

**"Architectural Journalism and Criticism"**  
**Session IV: Photography, Media and Publications**  
**The Egyptian Experience in Publication and**  
**Media in The Last Century**  
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**Alam El- Bena Magazine – Egypt**

Dear chairman, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be invited here to share in this endeavor. I would like to thank the Agha Khan Award for Architecture and the Kuwaiti Society for Engineering for organizing and supporting this seminar.

Before presenting my paper I would like to briefly comment on the chairman's presentation. **First**, it is true that architecture criticism which is performed through examining the actual buildings, is mainly based on photographs and printed publication.

But this process needs also certain level of culture and knowledge for the critics and a better understanding of the local conditions and community needs, moreover, it is important to increase the awareness of the local community to understand and interact with buildings and architecture. It is worth mentioning that architecture criticism in developing countries is far behind what is going on in developed countries.

**Second**, it is true that it is important to make use of the electronic environment in which we live today and to make use of the digital photographic technology which is available now through computers and internet mainly in English language. But how many of us in developing countries have access to internet and good command of English language?

It is true that films and TV provide the critics of architecture with a wide scope of information but in our developing countries the film and TV industry, whether controlled by the private or public sector, is not interested in architecture. This is revealed in the poor level of architectural awareness in the community.

Due to the high rate of illiteracy and poor affordability of publications the role of TV and film becomes more important.

I would like to point out two facts in which I believe: **first**, in developed countries, architecture students study architecture criticism in their curriculum and have access to exhibitions, publications and periodicals and attend seminars and conferences. Architectural criticism has been influenced by different cultural movements and by the ideas of philosophers and artists which form the intellectual movement of the society. This is not the case in the developing communities where the majority of architects are followers of the western architectural movements and they find it difficult to define and create their own vision for architecture which suits their local community, needs, abilities and culture.

**Second**, in our developing countries, architects are considered isolated and remote from the community as they mainly design and build for 10% of the community representing the elite only. Unfortunately, the example of Hassan Fathy does not exist any more.

Now I would like to present **the Egyptian experience** in publications and media in the last century.

Architecture in Egypt can be classified in two phases: the first phase from 1900-1950 and the second from 1950-2000.

In the **first phase**, Egypt witnessed different important projects and architecture was flourishing. Some foreign and international architects participated in building the city (Cairo) specially the new downtown, public buildings, palaces and villas of high artistic value. And this movement was accompanied by the cultural growth of the community and a high level of awareness. This gave the public the chance to express their views on architecture defining its nature and character.

But in the **second phase**, architectural movement slowed down due to our war with Israel. After our victory in 1973, there was a huge development and reconstruction in the country. Many distinguished projects were executed and many architectural competitions and conferences were organized. But unfortunately we suffer a lack of documentation and publication of the existing buildings. Moreover, this architectural revival was not paralleled by the upgrading and review of the architectural curriculum except lately. Besides, the role of the Engineers syndicate that was supposed to control and develop the architectural culture was nil. Also, the role of the architecture society was very limited in this respect. Now architects need strong and influential organization that can protect their interest, upgrade their knowledge and unify their efforts.

Concerning the history of architectural publications in Egypt in modern time, it is worth mentioning that the first architecture magazine, entitled “**Architecture Magazine**” was published in 1939 by the architect Said Kareem. This periodical which had ten issues per year, stopped during the World War II from 1943 to 1945, then it was resumed again till 1959 when it was closed by political force due to a great conflict between Said Kareem and the president Abdel Nasser. The total number of issues is 67.

In 1945, the Egyptian engineering syndicate published its own periodical under the title of “**The Engineers Magazine**” which is still published until now. This magazine addresses all fields of engineering but unfortunately architectural subjects are very limited. In 1980 the architecture society published its magazine twice per year under the name of “**The architectural Magazine**”. It did not last more than 10 years. There was another effort to publish an artistic magazine called “**Madina**” sponsored by Tamer Zakaria, Ali Gabr and Amr Abdel Kawi. This monthly magazine was first issued in 1998 and stopped in 2001. The number of issues is 21.

As for “**Alam El-Benaa Magazine**” which means the world of construction, it was first issued in 1980 by both my late father Dr. Abdel Baki Ibrahim and his late partner Dr. Hazem Ibrahim through their Center of Planning and Architectural Studies. The number of issues is 216 and it has stopped in 1999 due to lack of finance.

“**Alam El Bena**a Magazine” was very well known to architects and students of architecture in Egypt and the Arab world. It was written in Arabic with an English summary and few English articles. It presents wide spectrum of international and most important local projects and architectural competitions. Moreover, it reviews different theoretical, technical and critical subjects. It offers a great opportunity for architectural criticism. The magazine aims at the revival of our local, cultural and Islamic heritage and adaptation of modern techniques and new technology which is appropriate to our climate, resources, living conditions and needs of the local community.

**Alam el-Benaa** had a great impact on increasing the awareness of several generations of architects.

The Center for Planning and Architectural Studies (CPAS) organized monthly cultural evenings for architects which was held in its premises on the first Monday of each month during which architectural films were shown, significant architects were interviewed and different subjects concerning architectural practice and educational issues were discussed.

Moreover, CPAS published 12 Arabic books on planning and architecture written by Dr. Abdel Baki Ibrahim. It also organized training courses for architects to develop their abilities and upgrade their level. In addition to that, CPAS organized four local architectural conferences and another international one entitled “International Conference for Hassan Fathy’s Architecture”.

As a conclusion, in developing countries and specially in Egypt we nowadays have no significant architectural magazine as all of them are closed. Our engineering syndicate does not care for architects and does not help to increase their awareness or to protect their interest. As for the architectural society, it has a minimal role in this field. We lack architectural documentary films and TV programs about local architects and architecture. It seems that architecture is not a top priority on the agenda of our government.