

Stuttgart State Academy for Art and Design

Landscape Architecture elective course

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Open spaces Cairo

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*Landscape architecture means the planning and design of open spaces. The scope of work spans large scale planning through the design of single objects. Together with urban design and architecture it creates the larger dialogue of the built environment. The seminar aims to show the themes and issues of landscape architecture and to give an overview of methods and concepts of design and planning. The direct collaboration with the urban design studio, will create synergies and foster trans-disciplinary research of the relationship between open space and its built-up surroundings. Focussing on the quality and form of **public space** a specific open space in Cairo will be selected for analysis and design research. Subsequently a landscape architectural design will be developed for this space.*

Open space in Cairo

It is being prognosed that by 2050 about 80 percent of the world's population of then nine billion people will be living in cities. We can thus read the near 20 million metropolis of Cairo as an outlook into a possible future. By regarding Cairo, we have a chance to consider the future phenomenon city beyond our known daily routines and beyond our own conventions of urban space, its development, its form and uses. Cairo is a historic, a heterogenous, an international city. More than half of it was build informally; without larger planning, but at private initiative. Asking questions about the culture of the collective will then also consider Cairo as an Islamic city – certainly beyond formalistic clichés. In fact the political events of the last years have shun a new light on the role of public space in the Arab world Especially in Cairo, the *Arabian Spring* was perceived to have taken place on public squares. Tahrir Square has thus become an icon of political change. The Egyptians took their issues and demands to the streets and squares. Can we now expect a revolution of the design of urban space like in the 1990s with the iconic Barcelona of the post-Franco years?¹ Or are the ideas of open space and public space based on wholly different cultural concepts and historic developments? Is there public space in Cairo at all – taken our criteria for it being public?

The latter question has often been negated in reference to the “Islamic character” of the city. Citing *‘the intimacy of the Islamic city’*, the architect Lilita Villanueva in her dissertation on *Islamically determined urban squares in Persia and Central Asia* questions the urbanistic sense of squares at all.²

¹ After the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1980, the Catalan capital newly designed their public squares and parks as an expression of a new political and social culture – to wide international acclaim.

² „Zu nennen ist auch der weiterhin intime Charakter der islamischen Stadt, weil sich politische Kundgebungen (...) nicht etwa auf öffentlichen Plätzen, sondern in den Höfen der Moscheen formieren. Damit ist auch ein gewisser Verlust an städtebaulicher Sinngebung der islamischen Plätze deutlich.“ Lilita Villanueva, 2006, Einführung S. 3

Following the argument of the Cairo urbanist Mohamed Elshaded, the consideration of the essential divergence of Cairene open space culture would generate the very opposite perception. For him *Cairo is full of public space*.³ This space, however, is not determined by formality, representativeness or institutionality, it commonly is based on private initiative and is activated through improvisation.

Can the study of such otherness generate applicable knowledge for our work in European cities? Can we learn something about the future of our cities in Cairo?

The course initially will aim at the perception and study of this possibly *other* idea of space. What does the culture of public, of communal space look like – especially beyond official squares and parks?

The approach of the course will by necessity be experimental and will entail the development of a personal methodology. Which sensibilities do we as designers have to develop and cultivate when working with the givens of a real place? The seminar will, however, also ask how we as planning and designing actors can apply these sensibilities constructively. Starting from the perception and valorization of public open space as a cultural asset: How can we design the city?

Mapping on site in Cairo

The workshop in Cairo should be used to experience the city and its spaces with alert eyes, to gather impressions and to observe context and correlation. The gathering of this design vocabulary should entail a sharp scrutiny of the character and conditions of public open space. Focus your perception by sketching and photographing on site! Observe which kinds of open spaces there are! What dimensions do they have (not just spatially)? Who generates, uses and manages these spaces? How and by what is space generated and given form? What are the materials used? What role are plants and their cultivation given?

In order to enable a certain focus of observation and facilitate the later communication, you are asked to do a small cartography on site in Cairo.

- a) Find a public open space to be mapped and documented. You should choose the space as specifically pertaining to Cairo. Do communicate with the other participants in the seminar. There should be only one cartography for any space.
- b) position an object from another place in this space and photograph (or sketch) object and space together. Utilize this short liaison additionally for a short verbal description of the character of the site. (ca. five sentences)
- c) Take an object from the place. Document this object in another place. (in another open space, a room, in your sketchbook. Utilize the transposition for the description of your interest in the original site. (ca. five sentences)

³ „The question ‚Are there public spaces in Cairo?’ seems absurd if one walks around the city. People live their lives in public. Egyptians make use of public space in very creative ways. (...) By considering these appropriations of the city, Cairo is full of public space.“ Mohamed Elshaded, 2011, 15f.

- d) Sum up your cartography. **2 sheets DIN A 4 portrait.(vertical)**. Each 1 sheet with 1 (!) photo of the object/site (DIN A 5 landscape/horizontal upper half of the sheet, short text, drawings, information about location with the urban context, type of open space, dimensions. Possibly add information about background and history.

Landscape Architectural Design

Develop a design based on the findings for an open space in Cairo. This can also be done in the context of your urban design work. Consider the following:

The design should convey a concrete idea of space and form. The site can be – not necessarily though – concrete.

Who can be expected to use the site? At which times and how often will the site be used?

Which material will be used and who will implement them? What role do plants, water, light, energy and human effort?

The design can be thought to be temporary. You will have to its mid- and long-term development and implications. How would the design be kept and maintained? Which alterations and processes are foreseeable?

Do look at your design as visionary for the future of the city! Which conditions may have to be changed to realize your design / intentions?

Formats: work at scales 1:500 – M1:50. Plan and section. 1 (!) rendering/spatial representation.

Explanatory text ca. 200 characters integrated in the layout. Optional: model. Final format: 2-3 sheets DIN A 1 horizontal/landscape.

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