

A Chance of Dialogue Between Cultures

Maria Grazia Folli

Abstract In 2009, between AUC PhD at Politecnico di Milano, the Council of Antiquities in Cairo and the Luxor Governorate an experimental research has been started: the issue was been the definition of design methodologies and solutions that, following the rediscovery of Sphinxes Alley, would allow the overall Luxor urban regeneration. Reasons, strategies that used multidisciplinary, multi-scale and intercultural methodologies have settled in a context of cooperation to promote well-balanced sustainable growth and integration of historical and archeological values in the city structure. Shared conceptualizations and projects designs have tried to build new interlinkages between local resources and global perspectives, between past memories and visions of a better future.

1 Introduction, Background

The scenarios of globalization shows a liquefaction of the world that weakening the horizons of meaning, reduces the identities—ethnic, cultural, political and economic—in favour of a unique system. Local specificities are homogenized, in a general aspiration towards an exponential growth of wealth with obvious consequences on customs and ethic.

However, globalization is also an opportunity for: innovation, interconnection, openness, democratic participation, social responsibility and much more. The challenge therefore, as Cacciari said, is not to be ‘no global’ but ‘new global’,¹ in order to govern (and not to suffer) globalization. This means activating and bolstering exchange processes, forms of collaboration that are able to recognize, valorize, contaminate cultures, project methodologies. The aim is to produce

¹Cacciari (2014).

M.G. Folli (✉)

Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano DASTU,
Milan, Italy

e-mail: mariagrazia.folli@polimi.it



Fig. 1 Luís Teixeira, Portolan Chart. Lisbon, Ca. 1600

innovative tools and visions that can contribute to build a possible, more sustainable and reassuring future.

The Mediterranean, despite the fact that today is the scene of tragic conflicts, could play a fundamental role, thanks to its great potential of human, cultural and natural resources.

The Mediterranean is not only the common geographical characteristic of the twenty-two nations, of three continents, bordered by this sea but, it is expression of a multiplicity of tangible and intangible dimensions—cultural, social, political, scientific, epistemological—throughout history, it has been political space, exchange scene, place of cultural and ideological influences, contexts of debate, expression of ‘reciprocity’.²

What is the Mediterranean? One thousand things at a time: Not just one landscape but innumerable landscapes. Not just one sea, but a succession of seas. Not just one civilization but many civilisations packed on top of one other. The Mediterranean is a very old crossroads. Since millenia, everything converged on it³ (Fig. 1).

The Mediterranean according to Braudel is an ancient geo-historical system, a sea that joins landscapes, a reserve of resources and identities, a dynamic space, a

²Polany (1944, 1957).

³Braudel (1949).

sequence of human, social, cultural, political, religious, ideals events, a network of changing ties and conflicts between diversities.

One thousand things at a time, today a mosaic of complex, unstable realities. Since 1950, the total population of Mediterranean countries (around 213 millions) has more than doubled and, at least 75% of the inhabitants are concentrated in towns.

ONU foresees that, in 2050, Mediterranean population will be almost 605 millions. It is expected an increase of 41.2% in the south coastal countries, where the phenomena of urban growth will be more evident.⁴

The demographic dynamics of mediterranean Asian and African coastal zones are due to scenarios characterized by unstable and complex realities, where are striking the asymmetries in development. The World Bank data show an average income of states in southern shore of Mediterranean equal to one twelfth of the average of European Union and, at the same time, in these countries are present different socio-cultural, economic, political, religious worlds with their conflicts. These are problematic heterotopias but also repositories of resources, good intentions, imagination, interest in cooperation and exchanges; a richness that can be fruitful of new thinkings and new practices (Fig. 2).

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euromed) was promoted by the European Union with the *purpose* “to strengthen its relations with the countries in the Mashriq and Maghreb regions. The partnership laid the foundations for what came to be the Union for the Mediterranean.”⁵ The process started in 1995 with The Barcelona Conference, involving States of the European Union and countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, that has set up the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in which, the contributions from civil society organisations are playing an important role in supporting social, economic, cultural, political strategies.

Since 1998, the Euromed Heritage Regional Programme has founded partnerships between conservation experts and heritage institutions from the countries of the Mediterranean region. Almost 400 partners from the Member States of the European Union and MEDA countries (Algeria, Palestinian Authority, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) have created a network of universities, museums, cultural associations, non-governmental organizations which cooperate with each other. The main goal has been supporting the growth of Mediterranean countries’ capacities in managing and developing their cultural heritage—tangible and intangible, their agrarian and urban landscapes, by stimulating new forms of sustainable development and environmental rehabilitation.

Also AUC Ph.D.⁶ of Politecnico di Milano, with ethical commitment, has contributed to build knowledges and best practice in the network of Mediterranean cooperation; with multi-disciplinary and multi-scale approach. The doctoral

⁴Sources: United Nations Development Program, World population Prospects: The 2015 Revision.

⁵Barcelona Declaration and Euro-Mediterranean partnership, adopted at the Euro-Mediterranean Conference—27–28/11/95.

⁶Phd del Politecnico di Milano: AUC è acronyme di Architecture, Urbanism, Conservation of the Living spaces and the Landscape.

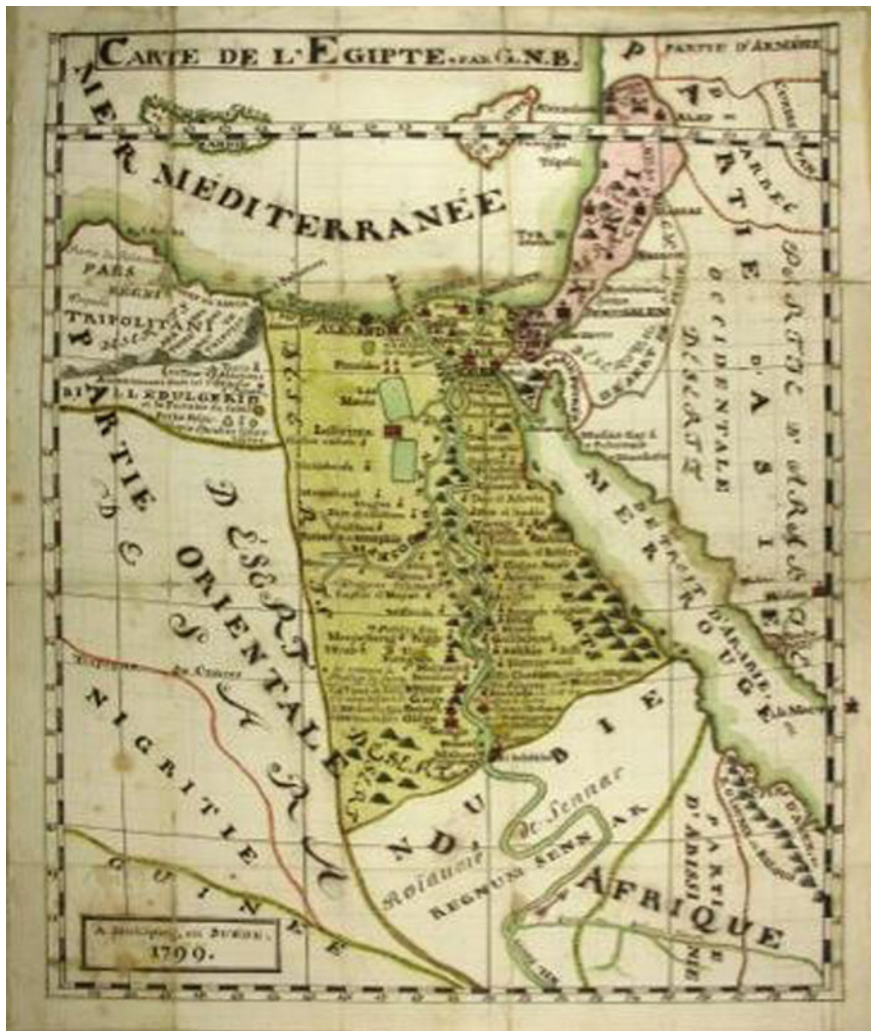


Fig. 2 Map of Egypt, made by Johan Henrik Tandefelt, around 1799

programme has carried out research activities and experimental design projects in the area of architecture, urban and agricultural landscapes, restauration and preservation of historical sites and buildings. The objectives have been pursued by means of the cooperation between AUC Ph.D. and Egypt; a country, today strained by a deep crisis, serious elements of instability and conflicts, that is an extraordinary reality, because of its immense cultural heritage and unexploited potentials, where supporting inclusive and sustainable development and exchange processes. The historic and artistic heritage should, certainly, be preserved but also, valued and contextualised through shared projects and strategies in an overall vision for a better future.

The Ph.d. Egyptian adventure started in 2008 thanks to a strong cooperation with the SCA (Supreme Council of Antiquities) of the Ministry of State for Antiquities, which, since 1859, has been responsible of Egyptian antiquities, from the archaeological digs to protection and promotion of cultural heritage: “to achieve its goals, it formulates and implements all policies concerned with antiquities; issues guidelines and permits for the excavation, restoration, conservation, documentation, and study of sites and monuments.”⁷ The Council has expressed an interest toward a shared research agenda, enabling to produce knowledge exchange, as well as comparison of strategies. The common goal was to define methodologies and procedures for analysis and actions concerning preservation of historical heritage but, furthermore, and above all, the relationship between antiquities and positive innovations: the archaeological remains would have to interact with the contemporary structure of its territory, with the social, architectural, environmental, functional, economic urban systems.

In March 2009, the cooperation was formalised by an official agreement with the task, for Politecnico di Milano Ph.D., of performing “a complete site management of Luxor’s east bank, more specifically the area of the Sphinx Alley”.⁸ The final goal had to be an overall project, able to increase the archeological and visual value of the Sphinx axis and, at the same time, upgrading the urban system in its morphological, functional, social and economic dimensions.

The result has been a wide and innovative project, which deals with a multitude of factors and scales, developing integrated solutions about urban morphologies, systems of settlements, functions, environment, roads network, infrastructures, houses, tourism, individual and collective use of space, et-cetera. The project has been expression of ideas and a sense of reality, pragmatism and a clear awareness of what is needed. For doing so, the continued cooperation with the experts of the Council and the ministries, the Luxor Governorate and the local communities has been instrumental.

Unfortunately, the political events of the recent years have shattered the Egyptian political scenario and, consequently, the overall framework of intercultural relationship within which the project had been developed. The realization of many ideas and proposals has been blocked, however, the cooperation wasn’t unnecessary; it has spread in the Mediterranean world, methods and possible solutions able to open up new perspectives for the future.

Maria Grazia Folli

⁷Supreme Council of Antiquities, SCA, in <http://www.sca-egypt.org/>.

⁸The Ph.D. Team was composed by M.G. Folli, Prof. of Architecture and urban design, coordinator, M. Boriani, Prof. of Architectural Conservation, G. Magli, Prof. of Archaeoastronomy, M.C. Giambruno, researcher in Architectural Conservation, R. Gabaglio, researcher in Architectural Conservation, besides Ph.D. doctors and students M. Moscatelli, R.M. Rombolà, A. Abulnour, B. De Carli, M. Flandina, E. Silvestri, M. Tolli, F. Zangheri.

Acknowledgements The Ph.D. team is grateful to the Egyptian Experts and Institutions, in particular:

Dr. Zahi Hawass, former Minister or State of for Antiquities Affairs; Dr. Amir Farag, former Governor of Luxor; Dr. Sabry Abdel Aziz Khater, General Director for the Supreme Council; Dr. Mansour Boraik, General Director of Luxor for the Supreme Council; Mohamed Mahmoud, Coordinator for the Supreme Council, Salah Elmasekh, Egyptologist, Archaeologist.

References

- Braudel, F. (1949). *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Paris: Armand Colin.
- Cacciari, M. (2014). Globalizzazione: scontro di civiltà? *Pantarei*, 14 Aprile 2014.
- Polanyi, K. (1944, 1957). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Boston: Beacon Press.