

An aerial photograph of a wetland area, likely the Aba Shawl, showing a complex network of water channels and land parcels. The image is in black and white with a high-contrast, pixelated appearance. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the bottom right corner, containing text.

aba shawl_process
phase II_study trip

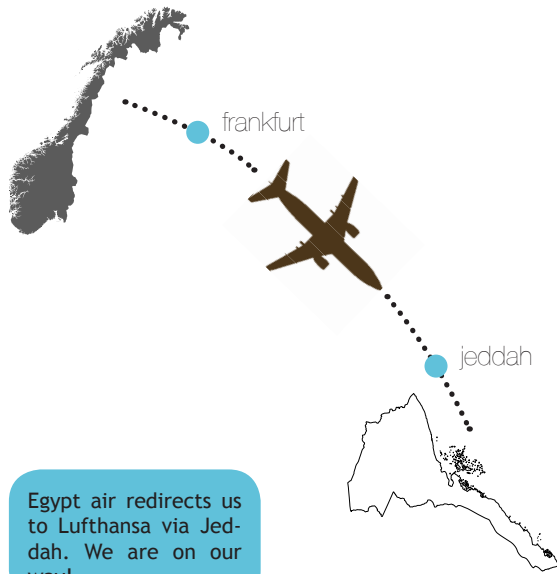
The process itself has been essential to us, as it is such an important part of the end product. The many meetings and new acquaintances have pointed out the direction the project has taken, so it is therefore valuable to document this in order to understand why the end result is what it is. This process has taught us a lot, and we will try to present the experiences and the lessons we have learned in these process reports. We also wish to show our work method and approach, as this can function as inspiration to the workers at DoI. We have split the report into three parts; before, under and after the second trip.

When starting with the project we did not know much about what we were actually going to do. Phase one started therefore with trying to understand the challenges and possibilities in Aba Shawl, and how we could shape a project around them. The result was a sketch project, which we presented and discussed in Asmara.

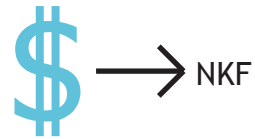
In phase two we went to Asmara. This phase was very exciting, and consisted of meetings with different people, site investigations and redefining our project every day. Especially the meetings with DoI were im-

portant, as we could discuss what we had so far and together look at the further development of the project.

Phase three was spent on developing the ideas and suggestions we had gotten in Asmara, and getting them in a proper system. Then, to illustrate how the new systems could work, we designed a proposal for the key parts of the area.



Egypt air redirects us to Lufthansa via Jeddah. We are on our way!



There are no ATMs in Asmara. All the money we would use for three weeks had to be brought into the country in dollars

friday

saturday

sunday

Revolution in Egypt. Will we have to fly through Cairo?

Apartment hunting:

To avoid 40 dollars per night in a hotel, we tried to find an apartment. It took several apartments and two days, but we found a nice apartment in the southern part of town in an area called Sembel.

“Sembel Residential Complex was built in 1996 by Keangnam Enterprises, Korea’s first contractor. It is therefore also known as Korea”

It is a challenge to adapt a new project to both the historical and the political context we are in. The people in Eritrea are positive to their future and their country’s living standard getting better, but there is a long way to go.

phase two_timeline

“remember to do a thorough social analysis, what do the people need? First be a diplomat, then an architect...”

Marina Mucciarella



Home office



Preparing for the presentation at the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) in two days.
Plans sections, diagrams, references, sketches and renderings.

monday

tuesday

NO



light

food poisoning

First meeting with Marina Mucciarella, architect, consultant for the European Commission, in charge of rehabilitation of the Market Area and Cinema Capitol

European Commission Project in Asmara

The project has been lying dead for five years. it is being re-establish now. It's main task will be:

- analysis of the current situation regarding conservation work in Asmara
- rehabilitation of the Cinema Capitol
- rehabilitation of the market area by the local buses
- advanced training of DOI
- digitalize the archives at DOI and improve their software
- the tentative list of 800 built structures now sent to UNESCO World Heritage list needs to be analysed and reduced to 400 before entering the program.

“ We want the unplanned city to be planned, How can it become planned if you don't focus on accessibility and giving them the same conditions as the rest of the city?

feedback on presentation

Feedback on our presentation:

black water? identity?

master plan?

accessibility?

narrow streets? realism?

Evaluate feed-back
and plan further work

wednesday

Presentation at Dol



Holding the presentation was a positive experience, as we really got a discussion going. We got some critical questions, which we need to address to strengthen our concept.

thursday



After the presentation we went out to eat injera together with Dol. Injera is a spongy flatbread that you eat together with all kinds of tasty sauces.



First visit on site. It is a lot narrower and in bad shape than we remember! And we got lost in the labyrinth it is a million times.....

“ Eritrea is the country in Africa with the worst sanitary conditions. Girls quit school because of the lack of toilets. Their parents don't want their girls to go to a school without the proper facilities.

Anne-Lise Fossland

friday

_meeting with Anne-Lise Fossland from Norwegian Church Aid

_meeting with Eritros in the backyard of the Norwegian embassy

saturday

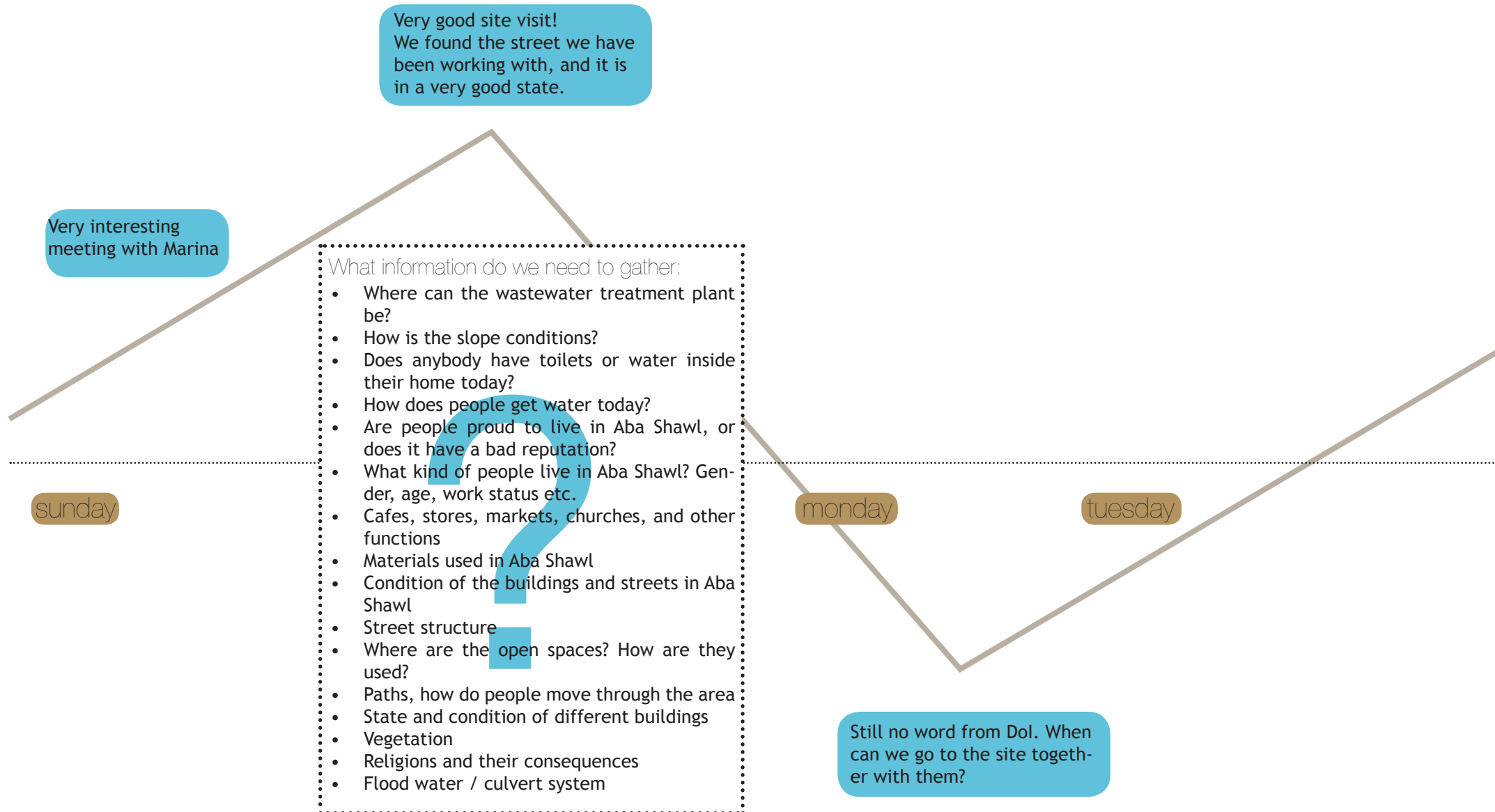
_Gaza Kenesha visit together with Eritros

studying materials

Eritros knew the owner of a stone store in Asmara, and they kept open just for us! We learned that cobblestone of granite is actually cheaper to use than asphalt. This suits Aba Shawl and its small scale very well.

“ It is a pity to keep the man in the jungle for us to look at.

Eritros



Site visit with Awel, the
“mayor” of Aba Shawl. We
finally got to ask the ques-
tions we had, and to go into
some of the backyards.
Meeting at Dol afterwards.

wednesday

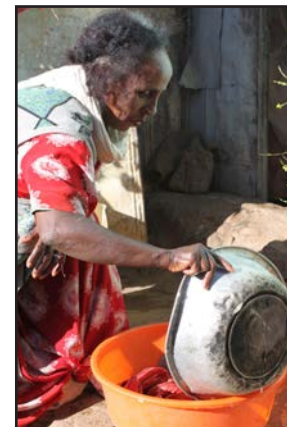


Site visit with Dol

thursday

“Observe the city in all point of view(not just architectural); logistical, religious, social and ethical. Minimize the impact you make in this historic context. Respect tradition. Analyse. Compromise. What consequence does your acts have? Are they robust? Do as little as possible to influence or disturb the city tissue.

Marina Mucciarella



Discussion with Dol

Our meeting with Medhanie and Meheretab from Dol later that day also went very good, and we discussed what approach was the best for both them and us. We talked about looking at the upgrade over a ten-year period, and with separate stages. They stressed the need for social amenities, but explained that shops and café's would naturally pop up if only there was a bit more space for it. The normal experience is that a family starts this inside their own home, and then pays a small fee to run it. We also talked a lot about keeping the existing streets and networks, and they meant this was doable if some people were moved, but then over a long time period. They wished we could study how this practice could be performed, and underlined that we shouldn't be afraid of removing some units if necessary.

We are also starting to accept that perhaps we can afford to do more powerful interventions, and still preserve the character in Aba Shawl. After visiting the area a few times, we understand how crowded it is and how important it is to improve this. The cover of the streets and new meeting places helps the conditions, but the access to water and the density are key issues for easing people's daily life. So far we have focused on what happens on the bottom and the top of the water line, but maybe we should shift this focus to the water line itself and what improvements should be done in the connecting blocks? The issues that have the most affect on the daily life of the inhabitants should be designed for first, and then according to the results we find, the other functions should follow.



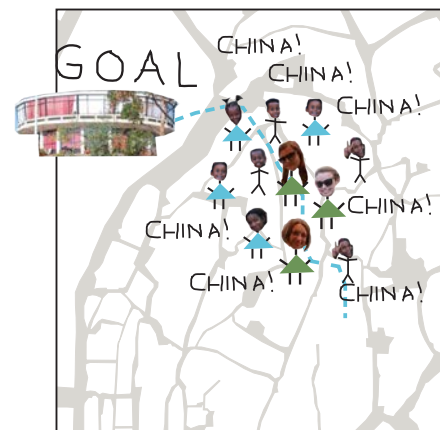
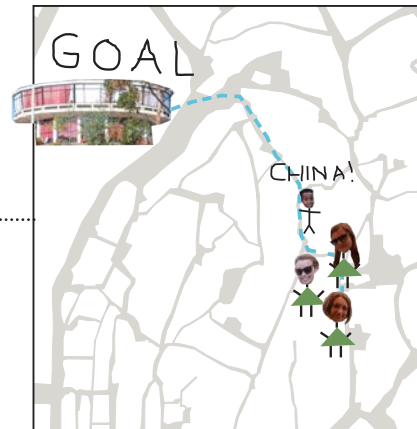
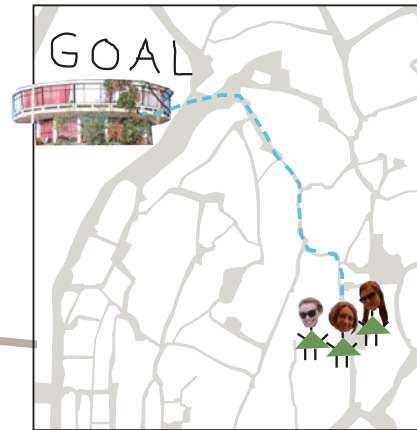
friday

saturday

sunday

Massawa

Meeting with Jaime



Last minute shopping:

- _straw hats
- _straw baskets
- _spices
- _ceramic bowls
- _paintings
- _silver

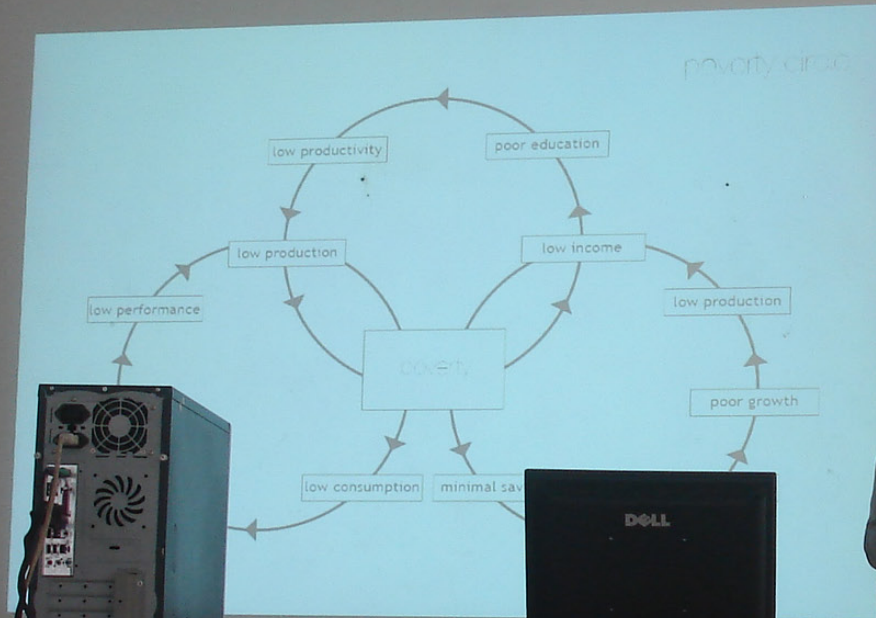
monday

Last site visit. The kids surrounding us all the time are starting to drive us crazy. The first half hour or so are nice and quiet, but then rumour spread that white girls are in the neighbourhood and all of a sudden we are surrounded by 40 kids. Exhausting, but fun!

tuesday



Long flight home...but what a great trip!



feedback sketch project

We were quite excited to present our sketch project to the people at Dol, and to see what their reaction was. The result was a lot of discussions and a wide range of opinions, but this we see as a positive sign. We managed to interest and engage them, which after all is a key issue for further collaboration. The general opinion (or misunderstanding) was that they thought we were doing an urban planning project for the entire area. On the contrary, we have rather tried to find a method to improve one general street, which can be implemented to the rest of the area. We have looked at key projects along this street, which we hope can have a positive effect on the entire area. They didn't quite understand this acupuncture approach to the site, and desired a more specific city development plan. Maybe we didn't communicate our strategy and its effect good enough for them to understand. This we will need to reformulate until we meet them again, in order to have a proper discussion.

The reason of their desire for a master plan is that their main goal for the area is to improve the accessibility. If we found where the new main streets would go, it would be easy to put water, sewerage and electricity in those main axes, they argued. They talked about the planned city, and how it had clear axes and a lot of space, and how they wanted the unplanned city to become planned. This was news to us, as they the last time stressed how important it was not to touch the people living there. We had not prepared a discussion about whether to keep the irregular structure or make a completely new and straight grid. However, we haven't been working much with

the issue of accessibility, and we agree that we need to address this problem. As it is closely attached to water supply, it can easily be added to our project. We think we can do this without destroying the character of the area, and to convince them of this, we can look at most old city centers. Italy for example, has numerous old city centers with curved, narrow streets where they manage to deal with the issues of both water and approachability for fire and ambulance personnel.

What they really liked about our project was the ideas for handling the water. Both the blackwater handling, the area on the hill with a water tower and the wastewater treatment plant at the bottom were ideas they wanted to see more of. We discussed what other functions could be attached to these parts, and they emphasized the need for social amenities and meeting points. This is exactly what we have been working with, but obviously this wasn't so clear to them. All the same, we concluded that we agree on these subjects.

After the presentations the whole group of approximately 25 people had a traditional Eritrean dinner together. The projects were discussed even further and it seemed the collaboration will was high. However, they seem a lot more interested in the bus area than our and the civil engineers students' projects. This has been the case since we first met them in November, so we knew when we chose this project that we wouldn't get as much help as the other group. This we first noticed at this point, when the bus group was

offered site investigations and meetings with them already the next day. The civil engineer students and us on the other hand, had to wait for them to decide whom our contact persons were before we could schedule anything with them. In the end we ended up having our first meeting a whole week later.

In the meantime, Svein and Ole had the possibility to have a meeting with them, on which they discussed our project among other things. Then it turned out that the people at Dol weren't so negative to keeping the existing street network as we have all thought, and that they actually were eager to meet us again.



Tennis
Squash

Ca'e Milano

meetings

In Asmara we were lucky to meet a lot of interesting people with relevant knowledge and experience from similar situations. We have had many discussions and feedbacks on our projects and feel that we have gained a lot from these meetings. It has been a part of broadening our horizon in addition to getting new contacts that we will be able to contact even after we finish our masters.



meeting with Anne-Lise Fossland

_Norwegian Church Aid representative in Eritrea

_Norway

The Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) has been established in Eritrea the last thirty years. They are a neutral humanitarian organization, which normally perform long-term and emergency aid, in addition to advocacy. Here in Eritrea they are only allowed to perform long-term aid, and even this aid is difficult to execute. We were introduced to Anne-Lise Fossland, who has been working here for the last two and a half year. She had a lot to tell us about the complications one need to expect when working here, and which projects they are currently occupied with.

Since NCA in Eritrea mainly deals with water issues, Anne-Lise was able to inform us about the current water and sanitation situation. In fact, Eritrea is the country in Africa with the poorest sanitation conditions. This affects a lot more than we have imagined, so we were surprised when she told us that girls actually quit school here because of the lack of toilets. Parents would rather keep their girls at home, than sending them to a school without toilets! Going to the toilet is also a problem in the villages, where there are few bushes and trees to hide behind. This can cause problems, both physically and mentally, and illustrates how important this kind of work is.

Anne-Lise showed us pictures and data from their projects, and both Mette and we found it inspiring. We were given valuable technical information about how these projects are carried out and maintained, which inspired us to work more with these topics. For Mette it will be very important to find technical solutions that they easily can maintain, which again will

mean that we have to create a space for the maintenance staff and equipment.

Another main issue we discussed, was the general situation in Eritrea. This topic keeps returning to our meetings, and each time we are left surprised over the information we are told. Eritrea is dealing with so many problems, and finding agreeable solutions doesn't seem so easy. The control the state has over everything that happens in the country is overwhelming, and for us it is difficult to understand that there are no loud protests. Especially when we look to the neighboring countries, where the revolution is at its peek. Considering the short time Eritrea has been a country, we assume that the satisfaction over winning their independence overshadow the dissatisfaction over the dictatorship. It will be very exciting to follow the development in the future, but most experts predict that we won't see big changes in Eritrea until the people from the trenches are gone.



Making the Kaluque dam, a project by NCA



meeting with Eritros Abraham

_Former head of Dol

_Asmara, Eritrea

Last time we visited Asmara, Eritros was the head of Dol and our main contact. But in December we were told that he no longer worked there, and we were left wondering why. Of course we were advised not to ask about this when we again met him this time, and he also didn't speak a word of it. Nevertheless, he was curious about our projects and had strong opinions on further development.

Our first meeting took place in the garden of the Norwegian Embassy, and was quite informal. We showed him the presentation we had just held for Dol, and were not surprised when also he started talking about accessibility. He liked the main concept, but our philosophy of keeping much of the area was not good, he said. His opinions were much more set than the people at Dol, and even though we had all the arguments ready, he showed no sign of understanding. It could of course be easy for us to simply ignore this since he doesn't work at Dol anymore, but it can also strengthen our arguments if we learned the background of his opinion. Surely he knows the area and its spirit better than us, but our agenda isn't personal as his.

Where we see the historical value of the area and the story it is therefore telling, he feels the area needs a new story. Eritrea has a story with old traditions, and you can see them many places, such as in their old houses agdo and hidmo. For us, this story is worth telling, but the story of winning a war and the greatness of this is a better solution for Eritros. The earlier days as dependent are over and the signs of this

should be removed to give place to the new grander nation. If it was up to him, the whole area should be transformed into a strict grid of streets and plots, which is performed in other parts of Asmara. To our arguments of preserving he answered "it is a pity to keep the man in the jungle for us to look at." Everybody has the right to a proper home, and he strongly feels this can't be done in the old structures.

The following day he took us to see one of his projects, where they had started on such a process. It was probably an attempt to fully convince us, as he must have noticed our skepticism. In the end of the main street Harnet, the area Gaza Kenesha lies. It has some of the same features as Aba Shawl, but the standard of the buildings are poorer and the streets narrower. Dol had started with the building of new big streets and a huge culvert, in addition to new houses. Just as the former unplanned city, this area lacked character and the intimate scale was gone. But at least the standard of the new houses looked good, and it seemed that everybody who have been forced to move had been given a new location to live on.

Another argument Eritros didn't value was the sustainability issue. Re-use and transforming is highly appreciated principles in the west, while it is the opposite here. This makes it quite ironic to study these cases, when we think of the ongoing debate about sustainability at home. In Norway ideas of car sharing and pedestrian friendly streets are discussed, while here the ideal is cars for everybody and bigger plots.

We are polluting far more than them, so who are we to suggest that they shouldn't have the same benefits as us? It proved very difficult to argue that Eritrea has the possibility to avoid our mistakes, and therefore we sadly ended up not understanding each other on this theme as well.





meetings with Marina Mucciarella

_Architecture & Planning

_Rome, Italy

_ Current

Team Leader in Asmara, Eritrea for EU Project; Technical Assistance for the National Heritage Program. Focus on Cinema Capitol and Market area.

_Past

Construction Expert at INTERSOS-AGIRE
Building Inspector at ARS Progetti
Team Leader at ARS Progetti

We met Marina quite early during our stay in Asmara. One of our teachers met her as a coincidence during a train trip and to our luck she was eager to meet us and joined us at several occasions.

Marina had arrived in Asmara only a few weeks before us and was still in the planning and organizing stage in her new job. She is the team leader for a project lead by the EU-commission concerning the upgrade of the Market area in Asmara. In addition, this involves a go through of the buildings listed as Heritage buildings in Asmara and training of the local staff at Dol. One may say that she has a busy schedule. Earlier, she has done projects in Beslan, Sudan, Kosovo, Surinam and Haiti.

Marina shared a lot of her experience with us. We discussed how you in this type of situation first have to become a diplomat and then an architect. She emphasized how important it is to involve the local government from the start and that everyone has an ownership to the projects. In Asmara, the staff at Dol are used to being able to decide exactly how everything should be. If you do something different, you have to be very good at communicating your ideas and put forward your arguments in the right way. "It's all about communication", she underlined. At the same time, they are the only ones that can tell you what they really need and therefore it is important to listen to their opinions and feedback. One has to remember their traditions and not use our own culture as a basis. You have to be prepared to take a few steps back and do your best to understand the setting

you are in. This is of course a lot easier to write than to follow. A person always has its own set of ideals and rules, and these will affect you even though you try to change your perspective. So when we present our ideas to Dol, it is with our set of thought as a background and to make them understand we have to be clear. Marina suggested that we should present them as phases and scenarios, instead of finished projects with two lines underneath the answer. Since we won't be in Asmara until we finish our projects, it could be smart to sit down with Dol and make up a list of bullet points of what we agree on before we leave. Then we would have a common platform to work from.

Trying to minimize the technical aspects of our projects is also advisable. They do not have a tradition for taking care of their things, so everything has to be easy to maintain. The technical suggestions we do put forward, needs to be clearly explained.

In Marina's work, she has to adapt to all the feedback she gets from the local government. If not, there won't be any project. We also have to take the feedback we get from Dol seriously if the projects are going to be relevant for them, but we have to remember that this is our master thesis. When we present our projects to a sponsor, it has to be our ideas and our project. We have to reflect around what Dol tells us and be critical. We will probably have to make some compromises, but our projects are meant as inspiration and not to be built.



meeting with Jaime Royo-Olido (& wife)

_Government Relations

_Madrid, Spain

_ Current

Architect working for the EU Commission Delegation in Asmara, Eritrea. Project: Construction of Education infrastructure in Eritrea

_Links

Slum dwellers international

Slum networking

Community action planning

SIDA: Ecological Sanitation

Rural Studio

Leurie Baker

It was the students from civil engineering that first was in contact with Jaime through his work at the EU Commission in Asmara. During their meeting they realized that it would be very useful for us to talk to him too. As a student and as a professional, he had done several projects concerning upgrading of informal settlements. He even had a project where he worked with a water tower and a water treatment plant. Jaime has a big engagement in these topics and is very up to date on relevant information, projects and theories.

We told Jaime about our project and he agreed with our thoughts about upgrading through water. He told us about an approach for improving urban infrastructure called “Slum networking”. It is developed by Himanshu Parikh (Ahmedabad, India) and addresses a range of facilities needed by slum dwellers, such as roads, storm water handling, water supply, sanitation and sewage, solid waste management, street lighting and upgrading of public spaces. These are the same topics as we have already started to look into, but it is good to find some more relevant expert knowledge to base our decisions on. The Aba Shawl is not a slum area, but many of the same methods and thoughts are still very relevant.

We also discussed the problems concerning moving people from their social network. You will need some broader roads to get a better accessibility into the area, but one should try to demolish as little as possible. It is internationally acknowledged that eviction is not a good way to do it. One at least has to offer

people something in return, such as land and building materials, but this also means that you need to have available land for such a purpose. The people living in the unplanned city have lived there for several generations, and moving them away from their social network will have a big impact on their lives.

Jaime also showed us some low-cost typologies for housing developed as student projects in Ahmedabad, India. The examples from India have a higher density than what we find in Asmara, but many of the discussions concerning the transitions between private spaces and public spaces in the street are very relevant.

We were also told that water system pumps function quite well in Asmara. The best is to use solar cellar pumps because it is difficult to get batteries in Eritrea. Also, solar cellar pumps have a lifespan of 25 years, while the lifespan of batteries are from one to six years. We will still have to look into the cost of solar cellar pumps.

Through our project, we can demonstrate an attitude towards how to upgrade informal settlements. We can illustrate both good and bad methods and different outcomes. Jaime gave us a lot of document and links to projects and websites that would be interesting for us to look at. He is also very interested in following our project and hoped that we would contact him if we wanted any input.



EUROPAN NORWAY
OSLO TRONDHEIM VARDØ
INVENTING URBANITY

meeting with Øystein Rø

_Architecture, 0047

_Norway

On our way home to Trondheim we stopped by Oslo for a couple of days, and were then given the chance to meet with the director at 0047, Øystein Rø. He currently works with “The year of architecture”, and he was eager to hear about our project.

We had a very interesting discussion about the importance of doing projects abroad, and what makes this project a bit different than many others. Our goal is to inspire, not to actually build something or to make drawings they can build after. Hopefully Dol will use parts of our project, but in the end we hand it over to them and they are free to do with it as they please. This way our project can be seen as so-called “paper architecture”, which is very often referred to in

a negative way in architecture magazines. However, we hope to keep it realistic enough for it to be more than this, and actually make a difference.



The first time we went to visit Aba Shawl, we decided to leave our cameras behind and just go for a walk. Aba Shawl is a residential area, and for three white girls to just wander in there and start taking pictures did not feel comfortable. We want people to get used to us being there and trust us a bit more before we bring our cameras. We hope this will prevent us from stepping on too many toes/crossing too many lines (privacy).

We started from the restaurant on the top and tried to find a street leading down to the public square at the bottom. Easier said than done. The streets are narrow and unpaved. Some places the water from the rain season has carved deep ditches in the middle of the streets. It is quite obvious that it is dif-

ficult, if not impossible, to use bikes or cars in most of the area. High brick fences surround the streets and there are few houses with windows and doors towards the street. Most doors lead into backyards shared by more than one household.

We tried to find our way down to the bottom of the area and stumbled upon some open spaces and even a mosque. We met a boy that was on his way to fetch water for his family. A truck comes with big water tanks and leaves them on the top of the hill. Then people bring their buckets and go back and forward until they have filled their water tank at home.

When we got to the bottom of the area, we took a look at the Sweet Factory. It has a good location for a treatment plant and could be interesting to transform. It looks rather empty and abandoned, but we

can't be sure if it is still in use or not.

This first day in Aba Shawl made us a bit distressed. The streets we had walked were very narrow and did not seem to have such good slope conditions. It seemed that we had walked a bit too far to the west and crossed the area too much in a diagonal way. Next time we will have to bring our map and focus more on where we are going. We will also try to bring a GPS. But the trip was very good to get a better impression of the area and it feels good to have started with some mapping and analysis. People seem friendly and curious, and we try to say hello, or "Saalem", to the people we meet.



On our second trip to Aba Shawl we also started at the restaurant on the hilltop, but this time Ole and Svein joined us there for a meeting. After the meeting, Ole joined us for a walk in Aba Shawl. We tried to be a bit more systematic this time, so we had brought a map, but we still didn't take any photos.

We found the street that we had selected in our sketch project and was positively surprised. The street seemed to be more than two meters wide most places and had several open spaces connected to it. There were also some shops and many of the houses along the street had quite a good standard. One open space was a lot bigger than the rest and also had a mosque connected to it. This was the same space as where we had proposed a sanitary station in the sketch project. In the middle of the space someone

had built a house, but surely they are possible to move. The space has great potential.

The last stretch of the street was of a good standard and even had a concrete base. The houses connected to it were nicely painted yellow and had clear blue doors and windows.

As we started getting closer to the more public parts at the bottom of the unplanned area, more and more children surrounded us. They were calling out "China! China!" and asked for money and chocolate. We didn't quite understand why they were shouting China, but this we were explained by Awel from Dol at a later stage. The Chinese are now the biggest contributor to Eritrea, and it must be known that they are bringing money to the country. Therefore children hope we are Chinese and that we can give

them money. Awel explained that when he was a kid they used to shout England, and his grandfather used to shout Italy, so apparently this is normal. Nonetheless, after a while in this noise it was impossible to concentrate! At the most we had more than 30 kids around us, and especially Ole was popular. We tried to walk back up to the restaurant, but all the kids following us made us get lost. We almost panicked, but in the end we found a way out, not a second too late. Exhausted by all the noise and impressions, we found a café in the very planned city and made a better plan for the next visit.



On our third visit we brought both maps and GPS, and tried to avoid the places we knew the kids were gathered. We started with a walk in the former unplanned area and mapped the different functions there. The former unplanned area has a strict 90-degree street grid and all the houses seem to be of about the same size. The doors out to the street seem to lead into a small backyard for one household. In this area we also found the administration of the Aba Shawl area and a food distribution center. We started to use the GPS, but it gives an inaccuracy of 4 to 9 meters, so we will have to double-check the heights we get from it.

We walked down the street we have selected as our target area and mapped all the functions along it. We also wanted to find all the blocks connected to this street, but it isn't always easy to follow where we are walking on the map. Sometimes we ended up walking the same street several times, which was of great amusement for the people observing us.

This time we were in Aba Shawl for a long time and

really got to understand more of how it works. We observed as much as possible, and whenever passing a courtyard with a gate we had a keen eye on how it looked inside. We also walked several other roads to map more functions and to try to find more possible access roads. People are still friendly and curious, especially when we are walking around with our maps. As usual, more and more children surrounded us and we had to take a break in the middle of the day. Before starting the site investigations we had not thought that kids would be our main challenge! Many of them are of course very sweet, but walking in two meter broad streets with 20 children doing their best to be heard, can be quite exhausting. We try to give them attention, but we can't start giving them money or other things at this stage. This time we had brought colour pencils, but we quickly realized this wasn't a good idea. More and more gathered around us, and the stronger children started taking the pencils from the smaller ones. Instead of repeating this, we want to find some families or organiza-

tions that can distribute them better than us.

At the end of the day a woman stopped us. She didn't speak any English, so first we didn't understand anything of what she was saying. More and more people surrounded us, and we had no idea what they were saying. It was difficult to understand if they wanted any thing, were angry or just curious. More people kept coming, but still no one speaking English. Finally, a girl our own age who spoke a bit of English came along. She explained that the woman who had stopped us needed aid and wanted us to help her. We could finally explain that we were architecture and civil engineer students cooperating with Dol, and that we were working with finding solutions for upgrading the area. The girl told us that people weren't angry, just curious and interested in what we were doing. We promised that we would bring Awel from Dol the next time we came, so that he could explain more of what we were doing there.



Awel is known as the mayor of Aba Shawl and grew up in the area. He doesn't live there now, but still has a very strong connection to the area and knows the area as the back of his hand. It was a lot more relaxing to walk there with him, and this time we brought our cameras. This way he could ask if it was okay for us to take pictures, and we finally got to start documenting the area. Finally we were also able to communicate with the people living there, and to discuss our project with them.

The first backyard we were invited into, was unexpectedly well kept. They even had a cozy corner with pergola and flowers! As they were located close to the top, they had water and also a toilet attached to a sanitary tank. It was unclear how they were actually going to empty the tank, but they said a truck would come and empty it. The backyard was quite

small, with eleven people living in the two units attached to it. After visiting some more backyards we realized that this first one was rather the exception than the rule. One of the other we visited was quite large, but had twelve houses connected to it and around 70 people living in them. Some of the women and a lot of the children were home when we visited, and they were most welcoming. They invited us into their homes and wanted us to drink coffee with them. Awel meant we had no time for this, as it would at least last for one hour or so. They showed us their common house for cooking and said they had water connections sometimes. It could go several months between each time it functioned, so most of the time they had to get water from the truck. We had earlier seen small pipes (5 cm diameter) lying in some of the streets, and they explained that parts of

the area were connected to them, but that it seldom worked. Awel confirmed this, but said that Dol had no account over this.

After walking around the area we ended up at the Sweet factory, and then Awel said that it was in full use! This was the complete opposite of what we had been told earlier, and this fact removed this location from the list over possible sites for the water treatment factory. We tried to get in to look at it anyway, but we weren't allowed.

When we had eaten lunch we went back, but now without the kid shield Awel turned out to be. We were saved by some youth, who showed us a couple more backyards, and an old woman asked if she could come with us to Norway. Interesting day in Aba Shawl!



Since the power was out in all of Eritrea for the fifth day in a row, Awel and Mike from DoI had nothing to do at work and could join us for more site investigations. We studied the possible sites for the wastewater treatment plant, and concluded that the prison and the Sweet factory should not be touched, but that the surrounding areas had no other functions than housing and shops. The slope conditions narrows the area even more down, and we are left with an area that is partly built and partly open space. We measured and documented the important buildings, and discussed different approaches. While we had the two guys there, we also filmed a lot from the area that we hopefully can use when presenting the area to others.

The last day in Aba Shawl was a mix of effective work and melancholy. We had a list over photos we missed, areas we hadn't been in and mappings we hadn't done. It was strange to be there for the last time, knowing that chances are high that we will never come back. We won't be able to follow the areas development further, and the proposals we make will have to stand on their own when we finish. Hopefully the inhabitants and DoI will find them useful, so that our work actually has a value beyond our own personal interest.

We have now spent so many hours in this area that we know our way around and where people and children are gathered. We have gotten to know the area as much as it is possible to in just two weeks, and we hope we understand the flow of things good enough to do a proper project.

After processing the experiences we have had in Asmara, we understand how privileged we have been to take part of such a cooperation. We have been given the possibility to work in a unique country, where few others have done the same. The complex political situation makes it difficult for others to intervene, and yet we are given full support. This leaves us humble, and makes us want to do even better projects.

Before we travelled to Asmara, we didn't know exactly what to expect from the cooperation with Dol. Would they be as interested as the last time, and would they keep this interest after we had presented our sketch project? What if they disagreed completely in the paths we had taken, and saw a further cooperation as a waste of time? A lot of questions went through our head, and before the sketch project presentation we were very nervous. How would it work out? Luckily we worried without reasons, and the interest was mutual. We had different point of views on several topics, and the communication was difficult sometimes, but after spending some time together we understood more and more of their arguments and hopefully they did too. What is important is that we develop our project in such a way that they still feel an ownership to it, or at least get inspired to do something with Aba Shawl.

When working with the sketch project in January, we had a certain impression of how Aba Shawl was, but the only basis we had for this assumptions were a quick walk through the area in November. That time we were guided by a local, who probably only showed

us the good sides. Therefore we were particularly excited when going back there. Had we perhaps romanticized it? To properly answer this question is of course difficult to answer even after all our site visits this last time, because as long as we don't live there and take part of their daily life, we can't feel what they feel about the area. It is easy to go into the area, spend the entire day there and try to blend in, but the case is that this is very difficult as long as you can return to a safe life without big economical worries in Norway. However, we did our best to understand, and we hope that the inhabitants see the same potential as we see in Aba Shawl. As it is the old city of Asmara, it should be treated as the old city centres in Europe. They are the most vibrant parts of the cities, and often one of the main tourist attractions with its shops, restaurants and cafés. Can Aba Shawl get these qualities? The standard of streets, houses and squares varied a lot, but in the some areas we already saw an improvement of the conditions. The will is there already, and it has started. Aba Shawl has a great location, and it is close to both the centre and the market activity in and around Edaga Hamus. However, the inhabitants are very poor, and the things we propose does not cost nothing. An upgrade will probably take years, and it is difficult to predict how it will get done.

With the sketch project we did not try to predict this development, but we presented the topics we saw as most important to improve. In retrospective we agree with Dol that we need to add a few topics to our list, and make a more complete study of the area. We

still wish to use one street to illustrate the upgrade, but when we say that they will have compost toilets we need to understand the consequences of this new system. How does it make an impact on their lives? A strategy for how the entire area functions with the interventions we propose should be worked out. We need to answer the questions we put forward completely and not halfway, to convince the inhabitants of the projects strengths. This we hope to develop to the mid-term presentation, in order to get proper feedback on the new parts.

