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The Culture of the Informal City. Innovation From Within

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Contemporary Architecture & Urbanism in  
the Mediterranean & the Middle East  
— CAUMME —  
Projects of Architecture & Urbanism in the  
Mediterranean & the Middle East



AGORA CAUMME 2020

AGORA - AUMME

Mediterranean: Between Expansion and Regeneration

Editors:

Jose Manuel Pages Madrigal, Husam R. Husain

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AUMME

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## 1.GENERAL INFORMATION

### 1.1. AGORA

AGORA is a research platform initiated by the department of Architecture and Urban Design at the German University in Cairo, in collaboration with the University of Palermo. The platform presents an interdisciplinary tool for research cooperation projects. The establishment of the platform is initiated by academics and research groups of the universities aiming at widening the vision of the Mediterranean studies between the three continents; Africa, Europe and Asia.

AGORA studies and reflects on the validity of cities' structures in the 21st century. It provides a refreshing perspective on four main methodological themes: Urban Landscape, Urban History, Technology, and Social Studies; covering, but not limited to, four main agendas; Urban informals, Urban Regeneration, Urban Expansion, and Transformation.

### 1.2. AGORA CAUMME PAUMME PARTNERS



AUMME



### 1.2. AUMME

AUMME (Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East) was founded in 2011 to foster a series of international events including symposiums and exhibitions. AUMME is a platform which intends to organize parallel events: CAUMME symposium, PAUMME architectural projects exhibitions, and SAUMME meetings of architecture and urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

### AUMME IMELINE

#### 2011

CAUMME / Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East was founded by Prof. Murat Soygeniş, PhD, and Prof. Ashraf Salama, PhD, to foster a series of international events including symposiums and exhibitions.

#### 2012

CAUMME 2012 / 'Global Impacts and Local Challenges' was held at Yıldız Technical University, Istanbul Turkey and chaired by Prof. Murat Soygeniş, PhD and Prof. Ashraf M. Salama, PhD.

#### 2014

CAUMME 2014 / 'Architectural and Urban Research, Education, and Practice in the Era of Post-Professionalism' was held at Girne American University, Kyrenia Northern Cyprus and chaired by Prof. Ashraf M. Salama, PhD, of University of Strathclyde, Glasgow – UK, Prof. Murat Soygeniş, PhD, of S+ Architecture, Istanbul, Turkey and Assoc. Prof. Hossein Sadri, PhD, of Girne American University, Kyrenia Northern Cyprus.

Founding Advisory Board of CAUMME - Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East included Prof. Ashraf Salama, PhD, Prof. Murat Soygeniş, PhD, and Assoc. Prof. Hossein Sadri, PhD. AUMME is a platform which intends to organize the following events: CAUMME Symposiums, PAUMME Architectural Projects Exhibitions, SAUMME Meetings – Schools of Architecture and Urbanism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

#### 2015

SAUMME 2015 / 'State of Practice and Education in the Mediterranean and the Middle East Region' was held at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul Turkey and chaired by Prof. Sema Soygeniş, PhD, of Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul Turkey.

#### 2016

CAUMME PAUMME 2016 / 'Migration and the Built Environment in the Mediterranean and the Middle East' was held at University of Naples Federico II, Naples Italy and chaired by Assoc. Prof. Renato Capozzi, Assoc. Prof. Adelina Picone, Assoc. Prof. Federica Visconti, of University of Naples Federico II, Naples Italy.

#### 2018

CAUMME PAUMME 2018 / 'Borders in Architecture' was held at Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul Turkey and chaired by Prof. Sema Soygeniş, PhD, of Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul Turkey.

#### 2020

AGORA CAUMME PAUMME 2020 / 'Mediterranean: Between expansion and regeneration' will be held at German University in Cairo (GUC), Egypt, chaired by Prof. Dr. Paolo Colarossi, Former Director of Urban Planning at the "La Sapienza" University, Rome, Italy and Prof. Dr. Jose Manuel Madrigal, Director of Architecture and Urban Design Program, German University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt.

## 2. AGORA CAUMME CONFERENCE 2020

### 2.1. ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

The Mediterranean and Middle East regions have long played an integral, if sometimes volatile, role in the urbanization of the world. The Mediterranean littoral has witnessed rapid growth of population between the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, from 281 million to 470 million inhabitants.

The level of urbanization was not limited only to the Middle Eastern region, but it was also witnessed in the whole world, leading to the emergence of new cities, including new urban social, political, industrial, and sometimes cultural factors, and, as a result, over half of the world's populations are now city dwellers. Urban interconnected communities currently contribute to a rapid-growth phenomenon, as witnessed today.

Furthermore, migrations, globalization, wars, post-colonization, new urban communication systems, economic and political activities, have a direct effect on urban forms through the growing demands on infrastructure and services. The new urban parameters in the last decades forced cities to work with expansion strategies to house the increasing population, rather than adjusting the existing structure to overcome the changes. As a result, the existing urban fabric is being neglected, and the population growth has to “cope with the insufficient infrastructure and cities having to manage the lack of planning to meet the needs of all people” (World Economic Forum Report, 2017).

In this context, it becomes clear that the last decades' urban challenges affect the physical and social structures

of cities. On the one hand, the implementation of new projects at new seemingly important locations becomes a necessity, with multidimensional planning approaches. On the other one, inhabitants of what is known as invalid and informal structure become victims of these transitions.

In this regard, the questions that are being raised in the 21st century include the following:

How to address the transformational shift in urban areas?

What are elements to structure the new posturban model?

What is the future for the existing structures?

In order to answer these questions, it must be taken into consideration that—in most cases—the emergence and changes of urban lived-in environments are not only a result of internal changes in cities' social and governmental structures; rather, they are related to the external factors coming from the adaptation to global social, political, and economic agendas.

In view of that, AGORA CAUMME 2020 aims to discuss current cities' structures validity, and to have a refreshing perspective on two main topics: Urban Transformation and Urban Informals, under the umbrella of four methodological perspectives: Landscape, History, Socio-Economic, and Geo-Politics.



## Earth Architecture in Rural Egypt

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The rural villages in Egypt has a long history and tradition for earth architecture. The mud brick family house was catalyst for an environmentally, socially and economically friendly society. However, throughout the years, villages are expanding due to huge annual population growth rates. These villages are compact and surrounded by intensively cultivated fields so any horizontal extension will decertify the agricultural land. Those agricultural lands are an important food security provider for the Egypt along the history. Accordingly, the vertical extensions were the only option to accommodate the expanding families. This resulted in the gradual disappearing of the earth architecture and the contemporary building materials are taking over the building industry. The villages are to be transpformed into an informal copy of the city and losing its identities Moreover, this change did not bring better performance and quality of life from different perspectives, especially the environmental ones. Earth, on the other hand, is a natural material, which has a very low impact on the environment, when compared to concrete and red brick, which require enormous amount of embodied energy and carbon footprint. After many years of innovations and technologies in the field of earth construction, the material was developed technically and structurally to withstand the current building challenges. However, earth has been socially precieved in Egypt as “poor material” because of different reasons discussed in the paper. The study aims to identify the challenges for creating middle density rural villages in Egypt using earth as a building material. A comparative study was done between historical and current status of a rural Egyptian village according to different aspects, such as: village fabric, population growth, building typologies and materials. Moreover, a review on different Earth potenials, challenges, techniques and technologies was addressed to identify the status map for Earth locally and internationally. The expected result is the identification of the challenges that face Earth to be reused in the rural Egyptian context. These conclusions will be inserted in a broader research about the different earth construction techniques, to maximize results and perceptions through a technique that is rarely applied in the country.

## The Culture of the Informal City. Innovation From Within

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In Latin America, with migration flows from the countryside to the city and the uncontrolled expansion of the urbs, the rural-urban dichotomy has been overcome many years ago. The dominant hypothesis is that of the „penetration -physical and cultural- of the urban world into the rural world“. However, many of the characteristics of rural construction are maintained in cities, but with less concern for the quality of the environment and more attention to income-generating economic activities. An example of this is the „new“ periphery of some cities known also as the informal city. One of the most important features of the informal city is the practice of self-construction of housing. In fact, many of the people that arrived in the big cities find themselves forced to build their own houses, where they can, in the absence of a formal solution by the State, without the skills and time to plan, and the economic, material and human resources to build properly. The aim of the research is to identify the technological potential, the collective capacity and the creative and participatory force that „informal“ architecture and its „popular“ culture offer, when combined with the technical and scientific knowledge of the professional architect who wants to contribute to the eco-compatible requalification of Latin American informal housing. The research is part of the constructivist cultural framework, defined in this study as a „guided bottom-up approach“. It is a transfer of social technologies through the integration of two methodologies: Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Human-Centered Design (HCD). Social technologies, understood as „the sum of total knowledge in which scientific and traditional knowledge interact, complement and enrich each other“ have as actors a case study community in Colombia and a professional architect. Through the „guided bottom-up approach“, it is assumed that the architect will be able to see the practice of „informal“ city self-construction no longer as a problem but as a model of Grassroot innovation, an opportunity for innovation and creativity based on other ways of understanding architecture, landscape and territory.

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