We are five architecture students who have done two master projects in the capital city of Eritrea, Asmara. One project proposes a possible strategy for the future development of the informal settlement Aba Shawi, while the other is proposing key projects that will inspire a sustainable upgrading of the city's public transport area.

We were first introduced to the possibility of doing our master thesis in Asmara in September 2010, but the collaboration between the Department of Architecture at NTNU and the Eritrean Ministry of Education started already in February 2010 when Dean Tore Haugen from the Faculty of Architecture and Technology (NTNU) started a collaboration with Eritrea. The Norwegian students are funded by the Nigerian government and all of them are sponsored by students from Nigeria who could not take a master thesis in collaboration with their own things being discussed. November 2010 we left for Asmara, and together with DoI we found engaging projects that both parts had interest in. These projects have been ongoing since then, and they are in different stages.

The Department of Infrastructure (DoI) in Asmara has great plans for the city. Many of them are presented in their Strategic Urban Development Plan (SUP), an extensive amount of research and investigations are being done for this project. They have mapped almost all possible social and economic properties, water supply, paved roads and sewerage, which have required a plan, a clear and good place for transit to future projects. However, the SUP was aiming to be a larger scale plan for the future and growth of the city. Hopefully, we can contribute with ideas and visualizations based on architectural analysis in a smaller scale. In addition, we will do a site project in Asmara with information about our meeting environment.

We attempt to look at the complex situation in this special culture and city. The challenges of limited resources, different climate and urban building techniques must be included and solved in our design for the projects to be valuable.

The problem of the existing urban situation, life and culture in Asmara is based on a natural sustainable heritage; an environment where the existing materials and techniques have been worked with for centuries. Despite this, the city still needs an upgrade of the built environment.

Although the city was not established as the country’s capital until 1992, the city has been populated for more than 700 years. Originally there were four villages in the area, which were later united, encouraged by the wishes of the villagers. The villages are called Aqaba, Adi, Asmara and Massawa. The “four are joined” referring to the four villages.

The Italians occupied Eritrea in 1889, and made their first urban plan for the city in 1890. They made significant architectural works, such as Teatro Amando, Palace Hotel and the Cathedra; in addition to making improvements in the medical, agricultural and infrastructural area. By the late 1980s the heart of the city was changing, with a new shape and new buildings. The rapid transformation of Arbas from a relatively poor town into Africa’s most modern and sophisticated city at that time overlapped with equally momentous events in the world of design and architecture. The politics of this new urban order and the technology of the new architectural forms. Asmara was an architectural zone in which there existed a rich variety of approaches in the development of the built environment. This is essential. The availability of different materials has been an important condition for the development of the projects. As a result we will have the opportunity to work with local materials and new ways, and propose new ways of well-known materials. By doing so and showing the potential we can give them a vital quality.

The access to materials in Eritrea is very limited. But due to the question of ecology this should be an important factor. Because of the few natural resources available the city of Asmara is developing with very few natural resources. This means we cannot use the same techniques and materials as in Europe or Americas. But we can use the local materials and find new ways of working with them.

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Ecology

With Eritrea being one of the poorest countries of the world, among few cad solutions is - however inspired from the principles of the new paradigm, in the same form as it has been expressed in all the different cultures and traditions that have emerged from all the different cultures and traditions that have emerged from all the different cultures and traditions. The local architects need to find solutions that are adapted to their own conditions and not to follow foreign models. This means that the Eritrean architect has to develop a new, specific approach to design that is inspired by local traditions and materials.

Most of the architects in Eritrea are trained in Europe and the Middle East, and they have a good understanding of the local context and materials. The availability of different materials has been an important condition for the development of the projects. As a result we will have the opportunity to work with local materials and new ways, and propose new ways of well-known materials. By doing so and showing the potential we can give them a vital quality.

Environmental friendly techniques and materials are now more common and the use of natural materials is increasing. In recent times, there has been a growing interest in the use of natural materials such as clay, wood, and stone, as well as traditional techniques. This is due to the fact that these materials are more sustainable and less harmful to the environment.

The Eritrean architects are now exploring new techniques and materials that are more suitable for their climate and culture. The use of natural materials and traditional techniques is becoming more popular, and the architects are finding ways to integrate these into their designs.
After many discussions we decided to split in two groups and focus on the unplanned city and the bus area.

As difficult as it is to imagine what the project might end up like, but based on the background information we think it could be...

- a new university campus?
- rehabilitation or transformation of one of the heritage buildings?
- new markets?
- housing?
- new functions within the communal sector, such as schools and hospitals?

After many discussions we decided to split in two groups and focus on the unplanned city and the bus area.

We really got a discussion going when presenting our sketch projects. Issues we had not been working with were introduced, and the following days we changed our projects' focus every day. Our projects are much more robust now than before we came here.

Several meetings with the supervisors and building engineering students concerning dos and don'ts in Eritrea.

First impressions were that the city is quite clean, with broad avenues and spacious piazzas. Can this be where the 500.000 inhabitants of the city live when the streets feel rather empty?

...as we really got to know the city, we discovered where all the activity was. There are markets all over the city, bustling with activity.

The guided tours with DoI were very valuable. We were able to talk with the locals and get inside buildings we otherwise would not have visited. DoI even closed the bus area in order to provide us with the correct information. We feel very welcomed.

Project delivered