LEAD-IN:

Basma Essam looks at several technological initiatives targeted at making the roads less crowded and more safe and aims to change the driving manners of the citizens of Cairo.

MUSIC - Setuniman peaceful moment

Doesn’t it feel nice to live in a city where there is no traffic at all? You reach your destinations in a short time and you really never worry about traffic. It has never been an issue and never will be. That’s why I love my city, Cairo.

SOUND - Rewind tape

NO, NO, NO, NO, WHAT ?!

Hold on...

Are you talking about OUR cairo? THE capital of Egypt? REALLY??

VOXPOPS

SOUND - Ice Cream Van

No wonder everyone is complaining about traffic, it has become crazy over here. In the 1950s, the population of Cairo alone was estimated to be close to 2 and a half million people,. Right now the population of Cairo is said to be between 12 and 13 million people, not putting into account those who commute to and from Cairo every day. Although a subway system which opened in 1987 was meant to help decrease the traffic, this was never the case.
Let me explain to you how it is over here. Imagine you wake up every day, get dressed and get in your car. About 2 hrs later you reach your destination. Don’t be fooled, after a long day spent at work, you will have another 2 hours to spend going back home. And repeat, every! Single! Day!

Marwa Heggy “going through this traffic everyday makes you think about the solution. And when I think about it I think there are different things to do. There are in the short term, they can do many things, to minimize the number of cars in the street, they can legalize Toktok and microbuses, let them be legalized, giving them some benefits with the license, for them to be keen to keep this license and not breaking the law or the rules”

If there were rules that people abide by and they get penalized when they don’t, maybe then the average employee would not need to spend on average 6.19 weeks per year trying to commute to and from their work destination. No matter how much you love being in Cairo and love its atmosphere, you will agree that it is a city out of control. President Mohamed Morsy had listed traffic second to security among the top 5 priorities in his first 100 days in office. Each day, we all hear about accidents and witness the traffic that makes all of us lose our temper.

MUSIC- ETGANEN BY ZAP THARWAT AND AIDA EL AYoubI

Tamer el mahrouky is a young engineer who had enough of Cairo’s traffic and decided to do something about it. On one hot July afternoon, he took a big sign that said (emshi fe hartak) which means (stick to your lane) on the 6th of October bridge. And you can imagine.

TAMER EL MAHROUKY “I called my friend Mona, she designed the logo for emshi fe hartak and then I made the fan page and after the fan page I printed the stickers and I spread the stickers I give it to anyone who wants to support the idea for free, but its my only condition that you support the idea, you stick to your lane, you behave well in the street while driving, that’s the main concern. After this part, I started making ummm, an awareness videos, its like a stop motion video with toys to ummmm, I try to describe the idea when you stick to your lane what happens and when you don’t stick to it
what happens. And this is the second part, the third part its all about spreading the idea, so when I have the chance to talk in a public event, in a radio interview, in a television interview, this is, this is how I reach people. My objective from emshi f hartak is the main objective is I want to solve the traffic problem in Egypt. That’s my main thing.

Tamer’s second goal is to turn the initiative into a life time project that keeps going forever by the young generations. The aim is to turn it into a student activity program and he will be starting with the American University in Cairo next semester and hoping to spread to other universities. But of course it is not that easy to start something from scratch and get people’s support. One of the main problems that Tamer faced was negativity from people around him.

Graphic designer, Mona Makhlouf, was one of tamer’s supporters all the way from the beginning, she expressed her support in the beginning by creating the logo.

MONA MAKHLOUF “the colours of the logo of emshi f hartak logo they consist of two main colours, red and yellow, and red is usually known for capturing danger and attention of course, and yellow is mainly for attention. So that’s why I chose these two colours, to ummm, create the logo and for it of course to these two colours go perfectly on any car colour.”

Like most of us, tamer knows that the future of traffic in cairo and in Egypt generally will not become any better unless someone takes action and actually takes the proper steps to solve the existing problems. When I asked around to see what are the problems in the street, here are some of the answer:

MAZEN ABOUZEID “I think the biggest problem concerning traffic in Cairo is the ignorance that people have of street laws and traffic regulations. The mere simple abidance to one’s driving lane could not be very difficult if only people understand its importance.”
SHERRIF AMMAR “well the traffic jam in Egypt has become literally unavailable almost everyone over 18 years of age owns a car now and even one’s who already got a car and buy new one, they sell it for new guy who doesn’t own one and the cycle goes on, I hate it, and everyone should hate it”

On the other hand, AUC alumni Mohamed el hagri and Wael khalifa decided to take some action and develop a new idea that exposes people who violate the rules of the road and points them out in the public. They created “Emokhalfa”

MOHAMED EL HAGRY “emokhalfa is the first crowd based ummmm platform for Egyptians to be able to report bad traffic behaviors in the street using car plate numbers. The main purpose is to create social pressure by having the car plate number inserted into a database that is available to the public and being given to governmental institutes and NGOs.

That was the voice of Mohamed el hagry, co-founder and project manager of emokhalfa. He is one of the 5 people who are running Emokhalfa. They are available in several ways, they have a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a website and an application which are available in both Arabic and English. Although they started not very long ago, in September of 2012, they have managed to reach about 50 thousand members.

MOHAMED EL HAGRY “we didn’t get any support, however we went to the ministry of interior and talked to them and they were very encouraging however they told us to research the legal aspect of this initiative and we did a very long research for that issue”

In order for tamer and Mohamed to succeed in their ideas to live, people need to be more open to the ideas and actually try and be supportive. Maybe traffic will become better one day and they would be the reason. You know, anything is possible.
Special thanks for Tamer el Mahrouky, Mohamed El Hagry, Marwa Heggy and Mona Makhlouf for the interviews. Riham Masoud, Habiba Ghanem, Salma Amer, Mazen Abouzeid, Doaa Gamil, Sherrif Ammar, Sarah Mohamed, and Timothy Kennett for their opinions on traffic. The song etganen by zap tharwat and 3ayda el ayoubi which was used in coca cola’s commercial which portrayed Tamer el Mahrouky and his campaign emshi f hartak. Statistics about traffic was obtained from Cairo Travel Guide Information. Thanks for listening.