

Reflecting on:

# a River Reborn

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An explorative landscape architecture design focussed on restoring natural river dynamics for the Nile River Basin.

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Flowscales: Landscape Architecture

# Reflection

## Reflection on methodology

### The structure

The theoretical framework has helped me a lot to structure my research. The watershed approach has been found most helpful, by using the systematic approach of the watershed and the interconnection within a watershed. On top of that, the river as a system has helped me to structure the research. It helped me to define my design locations and understand the relationships on the bigger scale of the basin. I believe that it took me quite some time to figure out the theoretical framework. During my P2 presentation I had not been focussing much on the theoretical background. This led to the main critique during my P2, namely, adding a more structured approach. After diving further into the theory, I noticed that it helped me a lot to gain some clarity in my research approach. This has been a great learning experience for me. To realise that theory is a tool that can help me instead of a burden that I needed to tackle.

### The process

During the process of the graduation project I have encountered a couple of difficulties. First and most of all, I have regretted not visiting the design location. Due to a set of circumstances I did not visit a part of the Nile. It is good to acknowledge that therefore I may have missed some sense of place, limiting my designs to become more site specific. Besides that, collecting data was sometimes harder. There has been a lot of research done on the Nile and the Nile River Basin, so there was enough information available. However, data on the local scale, especially in rural Ethiopia, was sometimes hard. For example, creating maps using GIS data was sometimes not possible. This has led me to making my own maps in AutoCAD, based on satellite data from google earth. Looking back, it may have been easier to choose a graduation topic in the Netherlands or western Europe. Nevertheless, I am still really pleased with my decision on the Nile, since I have found everyday working, reading and designing on it really interesting and exciting.

## Reflection on design

### Landscape architecture

The four central themes in landscape architecture all play a role in my research and design. Process, the complexity of processes and dynamics of systems within a landscape, is present in my research. The start of the project is the river system and processes, which is used as the building block for design in my project. Perception, the experience of space, is reflected into my project as one of the main challenges is restoring the relationship between humans and the Nile. By creating an aesthetic way of appreciating natural dynamics of the river. Palimpsest, reading the landscape as a biography, is present in my graduation project as I learn from vernacular practices, make use of historical knowledge by shaping them into (design)principles for modern times. Scale continuum, the affects, influences, connections and relationships that connects scales within a landscape is reflected into the project by the use of the watershed approach and working on multiple scales throughout the project, reflecting back on one another.

### Scope and scale

In choosing this graduation lab and topic, I expressed my desire to work on a large scale. Over the last few months I have often felt overwhelmed by the immense scale of the Nile, the amount of different landscapes, cultures and climates has made this project very complex. The theoretical framework has helped me to structure the research and design and make it less overwhelming. I have learnt the importance of understanding a whole system before designing a local situation. I believe that by analysing the large context, the designs have become much better, as opposed to just researching the regional and local scale.

## **My role as a designer and researcher**

### **Personal growth**

The last year, I have developed myself further as a person, a student and as a landscape architect. It was a great challenge for me to work for a whole year, on one topic, on my own. The main challenge for me was to battle my own pressure of wanting to solve all problems and design 'everything'. With personal interests into history and local communities I have often felt lost in information and details, that on the bigger scope of my project, did not matter at all. I have learned to make a distinction between the 'big' important parts that help the project further and what the little details are which can help create a nice story, but produce no big steps forward into the project.

### **Ethical considerations**

My great interest in the culture and landscape of the Nile River and Africa has led me to choose the Nile as a graduation topic. I have always tried to handle this project with great respect towards the location. Nevertheless, it is good to acknowledge that along this graduation project there has been multiple occasions where I have doubted my capability to design for the Nile River Basin.

I am a Dutch, female, student born in Europe and have no direct relationship to the northeastern part of Africa. I have therefore often felt misplaced and I have doubted my ability to fully understand the local context, grasping the true local cultures, practices and beliefs. I have often felt like an outsider, telling people how to improve while not being part of the place I am trying to improve.

### **Lessons learned**

The main take-away of my project is, in order to understand a place, the connected systems and processes should be understood. For example, when I started my graduation project, I wanted to work on the Nile in Egypt. But to fully understand the Egyptian landscape, the whole river system of the Nile should be understood. Where does the water come from?, At what time?, How did the river shape the land?, Why is it flowing in this direction?, What is the connection of the place within the whole system?, etc. etc.. I believe that in my future projects, I will include this approach, to conduct a complete understanding of a place.

## **Reflecting on the limitations and further challenges**

### **Dams**

The river system can never be fully revitalized with allowing natural dynamics to happen when big dams are still largely present along the Nile river course. The dams obstruct the natural flow of the river, taming water levels and disrupting the balance of erosion and sedimentation. In this research and design, the dams and their benefits and problems are acknowledged. However, the dams are not actively a part in the designs. The designs are explorations on creating conditions that would allow river dynamics and processes. Eventual removal of a dam or multiple dams, would need a systematic shift of the whole basin towards a nature based approach, allowing river dynamics and processes.

### **Measurability**

In this explorative research design, the relationships between three designs are assumptions. The assumption are derived from theory, case-studies and general logical thinking. In this research, the assumptions are not measured by data, models or scenario comparisons.

### **Politics and conflicts**

The Nile flows through eleven countries in northeastern Africa. The Nile flows for a great part through arid regions, where the Nile is the only source of life. Therefore, the water from the Nile is a conflict sensitive topic. Early in my research proposal, I have stated to conduct a transboundary, nature-based approach. I have neglected the political boundaries and regulations to truly design from a nature-based perspective to be able to let natural processes and systems be the basis.