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City Core Services

ETH Studio Basel

Contemporary City Institute

Tommaso Amaboldi, Emanuel Biland

Prof. Roger Diener, Prof. Marcel Meili

Mathias Gunz, Rolf Jenni, Milica Topalovic

Christian Mueller Inderbitzin

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CITY CORE

Alive and characterized by ambiguity, Assiut a paradigmatic city of the Nile Valley. The city core, with its many characteristics, represents this reality well. Assiut distinguishes itself from other cities of the region by its university, which also represents a parallel society.



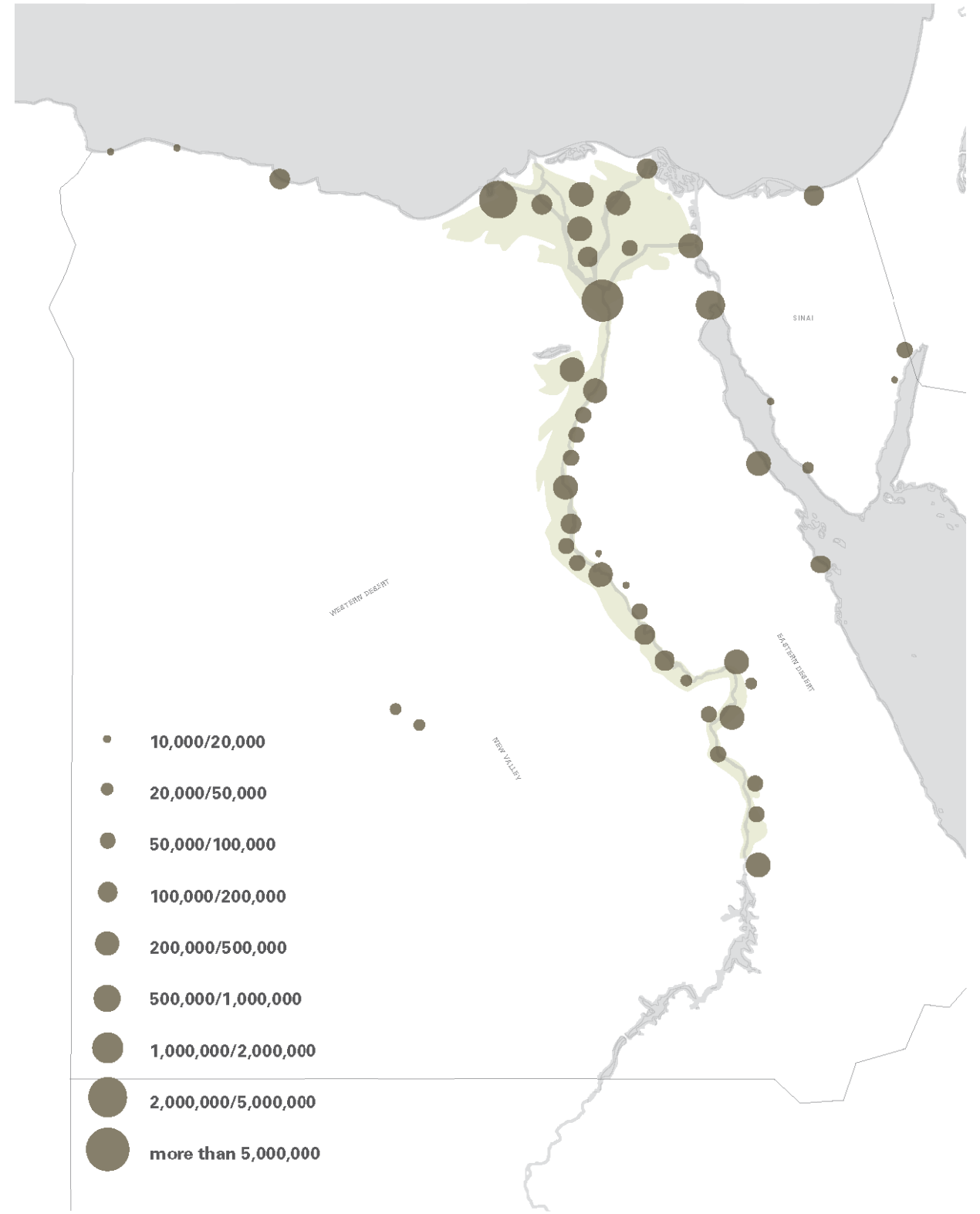
A NILE VALLEY CITY



Assiut
 11.2 sq km
 395,000 inhabitants
 35,200 inhabitants/sq km
 1.12% annual growth



Basel
 22.75 sq km
 165,529 inhabitants
 7,321 inhabitants/sq km
 -0.67% annual growth



Cities of Egypt

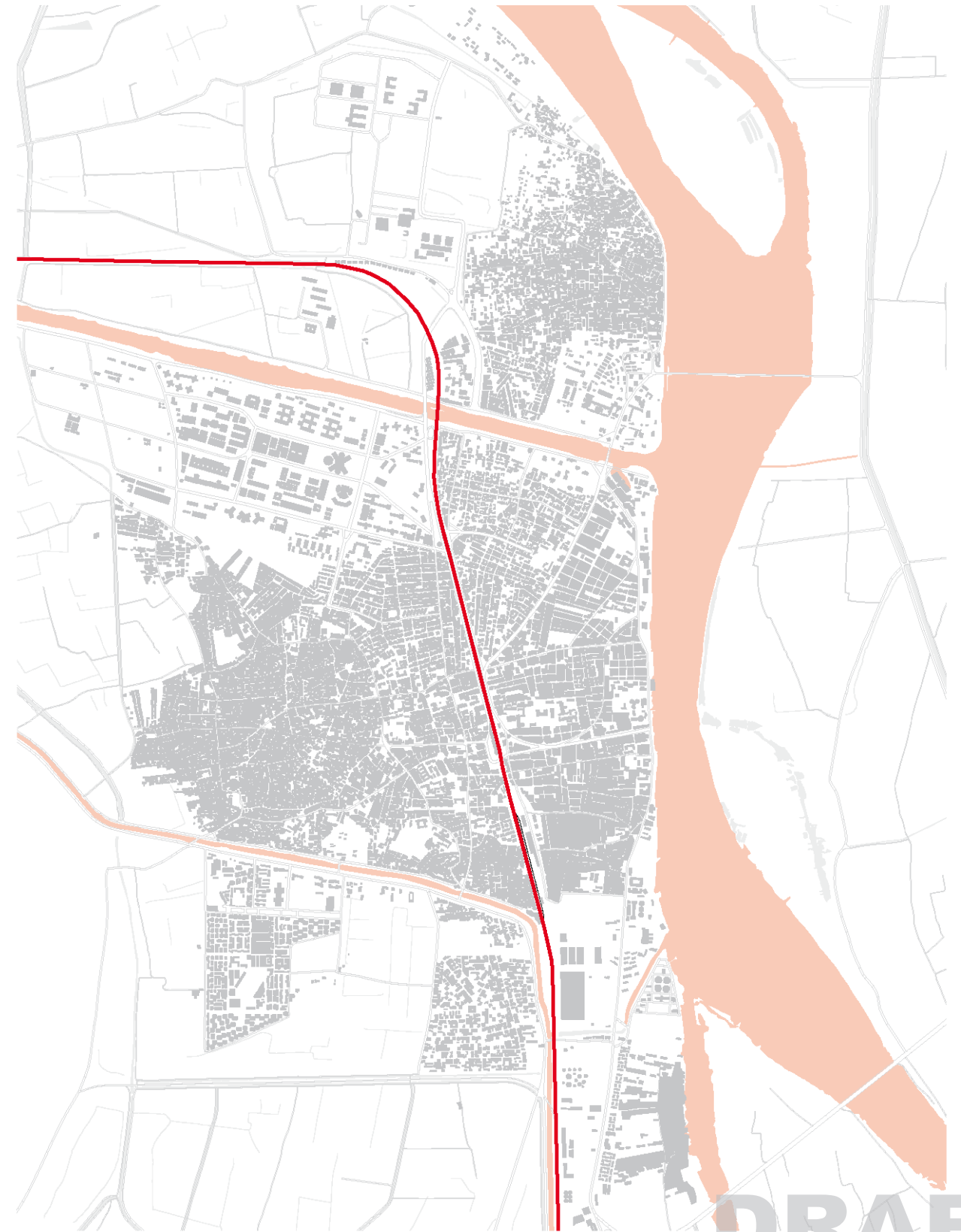
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Confining Elements

Assiut's bounds are determined by strongly confining elements: natural obstructions such as the river and the hills, and artificial constructions such as canals and the railway.



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Districts

There are 13 distinct districts in Assiut. With narrow streets and open markets, the Old City represents features of traditional Islamic architecture and planning. Downtown holds a fundamental role in all matters related to city mobility and economy; it is a central area which contains all commercial, transportation, and entertainment-related activities. Qulta exemplifies the modern phenomenon of luxury villa housing degrading into densely populated low-income housing. Mohafza is considered the most developed area in the city, containing many governorate buildings. Firial represents a modernized Assiut with concrete building, modular streets, and low population density. Mubarak is a relatively new district, created in 1973 with support from the Egyptian Housing and Construction Bank. Lastly, Hamra is characterized by low-income and informal housing.



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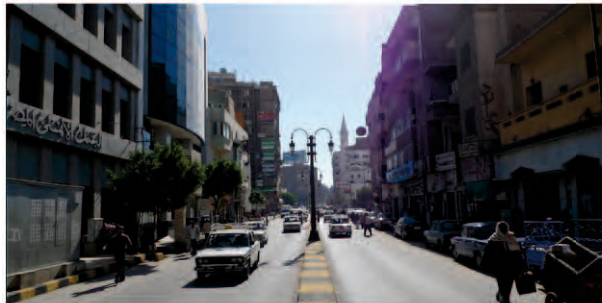
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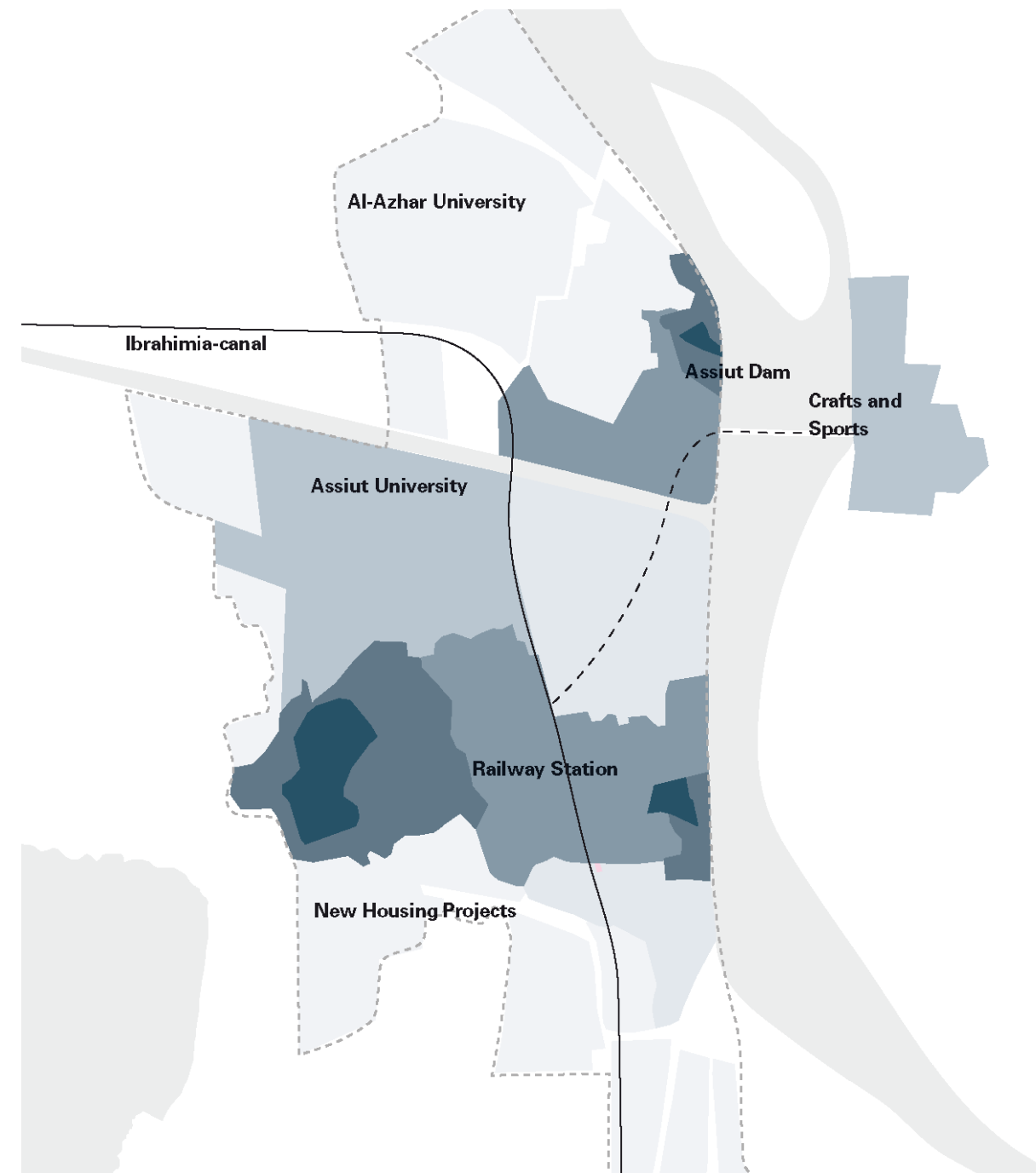
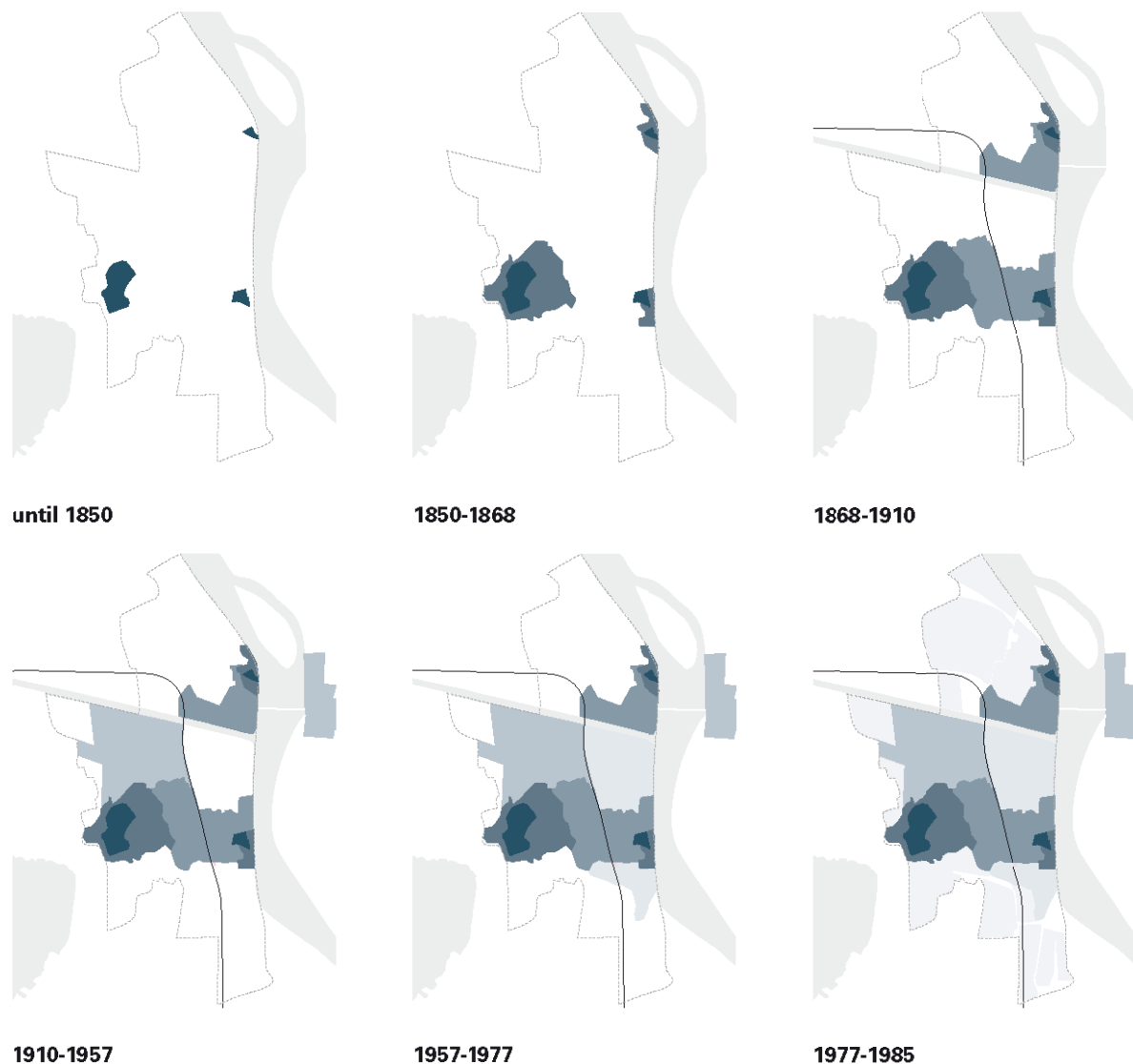


Section through the City



Forgotten Heritage

Historical city fabric is not easily recognizable in Assiut. The city seems to be more concerned with matters of everyday life rather than its history. Nevertheless, there is an uprising effort to renovate historical buildings such as Wikalas` (a common inner courtyard house type) for touristic reasons. The city has demarcated 122 buildings as historical, most of which are large solitary villas of a distinctive colonial style. A building law prohibits the destruction of buildings older than one hundred years. Consequently, some private colonial buildings remain, however, they are left unkept.



- earlier
- until 1868
- 1868-1910
- 1910-1957
- 1957-1977
- 1977-1985

Historical Development of Assiut

The foundation of Assiut goes back to pharaonic times. An important destination for travelers, traders and camel caravans, Assiut held Egypt's largest slave market until 1850. Until 1868, Assiut was a small town as well as two villages (El Hamra and El Walidiya) near the Nile. Between 1868 and 1910, the city underwent a remarkable expansion, especially toward the east the north. In this period, the Ibrahimia Canal (1873), the Assiut Dam (1901), and the railway were built. Between 1910 and 1957, the city expanded in the northwest and south direction, on both sides of the railway. Assiut University was founded in 1957. Between 1957 and 1977, city development clustered around the University area. Also, craft enterprises and recreation space were established on the right bank near Assiut Dam. Between 1977 and 1985, additional expansion occurred on northern and southern agricultural land. Al-Azhar University was founded on the right side of the Ibrahimia-canal in 1975. In the south, two new housing districts were established in 1985. In the same year, a building law was passed to forbid construction on agricultural land, stipulating that Assiut should expand vertically rather than horizontally.

SEGREGATED PUBLIC LIFE

Public life in Assiut is defined through a conglomerate of social, political and religious aspects and rules. A fundamentalist background consequently results in a highly but unequally controlled cityscape. Islamic thinking strongly influences society and structures daily life. These aspects together with distinct social classes results in a segregated public life.



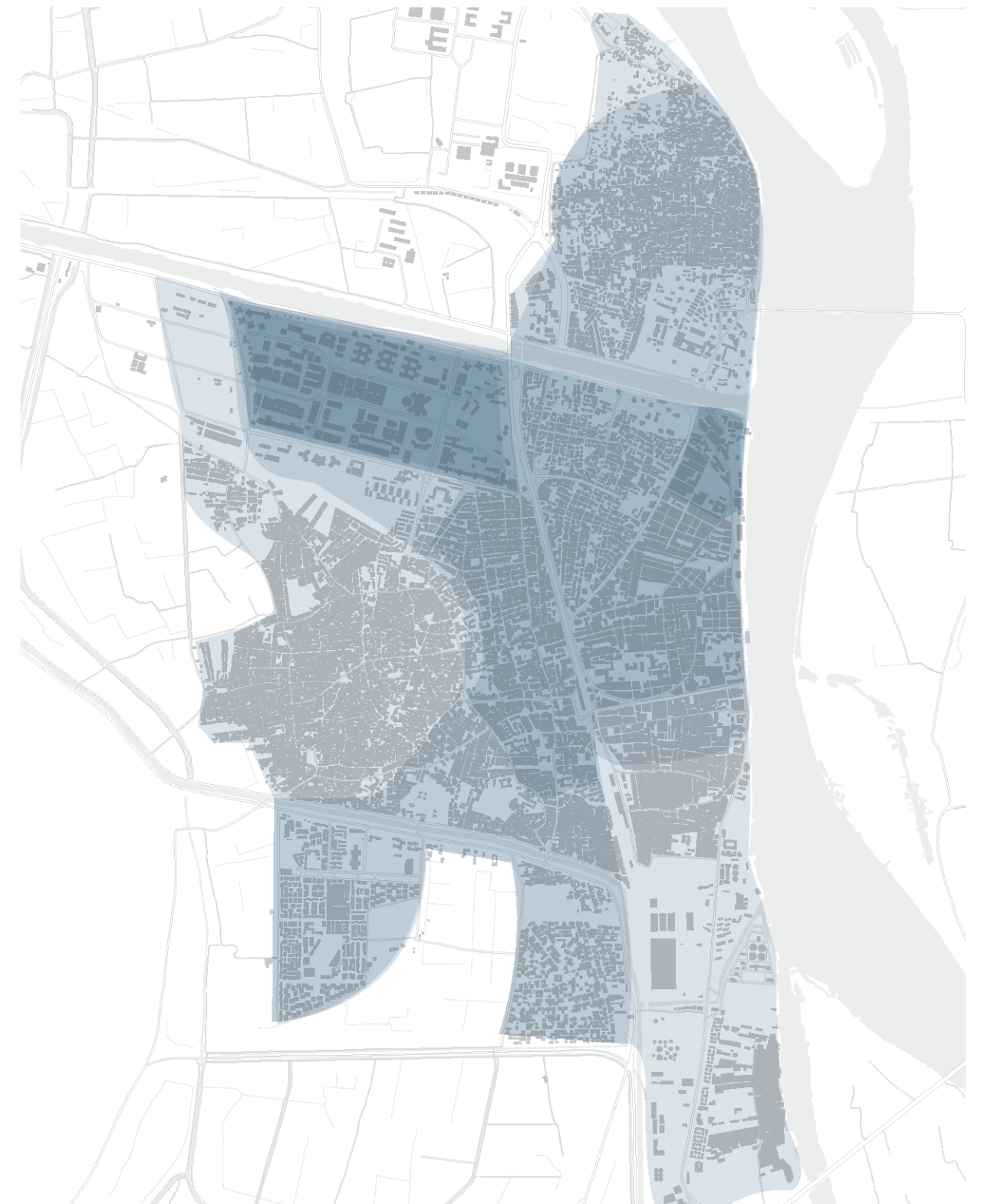


Small observation stations, camouflaged into the immediate background, are placed in strategic crossings for police to have an overview of city happenings.

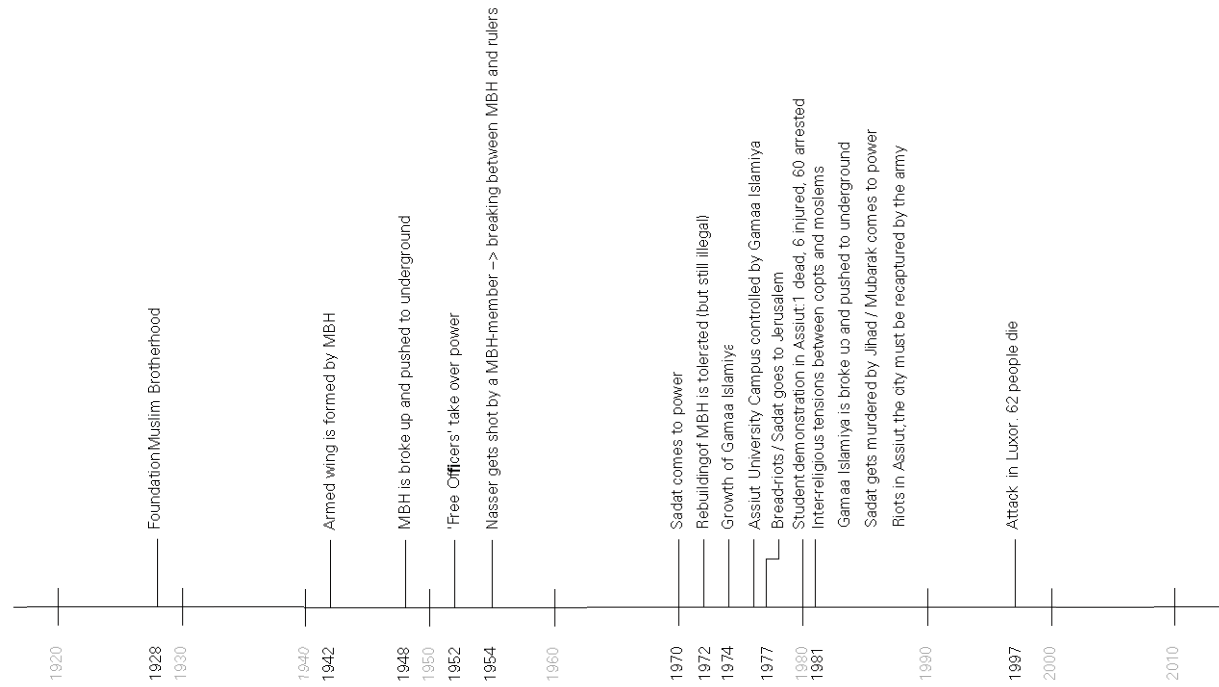
Most uniformed police officers are heavily armed. Tourists and other foreign groups must be constantly escorted by at least six officers in Chevrolet pickups.

City Under Surveillance

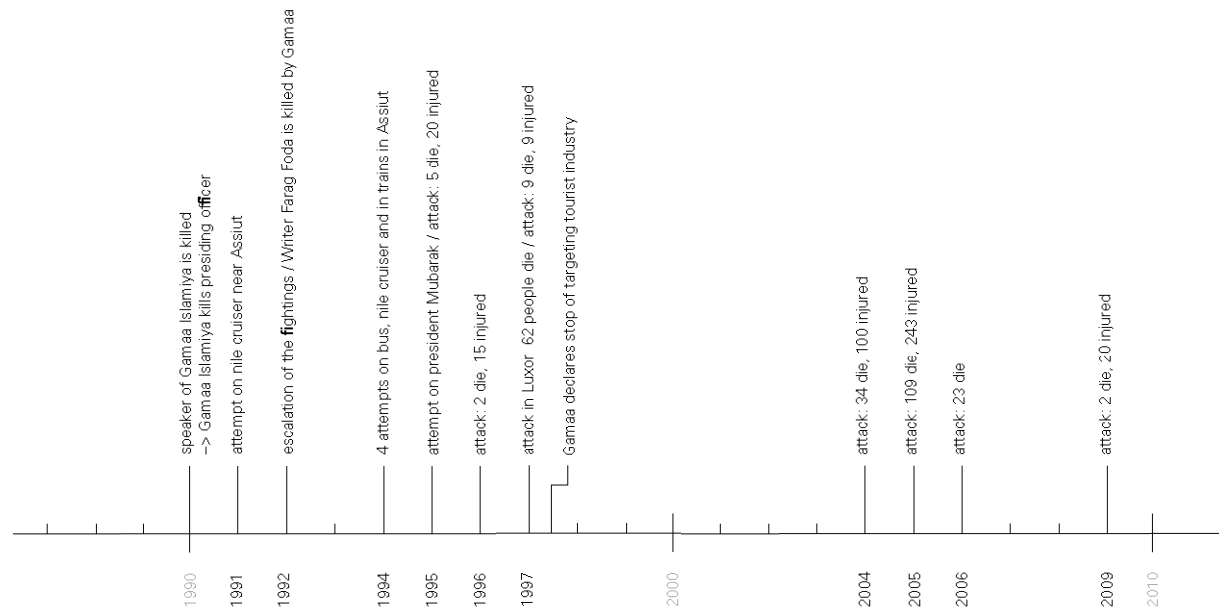
In the nineties, an increase in fundamentalist attacks in Egypt was ascertainable. Besides El Minya, Assiut is considered a fundamentalist hotspot. President Mubarak's policies attempt to mute the situation via a strategy of repression, however, attacks victimizing tourists still occur. All of Assiut is controlled by police through a surveillance system integrated into the city. However, different intensities of control can be found throughout the city. The poorer Old Town district seems to be of less interest.



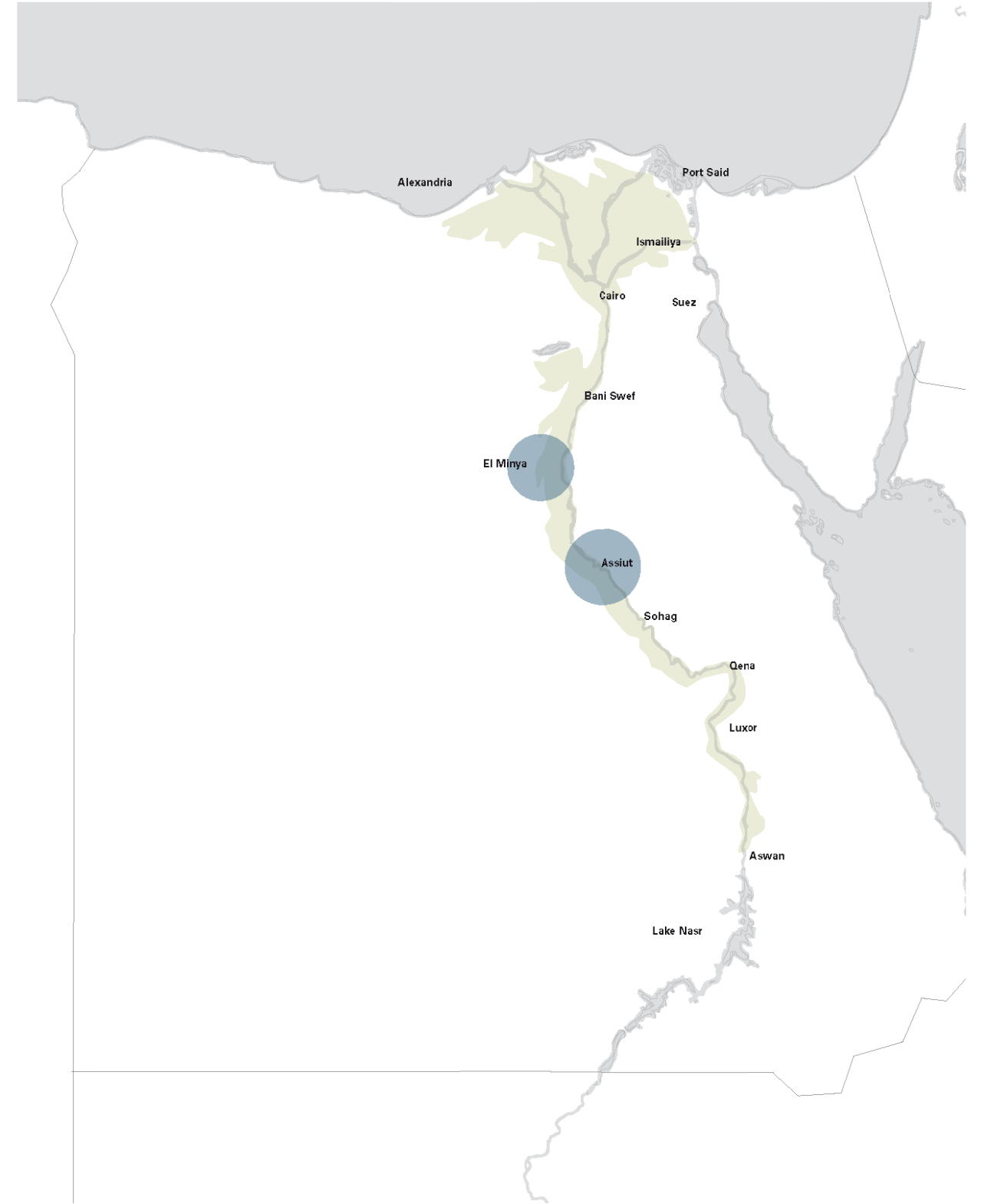
Intensities of Control



Fundamentalism in the Last Century



Fundamentalism in the Past Two Decades



Fundamentalist Hotspots



Islam

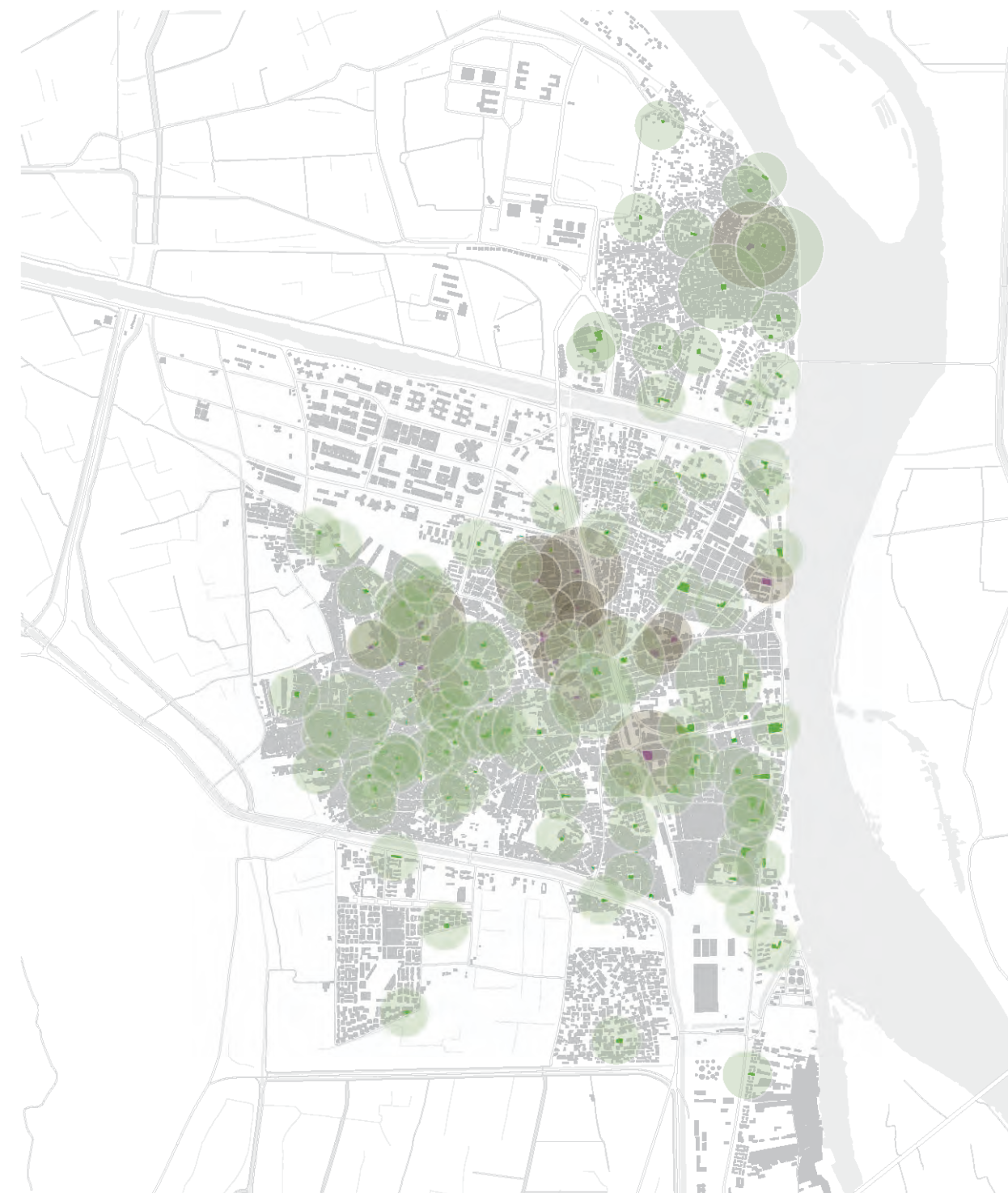
Assiut: Muslims 82%
 Egypt: 64,000,000 Muslims
 Muslim members of Parliament: 443

Christianity

Assiut: Coptic Christians 18%
 Egypt: 10,000,000 Coptic Christians
 Coptic members of Parliament: 1

Religion Structuring Space and Time

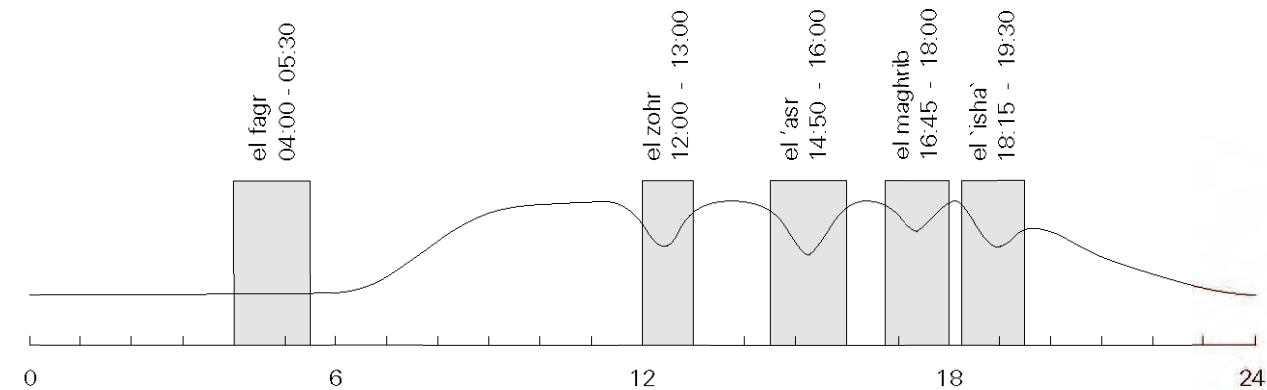
The state religion of Egypt is Islam of Sunni character. Assiut's religious population mainly consists of Muslims and Coptic Christians, with an insignificant percentage of other religious communities. Assiut has one of the highest percentages of Copts in Egypt. Religion strongly orders and influences public life in Assiut. Mosques and churches are quite mixed in location; there is no specific Coptic district. However, Muslims and Christians generally associate with people sharing their respective religion. Churches have a bounded front yard where public life takes place in a more exclusive setting. For Muslims, daily life is structured by religion into five prayer times throughout the day.



mosques
 churches

Religious Integration

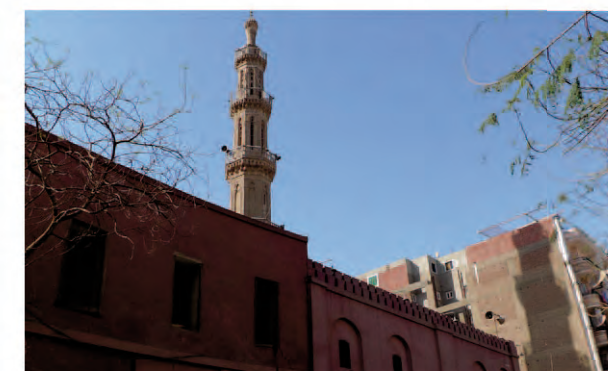
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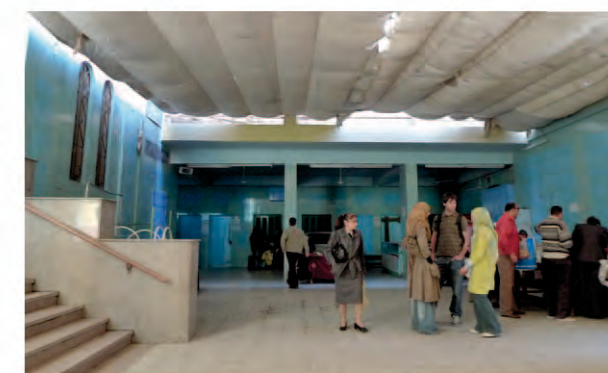
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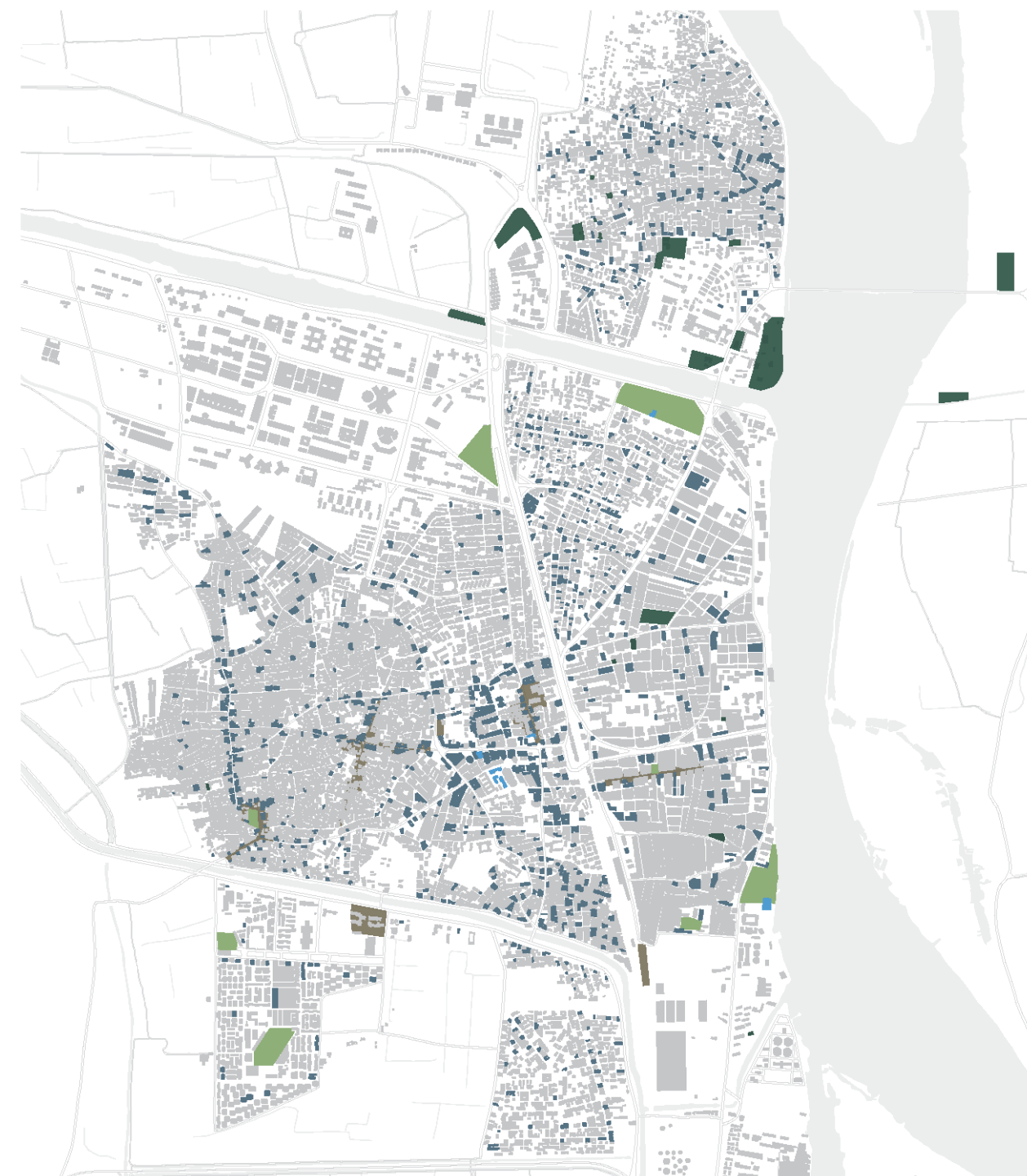
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- 1. Coptic church interior
- 2. Mosque interior
- 3. Mosque spire
- 4. Assiutel, the only venue where alcohol is served
- 5. City activity measured in relation to prayer times



Structuring Everyday Life

The presence of Islamic religion in the city is unmistakable. Mosques broadcast prayers over public speakers all over the city. Taxis, buses and minibuses as well as in shops also play religious recordings during prayertime. The presence of religion is highly visible in the city fabric, as seen in the prevalence of mosques and churches. Coptic churches also have their own visible, yet introverted spaces for contemplation. Religion also relegates vices such as alcohol to “tourist” areas, such as the Assiutel.



Segregated Spaces

City life has the tendency to segregate into different social communities. Daily life in the Old Town occurs mostly in the streets, under simple and sometimes impoverished circumstances. Coffee shops and tea houses are populated by an exclusively male social group, while women are more often found at the markets. Higher end establishments such as clubs are specially adjusted to specific user groups.

- Coffee shops
- Clubs
- Culture
- Green area
- Markets

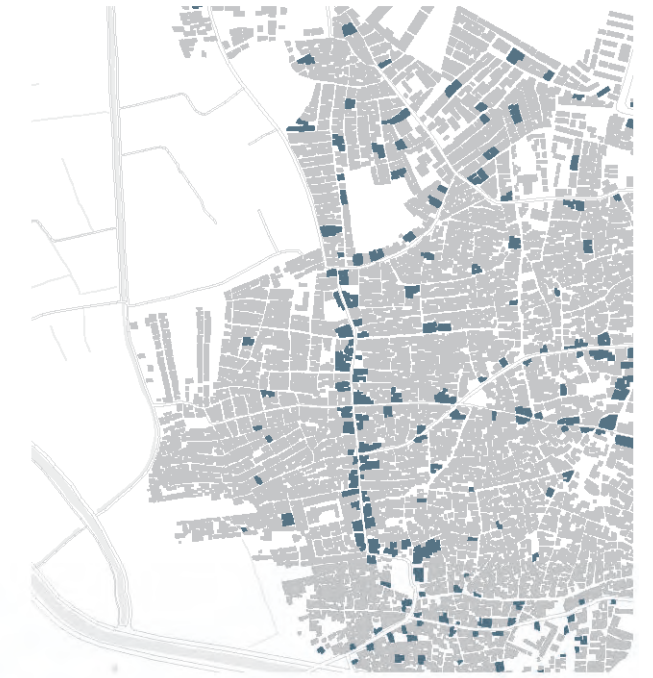


Neighborhood Life

The Old Town features a congenial light-heartedness. People live amongst themselves and daily life happens in the streets. One barely finds people from other districts of the city. The district itself is characterized by rural activities.

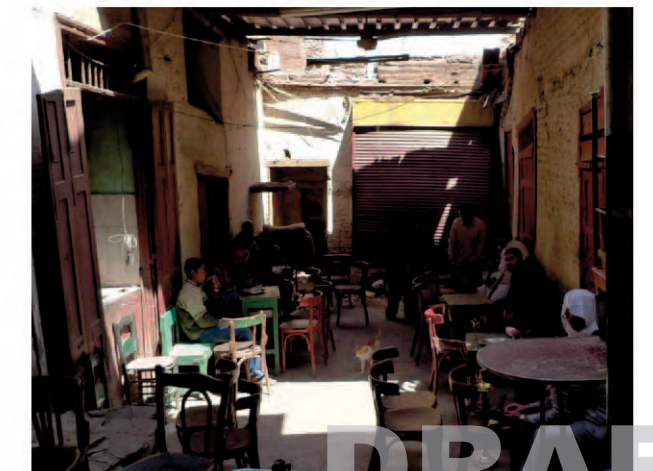


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Coffee and Shisha

Many coffee shops and shisha bars are spread around in the city, especially in the Old Town. Having coffee and smoking shisha is a male-dominated recreational activity.





Shopping and the Market

From daytime until late evening there are many non-food markets in the streets. More attended by female customers, while the sellers are mainly men, the market seems to hold unspoken rules for women moving in public. Often, they are accompanied by other women or family.



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Communities and Clubs

The mid to upper class spend much of their free time in clubs. Almost each occupational group of a certain level has its own club in the city. Enclosed by a fence, these members-only establishments provide everything necessary for recreation within. For instance the engineer's club provides a large clubhouse with green space and access to the Nile. It also holds a private restaurant and a meeting room.

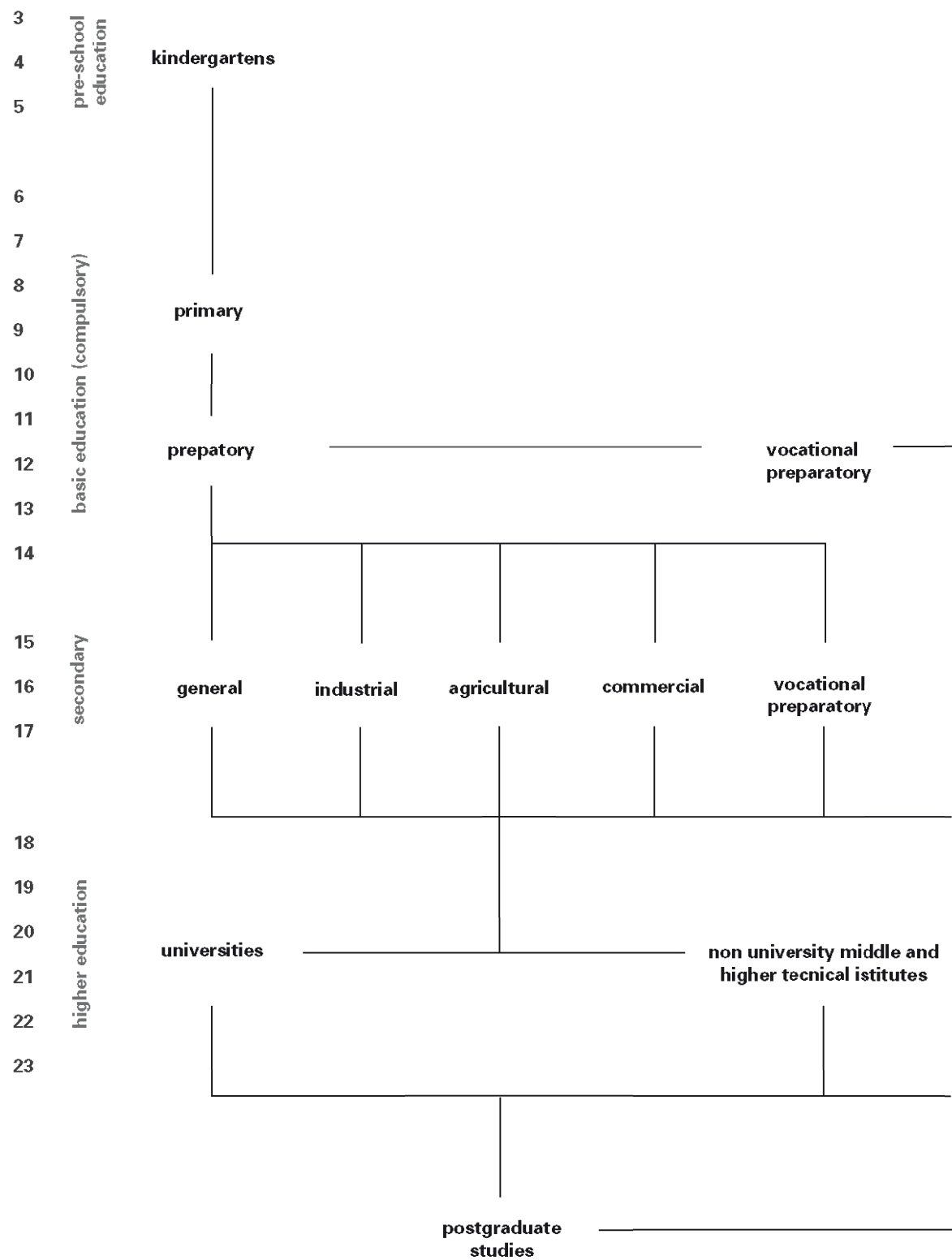


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UNIVERSITY: REMINISCENT MODERNITY

Since 1949, when the University was first proposed, a strong, hierarchical community has developed on campus. Serving over 100,000 students and employees, Assiut University offers many services for members of this community; it effectively has developed into a city within the city, with a modern plan of growth, a distinct architectural style, and self-sufficiency in its internal resources.





Educational Structure

basic education (compulsory)



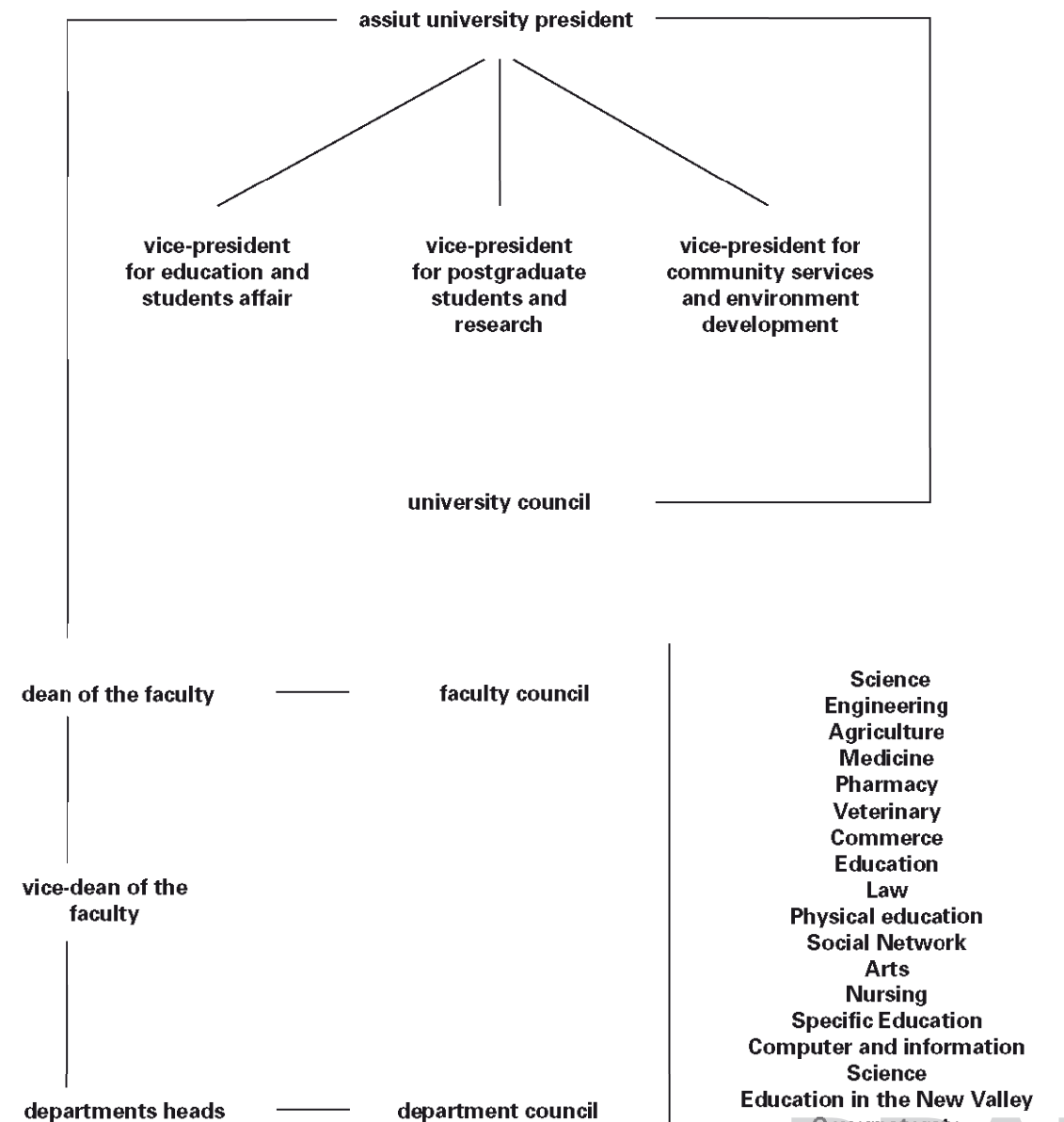
- University
- School

Over-Proportioned Campus



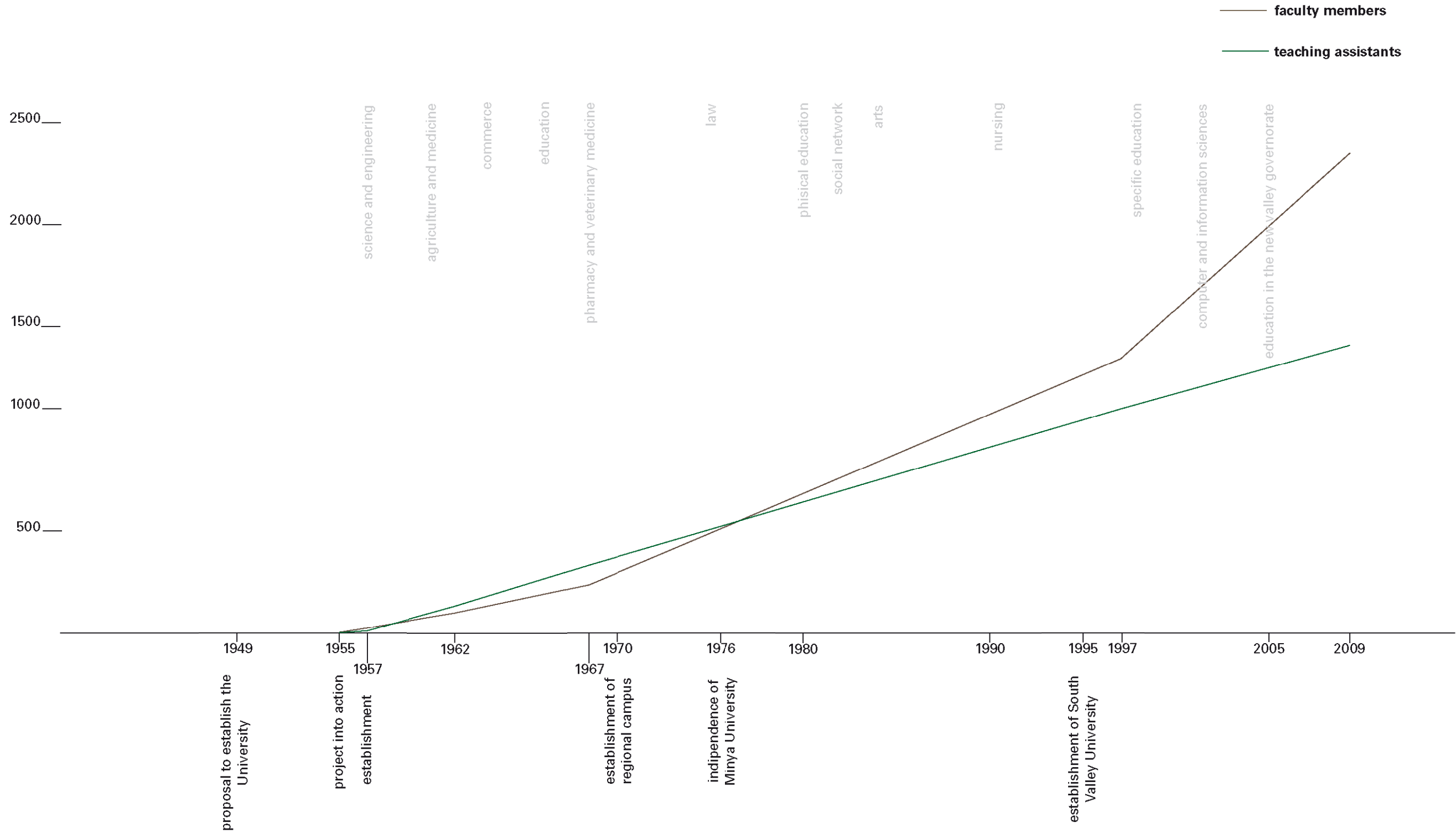
Hierarchical Structure

The university's structure is headed by a council led by the president along with three vice-presidents. Assiut University is the third largest public university in Egypt with 2,274 faculty members, 1,354 lecture assistants, 11,756 administrative staff, 3,876 service assistants, and 70,000 students



Governorate

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Departmental Development



City Within a City



Architectural Grammar

A modernistic urban plan characterizes Assiut University: abundant green spaces and stylistically similar buildings unite the campus into one scheme.



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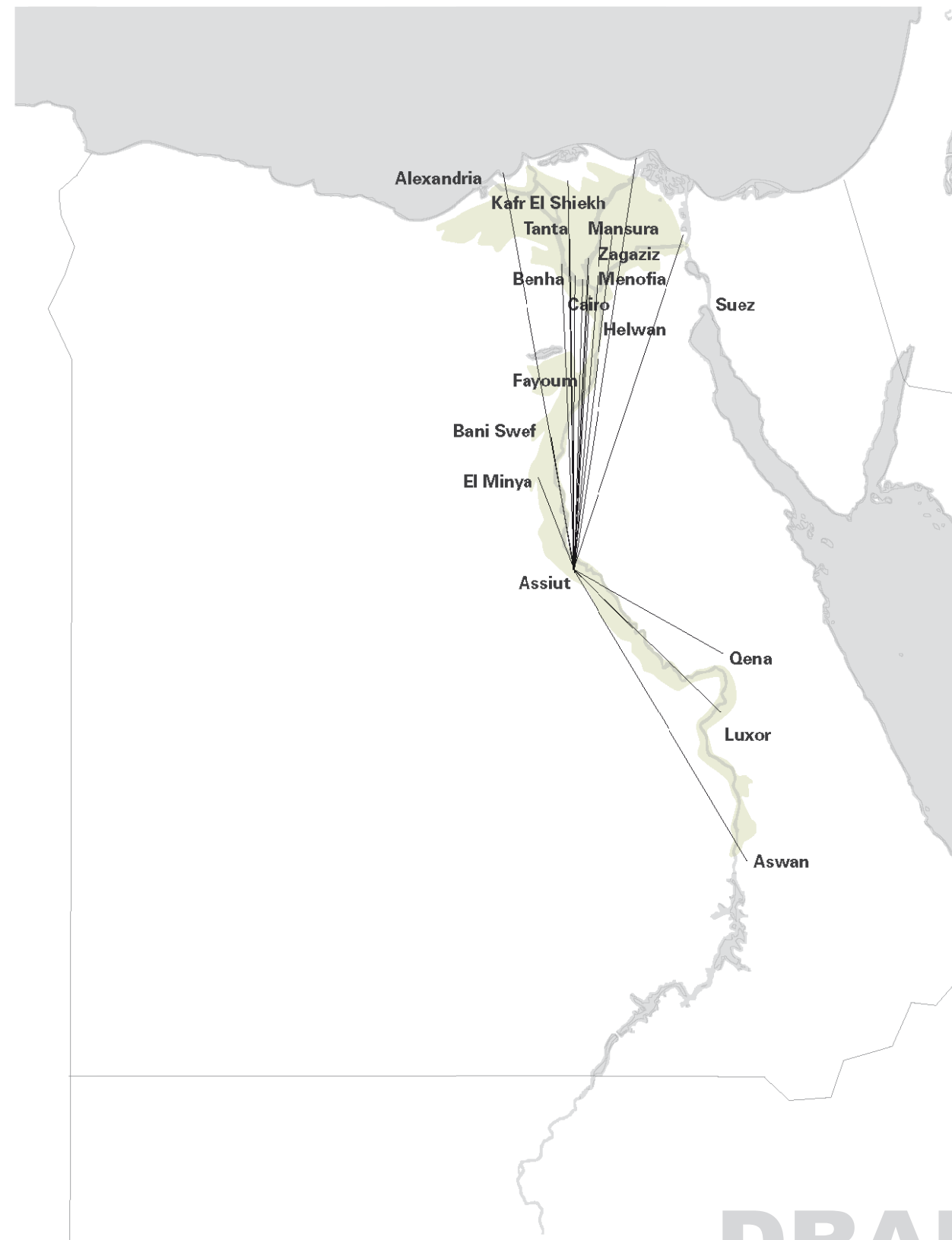
Maintained City

A strong wall divides the university and the city into two worlds; the border is material and abstract. Within, meticulous maintenance results in cleanliness and orderliness on campus, well under the surveillance of campus police.



Relations

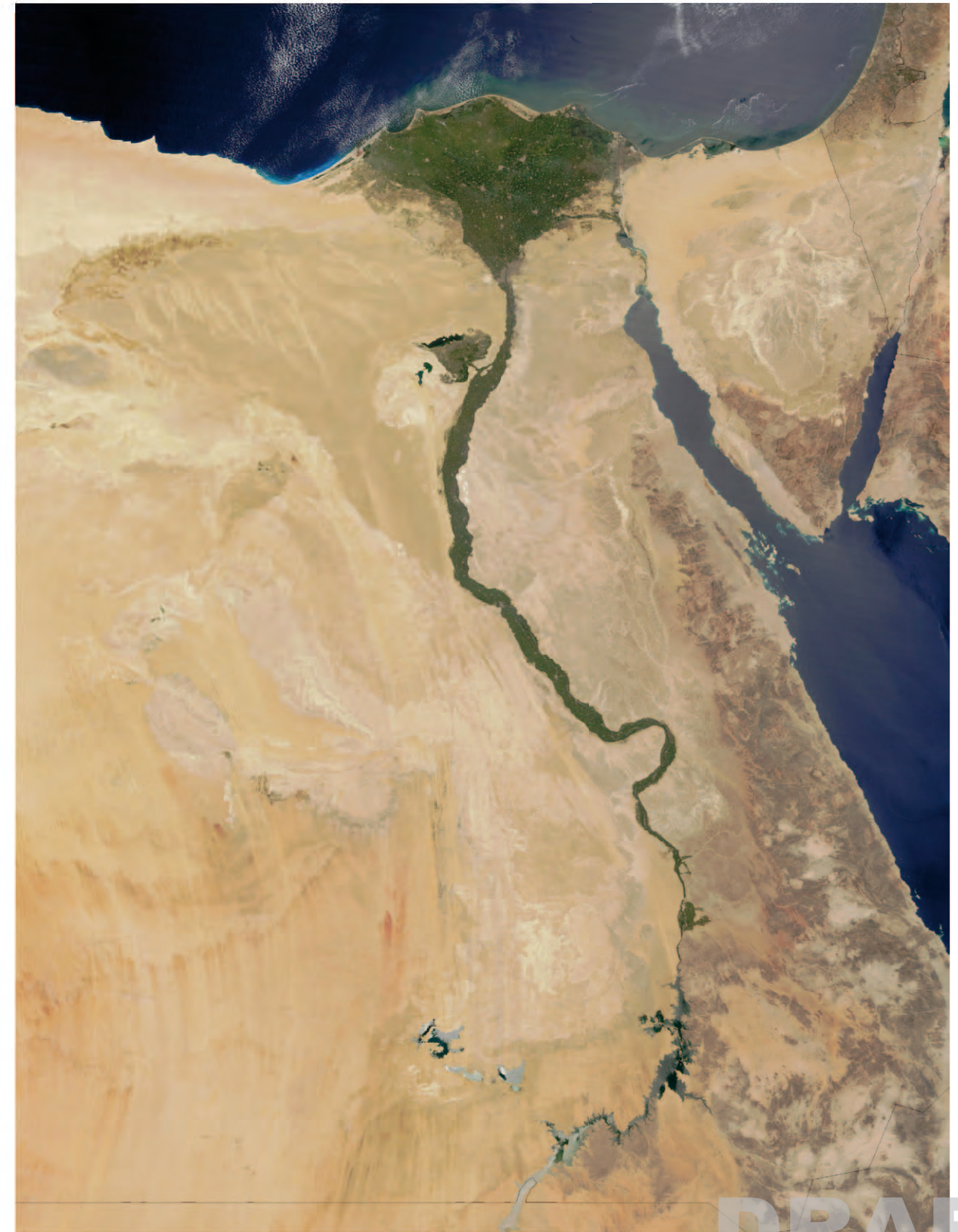
The university has different connections to the outside. Most are within a national network between private and public universities through the Egyptian Universities Network. The University also is international connected to Canada, Italy, Japan Poland, Russia, Spain, South Korea, Switzerland, and Syria.

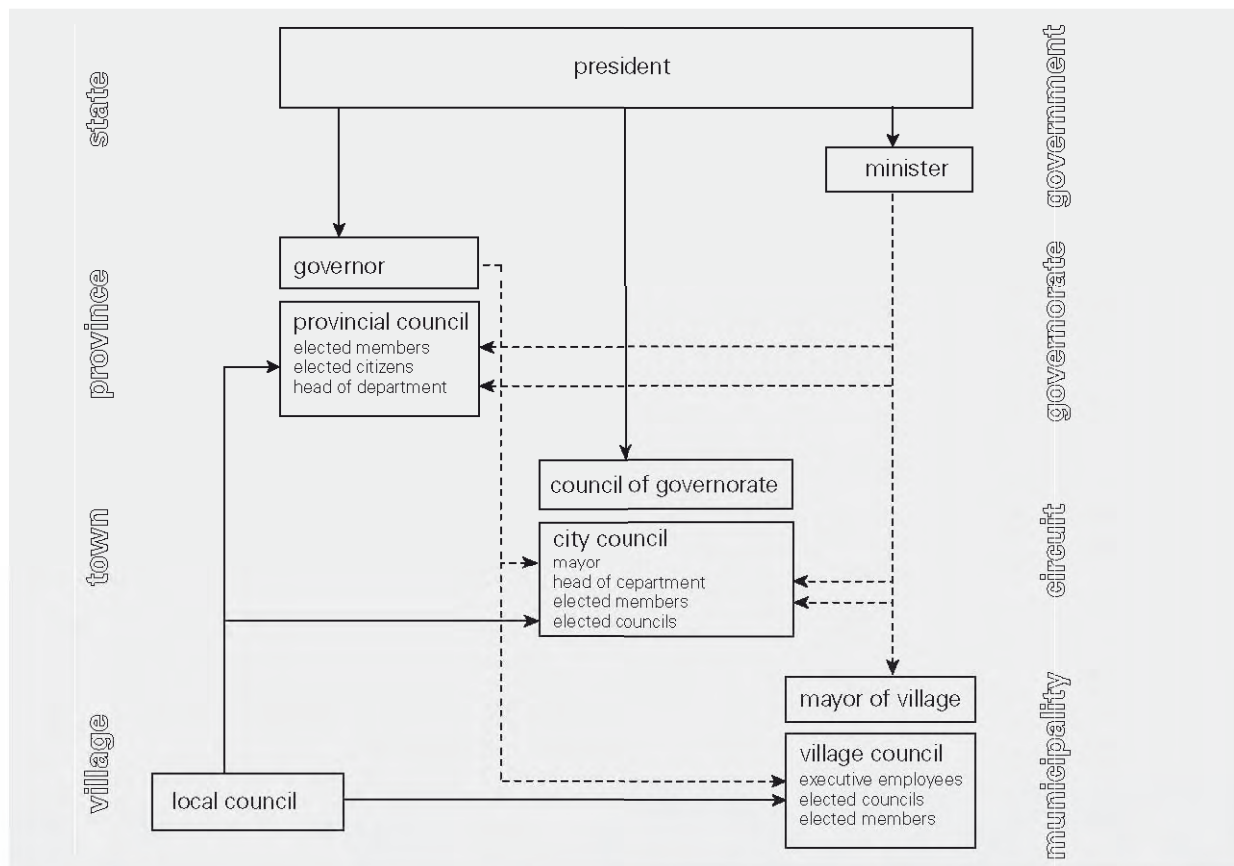


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SUPPLY CITY

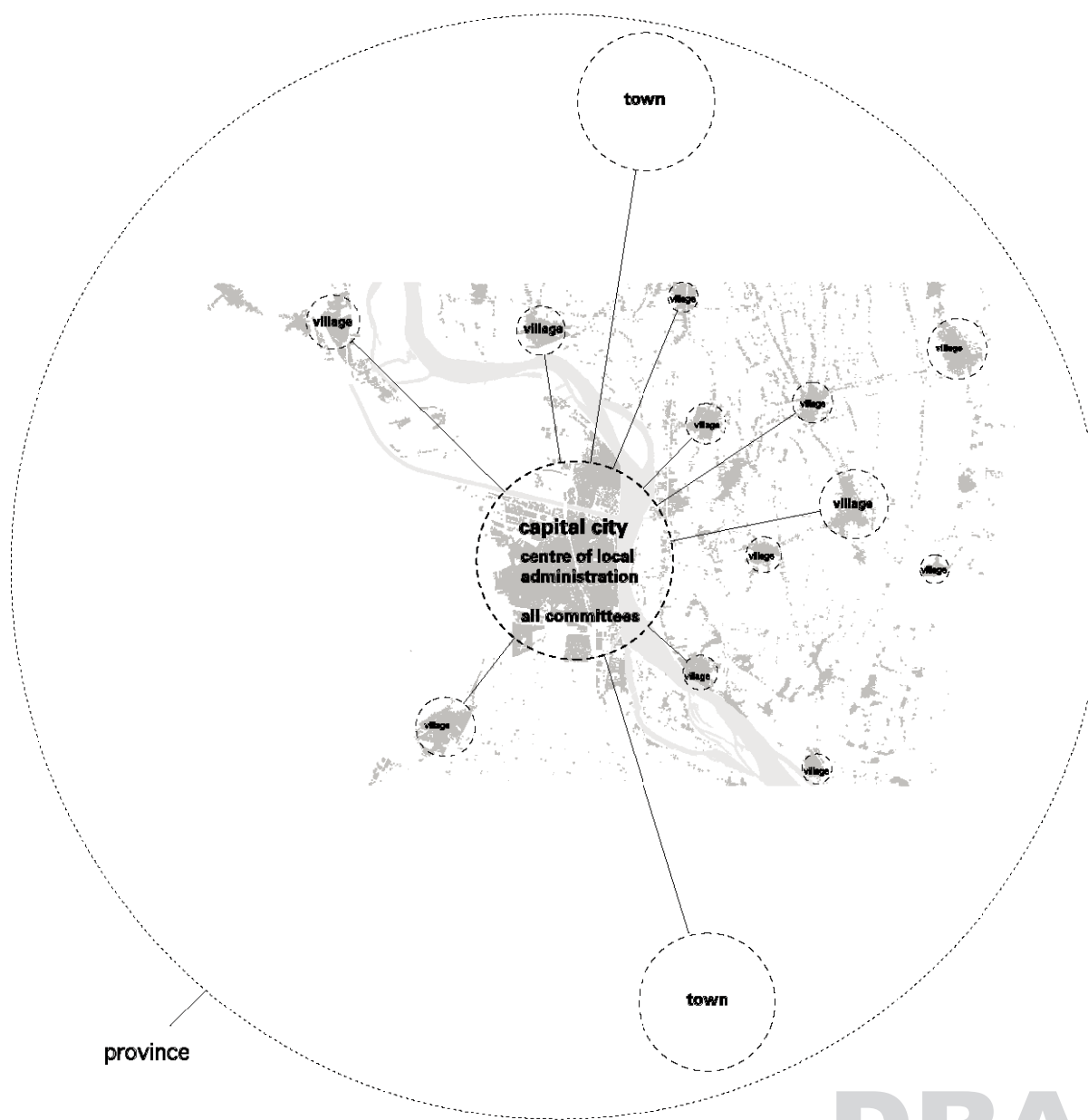
Transportation, politics, industry, agriculture, markets, public services and the University make Assiut a supply city. Its role is important on a regional rather than national scale; the city provides just the services required by the region but without any higher meaning. One can say it works like a functional hub or a supply city, with the exception of the University—the largest in Upper Egypt—acting as a national attractor within the Nile Valley.





Administration

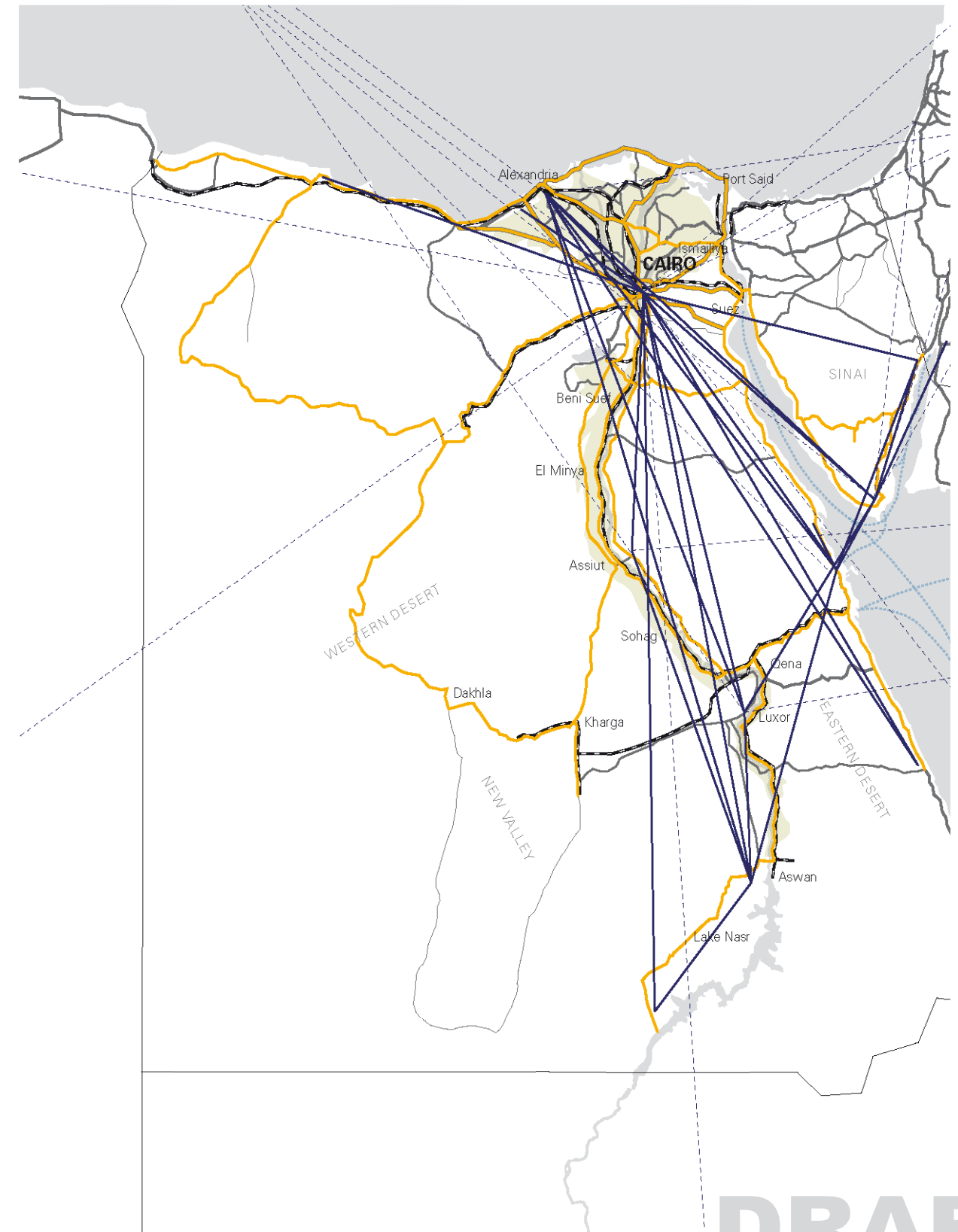
On a political level, Assiut functions on a level of local administration. Egypt's centralized government follow strict hierarchy. As a governorate capital, the city administrates local issues, but steers other affairs toward Cairo. In turn, circuit cities, towns, and villages of Assiut governorate are administratively subordinate to the governorate capital.





Nile Valley Hub

In terms of mobility, Assiut acts as an important node in the Nile Valley. In Assiut, a small airport offers a direct connection to Cairo three times a week. Minibus connections provide local connections but the main national form of transportation is the train.



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Agriculture and Industry

The most important economical sector in Assiut is the service sector with 42.8%, followed by the agricultural sector and the industrial sector. Agriculture is the main income resource for almost 5% of Assiut citizens. Industrial activities in Assiut consist of factories, workshops, and crafts.

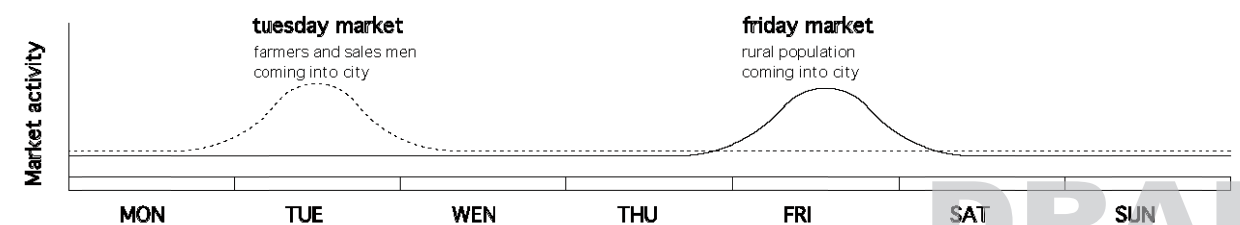
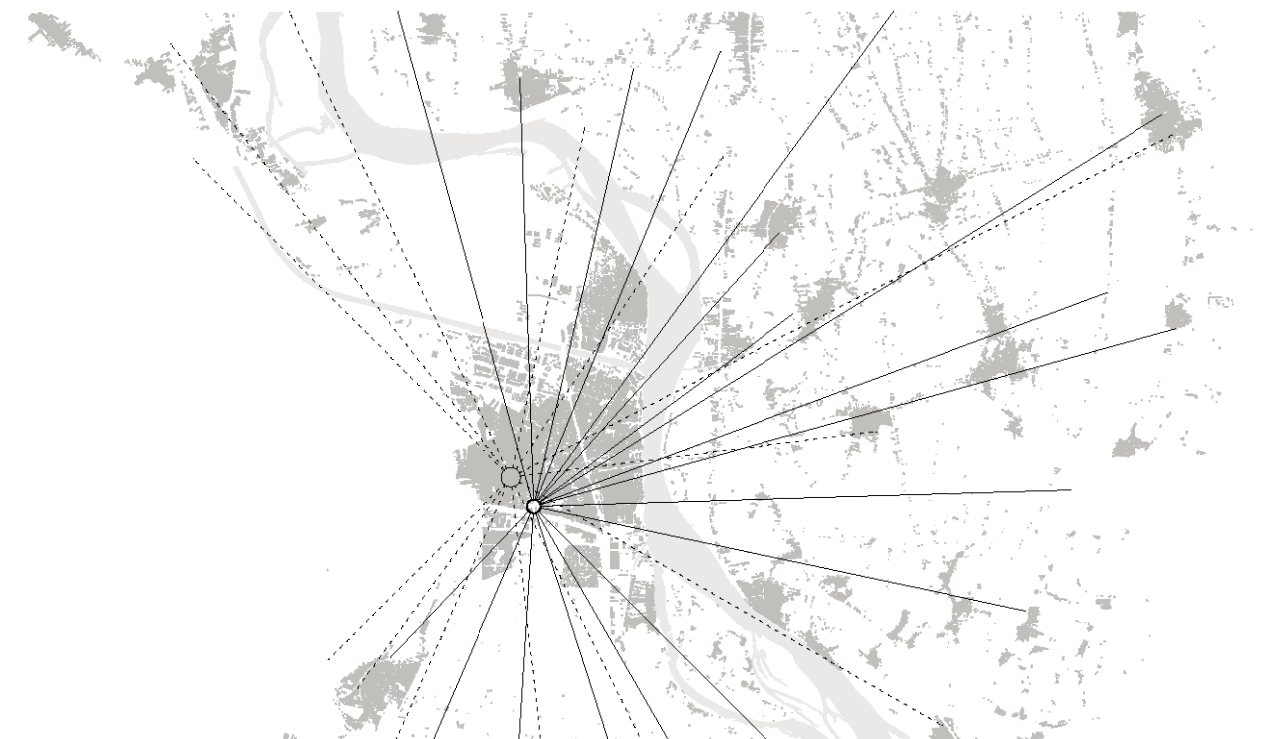


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Markets

Assiut holds regional relevance as a market site. Every Tuesday, farmers and salesmen come to the city and sell mainly agricultural goods in a large market at the southern city edge. This location is strategic in its connection to the railway and main street. Another market with regional relevance is the Friday Market, when the rural population of Assiut governorate comes to the city to purchase goods that are not available outside the city.





Facilities

Lending to its role as a regional hub, Assiut not only offers many services for city inhabitants but also for residents of the governorate. Services are offered in a variety of facilities, including markets, governmental institutions, hospitals, schools and universities.



- Schools
- Universities
- Gov. buildings
- Bus station



Education as Attractor

Assiut University is the third-largest university in Egypt after Cairo and Alexandria and the largest in Upper Egypt. With 70,000 students, it is a university with a supra-regional meaning. Many students come from other parts of the Nile Valley to study at the university. The public university serves as a reference model for other universities of the region such as El Minya, Sohag, and Aswan.



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IMAGES

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