expense of sectarian tensions and fanaticism should be disputed as well as the challenge of a wholly separation of socio-political institutions, legal values and cultural practices from religion, without any motivation of anti-religious feelings.
5. The serious consideration of the socio-economic effects that environmental pollution has on the coastal Mediterranean cities with special attention on the continuing rise of sea levels as a consequence of global warming. Additionally it should be assessed the contrapuntal relation between the environmental threats and heritage preservation as well as urban amenity and civic creative sensitivity. Special attention should be also drawn upon the impact that ecological degradation has upon tourism, which constitutes one the main growth industries of the region in the new post-industrial service economy.

4.5 Improving Alexandrian cultural tourism

The 1976 ICOMOS Charter on cultural tourism¹⁵⁴ defines as its main object on the one hand the discovery of monuments and sites, exerting on these last a very positive effect insofar as it contributes - to satisfy its own ends - to their maintenance and protection. This form of tourism justifies in fact the efforts which maintenance and protection demand of the human community because of the socio-cultural and economic benefits which they bestow on all the populations concerned. On the other hand cultural tourism takes into consideration and actively incorporates in the tourist experience aspects of the social life of their local

¹⁵⁴ According to http://www.icomos.org/tourism/tourism_charter.html

communities, their customs and traditions, their own sense of heritage, their history and artistic, architectural, literary and other cultural achievements. Regarded as a socially, environmentally and culturally responsible way of traveling, it implies low visitor impact and consideration to the local communities, through engaging them in the tourist industry, providing their children with educational opportunities, and engaging them in the protection of cultural and natural heritage.

Despite the suffocating power of attraction of the Nile – Pharaonic and Red Sea – diving tourism and the proliferation of mass summer tourists from inland Egypt or from the Middle East countries; despite the fact that the money tourism brings, as an unassailable argument for restoration and sensitive development, has not yet affected the unequal struggle between urban sprawl and heritage conservation, which still weighs at the expense of the latter; Alexandria can offer an alternative product of cultural tourism and profit greatly from the foremost national source of hard currency¹⁵⁵. On the one hand because she offers world-class cultural products of the past; on the other hand because she offers an immediate insight into the way of life of people in the location; something that could be considered as an added value, since glossy Egyptian tourist destinations (like Luxor, Aswan or Sharm el Sheikh) are usually manicured and cleaned up for the tourist trade. Yet special attention should be drawn upon the following points:

1. Since tourism is about presenting a place of which one is proud to the outside world, then branding a vibrant external image, locked into the mind of the visiting public, is vital. Therefore the headline idea, underneath which the real diversity and complex character of the place can be revealed with patience and curiosity to the potential visitor, should be that of a bustling with life Mediterranean metropolis with an extraordinary cosmopolitan tradition.
2. Keeping the city centre – “*the catalyst for civic identity and public sociability*”¹⁵⁶ – attractive and desirable to the cultural tourists means preserving its intrinsic cultural individuality. This is of special importance, since culturally evolved tourists do not travel so that they can have exactly what they have at home and are interested primarily in experiences whose needs and sophistication transcend those of the mass tourists that are mainly interested in the typical product of the territory. Nevertheless,

¹⁵⁵ Especially if it is underscored that it is possible for Egypt to increase the number of tourists on national level from 9,7 million in 2006/2007 to 30 million by 2020 (<http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2008/903/>)

¹⁵⁶ Bianchini, F. – Parkinson, M. (ed.) *Cultural policy and Urban Regeneration: the West European Experience*, Manchester 1993, p. 93

taking into account that culture shock often functions as the defensive mechanism of the average tourist, switched on by confrontation with strangeness, then a balance should be pursued between vestiges of non-mainstream localness and those creating familiarity to each tourist's original surroundings (a practical example is that of local versus global culinary habits).

3. “*The ‘sights’ of Alexandria are in them not interesting, but they fascinate when we approach them through the past*”¹⁵⁷. Yet “*every place has more assets than first meets the eye, hidden in the undergrowth, invisible, unacknowledged or under-acknowledged*”¹⁵⁸. In order this web of memory to be successfully restored and an itinerary of memory to be offered to the purposeful cultural tourists, who wish to revive the trans-historical cosmopolitan city, as well as to the local inhabitants, who wish to ‘dive’ into the unknown history of their own city, a story has to be made and tracked down into guides and maps¹⁵⁹. Moreover interpretive guides should be trained, as the quality of the guide is critical in creating a sense of awareness and understanding, and a proper attitude towards conservation. Interpretation is a key element of presenting Alexandria to the visitors. Such interpretations should not be dry or stale, but should aim at explaining the causality and intricacies of historical and social processes and ought to include elements of how human behavior has a key role in conserving or destroying social environments or cultures. Beside having the proverbial Egyptian characteristics of friendliness and hospitality, guides need to listen, encourage questions and discussions, and actively seek to involve the visitors in a learning, enjoyable and satisfying experience.
4. If we make an exception for the services and products of Bibliotheca Alexandrina, quality of services and products on offer by city's creative industries to cater the interests of the tourists should be increased, without putting in danger the cultural character of the city (e.g. interactive informative and display systems along with documentaries, models and publications in the archaeological sites and the museums /

¹⁵⁷ Forster, E. M. *Alexandria: A History and a Guide – Pharos and Pharillon*, London 2004, p. xxvi

¹⁵⁸ Landry, C. *The Art of City-Making*, London 2006, p. 272

¹⁵⁹ A fine example is the Alex-Med edition *Cultural Routes of Alexandria*, although the usefulness of these routes should be considerably enhanced by interventions in the infrastructural work in situ aimed at both residents and visitors and entangled in general upgrade of urban life, such as improvements on sign-posting, visibility and accessibility of the proposed attractions, tourist facilities, public transport and lighting, policing, parking availability, anti-litter drives etc.

remodeling of the Attarin quarter with the junk and antique shops, as a promotion vehicle of local craftsmanship / promotion of local or regional food products in quality packaging / designing of postcards / web content development / promoting staging events / recreation and night life attractions beyond the mainstream folkloric presentations).

5. Tourist development should use local labor and small private companies as far as possible so as bestowed tourism benefits to become really tangible and quantifiable on personal development, income returns and employability rates. This is not so easy because large part of the Egyptian tourist industry is granted to big international tourist chains that pursue maximization of profits by exploiting the local workforce through flexible, insecure working agreements and temporary, lowly paid jobs.

Conclusions

“Alexandria, her landscape and her peoples, the spirit of place, had, perhaps more than any other city of this century, the power to excite mythic visions.”

Jane Pinchin Lagoudis¹⁶⁰

In the wake of her eventful and turbulent 2,300-year history, Alexandria succeeded in generating a myth and a symbol of her, which, regardless of the actual facts at any given historical moment, has always stimulated creative global imagination¹⁶¹. In the field of cultural politics, she has twice verified that her multicultural model of urban symbiosis, oscillating fluidly between simple conviviality and inclusive interaction, has been not only quite functional, but moreover extremely productive. She has attained a sui generis balance between fragmentation and coalescence and she has ‘issued’ for her citizens an identity card, which was bearing a mysterious – seemingly contradictory – codified combination of deep territorial rooting and cosmopolitan openness. She has made clear that culture cannot rely exclusively on self containment; on the contrary culture is moving forward through incorporating and processing foreign contributions. She has proved that the creation, promotion, and support of a well ratified goal of individual and common happiness can effectively ease the borders of segregation.

Of course her ideal of co-existing cultural schemes that interrelate and influence one another was eradicated forcefully by the nationalistic cyclone that abruptly and inflexibly altered political priorities all around the world. Nonetheless now that immigration, populations’ mobility and transnational media development have once again brought modern societies face-to-face with the challenging coexistence of multilayered cultural identities, the Alexandria precedent can fertilize the debate over the democratic management of cultural diversity. The Alexandrian model may be today considered surpassed yet some of its virtues like religious tolerance or social cohesion, can still be used as guidelines for the present situation. Moreover the Alexandrian model is enlightening over the impact that has on urban consciousness the deliberate formation of blank or disconnected areas in urban collective memory, showing the limitations of a stable and sustaining – like a tortoise shell – national

¹⁶⁰ Pinchin, L. J. *Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell and Cavafy*, Princeton 1977, p. 7

¹⁶¹ As Durrell wrote: *“The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory.”* (Durrell, L. *The Alexandria Quartet [Balthazar]*, London 1968, p. 209)

community at the expense of multiplicity and mobility of identifications, and the dangerousness of one-sided intellectual politics of blame.

On local level Alexandrian multicultural legacy calls for immediate action and radical review both of urban mentality and urban policy priorities; otherwise the city is in danger of being irrevocably dispossessed from her distinctive elusive spirit and her true environments of memory, thus verifying Empereur's motto "*Alexandria delenda est*"¹⁶². In this case urban collective memory will be consequently in danger of amputation, if we follow Hallbwachs' postulate that "*collective memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects ... retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive*"¹⁶³. Of course the hands of time could not and should not be turned back and the past must not be dwelt on for its own sake, indifferently towards current economic, political, and social problems. Nevertheless within an inclusive agenda of sociopolitical reform, an urban cultural policy based on the redefinition of urban identity and on the perpetually active cross pollination of past and present, could and should serve as a springboard towards a different future. The operation of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina has given a fresh impetus to the city and has proved that city's symbolical capital offers inexhaustible resources for urban sustainable development. It is up to the creativity and the political imagination of city's decision makers to realize these potentials and take the right political initiatives, regardless of political cost.

¹⁶² Jacob, C. – Polignac, F. (ed.) *Alexandria, Third Century BC; The Knowledge of the World in a Single City*, Alexandria 2000, p. 188

¹⁶³ Hallbwachs, M. *On Collective Memory*, Chicago 1992, p. 9, 80

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