

Multidisciplinary and People-Centred Architectural Education in Egypt

DINA SHEHAYEB

Nile University, Egypt

YASMINE HAFEZ

Nile University, Egypt

Technische Universität Wien (TUW), Austria (Project Coordinator)
 Nile University (NU), Egypt (Technical Coordinator)
 Universitat Politècnica De Catalunya (UPC-ETSAB), Spain
 Universität Kassel (KU), Germany
 Università di Cagliari (UNICA), Italy
 Ain Shams University (ASU), Egypt
 Suez Canal University (SCU), Egypt
 Alexandria University (AU), Egypt
 Housing & Building National Research Centre (HBRC), Egypt
 Engineering Consultants Group (ECG), Egypt
 Megawra (NGO), Egypt

Collaborative Project

Timeframe: 2017 - ongoing

Urban Challenges Tackled

Sustainable Urban Development
 Design for Quality of Life
 Architectural and Planning
 Educational Innovation

Funding

EU funded project
 ERASMUS+ KA2 CBHE
 The Aga Khan Trust for Culture-
 Education Programme
 Nile University
 EMAAR Egypt
 UNICA



Group photo – IMPAQT all-partner meeting at Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria, Egypt.



Design Studio III exhibition – sponsored by EMAAR.

IMPAQT is an EU-funded project aimed to rethink architectural education in Egypt through a multidisciplinary and people-centred approach. Bringing together ten European and Egyptian partner institutions, the project ambition was to move beyond conventional, form-driven architectural training toward a more socially responsive and context-aware educational model. It led to two major outcomes:

- **The establishment of a 5-year Bachelor of Science in Architecture and Urban Design (ARUD) at Nile University, accredited in 2018, and,**
- **The development of a lifelong learning qualification targeting postgraduate students and professionals.**

The project promoted the integration of Environmental and Social Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, Urban Planning, Sustainable Development, and ICT-enabled design and analysis tools.

At the core of IMPAQT was the ambition to cultivate architects capable of transforming Egyptian architectural and urban practice.

Beyond EU funding, IMPAQT's impact continued through sustained partnerships, faculty exchange, student mobility, and a follow-up ERASMUS+ project (GET-MED), awarded in 2025.

The resulting curriculum embedded participatory design, stakeholder engagement, impact assessment, and adaptive reuse methodologies across multiple scales, from individual buildings to district-level urban strategies. Learning was grounded in real-life cases, frequently developed in collaboration with industry partners and public-sector actors.

One of IMPAQT's most transformative contributions was the institutionalization of collaborative workshops and knowledge exchanges as core pedagogical tools.

In Alexandria, a Heritage Conservation workshop brought together ARUD undergraduates, postgradu-

ates and practicing professionals. This cross-level and cross-disciplinary setting exposed students to the complexities of heritage intervention in real urban contexts. A community-based design charrette in Historic Cairo, organized with the NGO Built Environment Collective (BEC), exemplified the program's participatory ethos.

Another milestone was the vertical workshop with the SPECTRA Centre of Excellence at the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava (STU). The workshop marked the beginning of a long-term institutional collaboration: over three years, 13 ARUD students completed semester exchanges in Bratislava through ERASMUS+ mobility agreements.

Studio teaching was reshaped into research-based, multi-scalar investigations carried out in collaboration with local governments and communities across diverse Egyptian contexts, from Alexandria and Port Said to Qena and Aswan. Student work gained national and international visibility through exhibitions, competitions, and study trips abroad.

The Trans-Disciplinary Dimension

The process

In the initial co-design phase, EU partners led the development of core and thematic modules for the new undergraduate ARUD programme, while Lifelong Learning courses for professionals tested content and pedagogy. Egyptian academic partners collaborated in refining materials and led the institutional processes required for national accreditation.

ETSAB in Spain incorporated its findings into ten urban design studios involving 250 students working on Attaba Square, extending IMPAQT's influence internationally.

The co-production phase connected academic and non-academic actors through practicum-oriented activities, including Training of Trainers (ToT) for Egyptian staff, the compilation of real-life case studies from external institutions, and multidisciplinary initiatives addressing national priorities.

The “Technology for the Masses” competition exemplified this outreach strategy. It engaged young professionals and researchers developing technology-driven architectural and urban solutions for Egypt.

Participatory activities during one of the Training of Teachers (TOT) sessions.

Another key initiative was the winter school “Off-Seams,” co-funded with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture – Education Programme. Designed to test the IMPAQT educational model in a real-world setting, it brought together 25 participants and international mentors for a 7-day intensive workshop in Downtown Cairo.

Competences and Skills

The project brought together partners with interdisciplinary expertise ranging from building physics, structural design, and ICT to urban planning, landscape architecture, urban design, and environmental psychology. Leadership and overall project management were ensured by TU Wien, while technical coordination was led by NU to ensure effective task alignment and partner contributions. A shared communication platform facilitated coordination and the exchange of materials, complemented by facilitation and mediation efforts that actively engaged industry representatives and professionals in project activities and events. Knowledge exchange among partners was successfully translated into tangible courses and learning activities.

The Open Dialogue Dimension

Inclusivity

The program addressed: 1) Social inclusion by tackling the needs of the poor and marginalized, overcoming spatial segregation, and empowering them; 2) social capitalisation by encouraging people towards cooperating together to achieve common goals, 3) social mobil-

ity by empowering people to benefit from opportunities of urbanization in seeking human development, health, wealth, education...

Equity

At the Project level, gender was perfectly balanced throughout the project activities with substantial in-

volvement of women from partner institutions with no gender discrimination of any kind. In terms of outcomes, students in the ARUD programme are now taught to respect all user needs considering differences in age, gender and ability.

Sustainability

Sustainability is achieved by connecting academic programmes with society through lifelong learning courses, events, competitions, and cross-sector exchanges that integrate social, environmental, economic, institutional, and cultural dimensions.

The Intended Learning Outcomes of the program was to shape the mentality of architects towards considering human needs and people's interrelations while adopting participatory processes in design and planning.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture- Education Programme co-funded the Winter School - Off Seams.

UNICA waived the tuition of the 4 NU students who went for the semester abroad.



The Knowledge Valorisation Dimension

Dr. Dina Shehayeb, ARUD program director at NU hosted as a guest speaker and juror in Design Studio course at ETSAB, Barcelona, Spain.

- **Educational and Capacity-Building Value:** the IMPAQT project strengthened architectural education in Egypt by introducing innovative, multidisciplinary modules across partner institutions. Life-long Learning graduates developed broader, user-sensitive approaches to architecture and urban design, while early engagement of ARUD undergraduates through workshops, competitions, and the Winter School fostered hands-on learning, peer exchange, and international exposure.
- **Socio-Cultural Value:** By promoting participatory design, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive urban planning, the project enabled local authorities, industry partners, and community organizations to build practical experience in collaborative decision-making and people-centred design. These actors strengthened their capacity to engage communities, address social and cultural needs, and deliver more inclusive urban interventions.
- **Economic value:** Partnerships with industry and public authorities expanded professional networks and generated opportunities for applied projects, competitions, and exhibitions, contributing to sectoral innovation and local economic development.



Outputs & Impacts

Outputs

The main output of IMPAQT is the creation of a new five-year [Undergraduate Programme in Architecture and Urban Design at Nile University](#), distinguished by its compact structure, innovative pedagogy, and interdisciplinary approach within the Egyptian context.

Impacts

Teaching: Staff exchange among Alexandria University, Suez Canal University, and Nile University has continued beyond the project through part-time teaching, while partnerships with European institutions, such as Kassel University, UNICA, ETSAB, and TU Wien, have supported scientific collaboration, guest teaching, student studios, and staff development.

Research: Application for further research funding was successful leading to a new Erasmus + project titled

GET-MED “Grounded Ecological Transition for the Mediterranean.” The project introduces an innovative GET approach (Grounded+Ecological+Transition) to pro-green urbanism and climate-sensitive territorial regeneration, tackling key challenges in the Mediterranean.

Practice: Suez Canal University partnered with ECG’s University to Work program and HBRC to provide students with practical and research exposure, while Nile University collaborated with EMAAR Misr and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture – Education Programme to support studio teaching, an interactive learning platform, exhibitions, international engagement, and activities such as the Winter School and a study trip to Córdoba.

The qualifications and practical experience gained by students, graduates, and staff improved employability and professional mobility.

Collaborative research and academic exchanges further enhanced professional skills and global perspectives.

