

## **ABSTRACT**

The ashwaiyat or informal areas in contemporary Egypt are vast residential areas built during the last several decades without any means of regulation or following principles of physical planning. They gradually came to existence because of the continuing migration from the countryside to cities and by natural population growth. The newcomers, who were not able to find adequate housing in accordance with their economic possibilities, started to build their houses on private agricultural land which was not intended for building purposes, or on state desert land, to which they had no legal tenure rights. Any infrastructure in such areas was constructed relying solely on self-help. Despite the fact that the ashwaiyat phenomenon has grown substantially, it has not been addressed nor treated officially until recently.

Firstly, the formation and growth of the informal settlements with a focus on Egypt's capital, Cairo, is discussed. Further analyses are made regarding the hardships and poverty endured by its inhabitants using tangible evidence to illustrate specifics and everyday reality in some of Egypt's ashwaiyat. It shows that the informal areas are not homogenous and that they represent various living conditions. The purpose of this paper, aside from summarizing the development, is to potentially foresee future solutions which could be acceptable by authorities as well as the inhabitants themselves. Finally, the paper points out that dwellers of informal settlements do not necessarily have to be a burden for society. On the contrary, when provided with suitable help, they have a potential for economic activity and desire to become fully established citizens.

### **Key words:**

Egypt, Cairo, ashwaiyat, informal areas, illegal construction, poverty, Manshiet Nasser, zabaleen, Saft al-Laban, City of the Dead, development programs, participatory urban upgrading.