



overview of refugee camp Smara, near Tindouf, Algeria

ETH STUDIO BASEL – Institut Stadt der Gegenwart – Contemporary City Institute – FS 2011
Jacques Herzog – Pierre de Meuron – Manuel Herz – Shadi Rahbaran – Charlotte von Moos
Exercise types: ‘e’ (Entwurf) with ‘P’ (Planung), Group work in Basel and fieldwork in research location
Start: Tuesday, 22. February, 2011, 10 AM at ETH Studio Basel, Spitalstrasse 8, 4056 Basel

REFUGEE CAMPS of the Western Sahara

For the spring semester 2011 the chair of Herzog de Meuron at Studio Basel will embark on a unique experiment. Under the leadership of Manuel Herz, with the support of Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, we will research one of the most extreme urban conditions. As a one-time exception to our regular rhythm of teaching during the autumn semester, we will offer an opportunity to study the phenomena of refugee camps with the methodologies of architecture and urbanism. Due to the nature of the theme and the logistics involved, the project will be limited to a maximum of six students. We therefore seek the participation of spirited and independently-thinking (and preferably travel-experienced) students.

Camps

Refugee camps have been described as the spatial materialization of the state of emergency. In this sense they can be seen as the purest transformation of politics into space – or, as a replacement of politics by space. Refugee camps are temporary camps, erected by governmental or non-governmental organizations to protect and shelter refugees. These camps have become the place of dwelling for millions of refugees in Africa and Central Asia. The project aims at studying the urban and architectural dimension of these refugee camps, and the role that our profession of architecture has within the context of forced migration, with the case study of the camps erected by refugees from the Western Sahara in the border area of Southern Algeria.

Western Sahara

The Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony, is a country on the western edge of the African continent. 1975, on the eve of Franco's rule and with the departure of the Spanish administration it was invaded by Moroccan and Mauritanian troops. Following a period of guerilla warfare between the local 'Sahrawi' population and the invaders, and the subsequent withdrawal of the Mauritanian army, Morocco has installed itself as an occupying force over the largest extent of the territory. The beginning of the warfare also saw the flight of tens of thousands of refugees over the border into Algeria, a historical ally of the Sahrawis, and the establishment of four refugee camps on Algerian territory, near the border zone. Since the 1970s these refugee camps have developed into some of the largest urbanized settlements within the Saharan Desert, now housing approximately 170.000 refugees amongst five camps. In 1991 military conflict between the Sahrawis and the Moroccans stopped, with a UN peacekeeping mission (MINURSO) overseeing the ceasefire. The occupation of the Western Sahara by Morocco, though, has been ongoing ever since.



camp near Tifariti, Western Sahara

Urban Activities

Refugee camps are mostly planned and assessed in terms of technical parameters: Sizes of plots, number of water taps, and location of health centers, etc., tend to form the basis for camp planning procedures. The phenomenon that refugee camps, originally intended as a temporary response, often transform into (semi-) permanent conditions has been widely written on. On top of this, we can also observe that refugees with a rural background experience camps as a quasi-urban setting, and hence as an urbanizing environment. Thus, in addition to the technical parameters of camp design, an analysis and assessment based on tools of urban research becomes more and more important. Can we look at a refugee camp with similar questions as we have previously dealt with in Nairobi or Basel: How do people live in a camp? How do they work, trade or use the camp environment for learning and education? How are activities of recreation performed and what spaces do they produce? How is the camp connected to its cultural, economic, physical and social environment? In a word: can we introduce an urbanistic vocabulary in the perception of refugee camps? This is not intended to mean that camps are cities, but that they deserve to encompass some or most of the qualities of urban life, yet ready to be dismantled or abandoned, if the opportunity for return or resettlement arises. The refugee camps near Tindouf, housing Sahrawi refugees, offer an ideal situation for studying these processes.

Approach

It is these and other issues with which the research project on refugee camps will be engaged. By a careful description and analysis the study attempts to unfold the simultaneities and dependencies of the camps as quasi-urban spaces, carefully tracing the basic human activities and their spaces in which they unfold. It will allow us to question our own research methods, such as mapping tools, which obtain an urgency and a pivotal (political) significance and have often become tools of social control, thereby losing any remaining innocence that mapping is perceived to have. Space is the medium where debates, negotiations of power and conflict are played out.

Semester Organization

The project starts on Tuesday 22nd February 2010, at ETH StudioBasel, Spitalstrasse 8, 4056 Basel. Students will travel to Tindouf, Algeria for a two-week fieldwork phase during March 2011 (compulsory). The project is carried out in joint cooperation with local organizations and representatives of the Sahrawis, with Polisario, and with UNHCR. The estimated fees for participating in the project will be 900,- CHF. Students who are receiving stipends and grants, or who have been exempted from school fees can seek financial assistance by the ETH. (Application forms are available through Mrs. Giordano, HIL E 73.3)

IMPORTANT

1. Due to the nature of the project and the logistics involved, changes to the itinerary and destinations are possible.
2. We are seeking spirited and independently thinking participants. Knowledge of Spanish is beneficial.
3. The military conflict stopped in 1991 and no security risks exist in relation to this conflict.
4. Participants will have a simple standard of accommodation on the trip to Algeria / Western Sahara. The level of hygiene (food) and the sanitary conditions can be basic or substandard and will not always meet the accustomed level of comfort and quality.
5. The project is organized by Manuel Herz with full support by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron who will attend the juries and presentations.
6. Interested students with Moroccan or Israeli citizenship, or with Israeli stamps in their passports need to contact us BEFORE applying.



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SCHEDULE (to be confirmed)

FEB	22	Start	Basel	Introduction ETH Studio Basel	
	23	Themes	Basel	Distribution of Themes and the Refugee Camp Atlas Project	
MAR	01	Studio Work	Basel	Atlas development	
	02	Studio Work	Basel		
	08	Studio Work	Basel	Jury / Presentation of Refugee Camp Atlas Project	
	09	Studio Work	Basel		
	15	Studio Work	Basel		
	16	Studio Work	Basel		
	19	Algeria / W-Sahara Trip	Tindouf		Algeria / Western Sahara Trip starts
	20		Tindouf		
21		Tindouf			
22		Tindouf			
23		Tindouf			
24		Tindouf			
25		Tindouf			
26		Tindouf			
27		Tindouf			
28		Tindouf			
29		Tindouf			
30		Tindouf			
31	V	Tindouf	Algeria / Western Sahara Trip ends		
APR	05	Studio Work	Basel	Zwischenkritik / Mid-Term Jury	
	06	Studio Work	Basel		
	12	Studio Work	Basel		
	13	Studio Work	Basel		
	19	Studio Work	Basel		
	20	Mid-Term Jury	Basel		
MAY	26	Studio Work	Basel	All Day Final Jury	
	27	Studio Work	Basel		
	03	Studio Work	Basel		
	04	Studio Work	Basel		
	10	Studio Work	Basel		
	11	Studio Work	Basel		
	17	Studio Work	Basel		
18	Studio Work	Basel			
MAY	24	Studio Work	Basel		
	25	Studio Work	Basel		
	31	Studio Work	Basel		
JUN	01	Final Jury	Basel		