

Graduation Reflection

NEW (EDUCATIONAL) CENTER FOR MAÂRIF

Education as a common means to consolidate the disconnected neighborhoods of Maârif.

Matthijs R. Engele
4217128

Graduation Studio: Methods & Analysis
Positions in Practice: Analysis and Intervention in the Afropolis
Casablanca, Morocco

Tutors:
Dr. Ir. Jorge Mejía Hernández,
Ir. Gilbert Koskamp

The research and design topic

This year's graduation studio of the chair of Methods and Analysis is set in the city of Casablanca in Morocco, where we develop a proposed intervention, which is a result of exploration and experimentation with the methods we use to analyze and to design.

Casablanca is the largest and fastest growing city of Morocco. Because of the city's multiple extensions during the last couple decades, the district of Maârif now consists of multiple neighborhoods with different levels of income. Also, these neighborhoods differ in morphology and are separated by some main roads leading into the city.

The intersection where these neighborhoods meet is a big traffic node, two radial roads and a ring road come together. And right on this central location there is a large bus depot situated, the size of an entire city block. Currently, it has 4 high blind walls and it is splitting up the neighborhoods. Everything around this intersection seems to be evolving around motor vehicles. The resident and the person walking on the sidewalk seem to be completely forgotten.

I first came in touch with this location because it was one of the sites that I was analyzing together with Meng and Marloes during the fieldwork research. We were analyzing the life and architecture around the taxi stand located at this intersection. Because we analyzed the site's changes during the day, I spend a lot of time observing the location and the bus depot. I got a first-hand experience as a pedestrian on this by vehicle overtaken intersection. Since the first time on site during the first week, I was intrigued by this enormous and mysterious building that seemed to have landed in the middle of the city. I immediately saw the chance of using the plot of the building as a possible project site to (re)connect the different neighborhoods.

My intervention will introduce a new center for this district. This new center located in between the different communities will be a central meeting point to consolidate the disconnected neighborhoods. The main program on this site is focused around education. Education here is being used as a social equalizer and to communize the district. Schools from the different neighborhoods will be relocated to the central site. This will open up the opportunity for interaction between the students and their parents from different backgrounds.

The introduction of education as a common resource for the district connects to the studio's topic of Constructing the Commons.

"this studio will investigate the role of architecture in shaping, articulating and accommodating urban commons, and is structured along four aspects of the commons: resources, communities, commoning, and sharing knowledge. Moreover, this particular studio will introduce for the first time the exploration of a fifth aspect: the notion of Common Place." ¹

By creating a new common place for Maârif the school and its spaces will attract communal life and accommodate new forms of encounter through sharing knowledge. The site cannot be either just public or just private. By designing with different architectural tools, I hope to blur the line between public and private in a subtle way and create a new type of urban place.



Figure 1: Photos of the intersection and bus terminal (self)



Figure 2: Project site and the five neighborhoods (self)

Research method and relevance

Casablanca is a rapidly expanding city and faces a few different issues related to things as housing and (public) transport. As a group of three we started researching the public life around the intercity taxi stands. But quickly shifted our research to 'ad hocism'. We noticed that at both sites we were investigating, that there were a lot of traces of behavior, added to the original architecture by the people using the place. So, through ad hocism we want to understand the misfit between the architectural base-layer and the needs of the users. By focusing on a small detail in the public space of a specific place, we try to understand how the greater city functions.

One of the outcomes of our research was a set of issues to which the majority of the ad hoc interventions can be related to. These are the following; protection (climate and safety), capacity, representation and movement (separating flows and leveling)². These are some issues that Casablanca is currently dealing with. And it is up to the architect how his design copes with these found issues.

The process and outcome of the group research surprised and changed me in a way. Analyzing a city on this small scale and with this level of specificity never crossed my mind as an option during my years as an architecture student. It took me a while before I was convinced of the direction our research was going after the many shifts we made in the process. I was uncomfortable because it was unknown territory. But Ad hocism as a research method changed my perspective and introduced new approaches to position myself in the project of this kind.

After establishing the intervention of introducing an educational center as a means to consolidate the disconnected neighborhoods of Maârif, I started a theoretical research into different educational philosophies and how this is supported by the architectural layer. The experience of multiple architects has led to a number of understandings and points of reference. Studying the precedents of these architects, like Herman Hertzberger, inspired me to explore the possibilities of using a repetitive stamp to create intimacy into this large scale.

The relevance of this project is in the quality it adds to living in the district of Maârif. Casablanca is the economic capital of Morocco. The city's population almost grew six times its size since 1950. This rapid growth had a big influence on the living quality in the city. There are very few public squares and parks outside the first ring road. Every available plot of land is built with a 5+ storey apartment building. Casablanca currently belongs to the five most crowded cities of the world.

Maârif is, besides the city center, one of Casablanca's most dense areas. My project will bring the human scale and quality of living back into the district. The project site is located next to a busy traffic node in the city's road network which currently mainly evolves around motor vehicles. From personal experience, it takes a lot of effort to cross the 9 car lanes to get from one neighborhood to the other. There are a very limited number of crosswalks, big height differences and no sightlines. It is of importance that the pedestrians (the residents) can interact with other communities and have a common place to meet. Currently, the traffic (non-residents) is the main barrier preventing from any interaction between the neighborhoods.



Figure 3: Adhocism issues categories research (self)

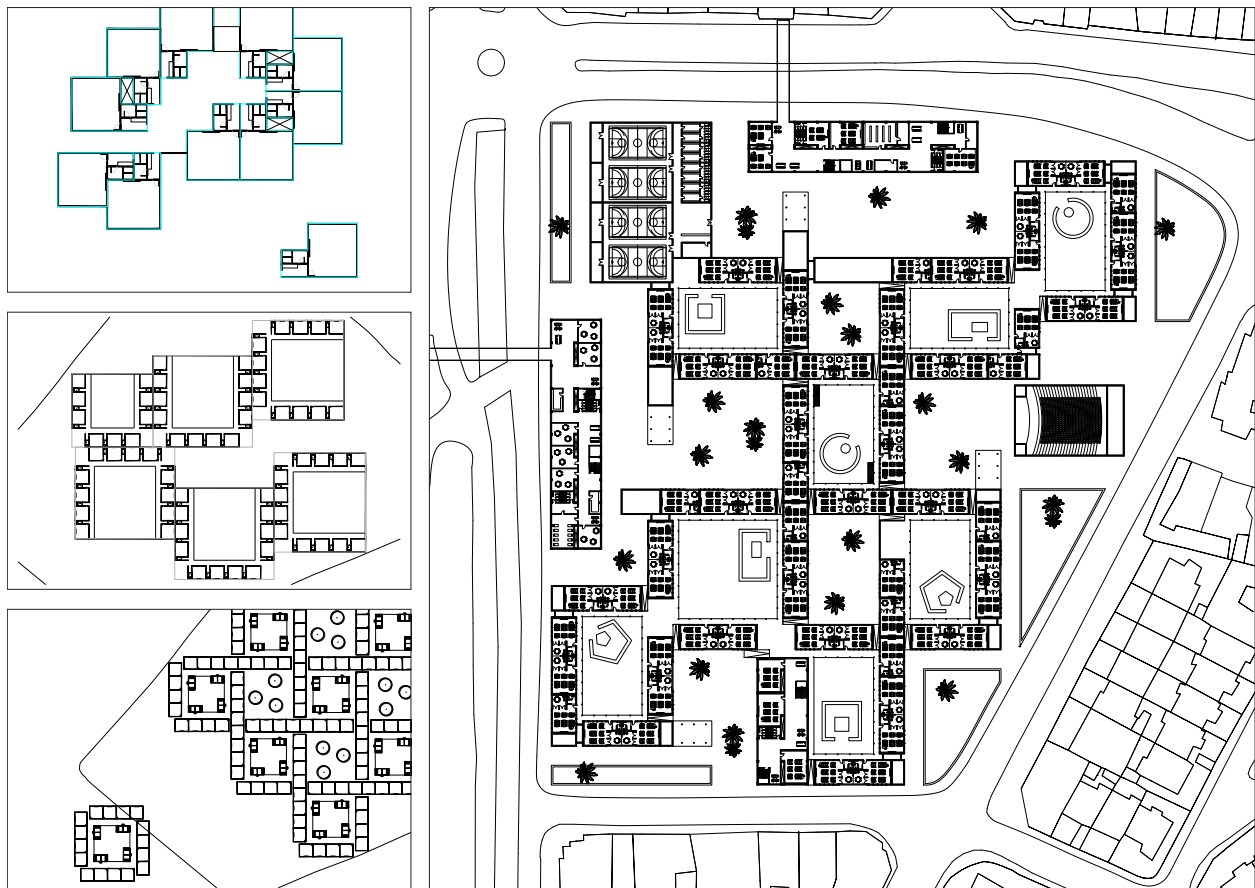


Figure 4: Explorations usage stamp, Scheme presented at P3 (self)

How research contributed to the design

After presenting my proposed intervention at the P2 presentation, I got a lot of comments on my project. The main concern was that it remained to be at a conceptual / managerial level. It was suggested to me to look into Northern Ireland's integrated education which also deals with educating children from different 'religious' background together in one school. After reading multiple theses about this topic it turned out to have made a negative impact on unifying different groups of different religious or political beliefs, but integrated education has shown good results when it comes to social contacts across communities.³ In Casablanca 99% of the people in Casablanca are Muslim, so my project, in current situation, won't have to deal with a conflict between groups of different religious or political beliefs.

I also was advised to look into the Reggio Emilia Approach, an educational philosophy from northern Italy. Malaguzzi, who introduced the philosophy, believed the physical environment to be the "third teacher", alongside adults and other students. The research into the architecture of this approach resulted in a number of frequently used means. Such as the use of 'the piazza', a large central area for the students to meet and form relationships. But also, the importance of the relation with the community and the outside.⁴ These and other understandings are also of great importance in my proposed design.

In the beginning I really tried to hold on to the concept where the schools could 'construct' the classrooms and where the students and teachers had influence on the individual classrooms. It was difficult to let this go, because it felt as this was the only reference to the Adhocism research we did earlier. In hindsight, I realize that, in a way, this concept was holding my project back. The adhocism is now visible in the breakout / 'hiding' places I introduced in between the classrooms. These places are open for interpretation by the different users, they don't have a dedicated function. Also, in the high-rise buildings, I used a systematic grid and rational climate concept what allows for flexibility of the future program and changing society. I'm only providing the architecture base-layer and an initial program. The many users of the introduced center will, over time, add their ad hoc infill to the base-layer to fulfill their immediate needs by resources that are at hand.

How to continue

At P4, my goal is to present a complete scheme with well thought through design-, construction- and climate concepts. After P4 I will incorporate the feedback, continue the design where necessary and elaborate on the start I made with the detailing and material concepts.

Earlier, I wrote about the issues identified during our Adhocism research. From these six issues, four of them are currently present in my project to varying degrees. Safety-protection and representation of the buildings is what currently lacking the most and needs further development.

For P5 I hope to take enough time for the representation of my project. I will make a series of physical models to show the multiple aspects of my intervention and will spend enough time for the visualization of my narrative.

Notes

- 1 Unknown, *Positions in Practice: Analysis and Intervention in the Afropolis* (Delft: TU Delft, 2018) 11
- 2 Engele, M., Knoester, M., & Yang, M. (2018). *Casablanca, analysis and research in the afropolis*, Adhocism (Rev. ed., pp. 58–60). Delft, The Netherlands: TU Delft.
- 3 Hayes, B. C., McAllister, I., & Dowds, L. (2007). *Integrated Education, Intergroup Relations, and Political Identities in Northern Ireland*. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/socpro/article-abstract/54/4/454/1653022>
- 4 Malaguzzi, L., Ceppi, G., & Zini, M. (1998). *Children, spaces, relations: metaproject for an environment for young children*. Retrieved from <https://llk.media.mit.edu/courses/readings/reggio.pdf>