

An aerial photograph of a long, narrow island, densely packed with buildings and infrastructure. A river or canal runs through the center of the island. At the very tip of the island, a small wooden boat is shown. The entire image is overlaid with a light gray grid.

# Qursaya Island

Resilient communities along the Nile

---

We dedicate this document to all communities around the world  
that have struggled to maintain their territories and culture in spite  
of the immense forces trying to sweep them into the history books.  
You are an inspiration to all.

---

## CONTENT

*This compilation is a testament to the island's spirit, captured through multiple lenses and woven into a shared narrative.*

# 01.

## The Importance of Communities

- 1.1 Preface
- 1.2 Communities, What?
- 1.3 The Big City in the Great Desert
- 1.4 The Last Green Stand in the Concrete City



# 02.

## Faces of the Island

- 2.1 Lost Records of an Endangered Island
- 2.2 Recent Statements and Official Documentation
- 2.3 Island Structure
- 2.4 Forms of Transport
- 2.5 Local Stakeholders
- 2.6 VeryNile: Case Study



# 03.

## Stories of the Island

- 3.1 Comic: Groceries Odyssey
- 3.2 Comic: A Little Girl's Agony
- 3.3 Comic: Where's All the Fish?
- 3.4 Fishermen's Wisdom



# 04.

## Community Welfare Indicator

- 4.1 Community Welfare Indicator
- 4.2 Basic Needs
- 4.3 Community Services
- 4.4 Social Equity and Housing
- 4.5 Governance
- 4.6 Conclusions on the Community Welfare Indicator



# 05.

## Resilient Capacities

- 5.1 Community Welfare Framework
- 5.2 The Future of Qursaya
- 5.3 Insights for Resilient Communities



# 01. THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITIES

This is the tale of resilient communities, which have developed all around the world, showing different ways to inhabit the planet.

Surrounded by the densely populated city of Cairo, in the middle of the Nile, this is the story of Qursaya Island.

- 1.1 Preface
- 1.2 Communities, What?
- 1.3 The Big City in the Great Desert
- 1.4 The Last Green Stand in the Concrete City

## 1.1 PREFACE

The Creative Industries Fund NL in collaboration with What Design Can Do (WDCD) initiated the Creative Climate Collective – a group of 18 architects, designers and makers from Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, the Netherlands and South Africa - to advocate for design that advances action towards climate justice. In November 2022, the collective took part in panel discussions, presentations and hosted an exhibition space at the 27<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) held in Sharm-El-Sheik, Egypt with the aim of building alliances with other stakeholders, exchanging ideas and forging connections across geographies and sectors.

Motivated by the inspiring conversations and shared experiences as members of the Creative Climate Collective, the project team launched this collaborative research project focusing on the resilience of the community of Qursaya Island, located in the heart of Cairo, Egypt. The project aims to translate insights gained during COP27 into action by fostering collaboration within a team of diverse professional and geographic backgrounds. We envision this as a long-term effort, where the lessons learned will guide collaborations with communities in the Netherlands and internationally.



## 1.2 COMMUNITIES, WHAT?

Over half of the world's population, nearly 4 billion people, lives in cities, a number that is expected to grow to 5.1 billion by 2030. Climate change, rapid urban growth, waste production, and energy access are some of the key issues that our cities are currently facing. These topics are putting our societal structures to the test and require our cities to become more resilient to change. Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable is an integral part of the UN Agenda 2030. Urban resilience is an international topic of discussion in global policy frameworks to seek solutions for present and future urban challenges (UNESCO, 2013; 2015; UNDRR, 2015a; 2015b).

A significant part of the solution to urban challenges lies within the existing social structures of communities. A community can be defined as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings (MacQueen, 2001). A community results from a web of complex and interdependent relationships that form over time among individuals who share common interests, values, and aspirations. Community members care deeply about one another and work closely together towards a common purpose (Gurteen, 2022). Resilient communities all over the world have withstood changing times and have adapted to ever changing conditions. Creating resilient communities has both social and physical dimensions. Reinforcing local identity and culture contributes to positive relationships among individuals, improving their

collective ability to face change. The community is an integral part of social-urban and socio-ecological systems (Longstaff et al., 2010).

Resilience may be defined as the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance, undergo change, and retain the same essential functions, structure, identity, and feedback (Longstaff et al., 2010). Resilience is also a useful concept in ecology where it draws attention to the ability of ecosystems to adapt to environmental stress through transformation: systems respond to a challenge not simply by restoring their usual form but by changing in ways that better fit the new environmental constraints (Kirmeyer, 2009).

The study of community resilience builds on these concepts to understand positive responses to adversity at the level of families, communities and larger social systems. The focus on community resilience addresses how people overcome stress, trauma and other life challenges by drawing from the social and cultural networks and practices that constitute communities. At the same time, it draws attention to the resilience of the community itself (Kirmeyer et al., 2009). A resilient community provides individuals and families new opportunities and resources to deal with challenges (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Community resilience is an interesting study topic for the urban challenges being faced at present times and can act as drivers of sustainable development. With a highly urbanized population in an era of climate change, the study of community resilience is more relevant than ever.

"It turns out that— whether we want to or not— we cannot continue living within modernity because it robs us of the very basis for life, including our mere survival!... There are two alternatives: to go deeper [within modernity] or to exit from it, to reform it or to revolutionize the situation, toward an alternative to modernity rather than of modernity. But we know well that this is the greatest taboo all over the world, that is, to leave behind the so-called Western civilization, because it means leaving patriarchy as such behind. This rupture is almost unimaginable anywhere, except within the indigenous worlds."

(Escobar, 2018)





### 1.3 THE BIG CITY IN THE GREAT DESERT

Egypt, also nicknamed 'Umm al-Dunya' or 'Mother of the World,' has a rich cultural history dating back to the First Dynasties over 5000 years ago. Considering its unique location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, Egypt has been a historical link connecting the East and the West as a commercial and cultural center. The Nile is Egypt's fertile lifeline flowing through the country's arid desert landscape. Over 90 % of the population lives along the banks of the river, which only represents 4 % of Egypt's total area.

Egypt's capital, Cairo, is a vibrant and chaotic megalopolis offering home to over 22 million residents, making Cairo the second-largest city on the African continent after Lagos, Nigeria. In recent decades Cairo and its metropolitan area are witnessing a significant growth period, increasing from 5.6 million inhabitants in 1970 to an expected 25.5 million inhabitants by 2030. Cairo's population boom has dramatically changed the city's appearance and footprint. In addition to building upward and outward along the fertile floodplain of the Nile River, development has spread to several new satellite cities built on desert plains east and west of the city.

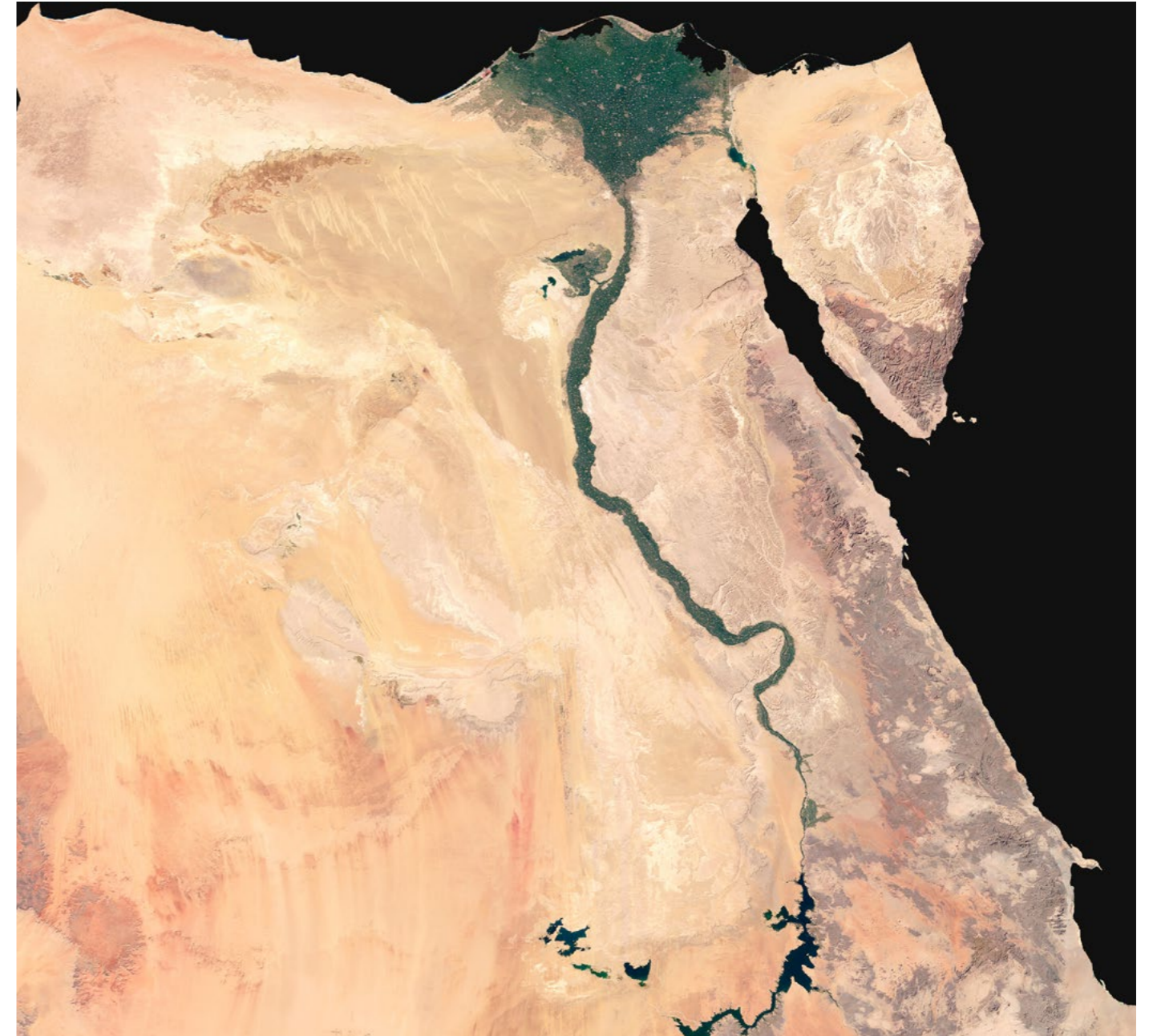
Cairo today is characterized by contrasts, both of tradition and modernity. Along the well-irrigated shoreline, lush vegetation shares the landscape with tall buildings. Cairo is home to the ancient pyramids of Giza and its historic old center, but is simultaneously planning on building a brand new administrative capital, including the highest

skyscraper in Africa, as a newly erected district on the east side of the city. Cairo's rapid urban growth has led to several urban challenges, as described by UN Habitat:

"Due to rapid urban growth in Egypt over the last four decades, urban planning, infrastructure and service delivery have not been able to keep up. Today, critical urban issues arise from the sheer size of the metropolitan city and from its population density. Due to inefficient public land management systems and prohibitive housing policies, impoverished individuals have no alternative but to settle in unplanned and sometimes unsafe areas. In addition to the stress on deteriorating infrastructure, public services and transportation systems are stretched to the limit." (UN-Habitat, n.d.).

Along with these problems, Cairo also lacks sufficient green spaces that can mitigate these difficulties and decrease their harmful effects. Green spaces in Cairo are currently being marginalized, and the city has been losing significant quantities of its already limited green spaces, in favor of other developmental projects (Aly & Dimitrijevic, 2022).

Right: Satellite image of Egypt







1984



2019

How can Cairo cope with these challenges, while its urban population continues to grow with an estimated half a million new inhabitants each year? How can residents become self-sufficient in light of the current challenges in the governmental provision of essential public services? How can individuals in informal settlements organize themselves as a collective to overcome life's challenges together?

These questions extend beyond Cairo and can be extrapolated to many other metropolises around the world. Governance structures all over the world face an immense strain to provide basic services, opportunities and decent living conditions to its growing number of inhabitants. Communities provide a possible path forward that enhance local capacities and distribute responsibilities among stakeholders through a bottom-up approach.

Left: Satellite images of the Nile River over the time



## 1.4 THE LAST GREEN STAND IN THE CONCRETE CITY

When standing on the observation platform of the 187-meter high Cairo Tower, on the central island of Zamalek, the sheer size of this megalopolis city becomes apparent. Concrete buildings seemingly stretch endlessly all their way into the surrounding desert, until the smog and fine desert sand start to obscure the view. The banks of the Nile are dotted with highrise buildings overlooking the riverfront, with the sound of car horns ever present in the distance. Overlooking the entire city from this vantage point, one patch of land located in the middle of the Nile River seems surprisingly undeveloped and green compared to its surroundings, as if it has been overlooked by modern urban development: Qursaya Island.

Located in the center of Cairo, this island is only a stone's throw away from the busy road of Al Bahr Al Aazam. Its presence often goes unnoticed by drivers that are busy navigating the hectic traffic. By the time you register the island, you've already passed the island's tip, leaving only the increasingly polluted river in view. Cairo's pollution goes beyond plastic and garbage littering the streets and river. It also includes a constant overload of sensory stimuli, making it challenging to find a tranquil moment of respite.

Unlike its neighboring islands, the highly urbanized El-Manial and Zamalek, Qursaya has no bridges or roads connecting it to the mainland; the only way to access the car-free territory is either by a pull-boat or rowing boat service, both operated by Qursaya's residents. Local children

are swimming along the shores of the Nile and playfully greet visitors who wait for the old wooden rowing boat to arrive.

The short journey to the island, crossing a narrow section of the Nile River, may take only a couple minutes, but supposes a transition between two different worlds that feel further apart than their physical distance suggests. Leaving the hectic inner city with its constant stream of traffic and arriving on the tranquil shore of Qursaya, visitors may experience a sensation of serenity and peacefulness, keeping the urban noise at bay. Without the presence of any vehicles, the pace of life on the island is dictated by donkeys and pedestrians, strolling up and down its narrow, unpaved roads. The lush green fields of Qursaya, dotted with egrets, form a stark contrast with the city where parks are oftentimes privatized and where limited green spaces are lost in favor of developmental projects. In the overcrowded city of Cairo, with a lack of space to accommodate its ever growing population, it is remarkable that Qursaya, located at such a unique central position in the city, has not faced urban development.

The island's true magnificence lies in its people. Qursaya island is inhabited by around 1500 residents across its 33 hectares, which results in a density four times lower than the average of Cairo. Here, life revolves around hard work, mostly farming and fishing. The islanders cherish the island's beauty and seclusion, often likening leaving Qursaya to a fish leaving the water.

The tranquil pace of life on Qursaya has been threatened though, as the small fishing and farming community reside on some of the most valuable land in Cairo. Several villas are currently under construction on the northernmost tip, encroaching on the agricultural land, purchased by outside investors searching for their own patch of tranquility in the middle of the city. The rapid urban growth of Cairo has major implications for the community of Qursaya and the future of this peaceful island, where time seemed to be standing still, until now.



Right: Satellite image of Qursaya



# 02. THE FACES OF THE ISLAND

More than just territory, Qursaya Island is shaped by its history and inhabitants.

- 2.1 Lost Records of an Endangered Island
- 2.2 Recent Statements and Official Documents
- 2.3 Island Structure
- 2.4 Forms of Transport
- 2.5 Local Stakeholders
- 2.6 VeryNile: Case study



Mayada



Arafa



Nageh



Loza



Saad



Mostafa



Omar  
Mohamed



Mostafa's  
grandson

## 2.1 LOST RECORDS OF AN ENDANGERED ISLAND

Researching communities in Egypt can be challenging due to the scarcity of information on the specifics of the local communities and the lack of publicly available data, especially in digital format. This information scarcity also applies to Qursaya island and its people. Most of the information gathered about Qursaya was obtained through storytelling of the island's residents. Additionally, some statistical data has been compiled by VeryNile, a local NGO present on the island (see 2.6 VeryNile: Case Study), which proved to be a valuable resource for understanding the island's structure.

The prevailing narrative suggests that the island has existed for centuries due to natural sedimentation in the Nile River. According to the island's inhabitants, people have lived there, although its habitability was seasonal due to rising waters that used to flood the land. Furthermore, the narrative suggests that the island became more habitable after the formation of the Aswan High Dam in 1970, which reduced the impact of rising waters on the island's surface.

It is important to note that this narrative is based on local sources and there is no official documentation, article, or statement that confirms or denies its validity. The absence of documentation leaves the locals vulnerable to official displacement, without much legal resistance, as there is no formal recognition of land ownership or the activities on the island. Unfortunately, the island has always been a site

of interest for commercial development. There is documented history of attempts to displace the people of Qursaya across the years (MHUC, UN-Habitat & UNDP, 2012).

### Timeline of displacement attempts on Qursaya Island

**2001:** The pattern of displacement attempts on Qursaya Island began when then-President Hosni Mubarak awarded the island to the Ministry of Defense (MOD), which later approved a tourism development project in 2007 (Sayigh, 2019).

**2007:** The MOD attempted to evict the inhabitants of Qursaya Island by force to make way for the approved tourism development project. This marked a significant escalation in the efforts to displace the local population (Murad, 2011).

**November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015:** President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi issued Presidential Decree 446, amending the powers of the Egyptian Armed Forces' (EAF) Land Projects Agency. This agency was authorized to engage in commercial activity and develop its resources, potentially impacting areas like Qursaya Island.

**February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016:** Following the amendment of the Land Projects Agency's powers, President Sisi issued Presidential Decree

57, instructing the Land Projects Agency, the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), and the National Service Projects Organization (NSPO) to form a public limited company for the planning, construction, and development of new urban projects. This included the Administrative Capital Urban Development Company (ACUD), which could have implications for land use and displacement in areas like Qursaya.

**Early 2018:** The mandate of NUCA was amended to include the development of prime real estate in central parts of cities, rather than in desert land. This change in focus put additional pressure on areas like Qursaya Island for urban redevelopment.

**December 2018:** The Nile River island of Warraq, similar to Qursaya, was placed under the authority of NUCA with the intention of creating an upmarket neighborhood. This move demonstrated the government's ongoing interest in transforming agricultural islands into real estate and tourism hubs, thereby increasing the risk of displacement for island inhabitants (Network Monitoring, 2023).

**January 2022:** A Presidential decree issued by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, approved the allocation of 36 of Nile's islands, in addition to one Mediterranean island, to the Egyptian Armed Forces. This decision was based on several laws, including the Local

Administration System Law of 1979, Desert Lands Law of 1981, Natural Reserves Law of 1983, and State Private Property Law of 1991, among others. The decree aimed to transfer the ownership of these islands to the military to protect them from various threats. The list of islands includes, but is not limited to, El-Qursaya, Manial Sheiha, El-Masara, and El-Badrashin (Napoleon, n.d.).





Um Nada



Um Nada's  
niece



Um Nada's  
mother



Rashad

## 2.2 RECENT STATEMENTS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

The official documents and presidential decrees mentioned above, particularly those issued in 2015 and 2016, highlight the Egyptian government's strategic interest in land development and urban redevelopment. These documents put areas like Qursaya Island at risk of displacement, due to the government's focus on generating revenue through the development of prime real estate. The amendment of NUCA's mandate in early 2018 further emphasizes this risk, as it explicitly shifts the focus towards developing real estate in central urban areas rather than in peripheral desert lands.

In summary, the timeline of displacement attempts on Qursaya Island is closely tied to the Egyptian government's and the military's broader urban redevelopment and land development strategies. Official documents and presidential decrees issued since early 2000s have laid the groundwork for these strategies, putting the island and its inhabitants at ongoing risk of displacement.

It's important to note that the island's history is definitely more than just a listed timeline of possible displacement attempts. However, it is important to understand that the people of Qursaya have very little documentation about their presence on the island, except the work of advocacy groups which has little effect on governmental decisions.

The future of Qursaya's inhabitants is uncertain, leaving them in a vulnerable position. They face the threat of displacement from their homes. This

book aims to document life on Qursaya Island, investigating the island's preservation value and proposing resilience tools for its inhabitants. The work focuses on gathering evidence to strengthen the Qursaya community's land rights and offers an alternative to island urbanization by highlighting the island's current and future advantages. By doing so, it seeks to increase their visibility and resilience in the face of uncertainty.





Ahmed  
Kamel



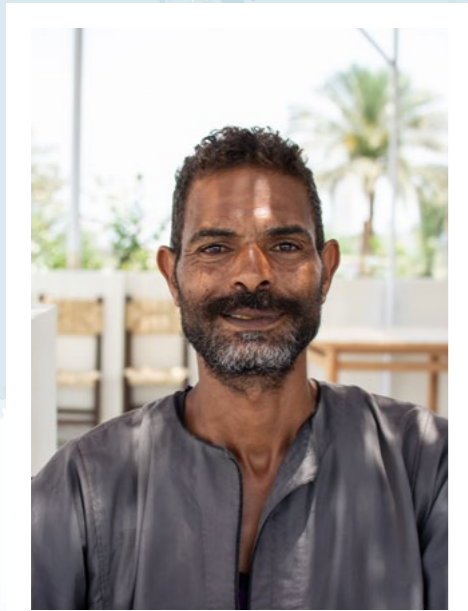
Mohamed  
Atalla



Amal  
Maher



Sayyed  
Mohamed



Sayyed



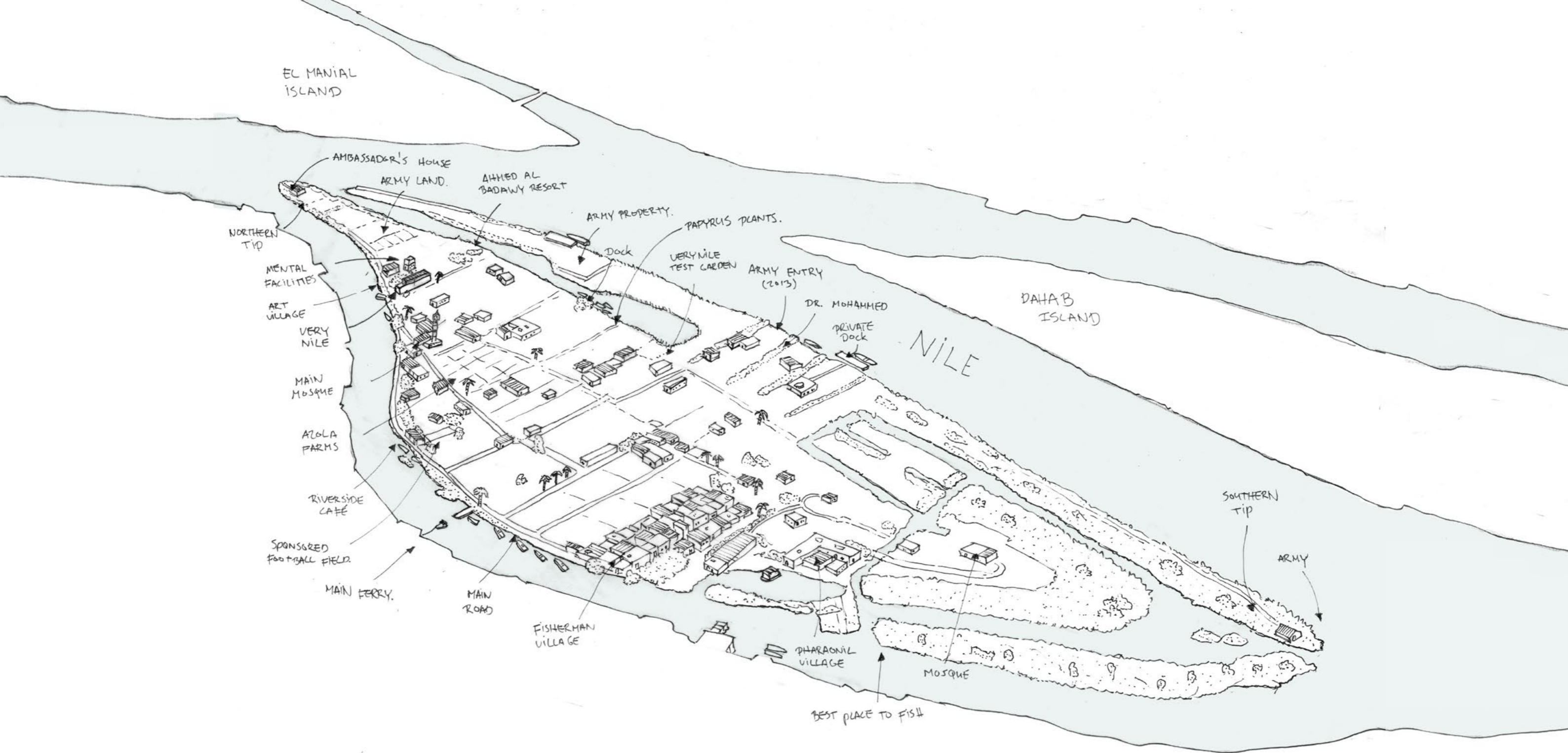
Azolla farmer



Ewes



Said



EL MANIAL ISLAND

AMBASSADOR'S HOUSE

ARMY LAND

AHMED AL BADAWY RESORT

ARMY PROPERTY

PAPYRUS PLANTS

VERY NILE TEST GARDEN

ARMY ENTRY (2013)

DR. MOHAMMED

PRIVATE DOCK

DAHAB ISLAND

NILE

NORTHERN TIP

MENTAL FACILITIES

ART VILLAGE

VERY NILE

MAIN MOSQUE

AZOLA FARMS

RIVERSIDE CAFE

SPONSORED FOOTBALL FIELD

MAIN FERRY

MAIN ROAD

FISHERMAN VILLAGE

PHARONIL VILLAGE

MOSQUE

BEST PLACE TO FISH

SOUTHERN TIP

ARMY

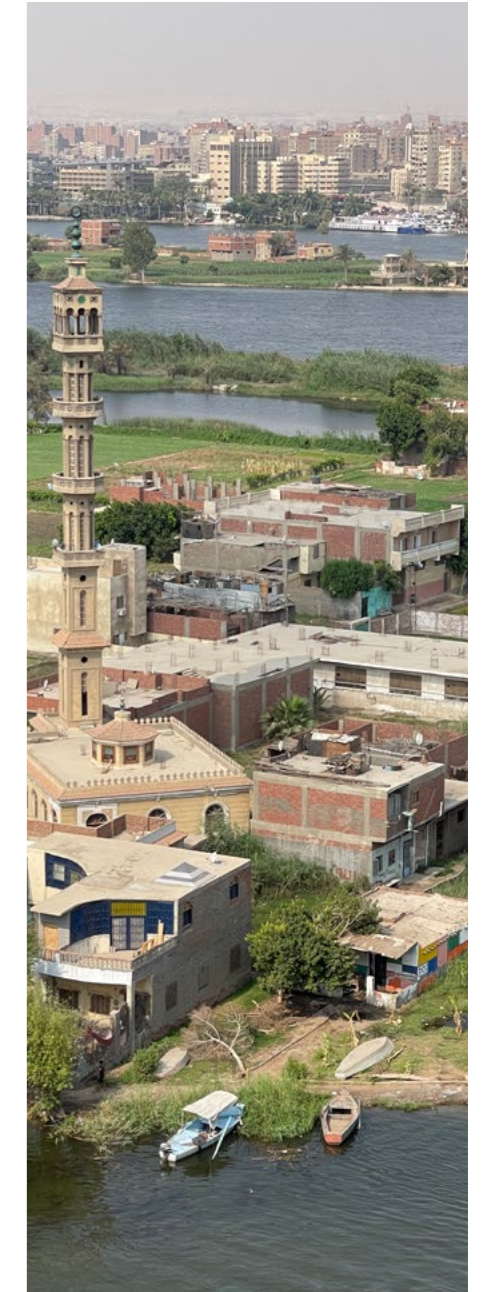
## 2.3 ISLAND STRUCTURE

“Urban sociology sees community as having both a cultural and spatial meaning, with community being connected to individuals, networks, and strong ties, and neighborhood being connected to socio-spatial organization and ‘collective efficacy’” (Castrignanò & Manella, 2011).

Qursaya has organically developed a unique form of living within Cairo. The relation between the built environment and nature is unparalleled in the city, and its pedestrian nature and atmosphere resemble new utopias that experts from city planning disciplines strive for and that are presently being simulated by Nature-based health interventions (NBIs) (Shanahan et al., 2019), and public health promotion and prevention strategies (Maller et al., 2006). It is especially relevant when acknowledging the exponential expansion the city of Cairo endures. There is a direct relation between the resilience of the island’s community and the island’s spatial structure. Its unique conditions have shaped the island in a completely different way than its immediate surroundings.

Its scale resembles a medium sized neighborhood, yet its social and natural conditions remind us of a small village. The result, from an urban perspective, is a new typology that can be referred to as ‘village-hoods’. The strong sense of identity within the island and the forms of governance that are present give it a heightened sense of self reliance that is lacking in big urban structures. Qursaya is a diverse and complex territory in relation to its size. The island has several distinct

urban layouts and different neighborhoods with unique spatial configurations, where some parts of the island display an urban character, while others retain a distinctly rural appearance.







Plan view of Qursaya

The island's map reveals an organic, long-evolved layout. Initially it's hard to grasp a logical urban structure, however, upon visiting the island and moving through the different areas patterns start to emerge. The shape of the island has determined

which areas have become more consolidated and which areas have not. The existing piers that connect the island to Giza have set the conditions for a more intensive development. Transport and delivery of goods and services is most efficient



● Pharanoic Village ● Housing groups ● Green areas ● Large houses

Zoning plan of Qursaya

in these areas and therefore its inhabitants have tried to group around them. The areas more densely populated are also less prone to flooding. The waterfront of the island has been developed in some cases as private villas. The owners of

these properties have access to private boats as commuting and delivery becomes less of an issue for them. The internal green areas have a tendency to flood and therefore are perfect to use as fields for certain types of crops.





"I've worked as a fisherman for 15 years now. I was born here and I am now married.

My everyday routine starts at 4 a.m. I fish until 9 a.m. and then come back home for breakfast and some rest. I then go back fishing until sunset.

What I catch I sell to vendors at the fish market. And the plastic I collect I sell it to the factory in the waste market.

Fishing is getting harder and my earnings have gone down. Twice a year there's a removal of waste from the Nile that affects where fish live and reproduce.

What I would change in Qursaya? Water supply is weak. We can't drink the water from the Nile. It can't be used for washing either. I also hope for a hospital and a school someday."

Ahmed Kamel Sayed

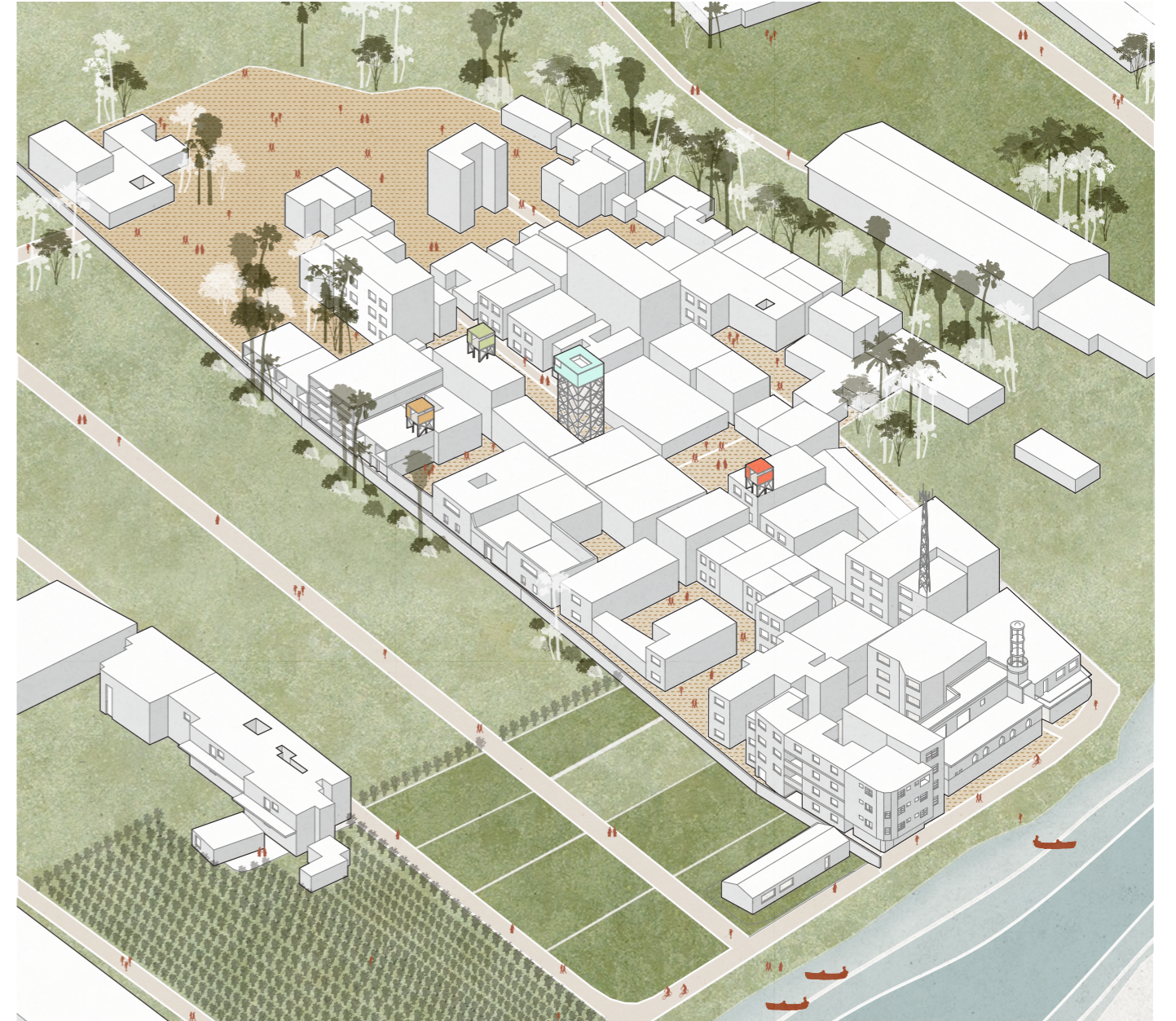
Left: Section drawing on the building density comparing Cairo, Qursaya, and Giza.

## FISHERMEN'S VILLAGE

The fishermen's area, also known as Al Ezba is characterized by two or three-story buildings with meandering narrow streets in between which provide shade from the prevalent and intense sun exposure. Life develops mainly indoors due to the strong sun, although the shade of the buildings also gives way to spontaneous interactions and gatherings among neighbors just outside their houses. The central main street is where most of the communal life unfolds due to its street profile with tall constructions on both sides. The fishermen's area has access to one water pipe, although insufficient for the demands of the population, its layout is as efficient as possible. The village is served by a pulley system to enter and exit the island, making it the strongest link between the city and the island. It is therefore no wonder the village resembles the city of Cairo the most in its spatial reality.



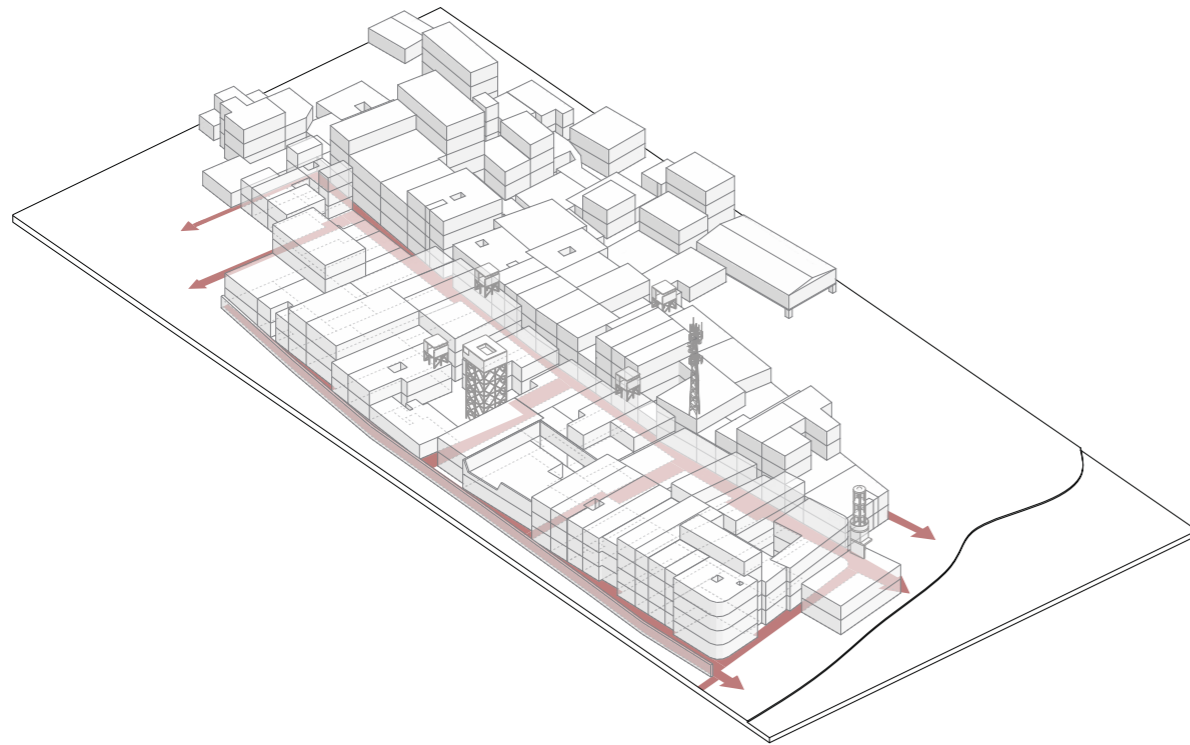
Plan view of the fishermen's village



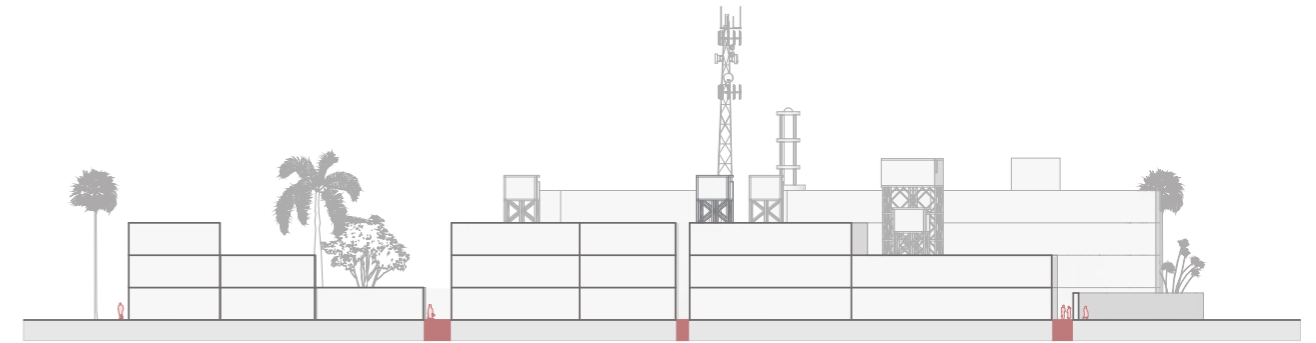
Axonometric drawing of the fishermen's village



Views of the fishermen's village



Axonometric drawing of the building typology



Section drawing of the building typology

Houses are organized in an urban grid resembling traditional city structures, row house typologies fill each block. Pigeon towers appear in the skyline as alternative sources of income and

cultural icons. The section of the village shows the relation between the width of the pedestrian streets and the height of the buildings, traditional of middle eastern urbanism.

## AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

The agricultural sector is characterized by bigger plots of land with an isolated house within. The inhabitants of this area protect their houses by planting big trees around to generate shade. This gives the area a completely different atmosphere from that of the fishermen's village. It's important to note that not all plots of land have constructions on them and some are only used for agriculture. These plots are tended by locals and externals alike. The borders of each plot are used as pedestrian roads and the different shapes and sizes of each plot of land result in a winding and interesting commute. The pedestrian roads are built slightly higher than the arable plots so people can keep dry when these are flooded. Several shaded shelters are provided for animals, along with a few overhead coverings on the pedestrian paths to shield them from the sun.



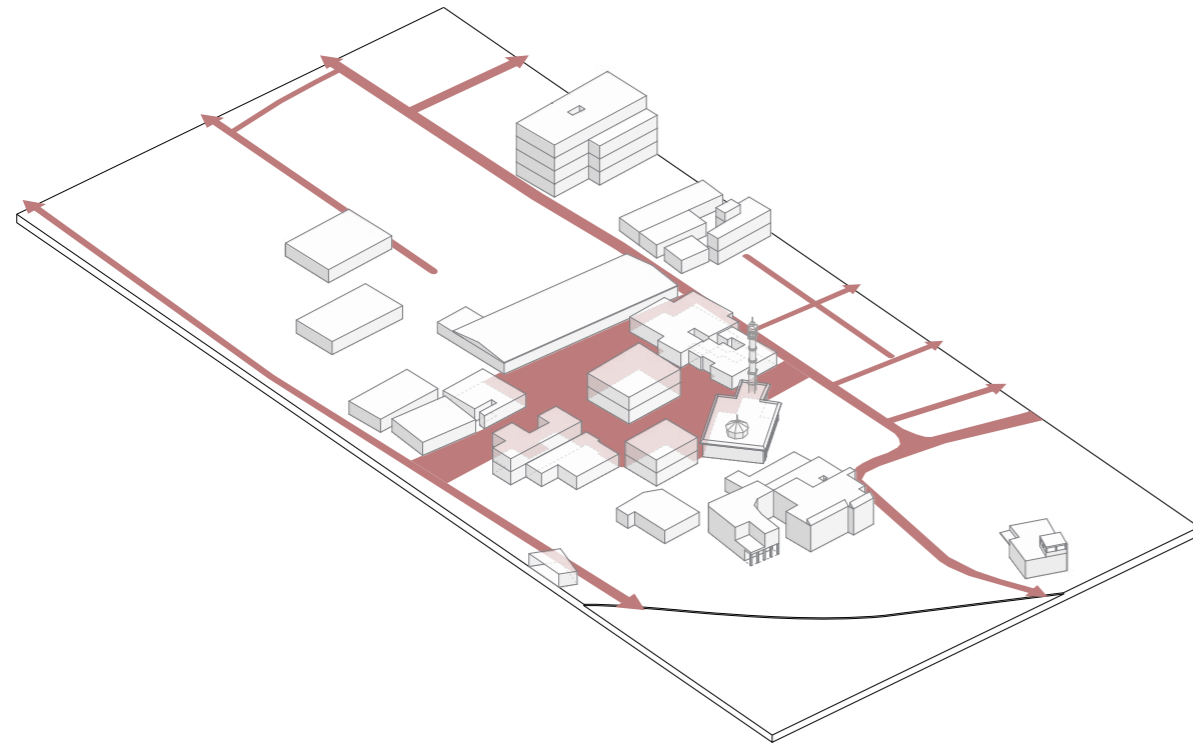
Plan view of the agricultural sector



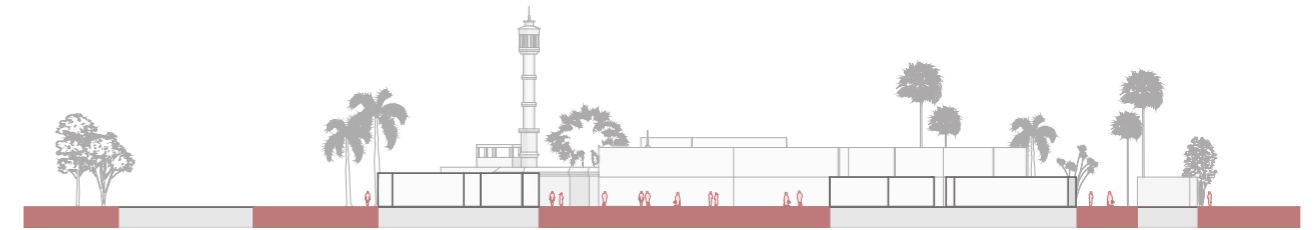
Axonometric drawing of the agricultural sector



Views of the agricultural sector



Axonometric drawing of the building typology



Section drawing of the building typology

Although most houses are isolated there is a small square with different types of buildings and a mosque that gives the island its distinct skyline, as its minaret is the tallest structure. The layout of the mosque, facing Mecca, contrasts with the east-west layout of the rest of the constructions,

generating a unique and rich public space. The section of the agricultural sector shows the big open areas between constructions. This results in large green areas and fresh air. The spaces, however, are rarely used during daytime beyond agricultural activities.



"I'm from Minya, but currently live in Cairo, in Dar El Salam. I used to work in tourism in Cairo, Aswan and Luxor before joining VeryNile two years ago. Now I'm the one responsible for the cleaning boat. Even though I don't live here, everyone knows me and treats me as part of their community.

This place is small and quite nice, but it needs better sanitation, buildings, services, a hospital and a school. It makes me sad to see children leaving on boats to go to school as I go out to work everyday. They then have to pass those dangerous streets just to study!"

Ibrahim Hassan Mohamed





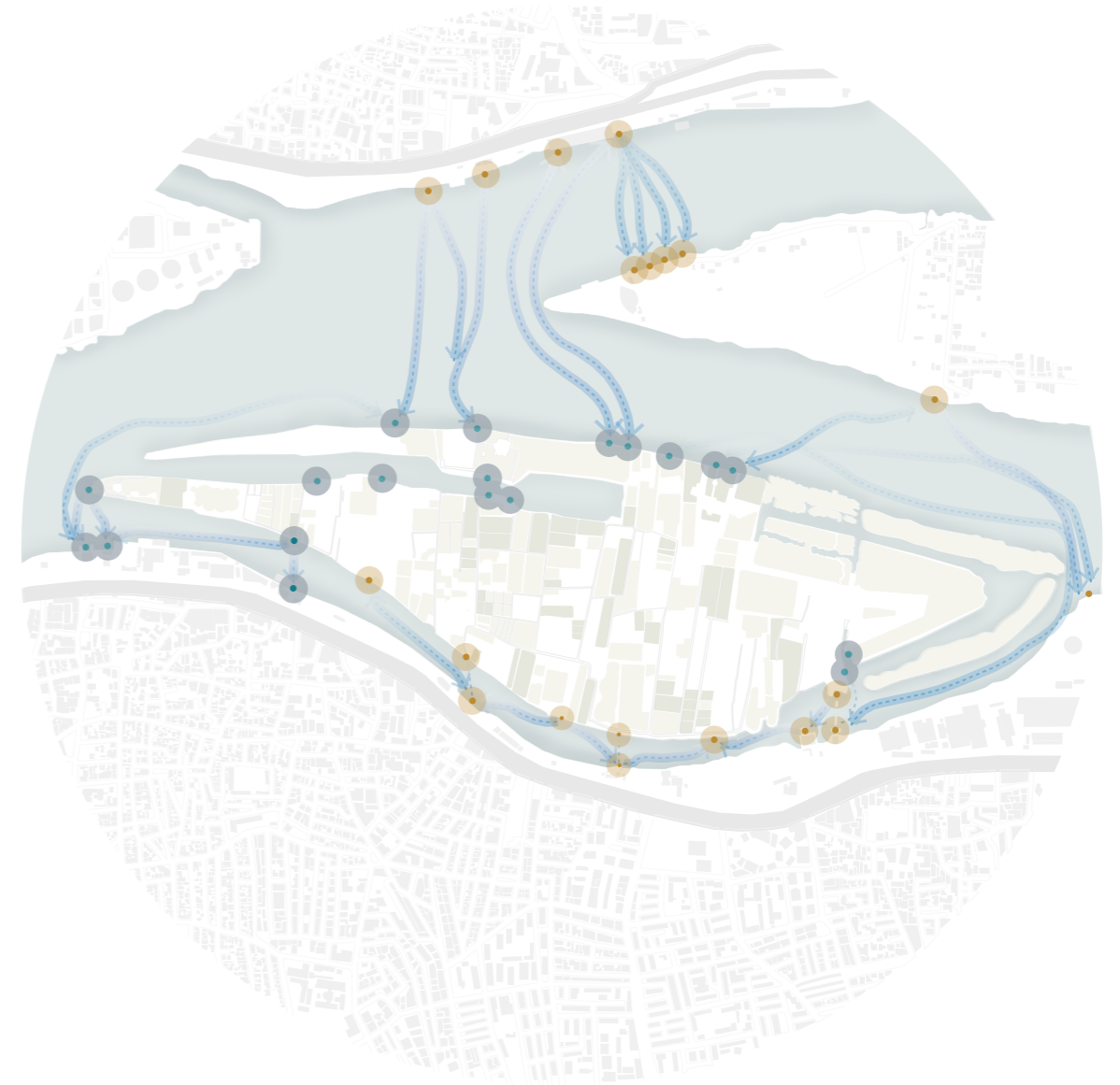
## 2.4 FORMS OF TRANSPORT

Qursaya transportation infrastructure, or the lack thereof, is part of what has preserved the island from large-scale development. Its apparent inaccessibility has allowed its closely knit community to maintain control over the territory. The island has an internal system of paths that constantly changes directions to go around agricultural fields, neighborhoods or small isolated houses. The discontinuous road system makes commuting an experience in itself. People, small carts and donkeys roam the narrow streets. No motor vehicle is present and therefore, the island enjoys a silent seclusion from the noisy streets of Cairo. While many cities in rich countries are exploring the benefits of car free roads, Qursaya is a prime and proven example of its benefits.

The island is connected to the rest of the city by two main ports of entry. Each port provides a different experience and serves the community in different ways. Both ports are located in Giza. One appears more formal and uses a pulley system to glide along the Nile, perpendicular to its flow. For a few Egyptian pounds, it is possible to cross the river in a couple of minutes and enter the fishermen's neighborhood. The other port depends on a rowing boat piloted by one of its inhabitants. The bigger houses on the western side of the island tend to have private boats and even a couple of yachts with their own private piers.

The scale of the island, too small and too close to the embankment to justify the construction of

a bridge for vehicles, makes it a safe haven for pedestrians. In a city where traffic is an ever present feature and honking is an apparent necessity, Qursaya has unintentionally built a sanctuary.





“All men should fish,

I couldn't help noticing.

Patient strength. Contemplation.

Silent wisdom. In contact with nature to sense the flow of life in the river, to use their energy as efficiently as possible and find the catch of the day.

Few disciplines exist in contemporary society with the balanced characteristics of fishing.

Language is not a barrier, the messages from life flow through the river and its many parts, living and nonliving, but always conscious and part of the whole.

Stewards of a territory in continuous flux. A territory where you cannot stand still, a territory that is different with every passing second. And precisely because of this it's a territory pulsating with life. Pumping the blood of the earth along its surface.”

Julian Restrepo





## 2.5 LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The Qursayans, the roughly 1500 inhabitants of Qursaya, are a diverse group with significant roles in shaping the island's dynamics. The island is a surprising melting pot of different cultures, hosting a diverse array of business activities besides the main activities of farming and fishing. Not all of these business activities were necessarily initiated by Qursayans, yet they are very much a part of the island's identity. This section describes the local stakeholders identified during our visits to the island and through interviews with individuals across it. The categorization into subgroups is based on their geographical distribution and housing on the island, reflecting their unique lifestyles and contributions. The local stakeholder VeryNile will be described in the consecutive section as a case study.

### Farmers

**Location:** Spread across the island in houses.

Farmers represent the island's agricultural heritage and are often seen as the custodians of Qursaya's traditional way of life. Their historical ties to the land ensure a continuity that enriches the local culture. They produce a variety of crops such as onions, tomatoes, lettuce, Jew's mallow (Molokheya), and cultivate a number of fruit trees, including dates and mandarin. These farmers engage in raising cattle for milk production and, eventually, for livestock trade. Most of their agricultural supplies, such as fertilizers and feed, are sourced from off the island. They are

highly sensitive to fluctuations in raw material prices, often finding it challenging to adjust to the frequent economic shifts.

### Fishermen

**Location:** Primarily residing in the area known as "Al Ezba".

Fishermen coming from various parts of Egypt add to the island's cultural diversity. Most fishermen work individually and own their personal boat, catching fish around the island and selling it on the shores of the mainland. Several fishermen mentioned that their daily catch has been declining over the past decade due to overfishing and pollution of the Nile river, putting pressure on their source of income. Within 'Al Ezba', there are also fishnet knitters that provide fishermen with the nets used for fishing.

### Women of Qursaya

**Location:** Integral members of both the farmers' and fishermen's communities.

The women of Qursaya comprise a subgroup substantially different from the first two mentioned. Noticeably this third category does not depend on economic or laboral activity for its definition but responds exclusively to gender. Women's role in Qursaya is heavily defined due to cultural heritage and Egyptian traditions in which patriarchal arrangements evidence in daily dynamics, income

distribution and occupation. In this sense, women are ever present, the tails side of the coin, and are the ones to be thanked for maintaining the weave of family groups, neighbor gatherings, household activities, children upbringing and social community fabrics. Their contribution may be evidenced mostly indoors or when they come together to travel to the market, do household chores or tend for children and elders.

Their sphere of influence has broadened considerably since the foundation of the social enterprise VeryNile in the Island, where some of them labor, not only in the kitchen and in cleaning jobs, but developing new possible business areas as artisans. In this sense, they have played a pivotal role in transforming the island's socio-economic landscape, especially through their early endorsement and involvement in the VeryNile workshop and kitchen. Their influence has been key in fostering acceptance and success of some new initiatives.

### Military forces

**Location:** Positioned at the northern and southern tips of the island.

The military forces are among the most influential stakeholders in Egypt, with significant interest and impact on societal and territorial dynamics. Their strategic placement of bases around Cairo ensures their defensive superiority. In January 2022, a presidential decree transferred ownership

of 37 Nile River islands, including Qursaya, to the Egyptian armed forces, overturning a prior commitment to designate these islands as nature reserves. The military's powerful legal and political influence leaves the residents of Qursaya in a vulnerable position, despite their resistance to these control attempts.

### The Pharaonic Village

**Location:** Situated on the eastern shore of the island.

This open-air museum in Cairo offers an immersive introduction to the ancient world of the Pharaohs, featuring replicas of ancient Egyptian monuments such as temples, tombs, and pyramids, often visited by groups of primary school children. Those who work for the Pharaonic Village do not interrelate closely to farmers and fishermen in Qursaya, nor do they live there, in most cases. They access the island to work and then go back to Cairo with little or no interaction with the rest of the island. Tourist and children who visit the Pharaonic Village museum do not traverse the rest of the island.

### Influential residents

**Location:** Scattered around the island, primarily in luxurious villas.

These residents are distinguished by their ability to influence and enhance the island's well-being,

often by providing employment opportunities and essential services. Although the opulent villas owned by expatriates, political figures, and artists may initially appear to highlight economic disparity, it's crucial to recognize that these individuals also play a significant role in providing some security for the island. Despite the concentration of other residents in densely populated areas, the presence and influence of these prominent individuals bring a positive impact to the community. For privacy reasons, examples of influential residents are described generally below.

#### **The community doctor (Dr. Mohamed)**

Dr. Mohamed voluntarily provides essential primary healthcare, highlighting the critical role of community-driven support and healthcare accessibility on the island. Dr. Mohamed resides in a villa on the western side of the island and is married to an expatriate. He owns extensive lands that include residential houses and a smaller house for art residents from Switzerland who come to work on their projects seasonally.

#### **A political figure**

This individual owns two villas on opposite sides of the island and is a prominent political figure in Egypt. His significant contributions to Qursaya, including connecting the island to the electrical grid, have earned him

widespread support among residents. His political influence is evident, with many islanders supporting him during Parliamentary elections due to his contributions.

#### **The cafe owner, Hamada**

Hamada, from a well-connected family in the fishermen's village, owns a local cafe. His family's ties to the Pharaonic Village provide employment opportunities for many islanders. By employing locals directly in his cafe and facilitating jobs at the Pharaonic Village, Hamada significantly influences the local economy and social dynamics, especially in "El Ezba".

#### **Mr. Badawy's resort**

Located next to the VeryNile headquarters, Mr. Badawy's hotel houses several exotic, rare animals and attracts daily visitors. This not only increases the island's tourism potential but also provides employment opportunities for locals in managing and maintaining the resort, contributing to the island's overall economic development.

#### **Emad Samy - Boat repairs**

Emad Samy is among the most renowned and influential figures on the island. Originating from a family of farmers, Emad has carved out a niche in the boat repair business. His

work supports a diverse clientele, including fishermen, owners of luxurious boats, and farmers, granting him access to many of the island's resources and stakeholders.

#### **Azolla farming**

Azolla farming on the island attracts various investors due to its cost-effectiveness compared to other locations. This sector is primarily export-oriented, with most of the produced feed being sold off the island, underscoring its economic significance.

#### **The ferrymen**

Access to the island is facilitated through four aquatic entry points. The main mode of transportation is a public ferry, strategically located to maximize accessibility for residents. Additionally, there are two or three private points where boats can be rented for short crossings at a fee of ten Egyptian pounds. The ferrymen manage these operations as small businesses, catering mostly to tourists and daily visitors who need to reach parts of the island not serviced by the public ferry.

#### **The fish restaurants**

Near the public ferry landing, a Qursayan-owned fish restaurant draws on local resources, sourcing fish from island fishermen and employing local workers. Catering mainly

to non-residents, the establishment links Qursaya to the wider dining scene.

#### **Art galleries and workshops**

Qursaya boasts a vibrant arts scene, including at least two galleries and several workshops. One notable sculptor, previously supplying replicas to the Pharaonic Village, now creates for theater sets and decorations. A standout in the local art community is Mohamed Abla's gallery. Abla, a celebrated Egyptian painter, has long been an advocate for Qursaya's rights. These artistic endeavors not only enrich the cultural tapestry of the island but also elevate its profile, linking Qursaya with significant figures in the art world.

“We had another manager before. But he ill-treated the people, especially women. We tried to talk to him about it, but he kept on doing it and in one last occasion became aggressive. He was taken out of the project. It was hard to do.

His mother still comes and asks that we take him back. It’s been tough to manage this. Still, I think it has taught us all about the importance of how to treat each other. The project not only helps sustainability in economic terms, the whole community can learn from this.”

Hatem Hamdy

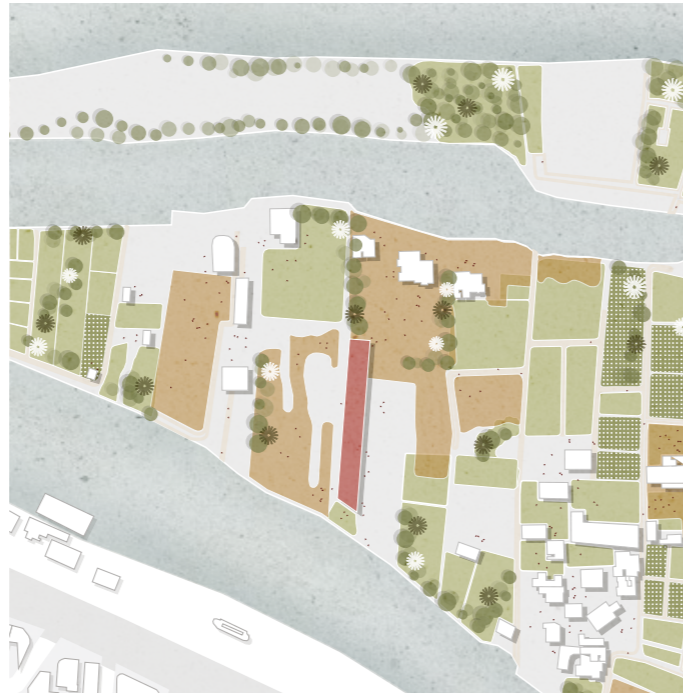




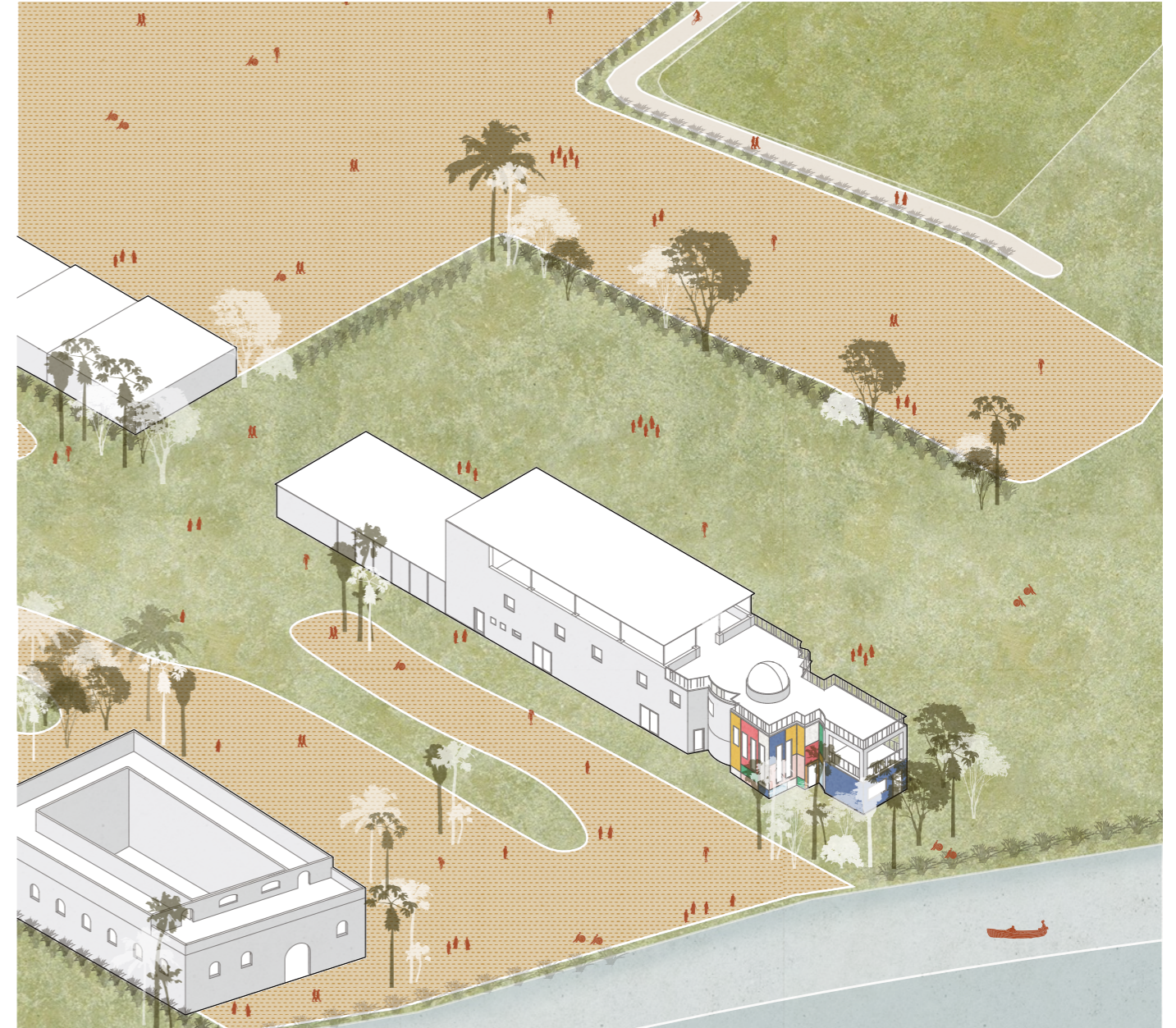
## 2.6 VERYNILE: CASE STUDY

VeryNile is a social enterprise that aims to improve the environmental and social conditions of the Nile River and its communities. Created in 2018, VeryNile's core activity centers around collecting plastic from the Nile around Qursaya island and Assiut Governorate. This project empowers the marginalized community of fishermen of the Nile through an environmental process of collecting recyclables and trash from the river. Fishermen and women are already engaged in fishing on the Nile. They own small boats that can access any part of the river and have an unmatched familiarity with it. Most importantly, preserving the Nile will enable the restoration of fish populations and enhance biodiversity.

In exchange for cleaning the Nile, fishermen receive a financial incentive, social insurance and social services such as access to educational and healthcare services, as well as environmental workshops and training. The collected recyclables are segregated and compacted in VeryNile's Fishermen Hub which is located on Qursaya Island, before being sold back to recycling facilities to recreate new products. The process helps reduce the amount of plastic that has been thrown in the Nile, while creating a new source of income for fishermen.



Plan view of VeryNile's location



Axonometric drawing of VeryNile

**Waste collection and recycling**

Plastic waste is collected from the Nile by the fishermen. The waste is brought to VeryNile’s segregating facility, such as the VeryNile Hub in Qursaya island. At this location, the waste is weighted and sorted per kind. The waste is compacted or shredded and the resulting bales or flakes are sent to recycling partners that employ them as primary material to produce other goods.

**VeryNile.Shop**

VeryNile.Shop creates upcycled and recycled products in collaboration with women living by the Nile. Plastic bags and caps are transformed into functional and durable products, produced by local artisans. The products include bags, home accessories, clothing and furniture. Artisans used to have limited access to sustainable income due to the lack of job opportunities in Qursaya Island and challenges to access jobs on the other side. Currently, artisans are actively involved in managing the shop’s activities. They engage up to 30 additional women and girls on a project basis, providing job training that helps develop the skills of other community members.

**VeryNile Community Kitchen**

VeryNile has partnered with local female farmers to establish ‘Shoka w Megdaf’, an eco-friendly community kitchen. This initiative creates job opportunities for women through their involvement in food preparation and the supply chain. Shoka w Megdaf serves multiple purposes. It welcomes

visitors to the island, offering them unique experiences that raise awareness about the island’s environment and the community’s role in protecting it. The kitchen also provides nutritious meals to VeryNile’s workers, contributing to the overall health of Qursayans.

**VeryNile’s Community Development**

VeryNile is actively conducting research that helps understand the socio-economic conditions of the island inhabitants, as well as to propose ways of amplify the assets of the community to respond to their own needs. VeryNile established a community development department dedicated to initiating a continuous communication channel with the community to ensure that any solutions proposed are community-led. The research methods include participatory spatial mapping, transect walks, interviews and prototyping products and community services.



**VeryNile Community Clinic**

In collaboration with the local community and other stakeholders, VeryNile has recently installed a clinic that will respond to the health needs of island residents, approximately 1500 individuals who have limited access to health services. VeryNile aims to improve the health and well-being of its partners, as well as to empower them to take charge of their own health. Community-based solutions for health have been effectively initiated through the implementation of community-based healthcare insurance.

Such a project comprises the establishment of a community clinic staffed by a community health worker who serves as a focal point of contact for the community. The community health worker can facilitate access to telemedicine services,

connecting the local population with a network of doctors who provide remote medical advice and support. This model helps overcome barriers to healthcare access, such as geographical isolation and limited availability of healthcare professionals in rural areas.

To ensure the sustainability and affordability of these community-based healthcare initiatives, a small financial contribution from participating members has been established to create a monthly relief fund. For example, a contribution of \$ 3-4 per month from 50 members could provide coverage for chronic medication expenses and subsidize 50 % of outpatient services, medications, and tests. Additionally, the monthly relief fund could be used in the future to cover the costs of inviting specialist physicians to the community clinic, based on identified needs. This



strategy ensures that the community gets access to a range of healthcare services, tailored to their specific health concerns, without the need for costly and time-consuming travel to distant healthcare facilities, while also disincentivizing the community from recurring only to pharmacies that may only give instant relief to situations, but no long-term remedies.

This program can provide affordable and accessible healthcare services that are responsive to the unique needs and cultural contexts of the populations they serve.

**Overall impact of VeryNile**

VeryNile has a profound positive impact on the island and is an example of successful community involvement. As Hany Fawzy, Head of Operations

at VeryNile explained: "The plastic collection is a multi-faceted solution. Its economical implications allow fishermen to earn additional income and consecutively offer stable job opportunities in the waste processing and food preparation for both men and women. This steady base enables families to invest in their future, for example by paying for their children's education. Furthermore, the reduction of waste and pollution improves the natural habitat and increases the diminished fish populations around the island. No more plastic is burned on the island, improving the air quality and the general public health. The enterprise reinforces social ties, building a stronger and more resilient community on many different levels".



“My grandfather was one of the first to settle here in Qursaya, before the 1970s. In that time the land here was uneven. It had high areas and places filled with water. When the water level rose, people had to go to the neighboring island, Dahab, also called Exbet Ya’qub or ‘Between the Two Seas Island’.

My grandparents leveled and prepared the land for construction and farming. And I’ve worked in VeryNile since it started with only 2 workers. It has grown so much we have now 65 working here. I started collecting plastic and garbage from the Nile, and fish have slowly begun to return to the areas we’ve cleaned.

I usually pass my free time with Omar and Arafa. We are good friends and don’t even notice the distance in ages we have. We love to sit by the seaside, it’s my favorite place. Watching the sunset in a boat in the middle of the Nile is the best evening plan. It’s the perfect get-away from all the crowdedness for a few hours, just enjoying the serenity of the Nile”.

Sayed Mohamed Fathi



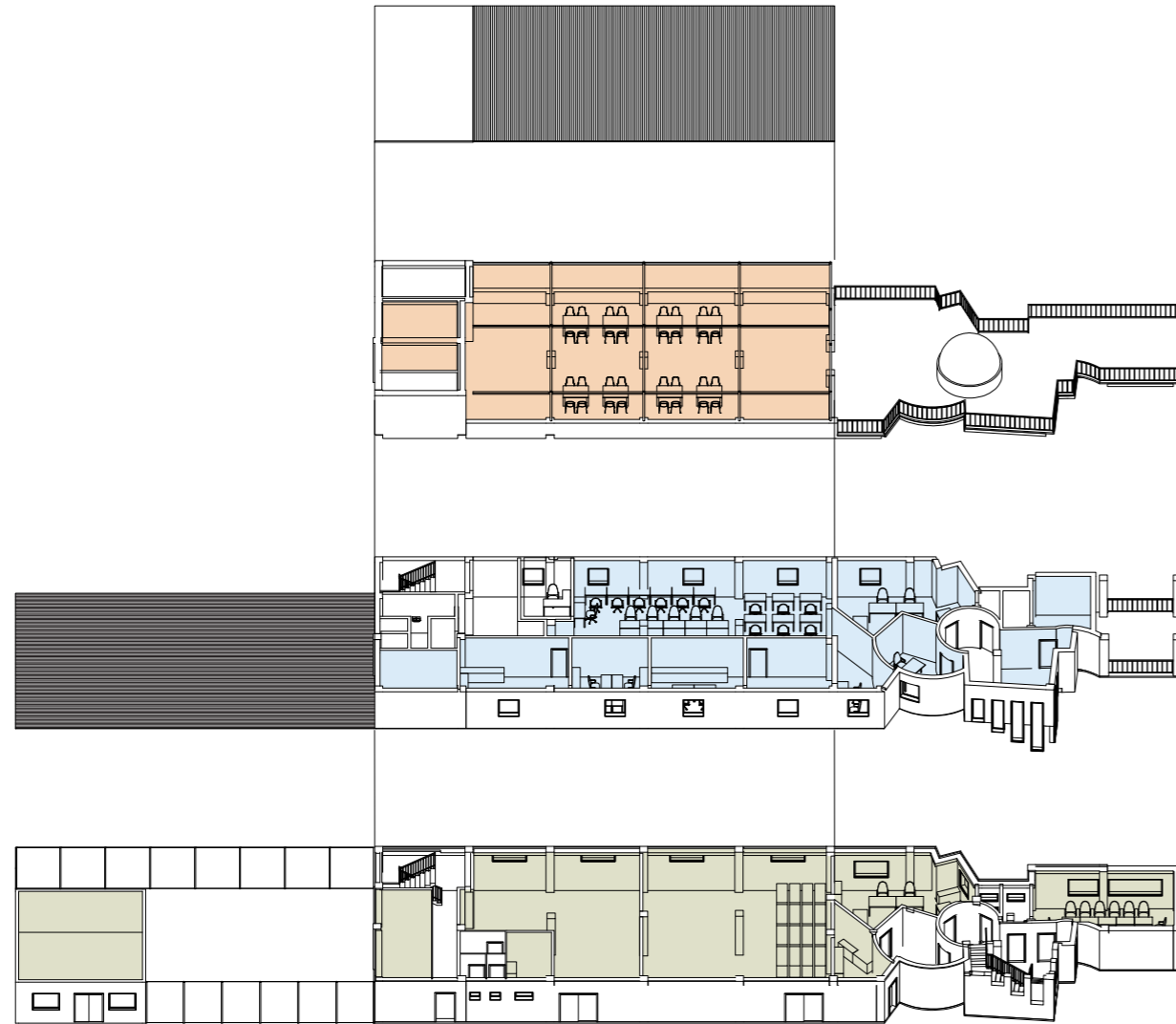
“I’m from the island of Warraq but now live here in Qursaya and I’ve worked for VeryNile for 3 years now. I work with the machine that compresses the plastic collected from the Nile. My children also work in this with me.

At the start, VeryNile only hired people from the island, but since it has grown so much, they started receiving workers from outside.

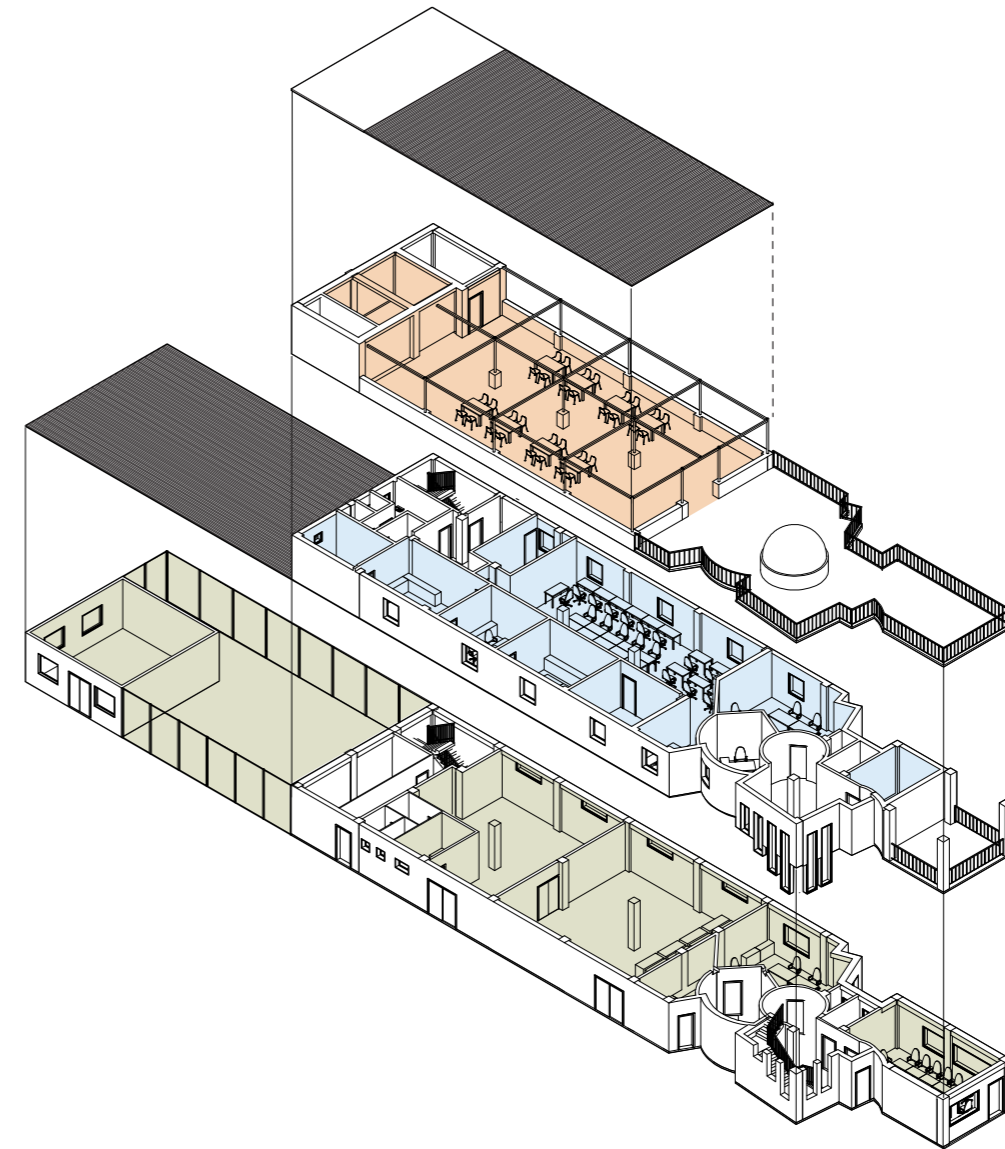
Seven of us handle plastic compression, but VeryNile aims to expand the factory very soon”.

Arafa Jaber





Exploded axonometry of VeryNile's building



Top down axonometry of VeryNile's building

- Second Floor  
 Roof / restaurant  
 Kitchen
- First Floor  
 Coffe  
 New VeryNile shop  
 Managing director  
 Manager's office  
 Carpentry  
 Clinic  
 Office  
 HDPE  
 LDPE
- Ground Floor  
 Compacting unit  
 Storage for plastic  
 General storage  
 Workplace  
 Kindergarden  
 VeryNile shop  
 Old shop

# 03. STORIES OF THE ISLAND

Voices of tradition and change.

- 3.1 Comic: Groceries Odyssey
- 3.2 Comic: A Little Girl's Agony
- 3.3 Comic: Where's All the Fish?
- 3.4 Fishermen's Wisdom

"I was born here. My ancestors had lands here and managed to cultivate, despite the Nile flooding the island every now and then. Sometimes the water level went so high up that boats ended up in front of our household door. Our house flooded also. My grandfather owned livestock and sold milk and cheese outside Qursaya.

I love it here. The only thing I just can't get used to are mosquitos and flies.

I've worked in the VeryNile kitchen for 8 to 9 months now. I offered Salma to cook and provide meals for the workers in the factory. I prepared a 'Koshary' meal for them to taste, and then tried other dishes. It went well and I am now in charge of feeding them.

I enjoy it. I go to the market and love picking the vegetables and fruits myself, even if it means paying an extra two pounds for the privilege.

I start preparing everything early in the morning in my father's house since the factory has no kitchen yet. Then I have to take it all in a large tray over my head for a 10 minute walk. This has been challenging. It's easy to stumble and I am

now having headaches and neck pain. I also became afraid of coming across cows with the tray over my head.

On regular workdays, I cook meals for 40 people, but if there's a visit or an event, it can be for about 100 people. During Ramadan, I cooked meals for 200 people. I had 7 helpers and we had to stay up all night, working for 20 hours. It was really hard since we were fasting while cooking because of Ramadan tradition.

My free time? I spend it studying. I studied only until the third grade so I'm picking up reading and writing. Through VeryNile Salma hired a literacy teacher for us in Qursaya. I'm learning a lot, my teacher gives me good grades and I hope I can progress fast. I once started a Youtube channel about cooking and recipes, but I had to stop since I can't read well.

My favorite place here? My father's house has a lot of palm trees in front. I love sitting there. There is a sense of peace and fresh air I can't find elsewhere. I can't even imagine living anywhere other than Qursaya."

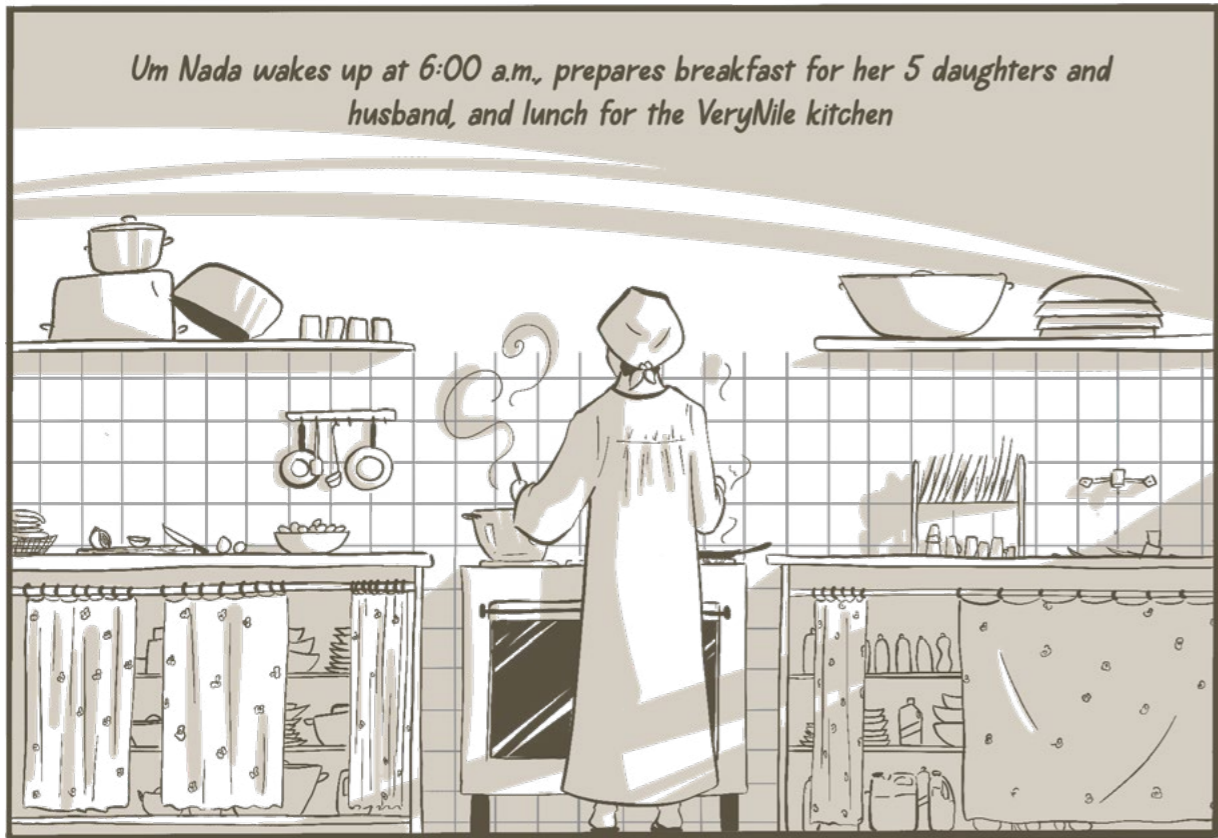
Um Nada, 38 years old



# Waking Up

6:00 a.m.

*Um Nada wakes up at 6:00 a.m., prepares breakfast for her 5 daughters and husband, and lunch for the VeryNile kitchen*



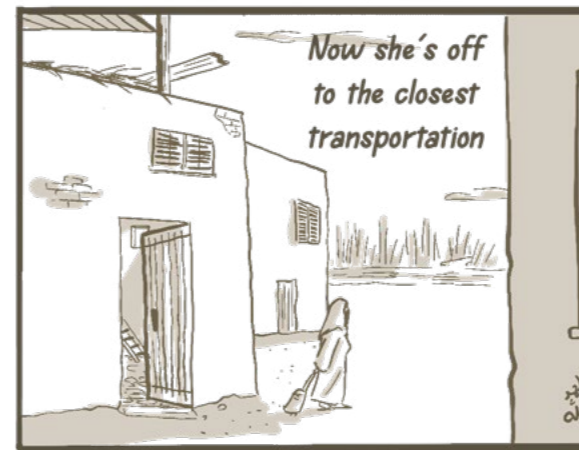
*She then checks what's missing, mentally noting her grocery list so she can buy them later today*



*She gets ready to go to "the nearest" Market*

# Hike

7:45 a.m.



*Now she's off to the closest transportation*



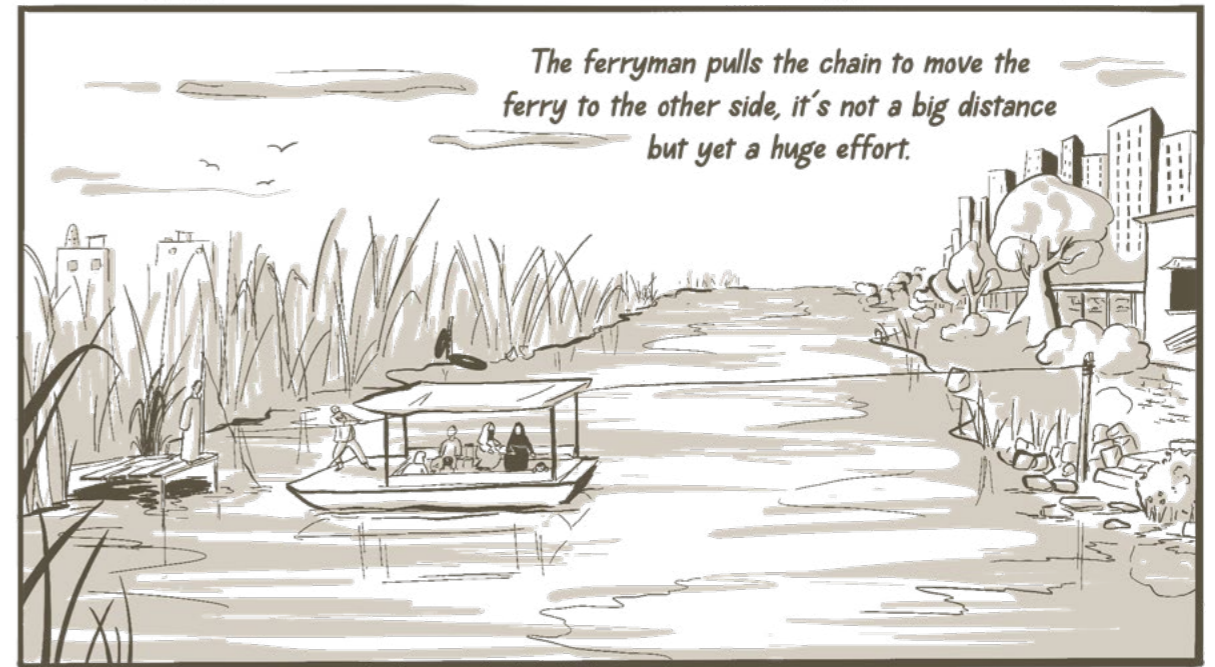
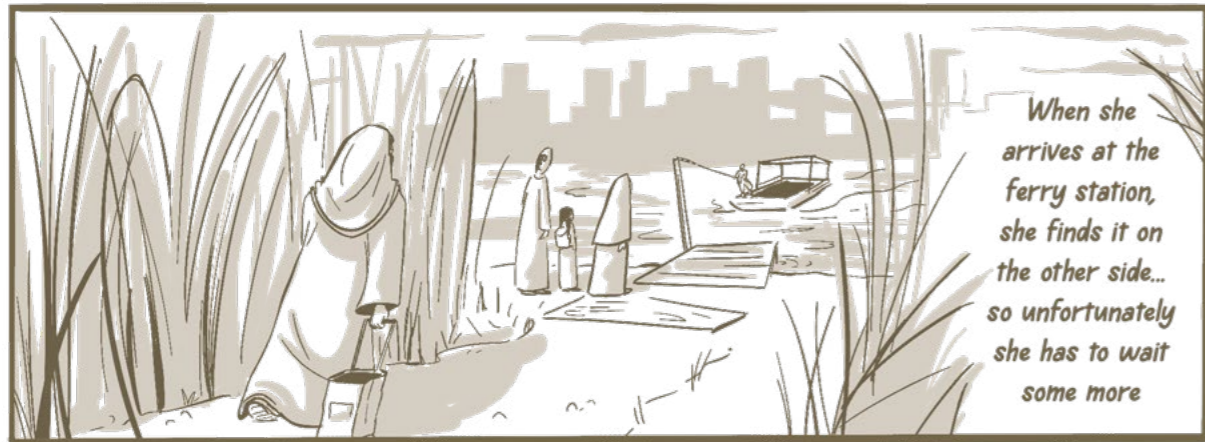
*It's a 15 minutes walk... But "it's alright", she says "I've been aiming to get more steps in anyway"*

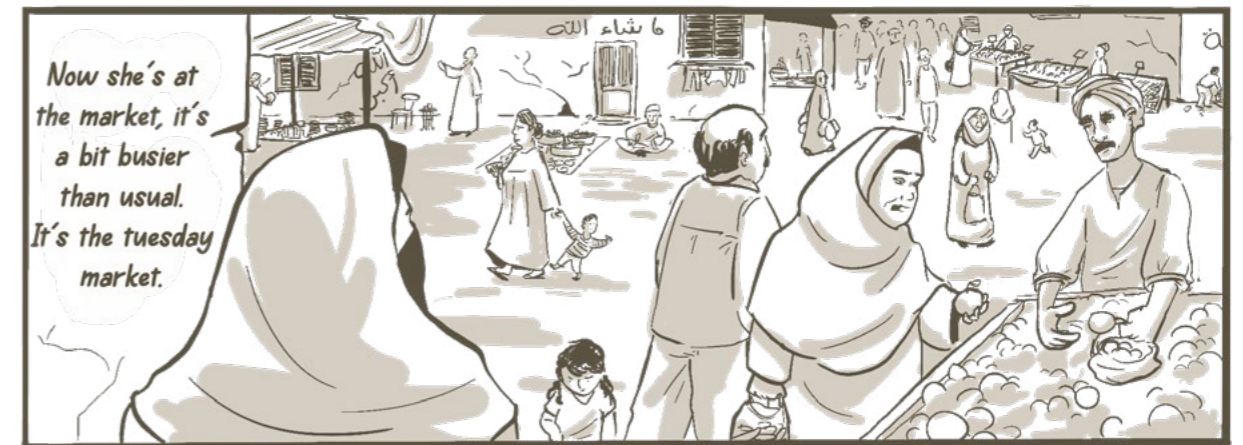
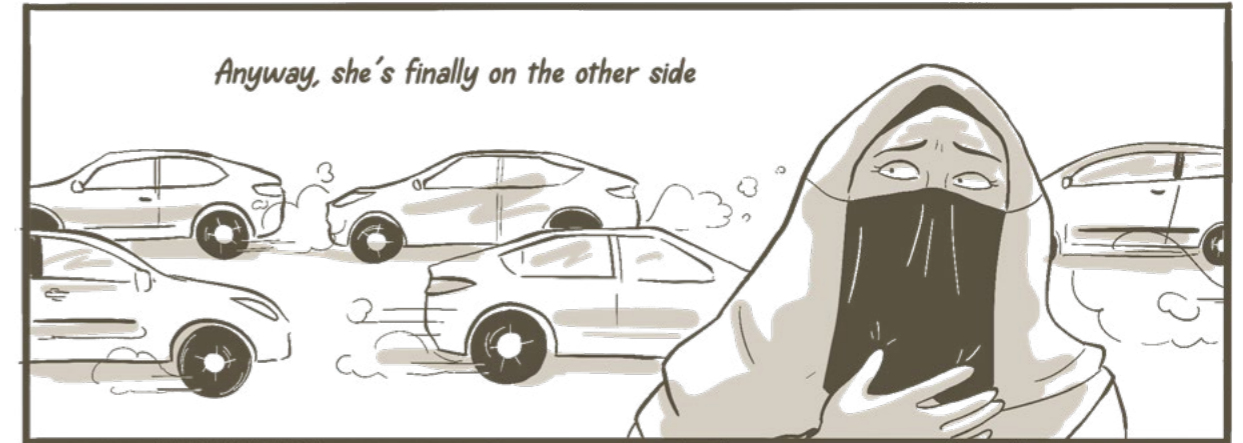
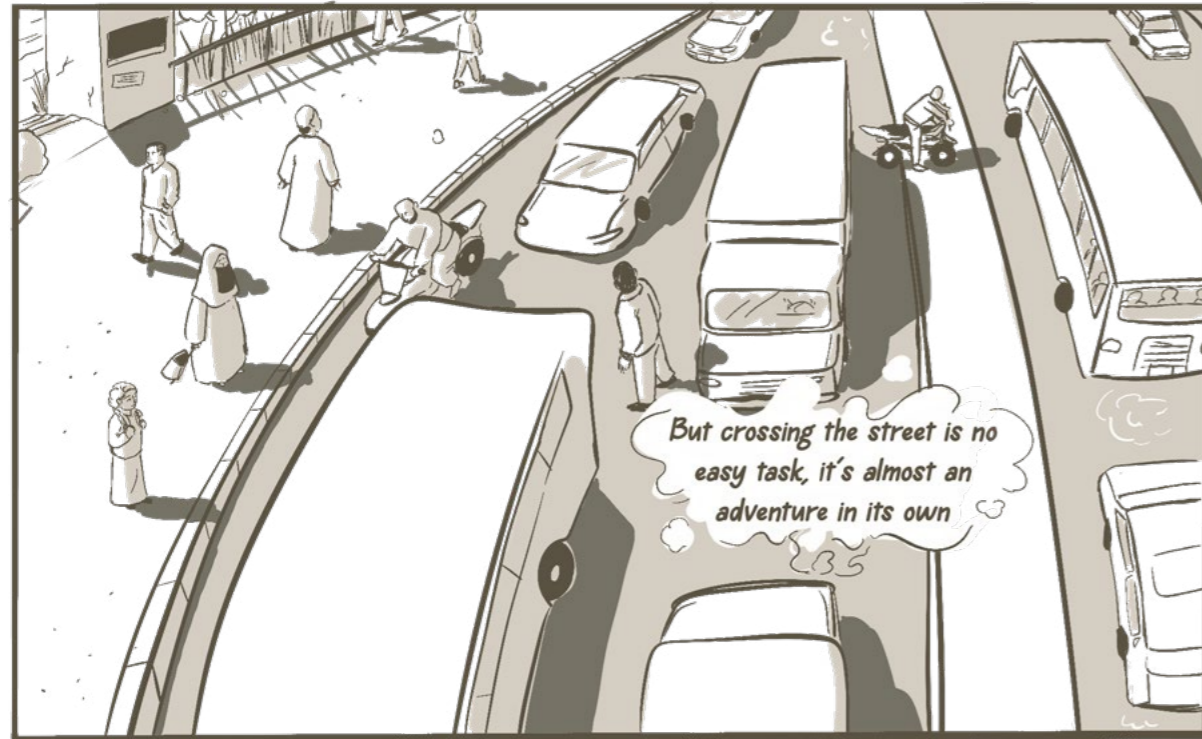


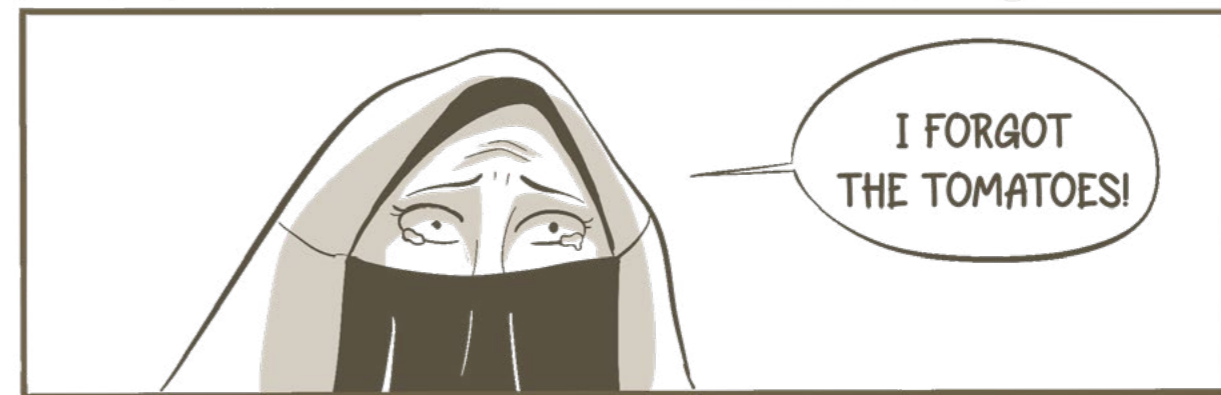
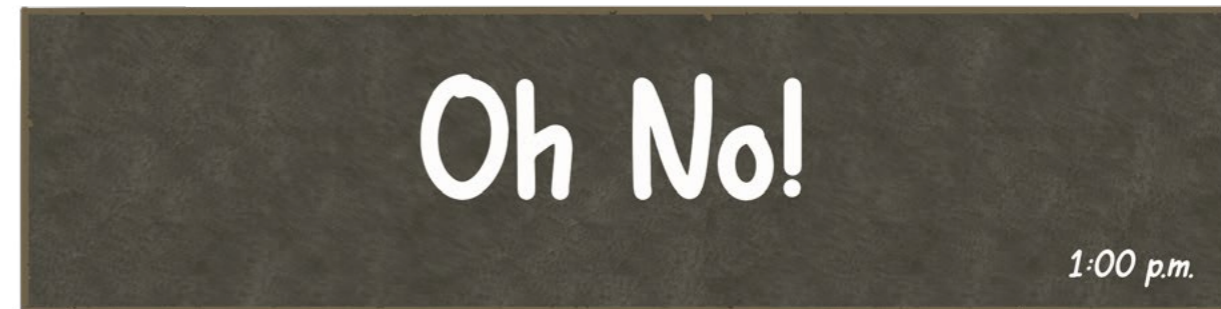
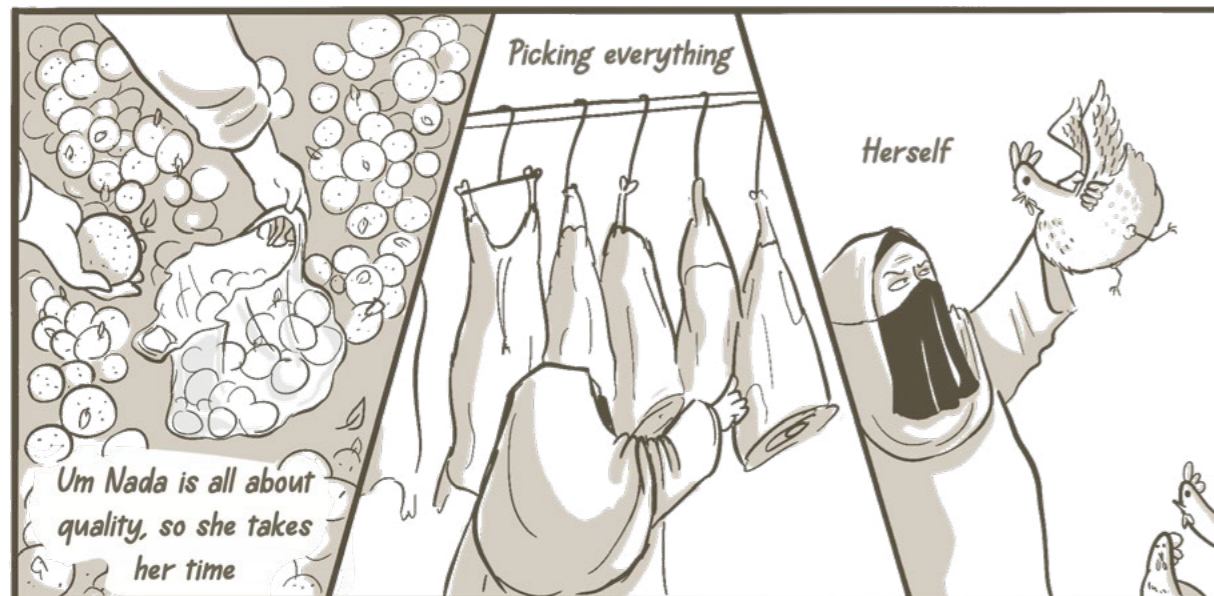


# Crossing

8:00 a.m.









"My family has been here since my grandfather's lifetime.

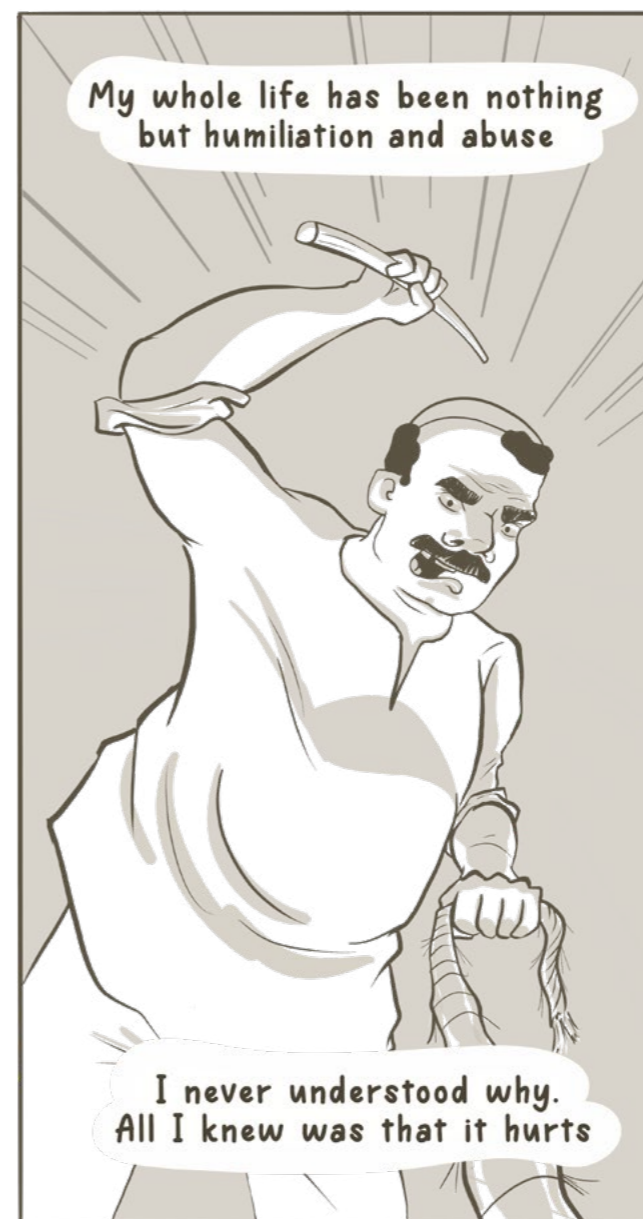
Working for VeryNile has been my first job. I was studying before that, and now I've been here for 2 and a half years. We start at 8 a.m. and finish about 4 or 5 p.m. After that we usually go fishing.

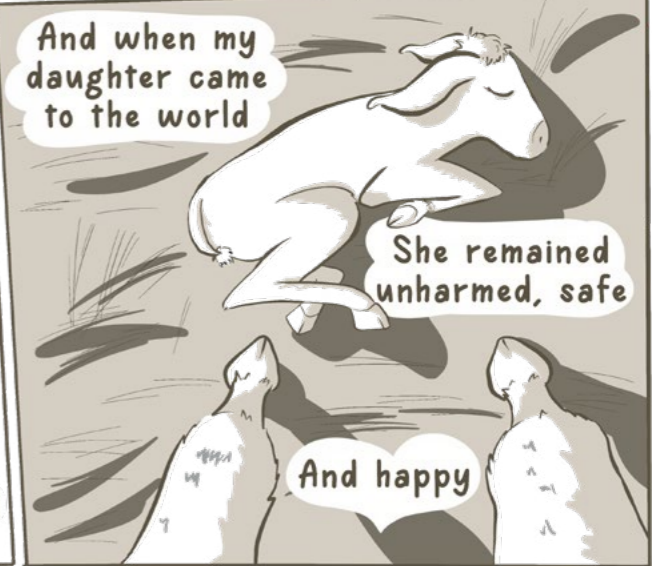
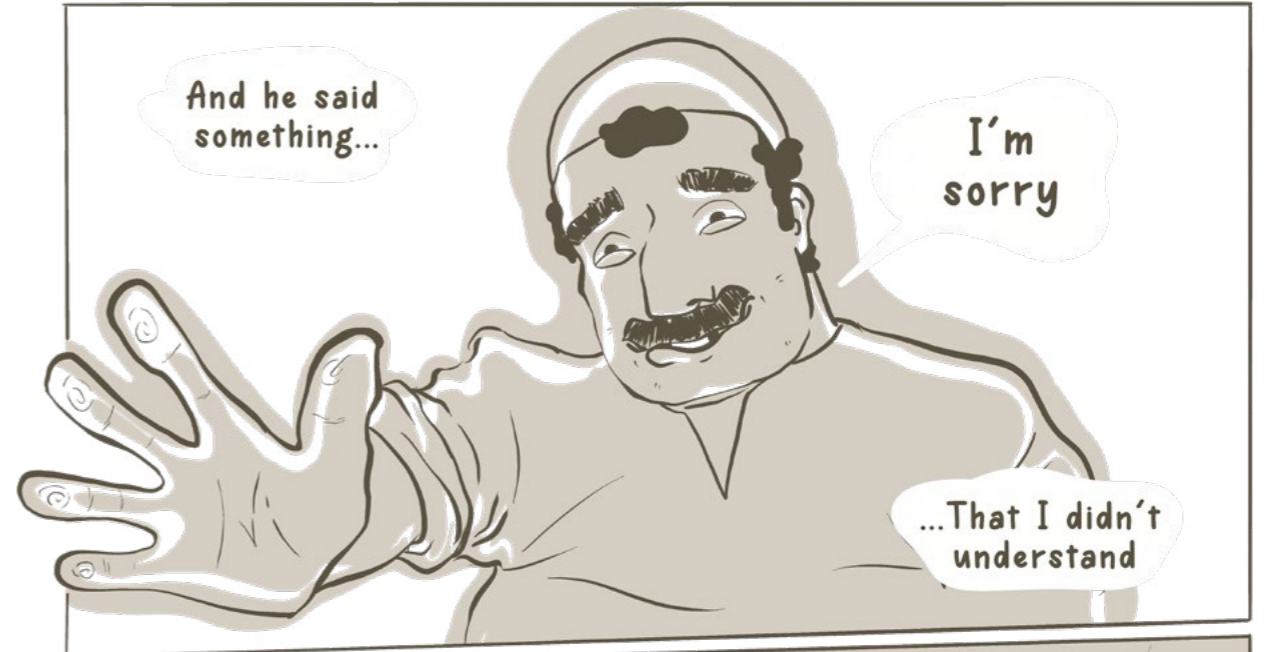
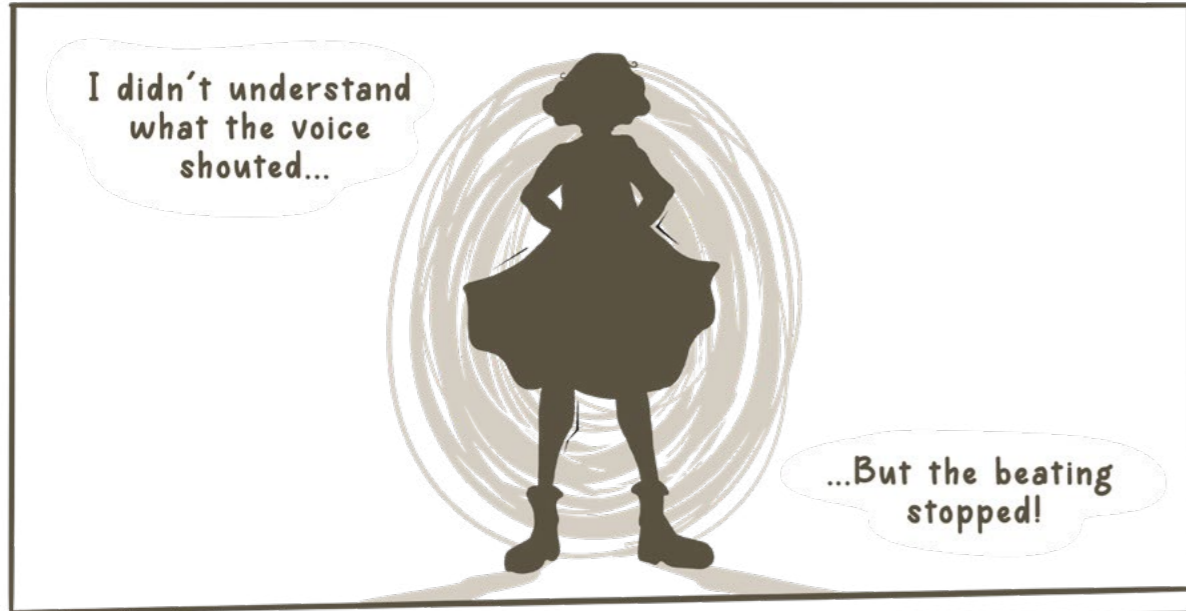
Why do we cling to living in Qursaya? Well, it's like a family system. You won't find that anywhere else. We all know each other, so the environment is quite friendly, especially for women and children. You can sleep with your house open.

The community is so strong that if a stranger crosses by boat, they must inform what is their purpose and who are they visiting."

Omar Mohamed, 22 years old









- There are no fish markets, which is really weird because they are fishermen. So they just sell their fish on the other side. But there are no markets here. Maybe just one supermarket, little stores or something.

- So if they need anything, if you're hungry at the middle of the night, you have to go to the other side?

- You have to cross the river. Yeah, for anything. Even if someone was tired and hungry, they'd have to cross.

- There are no hospitals, nothing, no schools either.

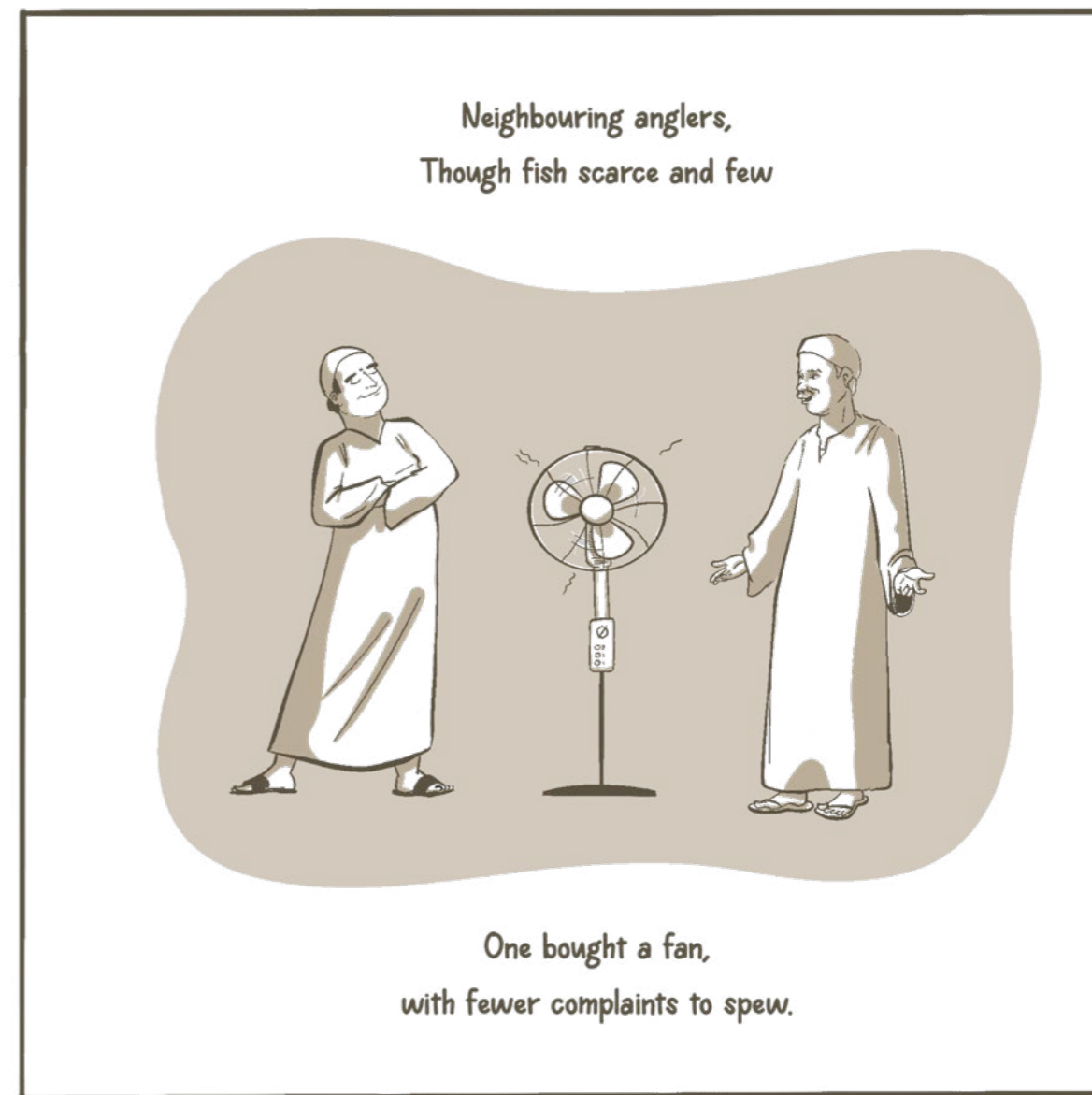
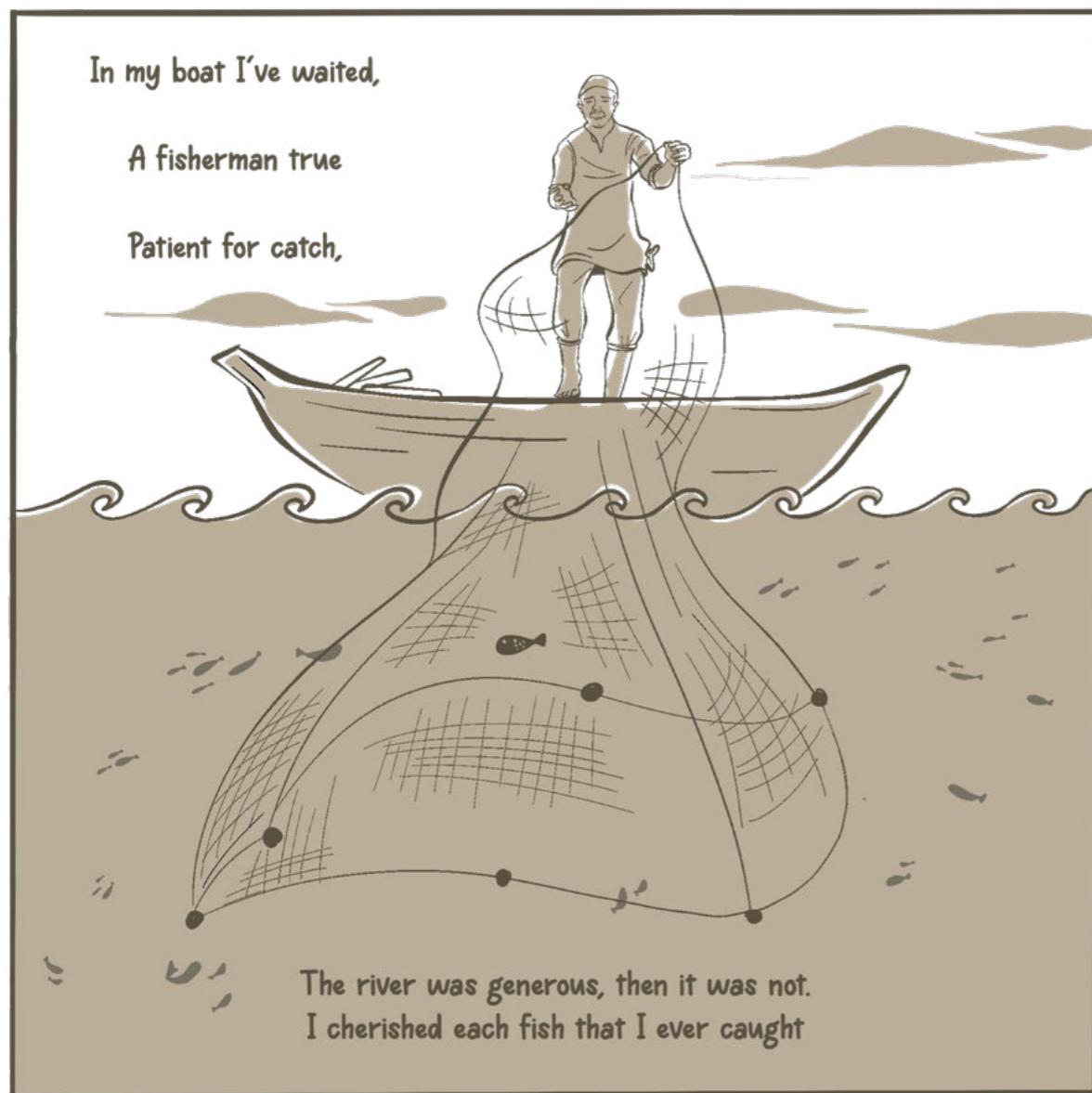
- Why would you rather stay where you have no good fresh markets, a health care place, an ER, somewhere to study nearby?

- Still, apparently, from what they say, whoever tries to live in the city comes back...

Extracts from conversations that emerged unexpectedly, based on understandings shaped by a Western worldview of development and ideal living conditions.

Part of our task in this project comprised revisiting our own (mis)understandings, that which we hold indispensable and primordial, and try to appreciate from inside. It was necessary to get to know that which is most valuable for a community where peaceful natural landscapes, silence, and freedom surpass the need of advancing, of growing up "to be someone", of consumption and prevention.

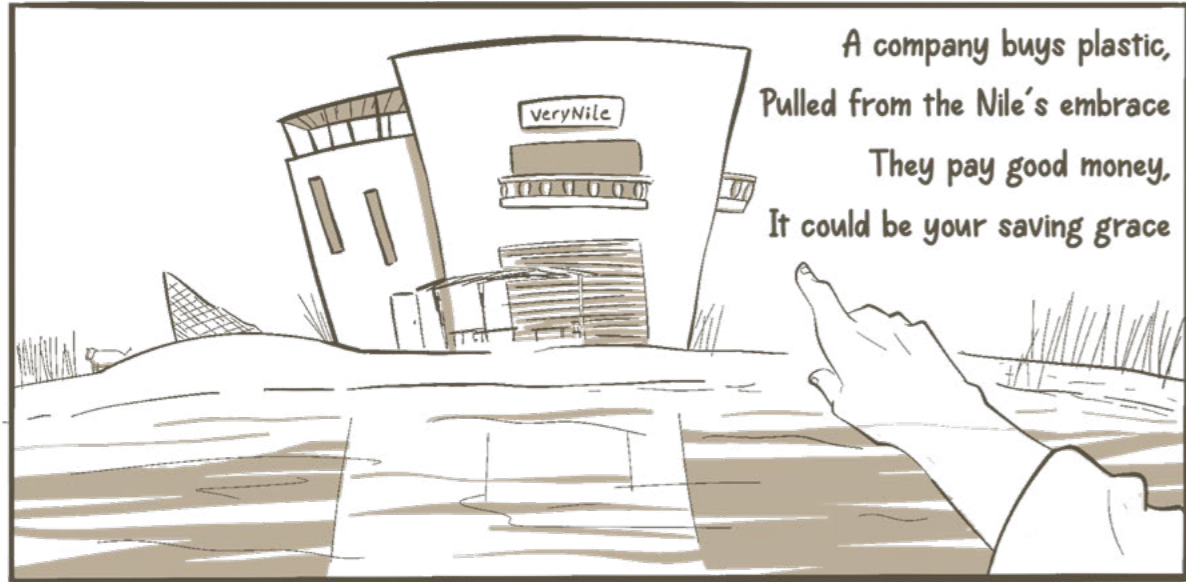
In Qursaya, present times seem, even though tautology arises, much more present than in capital cities of Cairo in Egypt, Amsterdam in the Netherlands or Bogotá in Colombia, where we prevent, plan and travel to future scenarios based on past eventualities and logics.







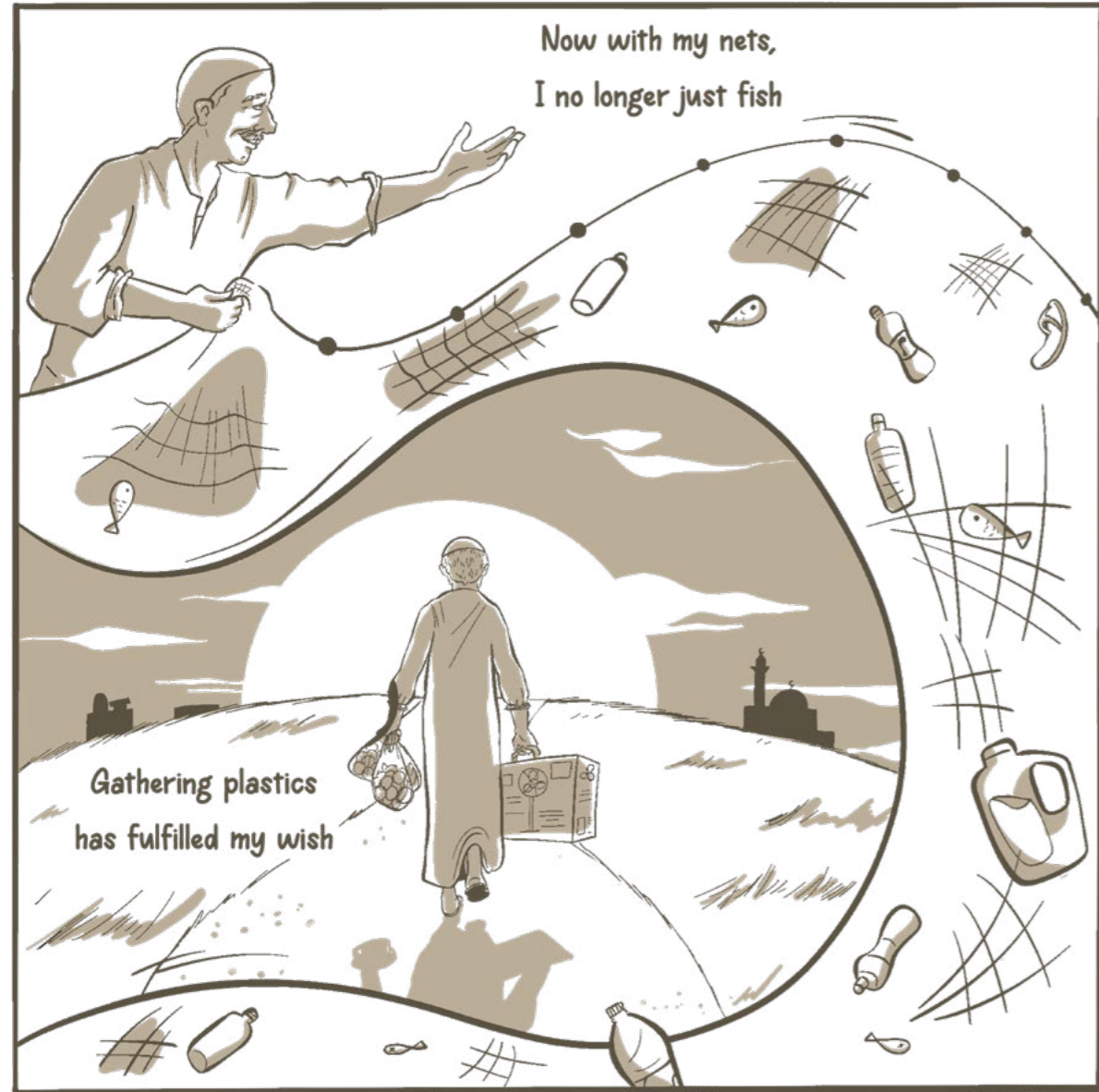
But as fish dwindled,  
 a friend shared a clue  
 Collect river plastics,  
 They pay for that, too.



A company buys plastic,  
 Pulled from the Nile's embrace  
 They pay good money,  
 It could be your saving grace



Skeptical first,  
 But as tough times pressed on  
 With no fish left,  
 To this new task I was drawn



“I work with fishermen in Upper Egypt, Qursaya and Muhre Island. We get more pounds out of fishing fish yeah, but it isn’t constant, it’s seasonal. Sometimes it’s even banned. That never happens when fishing for plastic. Less gains but there’s always plastic there to fish for. Summer is the high season for plastics, ‘cause tourists buy a lot of PET bottles that end up in the Nile”.

Hany, waste project manager at VeryNile



### 3.5 FISHERMEN'S WISDOM

Spoken Language is not a barrier, the messages from life flow through the river and its many parts, living and nonliving, but always conscious and components of the whole. Language is but one of many tools we have avidly developed throughout our short history to express who we are and how we feel. Our bodies convey our individual and collective stories, our struggles, our strengths and our hopes for a better future. If we are attentive enough, we will get the messages that others communicate by their very presence, messages about our position in the world and about the very meaning of life itself.

As a non-Arab speaking foreigner my time in Qursaya was spent in constant observation. Even though we were helped by our teammates with translations, it was the unspoken messages that had a deep impact on me.

Qursaya's fishermen gifted us with the wisdom of a craft that is almost as old as our species and reminded us of a different, many times forgotten, way of life. Few disciplines exist in contemporary society with the balanced characteristics of fishing. The men we met throughout our stay all portrayed the values of their profession and showed a strong connection to their communities and natural surroundings. Their labor is a delicate balance where the natural ecosystems need to be sustained in order to provide sustenance to the local population.

In a moment in history where society feels like a never-ending race to an unknown, but apparently desired destination we are reminded of the power of contemplation. Few professions embody this like fishing. The men dedicated to fishery have a keen eye for the

natural dynamics of the river and their surroundings. They become stewards of a territory in continuous flux. A territory where you cannot be still, a territory that is different with every passing second. And precisely because of this it's a territory pulsating with life. Pumping the blood of the earth along its surface. As our built world slowly detaches itself from the natural environment, we lose the subtle messages that life sends us constantly. The fishermen in Qursaya are observant of the movement of fish, they understand the changes of the territory and plan accordingly. Fish move with grace and silence; they flow with the currents and react at lightning speed to possible dangers. The fishermen cannot compete with their velocity, it is therefore necessary to listen acutely.

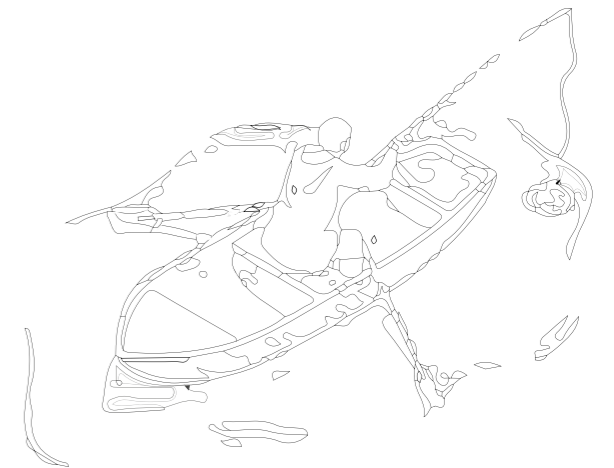
In Qursaya the fishermen go out at dawn and patiently wait for the opportunity to acquire their bounty. As the population of fish diminishes in the Nile, the effort becomes greater every year. Although they worry, they don't change their tactics. They can only develop a stronger sense of contemplation and patience. How many times have the rest of us rushed in order to escape our personal worries ourselves? How many times could we have benefited from the immense power of stillness and calm? How would our world look if we took more time to observe and respond instead of react?

When the opportunity finally arises, the fishermen can quickly identify the potential and act accordingly. Their hands are strong, their bodies have been strengthened by time. The beautiful combination of power and wisdom reminds me of the martial arts. Yet this noble craft focuses its energy differently, it is a way of bringing nourishment to all. Maybe that is why they can smile so

lightly and sincerely. It's not that they don't have their own personal struggles, life in Cairo is never easy and everybody is working hard to survive. However, if you are aware of your own deeper purpose you can enjoy more profoundly what you have.

As in the rest of the world, Qursaya's inhabitants are facing new challenges from the effects of the ecological crisis that is upon us. Fishermen in the island have seen a reduction in their income both because of the amount of fish in the Nile and a struggling economy. Although patient and calm they are not oblivious to change. New opportunities arise from their knowledge and sustained effort to preserve the river and its fish. Alongside VeryNile they are now working to clean and recycle plastic that is polluting the very source of their livelihood. This adaptation of their craft is as noble as fishing itself and again, everyone benefits.

At the end of our journey I couldn't help but wonder how we can all learn and embody the important lessons the fishermen imparted in us during our visit. How can we transgress disciplinary boundaries and incorporate them into our lives? To understand what strength is really for, how to be truly present in the moment and learn the art of contemplation, how to be calm even in the midst of never-ending problems and how to smile at the end of the day because you know how precious it is to appreciate what life generously gives you.



# 04. COMMUNITY WELFARE INDICATOR

A guide into the dimensions of community wellbeing.

- 4.1 Community Welfare Indicator
- 4.2 Basic Needs
- 4.3 Community Services
- 4.4 Social Equity and Housing
- 4.5 Governance
- 4.6 Conclusions on the Community Welfare Indicator

## 4.1 COMMUNITY WELFARE INDICATOR

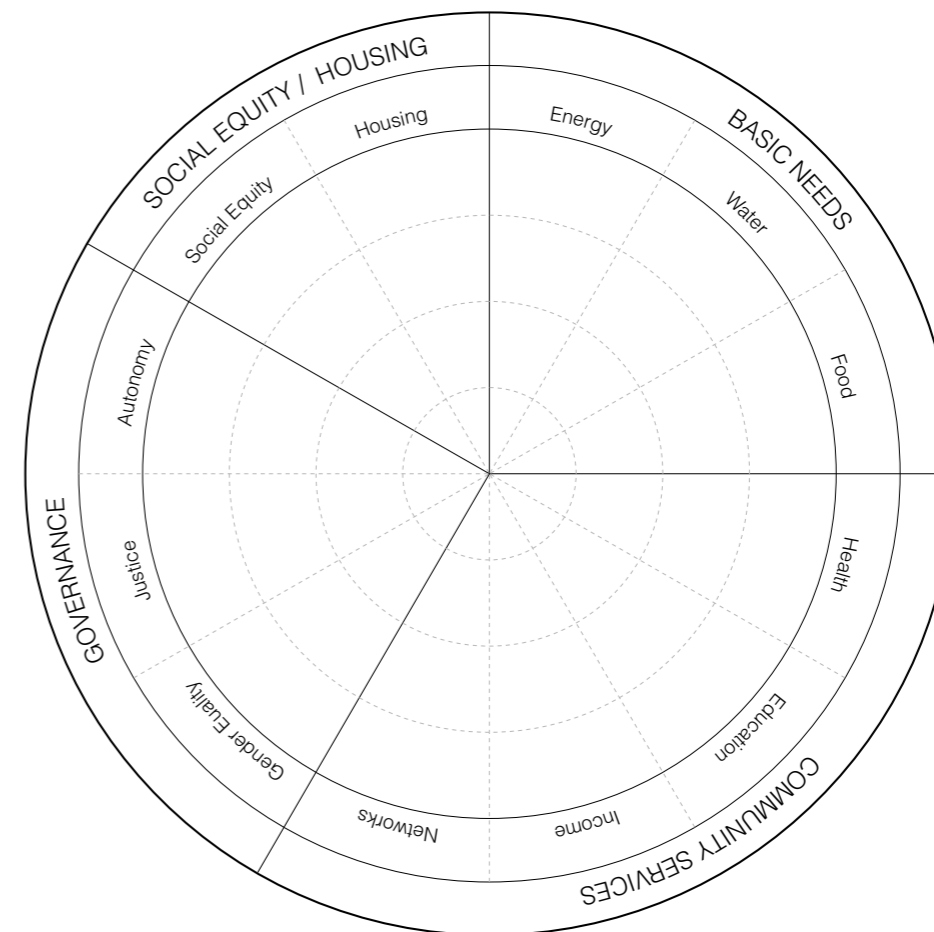
A community's social foundations and ability to thrive depend on the presence of basic human needs. These basic human needs are internationally agreed minimum social standards and established through the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Water, food and energy need to be met as a baseline to survive. Furthermore, community services such as healthcare, education, income and social networks provide essential services to learn, heal and flourish. Gender equality, peace and justice and a political voice provide the basis for a fair political environment. Furthermore, housing and social equity ensure everyone in a community has access to the same opportunities and outcomes. All these categories are strongly interlinked and impact one another, jointly shaping the social foundation of a community.

All the categories mentioned above are represented in the Community Welfare Indicator proposed. This model is derived from the framework of Doughnut Economics (Raworth, 2017), to analyze the social foundations of the island and to assess the overall wellbeing of the community. The framework aims to highlight specific areas for improvement and display which areas are up to standard. This framework is applicable to communities at various scale sizes and can be used as a self-assessment tool to evaluate all individual categories that constitute the welfare of the community in a structured process. The assessment seeks to empower communities and help them focus their strategies and actions to

attain better overall living conditions. As part of the analysis of Qursaya, this framework aims to understand the island in a holistic manner and contribute to possible future scenarios that benefit its entire ecosystem.

A quantitative survey was conducted to assess residents' perceptions of community welfare on the island. The conducted survey comprised 58 questions pertaining demographic data and quality perception of variables considered as indicative of appropriate living conditions. The constructed survey tool may be adapted to evaluate other communities around the world and will be available online as an open-source tool. In the quest for ongoing research and understandings of Qursaya and resilient communities, the findings—including responses, graphic analyses, reflections, unresolved inquiries, and open-ended questions from the current study—will be made accessible online.

Two hundred individuals (130 female, 70 male) rated various categories as part of the community self-assessment. This quantitative data was complemented by qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with residents and community leaders, as well as observations made by the research team during their island stay.





"I've been living here for 30 years, in the village area. Before we lived in Giza and my dad bought a house here. I worked as a fisherman for 15 years before starting with VeryNile.

In past years fish became scarcer, the bigger species are almost not seen anymore, fishing nets are more expensive, taxes increase. Add that to the fact that fishermen's incomes have been cut in half. I get to the factory at 7 a.m., if there's no work there for me that day I go to the Nile and try to fish or collect plastic waste to sell at the waste market.

I have never considered leaving Qursaya. I'm happy here, even though I dream of better sanitation and access to fresh water."

Mohamed Saleh Saleh

## 4.2 BASIC NEEDS

The availability of water, energy, and food is essential for meeting the basic needs of the world's population and fostering human prosperity. These three fundamental resources are closely interrelated with their deep interdependencies, often referred to as the 'water-energy-food nexus' at the heart of sustainable development. Agriculture is the largest consumer of the world's freshwater resources, and water is used to produce most forms of energy. Demand for all three is increasing rapidly. To withstand current and future pressures, governments must ensure integrated and sustainable management of water, food and energy to balance the needs of people, nature and the economy (UN, n.d.).

### Energy

The island residents of Qursaya use three sources of energy for their daily activities: Electricity, diesel and natural gas. Electricity serves as a vital energy source on Qursaya Island, primarily for residential purposes. The island has informally integrated electricity into its fragile infrastructure by establishing connections to the main grid located in Giza. This integration helps residents meet their household energy needs. Even though all respondents have access to electricity in their household, only 46 % of respondents indicate that the provided electricity fulfills their needs, as the island is frequently subject to power outages. Diesel is mainly used to power pumps that extract Nile water for land irrigation. Diesel is also used for grass cutting machines that

are designed to efficiently cut and trim weeds, making the land ready for planting. Other farming-related equipment, such as pesticide backpack sprayers, also require diesel for powering the devices. Furthermore, diesel is also used for motor-equipped boats used by some fishermen. Natural Gas comes as another source of energy for the community, used for cooking. Natural gas is provided through compressed cylinders that are transported from boats to donkeys to the different houses.

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

The island is experiencing poor environmental services related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Residents face significant challenges related to both the quantity and quality of drinking water. Survey results indicate that 35 % of respondents have access to drinking water for less than 4 hours daily, while 28 % lack daily access. Additionally, only 31 % of respondents expressed satisfaction with the water quality. Fishermen occasionally have to cross the Nile in order to fill their bottles with tap water.

Additionally, poorly maintained water pipes provided highly contaminated water and forced Qursayans to install pumps to extract groundwater. Water analysis of these pipes made by members of the current project evidenced poor water quality, indicating the pipe's dilapidated status. The maintenance of the water pipe is of utmost priority to provide clean potable water to the



Fishermen's area. It would be also of importance to introduce a maintenance mechanism for the other two pipes.

The island primarily relies on cesspits and trenches for sewage management. These are pits dug by residents themselves, resulting in wastewater being absorbed into the soil. This practice poses a significant health risk as the sewage can seep into groundwater, which is sometimes used for drinking. Apart from contamination of drinking water, such cesspits lead to sewage flooding in residential areas during every rise of the river in summer times. This poses a serious threat to the quality and safety of the drinking water supply for residents. Notoriously, 87 % of respondents indicated an unhealthy living environment due to the current sewage system.

Moreover, stagnant water in the trenches attract mosquitoes and other insects that can transmit diseases such as malaria, dengue fever and filariasis. Therefore, it is essential to introduce a sewage system that can collect, treat and dispose of wastewater in a sanitary and efficient manner. A sewage system would not only improve the environmental conditions and reduce the risk of waterborne and vector-borne diseases, but also enhance the living standards and dignity of people.

### Food

The island's inhabitants produce a portion of their nutritional intake, including seasonal vegetables and fruits. They produce a variety of crops as aforementioned, such as onions, tomatoes, lettuce, Jew's mallow (Molokheya),



and cultivate a number of fruit trees, including dates and mandarin. However, they are far from being self-sufficient. Located on the city's edge, Qursaya exemplifies a peri-urban food-producing community. Like many similar areas in Egypt, small-scale farmers in Qursaya face challenges such as poor infrastructure and services, limited market access due to inadequate transportation, high transaction costs, and low market prices. In addition to these challenges, another multiplicity of factors can impact food safety on Qursaya Island as mentioned by Hala Barakat (Professor at the Cairo Initiative for Liberal Arts and Sciences, Ph.D. in Palaeoecology, Université Aix-Marseille III, France) during her field survey with VeryNile. For example, the use of unsafe agricultural practices, such as the excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers that can contaminate food.





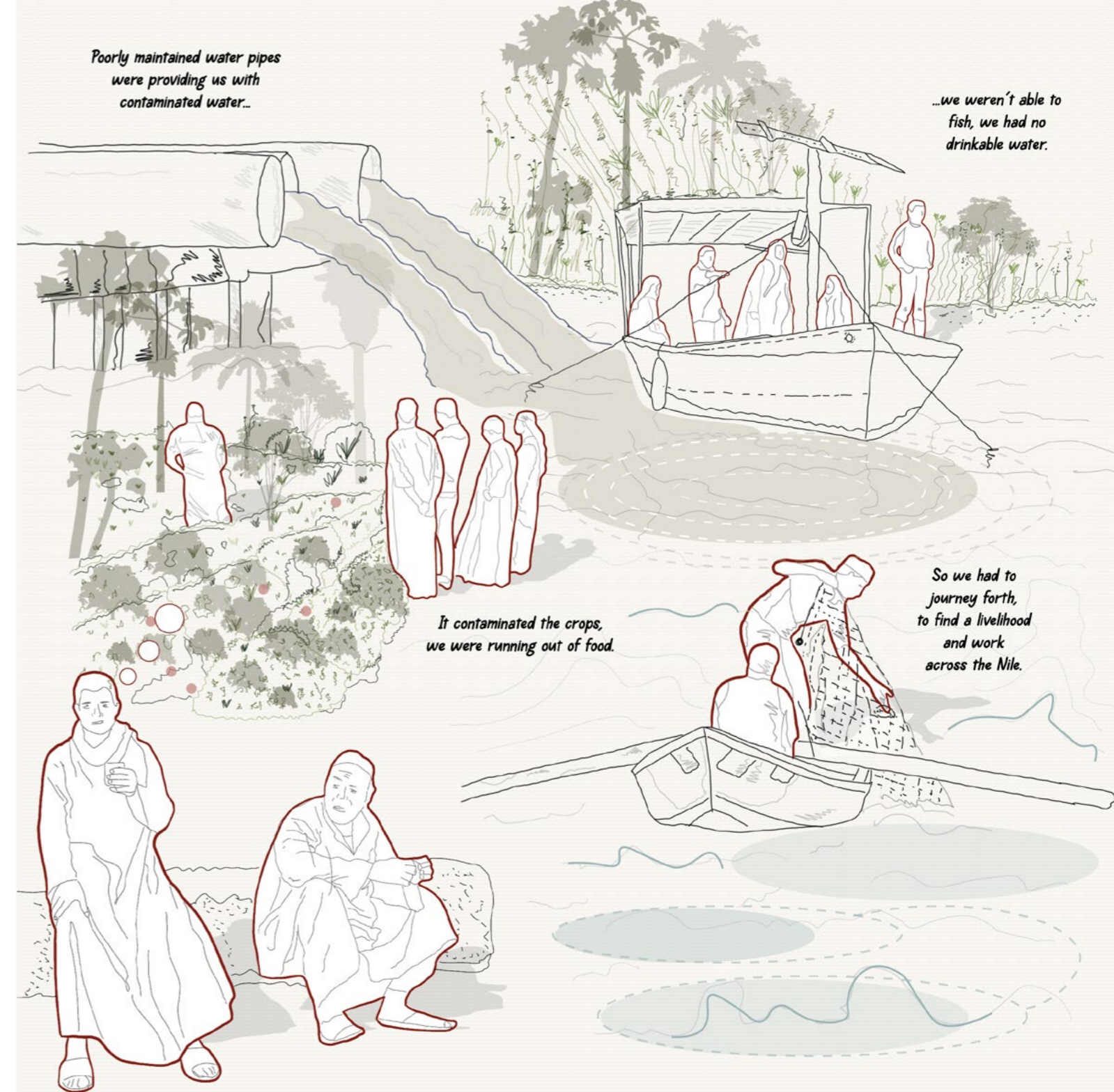
"I come from Assiut in Upper Egypt, but my family originally lived here in the 1930s. We left when my uncle died. I came back here with my cousin and have lived here for 36 years now.

Every morning I wake up at 4 a.m. and go fishing and collecting plastic waste. Fish started to decrease 10 to 12 years ago. Before that, the Fisheries Authority used to throw tons of small fish in the Nile. These grew in about 45 days and weighed between a quarter and half a kilo. But they just stopped doing that, so fishing was naturally affected. Nowadays, my daily catch can range from 2 to 5 kilos, before that, I caught over 50 kilos a day.

When VeryNile started it offered two good things: cleaning up the Nile and an alternative source of income. I want the island to stay as it is, but with sewage systems and better fresh water pressure.

I do have to cross. Here there are no hospitals nor schools, and also for buying what I need. The thing is that I have no ID, so I can't get the ration card. We are six people in my family and a loaf of bread is now 3 Egyptian pounds. We normally have lunch but have to skip dinner. I don't complain. I'm so grateful for what I have!"

Sayed Abbas, 43 years old



## 4.3 COMMUNITY SERVICES

There are great gaps in community services provided to the island. In Western literature we are very used to understanding the welfare of a community through the quality of its provided services, which refer to a range of programs that are supplied by the government including healthcare, education, social services, public safety, and environmental services. But what if there is a complete absence of such services? Does that mean that the community will not survive? Let's address the current state of different services.

Qursaya Island inhabitants face a significant environmental challenge due to the absence of infrastructure for any environmental service. This includes but is not limited to waste management systems, sewage systems, and access to clean water. This governance gap has increased the vulnerability of the island's marginalized community to environmental risks.

Hussein (2019) has shown that the surrounding urban environment in the Giza Governorate is already congested and public services are performing poorly, leading to environmental impacts such as sewage spills, electricity cuts, and waste accumulation. There also seems to be a lack of public service buildings such as hospitals, educational buildings, and others. Qursaya Island, as an island in the middle of this governorate, is completely secluded from such congestion, yet it is not even connected to these basic environmental services.

### Health

The lack of a proper sewage system and the main reliance on informally built trenches and cesspits have led to increased rates of parasitic and water-borne infections among the population. This is caused by inadequate sanitation, along with the lack of access to clean water. The accessible water source also shows signs of contamination due to poorly maintained water pipes and might also have potential chronic impacts, due to exposure to high concentrations of different metals.

Another health risk factor stems from the residents' habits of burning waste, as a result of an absent waste management system. This practice not only exacerbates existing respiratory conditions, but also contributes to widespread allergies among residents, which are further intensified by the excessive use of pesticides for their lands.

Moreover, healthcare facilities on the island are also almost nonexistent. The island is home to Dr. Mohammed, a surgeon who has provided health services on a regular basis for the islanders for over 20 years; He has been there for them during emergencies. VeryNile recently opened a Community Clinic on its premises to provide essential first aid, telemedical services, as well as a better referral system. Apart from that, Qursayans have to cross the Nile, and walk for 30 minutes to get to the nearest emergency unit, Om El Masryeen. One resident noted: " We would only cross if it's an emergency for our children,

yet for us adults, we just stay at home until we feel better. Occasionally, we seek relief in the form of painkillers from the pharmacy". Situated directly opposite the island, an accessible pharmacy functions as a primary healthcare center for residents. However, this scenario is predominantly present in some rural areas of Egypt, characterized by a notable absence of constraints on pharmaceutical acquisitions in local pharmacies.

### Education

Qursaya Island faces a significant educational crisis characterized by an absence of local schools. Students must commute daily to distant schools in order to access educational facilities, highlighting the island's geographical and educational disparities. The lack of local schools contributes to a fragmented and inadequate learning environment. The survey revealed a significant lack of education among respondents, with 42 % of illiteracy and 32 % having completed only primary education. Moreover, a disconnection between students' lives and the curriculum is apparent.

According to Qursayan residents, children on the island exhibit a disinterest in education, lacking aspirations for a better future, or not believing that the type of education they receive may truly provide them with the necessary tools to construct a better future for themselves. This may also be supported by the fact that illiteracy does not seem to correlate with unemployment,

since 78.5 % of the survey respondents referred to being employed permanently and 11.5 % were temporarily employed. The disengagement with education is likely linked to the vast gap between their reality and the curriculum. Only 13 % of survey respondents were satisfied with the quality of education provided by their children's school.

In response to the educational deficit, VeryNile has initiated a program to provide regular access to environmental education and cultural heritage, compensating for the deficiencies in the formal education system. By instilling awareness of the island's intrinsic value, this initiative strives to empower the children with a sense of pride and understanding of their own heritage. Furthermore, VeryNile offers free reading and writing lessons to illiterate members of their workforce. Every week, math and Arabic language lessons are offered at least once in VeryNile facilities to small groups of VeryNile workers eager to learn.

### Income and work

Seasonal variability significantly impacts the income sources on Qursaya Island. Fishing, a primary livelihood for many residents, is a seasonal occupation highly dependent on environmental conditions, leading to fluctuating periods of prosperity and scarcity. Similarly, agriculture, another key income source, is subject to seasonal changes, resulting in inconsistent yearly income and financial instability for those reliant solely on farming. Only 8 % of respondents

reported satisfaction with their current income and financial stability, while just 6 % were satisfied with job opportunities on the island.

Beyond these primary sectors, the island's economy also includes skilled and unskilled labor. Jobs in construction, artisanship, and tuk tuk and Uber drivers living on the island that cross daily to Giza to work, while potentially offering more consistent income, are often limited in availability and heavily influenced by the fluctuating demands of tourism and local economic conditions. Unskilled labor roles, such as simple maintenance, cleaning, or general assistance, are typically irregular and provide limited financial security due to their ad-hoc nature. This combination of seasonal and inconsistent work opportunities contributes to an overarching environment of economic uncertainty for the island's residents.

On the other hand, VeryNile plays a significant role in the island's economy by offering stable employment opportunities to around 80 people within the organization and 180 fishermen for collected plastic as additional revenue. This integrates seamlessly with Qursaya Island's existing economic framework, providing a layer of stability to the island's finances. VeryNile's co-creation model, implemented with local partners, channels corporate funds into essential services like healthcare and education. This helps mitigate the impact of residents' fluctuating earnings.

Meanwhile, the expenses of Qursaya residents are mainly in off-island markets, meaning that the income generated through labor, and even the funds injected by VeryNile for community

services, are not fully being circulated within the local economy. This limits the potential for local economic growth and development, as money earned on the island is not being directly reinvested into its economic ecosystem. The trend of spending off-island highlights issues of self-sustainability. With most necessities and raw materials sourced externally, the community remains especially vulnerable to external market fluctuations and supply chain disruptions. This vulnerability increments due to the already existing economic uncertainties imposed by seasonal variability of income sources.

### Networks

The island of Qursaya is unique in its social structure. There are clear divisions between different occupational groups and living standards. However, there is also a strong sense of unity that connects local inhabitants, who are protective of their island, against anyone from the 'outer world', as one of the inhabitants referred to the surrounding urban area of Giza. Every Qursayan is very proud to say that no one can enter the island, except when they state where they are going and why, so there is a sense of security that is agreed upon by the islanders and that is made evident: 90 % of the respondents reported to feel very safe in their current housing situation.

The local information network is strong and words travel fast between the locals. Everyone knows each other and nothing happens on the island without getting known. Yet, the connections with the "outer world" are not as strong, however, the wealthier and more influential group of people on

the island do have connections that would prove helpful for the island's wellbeing.

In contrast with the sense of security that Qursayans mention, it is important to note the appreciation given to their social support system as weak by 72 %. Their sense of unity apparently comes from differencing themselves from the "outer world", more than due to strong ties made with the rest of the island inhabitants. Therefore, it would be possible to state that the general social ambiance in the island manifests division and lack of social cohesion. Such a fact can be approached as an invitation to strengthen

bonds and quality-time spent with the rest of the "inner world" on the island. Even though green natural and open space is undoubtedly one of the greatest assets of Qursaya, meeting spots seem to be absent, other than the Mosque and working places. Due to the high temperatures and sun exposure, and there not being many public spaces that offer shade to rest by, Qursayans might prefer to remain indoors instead of engaging with neighbors outdoors. Survey results lead us to emphasize on the beneficial role public open spaces and leisure activities may have in making communities more resilient and self sustainable.

*"VeryNile recently opened a clinic on its premises to provide essential first aid, telemedical services, as well as a better referral system".*

Hatem Hamdy





“I come from a fishermen’s family. We moved to Qursaya to be nearer to the river, where boats could be safer. I started working with the textile factory in VeryNile from its very start, when no one came to sell us plastic. We had to collect it from the island ourselves, sanitize the plastic bags and then transform them into crochet threads. The bags that couldn’t be used for threads we turned into baskets.”

Um Kamal, 48 years old

“I’ve lived here in Qursaya since I was born. My parents have always been here as well, although my grandfather is from Mansoura and we sometimes visit on holidays. I’m getting married pretty soon. My fiancé lives in Al-Munid which isn’t far away, and wants to come live here in Qursaya as well. But that’s not an option. It’s too far away from his workplace in New Cairo. After I marry, I will have to go live there, but plan to keep on working here. I don’t want to leave.”

Esraa, 20 years old



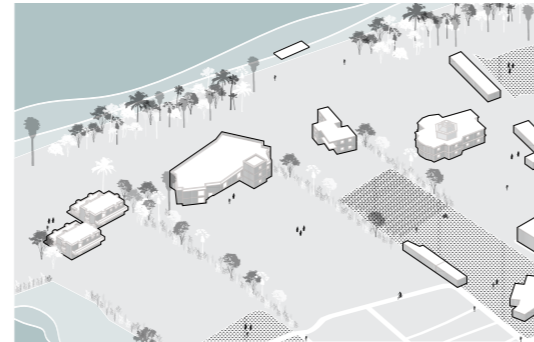


## 4.4 SOCIAL EQUITY & HOUSING

On Qursaya Island, the assessment of equity is a difficult task that is marked by the contrast in housing among its diverse residents. The island possesses a spectrum ranging from luxurious villas owned by political figures and expats to modest homes of farmers and fishermen. The disparity is evident not only in the architectural grandeur but also in the spatial organization of these residences.

Farmers on the island live in spacious homes, reflecting their agrarian lifestyle, while fishermen's housing is densely packed into clusters, revealing economic and social distinctions among island's population. The luxurious pillars of the island are embodied in the villas, characterized by expansive gardens and opulent elements. These residences often belong to political figures, artists, or Swiss residents, signifying a socio-economic elite. In contrast, simple fishermen's homes, clustered in a restricted area, highlight the financial challenges faced by those with limited means. Despite these disparities, 72 % of respondents reported being either moderately or very satisfied with the quality of their housing.

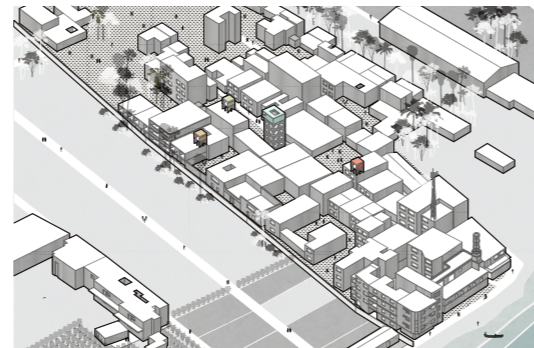
Qursaya Island thus becomes a microcosm, where the varied housing landscape reflects the broader socio-economic spectrum of its residents, encompassing both the privileged and the struggling, creating a tapestry of diversity and inequity.



Axonometric drawing: Big houses



Axonometric drawing: Agricultural sector



Axonometric drawing: Fishermen's village





## 4.5 GOVERNANCE

Qursaya Island stands as a miniature of the Egyptian state, a microcosm of Egypt, embodying a complex social phenomenon with diverse stakeholders, evidencing also the power relations and disparities within different groups that make up their community. Its residents, ranging from humble workers to influential figures, mirror the broader spectrum of Egyptian society and culture. The presence of a military base further adds layers to its social landscape. Despite its representative nature, Qursaya Island suffers from a lack of clear governance, mirroring the deficiencies observed in neighboring urban areas as well.

### Autonomy

A distinctive feature of Qursaya lies in its governance status. While officially under military governance, it operates outside municipal jurisdiction, depriving it from services provided to other communities. This unique administrative setup raises questions about the island's resilience when facing external pressures, especially from investors and development projects funded by large financial institutions.

The island's vulnerability to development initiatives depends on its perceived economic potential. It is reasonable to ask whether Qursaya might become a target for investment, potentially altering its social and cultural essence, as other local communities have experienced in Egypt. The absence of municipal services could make it more susceptible to outside influence, and the

lack of local governance may limit the community's ability to resist such changes. Ultimately, the fate of Qursaya in the face of development projects funded by big banks will depend on the balance between external economic interests and the island's ability to maintain its autonomy.

### Gender Equality

The issue of gender equality does not differ drastically from the surrounding suburban area in Giza. The journey towards gender equality intersects with various socio-cultural and economic factors. Despite overall low levels of education, both men and women have relatively equal access to education, reflecting a notable aspect of the island's educational landscape. About 72 % of respondents believe that men and women have equal opportunities in terms of education and employment. However, gender-based violence remains a significant challenge, indicating the need to address deep-rooted cultural norms. Noticeably, 36 % of respondents reported observing instances of gender-based discrimination in their area.

The project of VeryNile, employing around 50 women and addressing the gender pay gap, has been instrumental in empowering women economically and enhancing their role within the community. Consequently, there has been a noticeable increase in women's participation in the labor force. Moreover, women are increasingly taking on leadership roles, driving



community initiatives such as improving water access infrastructure. A great example of female leadership is Um Nada. She made her entrepreneurship come true by socializing her idea of cooking for the social enterprise events and workers. She organized and presented her project to VeryNile and offered samples of what she could offer. Um Nada is currently head of the VeryNile Kitchen and meal service. Another leading female case to mention is that of Salma El-lakany, urban planner, VeryNile's VeryNile.Shop Founder and Head of Community Development at VeryNile. Although she lives outside the island, it is she who mobilizes the VeryNile enterprise.

### Peace and justice

The island's isolation from conventional governance structures strengthens a sense of self-reliance and also encourages community cohesion. Qursaya might develop mechanisms to protect itself against external forces, valuing its autonomy and preserving its unique identity. They know that whatever conflicts or agreements take place, these shall stay within. The Nile River acts as a natural barrier for entering the island in the absence of bridges. The local ferry operators control the boat traffic towards the island and decide who can set foot on the island, which provides a sense of peace and safety.

“My family is big and influential in Qursaya. We have been here for 150 years, I'm the 4th grandson. The great thing is that we have no bad blood here, we are very close and unite when bad times come, like in 2013 when things were so harsh and we didn't know what would happen next.

We work with the land. Primarily farming fodder for the cattle and growing tomatoes and cucumber. But in the last 3 years it has been impossible to grow tomatoes nor cucumbers, only fodder; And still we need to buy fodder from outside to sustain our 5 heads of cattle.

Females are for milk and reproduction, male ones we feed and then sell as meat in slaughter seasons.

I use chemical fertilizers mostly, the organic ones that come from waste are better, yes. But, if we don't get good produce from it at the end of the season, what will people say? How will my family look if we don't do well?

In VeryNile I work on community development and pass by the waste bins on the island. I also have a Yamaha boat fixing workshop.

I hope everything stays as it is. A hospital, a school, a good sewage system and everything could be perfect. The well-being of Qursaya is what we hope for. What would be of the people if my family left the island? I don't even want to imagine leaving.”

Emad Samy



## 4.6 CONCLUSIONS ON THE COMMUNITY WELFARE INDICATOR

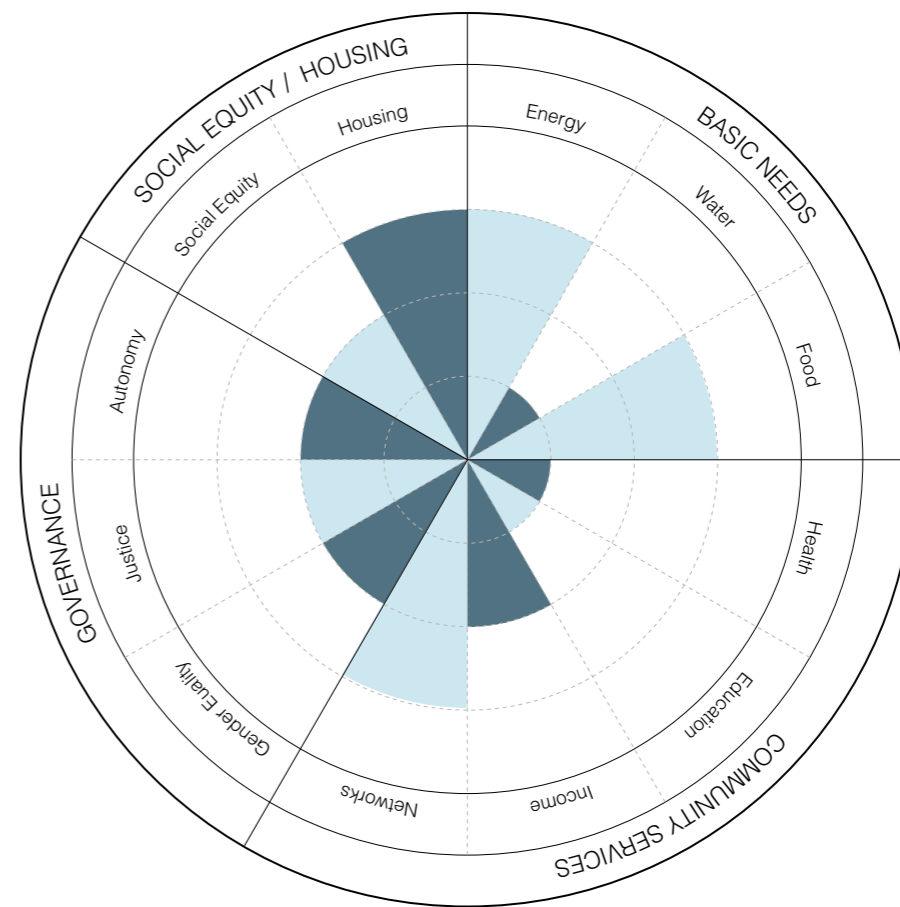
The Community Welfare Indicator considers the quality of provided services, like healthcare, education, social services, public safety, and environmental services, to assess a community's well-being. Based on the results of the survey and the interviews, the quality of the services have been scored in the figure. The categories are rated from 'poor' (one bar) to 'up to standard' (four bars). These help identify the categories scoring lowest, which should be prioritized for improving overall community welfare.

Qursaya Island faces critical shortages in access to water, education, and healthcare. These fundamental necessities contribute to the community's well-being and development, as such, they require immediate attention. Scarce resources, a history of marginalization and gaps in governance contribute to a lack of basic necessities and essential services, creating a significant environmental challenge for the island's inhabitants. The challenging political environment further complicates this situation, increasing the vulnerability to environmental risks of the already marginalized community. In contrast, access to food, energy, housing and the presence of social networks are relatively well-established in comparison to the other categories.

VeryNile plays a significant role in creating economic flows within the island. Its involvement, particularly in injecting corporate funds into essential community services like healthcare and

education, offers a stabilizing counterbalance to the residents' fluctuating earnings. However, a key concern is the potential for dependency on external support for these essential services, which raises questions about the long-term sustainability and future ownership of such services. The most significant risk lies in the possibility of VeryNile refocusing its efforts or reducing its involvement on the island for whatever unforeseen reason. This could leave the community facing a critical shortfall in these areas, especially considering the existing economic uncertainties due to the island's reliance on seasonal income. The present scenario highlights the need for a holistic and integrated approach to economic development on Qursaya Island. This approach should not only value the contributions of organizations like VeryNile, but also prioritize building local capacities, diversifying economic activities, and ultimately fostering a self-sufficient and resilient community.

The Community Welfare Indicator developed for this project proves to be a useful tool to determine areas that require improvement, but still overlooks some fundamental aspects that constitute quality of life. It does not yet include questions with which to measure the joy of living in a pristine natural environment surrounded by wildlife, removed from the fast-paced urban life. Recent research and initiatives focus on addressing such variables, for example "Green Cities: Good Health", an academic partnership between the University of Washington



and the US Forest Service, Urban and Community Forestry Program that emphasizes the health benefits of green urban design, or the Oxford Textbook of Nature and Public Health (van den Bosch & Bird, 2018) which offers a detailed look on the wide scope of influence nature surroundings have on overall wellbeing of communities.

The Community Welfare Indicator neither accounts the leisurely conversations among its residents and the warm welcomes that visitors receive once they set foot on the island which greatly contribute to daily quality of life. Consequently, to fully comprehend the community's strength, the story of Qursaya island requires additional subjective perspectives through lenses of storytelling and community engagement. Such approaches may distance themselves from data, equations and graphs but concentrate on human, emotional and creative viewpoints, decisive for resilience. Despite lacking many basic services, Qursayan residents seem genuinely content with island life and express no desire to leave, praising a strong sense of safety and unity. Their self-reliance and ingenuity are evident in their efforts to improve living conditions. While substantial progress is needed in community welfare, these incremental advancements offer hope for a brighter future.



# 05. RESILIENT CAPACITIES

A glimpse into the resilient qualities of  
the community and its territory.

- 5.1 Community Welfare  
Framework
- 5.2 The Future of Qursaya
- 5.3 Insights for Resilient  
Communities

## 5.1 COMMUNITY WELFARE FRAMEWORK

No single tool can fully grasp the complexity of a community or determine its resilience fully. The complexity of the matter resides in the infinite web of relations between all its inhabitants; living and non-living entities. It is possible however, to build frameworks for new narratives weaving different forms of knowledge together. The use of ancestral storytelling, specific scientific surveys, spatial and urban analysis, photography and the proper act of deep listening all come into play to build a better map of a community, its territory, resilience and health.

During the project design and implementation, the team focused on creating a framework for developing a Community Resilience Report that accurately represented the community. This framework is intended to be replicable for other projects and to serve as a foundation for strategic roadmaps, aimed at ensuring a stable and healthy future for these areas. It provides institutions and individuals with easy access to a tool that supports community welfare projects in an open-source format. Designed to be modular, holistic, and human-centered, the framework captures the true essence of any community. It draws inspiration from existing models such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and Participatory Action Research (PAR), combined with the team's experience working with the Qursaya community.

### Community Research and Connection

The framework commences with **Community Research**, which involves identifying and comprehending the community, specifically Qursaya, and collaborating with local entities, such as VeryNile.

### Community Engagement

Throughout the framework, community engagement remains a central focus, ensuring that the community's voice and needs are at the forefront of all activities and interventions.

### Immersion and Community Workshop

The team visited Qursaya and engaged with the community through a local partner, in this case VeryNile. The team gathered visual data for mapping and direct insights from the community members that aided in generating a social cartography map.

This section comprises three primary activities:

**1. Narrative-based Evaluation:** Engaging in storytelling activities with community members to gather qualitative insights.

**2. Context Monitoring and Evaluation:** Conducting field visits and stakeholder interviews to assess the community's context and requirements, and employing visual mapping techniques.

**3. Data Collection and Verification:** Conducting community welfare indicator surveys to gather and verify the relevance of the project conclusions.

### Data Processing and Analysis

The gathered information should be analyzed using a variety of tools, including social-spatial models, stakeholder maps, social cartographies, artistic impressions, and narrative exercises. Data from focus group discussions provide a valuable opportunity to engage with the community, identify health concerns, and highlight local environmental health risks for future action. This approach also helps to recognize the environmental factors and underlying economic and social challenges contributing to these risks.

The collected data undergoes processing and analysis through various methods:

**1. Artistic Impressions:** Utilizing creative methods to represent and preserve cultural aspects and tell the community's stories in writing, or visual arts (comics, photography, videography, etc).

**2. Stakeholder Map and Needs Analysis:** Identifying key stakeholders and analyzing their needs and contributions hand in hand with the community members by interviewing, and collaborating with local stakeholders to generate a relevant needs assessment.

**3. Social Cartography:** Mapping social connections and interpersonal dynamics within the community.

**4. Community Welfare Indicator:** Collecting and compiling technical data on the community's welfare indicators. The indicator does not work only as a data collection tool but also as a verification tool to make sure that the work of the project aligns with the community's needs and perceived priorities.

### Community Resilience Report

The processed data is used to create the Community Resilience Report, which narrates the community's resilience stories through storytelling, data visualization, social cartography, and other comprehensive methods. This report functions as a detailed map of the community, depicting their daily lives, dietary habits, social interactions, and pathways, as well as the current status of their needs. It extends beyond traditional community development tools by addressing how to measure resilience in ways that capture not just numerical data, but also the community's emotional experiences and overall sense of gratitude with their current situation.

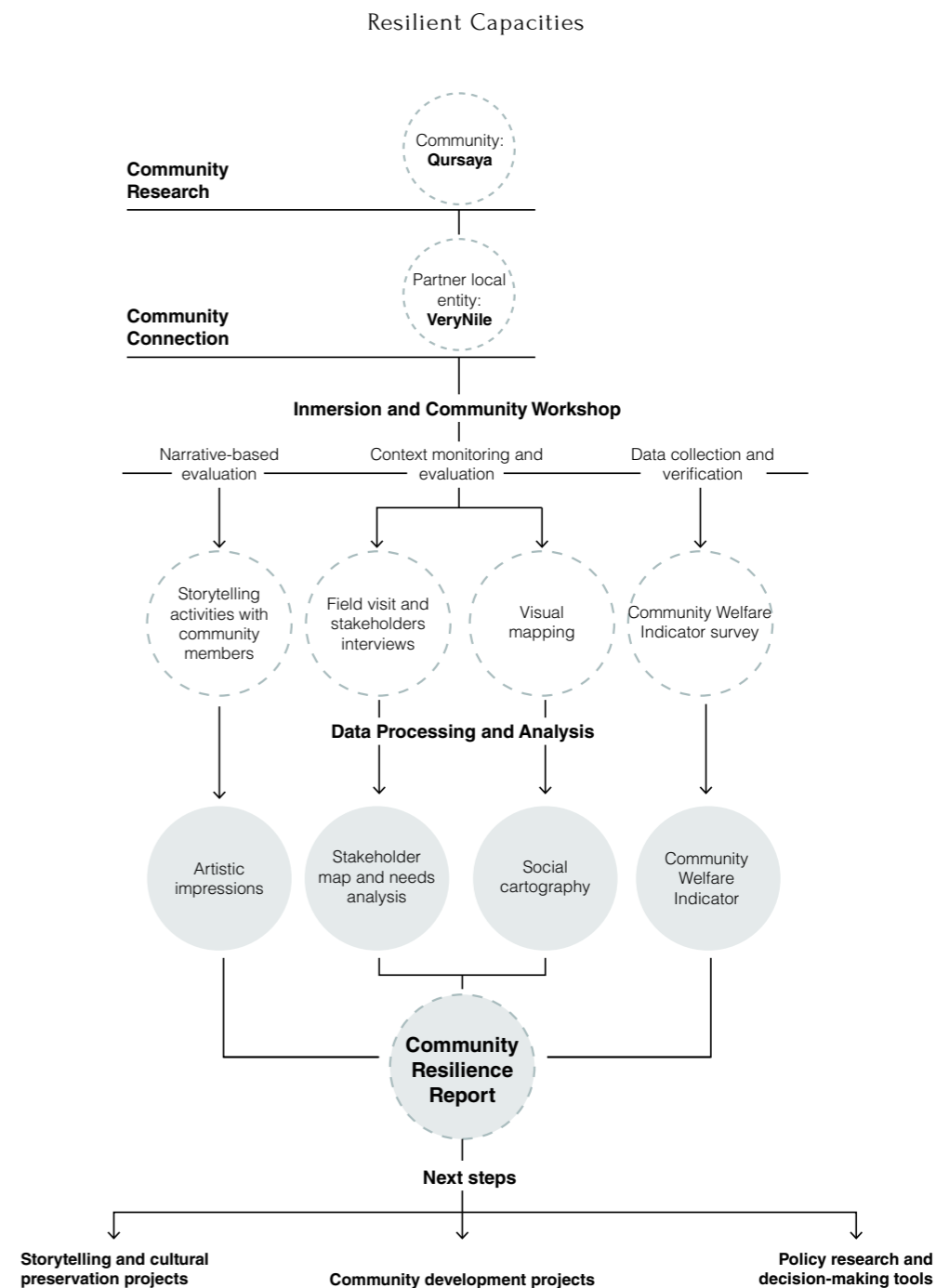
### Suggested Framework Outputs

With the current format of the Community Welfare framework, there are three main project output formats that can be generated, depending on the user's focus. The three suggested outcomes are:

**1. Community Development Projects:** The processed data results in a Community Resilience Report, which highlights the community's strengths, challenges, and areas for development. This report serves as a conversation starter with the community, facilitating the co-development of projects that meet the community's needs and align with their current priorities.

**2. Storytelling and Cultural Preservation Projects:** The narrative-based analysis input is synthesized to create artistic impressions and narratives. These outputs can be further utilized as references for projects that focus on preserving and promoting a community's cultural heritage. It may also help empower communities when such artistic expressions are created by community members or with them. And may also generate a sense of identity with community members and their personal stories.

**3. Policy Research and Decision-Making Tool:** The framework integrates the gathered data and insights to develop tools and resources for policy research and decision-making, supporting community welfare and development.



## 5.2 THE FUTURE OF QURSAYA

Predicting Qursaya's future is challenging due to uncertainties about its land ownership and the ongoing trend of urban expansion. Cairo's population is expected to grow to 25.5 million inhabitants by 2030, requiring even more land to house its residents. Qursaya, located in the heart of the metropolis, is a prime target for major urban development, despite its agricultural character and the displacement it would cause.

Given its ecological significance as a rare natural hotspot and its integral role in the Nile River ecosystem, protecting Qursaya should be a priority over capitalist expansion. Qursaya has the potential to become a model for sustainable development, demonstrating how humans and nature can coexist harmoniously. The island could be repositioned as an agritourism destination, similar to places such as Saqqara and Dahshur.

The island could either preserve its unique ecosystems and flourish, or succumb to overwhelming external pressures and disappear into Cairo's urban expansion within a matter of years. To safeguard Qursaya's future, residents must unite and seek legal counsel and international support to formally protect their ancestral land. This book aims to support their legal journey by documenting and underscoring the importance of preserving this unique island community.



## 5.3 INSIGHTS FOR RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Qursaya's distinctive history and characteristics have revealed key factors contributing to the community's resilience and, in some cases, prosperity. While facing challenges, Qursayan residents have cultivated a strong and resilient community with valuable lessons for the world. This section presents key findings from our study of the island, its inhabitants, and the forces that have shaped them.

### The value of diversity

The island has a wide variety of inhabitants, both human and non-human. The coexistence with farm animals and a wide variety of birds enrich the lives of its human inhabitants and are an integral part of the community. The human population is also very diverse. The existence of both fishing and farming communities provides the island with diverse income streams and a labor force, enhancing its resilience. The influential residents also contribute to the community and give it a stronger footing with regard to outward influences. Lastly, the presence of different businesses helps the local economy and brings diverse people to the island on a day to day basis.

### Living amongst nature

The balance between the built and natural environment is unique in Cairo and one of the main values of this territory. The health of the natural environment has a direct impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of its inhabitants and

visitors alike. Communities can greatly improve their resilience with a better spatial relation to nature (de Vries et al., 2003; WHO, 2016; Van den Bosch & Bird, 2018).

### The presence of a social enterprise

VeryNile's presence on the island has improved living conditions greatly. A social enterprise not only provides work for the local population but generates complementary social programs and activities that make the community more cohesive and helps everyone thrive. VeryNile increases the welfare of the population in aspects where the city government is providing insufficient support and can act at a small scale, beneficial to the island.

### Sustainable forms of transportation

The lack of motor vehicles in the island gives a sense of safety without slowing down the activities in the territory. The lack of noise and the reduced speed of movement makes it pleasant and relaxed. The resulting transition from the buzzle of the city to the island fosters a sense of a unified community.

### Provision of basic services

Despite lacking some essential basic services, the island's development of informal alternative systems contributes to its long-term sustainability. The stress on services of a city like Cairo is immense and alternative systems can help the

city as a whole. While there is significant room for improvement, the island offers a valuable lesson in self-reliance that all communities can learn from.

### Complementary forms of governance

City authorities face a broad range of responsibilities, making it difficult to address the specific needs of individual communities. Complementary forms of governance that directly tackle these issues can significantly enhance community resilience. The empowerment of local leaders and the setup of periodical spaces for dialogue and conflict resolution can build consensus on key topics and generate solutions quickly.

### Circularity and waste management

Waste management has become a complex challenge in virtually all human settlements. It is a symptom of a flawed societal design. Unlike human systems, natural ecosystems produce no waste, as all materials and byproducts are recycled and integrated into ongoing natural cycles. VeryNile is harnessing the knowledge of fishermen and the entire community to clean up the river and its banks. Through these efforts, the project reduces waste generation and repurposes wasteful by-products of our society. By building circular social enterprises and systems, communities can benefit both locally and within the wider city.





Qursaya as a whole and the resulting community that resides in the territory is an inspiration for communities all over the world. The delicate balance between its challenges and solutions set a unique example of a resilient structure and system that has evolved through time. It begs to question what makes them so resilient in circumstances that are far from easy.

Our short visit and continuous research have only scratched the surface of a complex set of dynamics that are woven together to generate a living organism that continues to thrive and adapt. Resilience appears as a response to a set of hopes and fears that motivate its survival.

The community shares a common, unspoken utopia, far from the utopias from western and capitalistic society, of the enjoyment of a healthy territory and a simple yet nourishing form of life. They wish to maintain a level of self reliance that has become stronger as the challenges they face are met directly and a joint response is implemented. This elemental yet wise vision for a possible future inspires all inhabitants to work together. The apparent economic scarcity makes them sensitive to their environment, since their livelihoods actually depend on the entire system's health.

Every person wants to feel safe and secure, to eliminate risk and find stability and comfort. Yet life is never stable and, as the world changes at an ever increasing pace, we need to be prepared to evolve constantly and learn to enjoy the process as it unfolds. There are countless scholars, scientists and researchers advocating for new

success metrics, new narratives and utopias that can help us change course as a species and help ourselves by helping the planet. In Qursaya people are doing exactly that.



“I’m from Assiut, but have lived here in Qursaya for 27 years now. When I was doing my military service I lived on the island with my relatives and got married here. When I finished military service, Assiut and upper Egypt were in bad shape so, why leave? My wife is from Qursaya, she couldn’t get used to Assiut either. Life is comfortable here you know? As a fisherman there’s no better place to live than near the Nile. I can work at any time of day. If I don’t catch fish in the morning, I can fish at night.

Qursaya has loads of advantages, like there are no conflicts with the rest of the community. We live peacefully amongst ourselves. You know everyone and no one tries to cross boundaries here like in the outside world.

It’s not perfect either, you know. Sewage is a big issue here and that doesn’t help with mosquitos. We need to cross quite often also, even to get bread. In Qursaya small shops only sell some basic needs.”

Rashad Hammad Salem



## REFERENCES

- Aly, D. & Dimitrijevic, B. (2022). Public green space quantity and distribution in Cairo, Egypt. *Journal of Engineering and Applied Science*, 69(15) . <https://doi.org/10.1186/s44147-021-00067-z>
- Barakat, H. (2023). Qursaya food sub-project' Report. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vrAv64AL0wf9roByDbxxprfL3ofPQ4JS/edit>
- Castrignanò, M. & Manella, G. (2011.) The Concept of Community Today: A Cultural and Spatial Perspective. *Sociologia urbana e rurale*, 94, 135-159. <https://doi.org/10.3280/SUR2011-094010>
- de Vries, S., Verheij, R., Groenewegen, P. & Spreeuwenberg, P. (2003). Natural Environments—Healthy Environments? An Exploratory Analysis of the Relationship between Greenspace and Health. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 35(10), 1717-1731. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a35111>
- Gurteen, D. (2022). What is a Community. *Conversational Leadership* [blook]. <https://conversational-leadership.net/quotation/what-is-a-community/>
- Hussien, W. H. (2019). An approach to determine the environmental impact of unplanned housing growth problems in Egypt case study (al-talbiyeh district-giza governorate). *Journal of Engineering Sciences*, 47(6).
- Kirmayer, L.J., Sehdev, M., Whitley, R., Dandeneau, S.F., & Isaac, C. (2009). Community Resilience: Models, Metaphors and Measures. *International Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(1), 62-117. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijih/article/view/28978/23910>
- Longstaff, N., Armstrong, P., Perrin, K., Parker, W.M., & and Hidek, M.A. (2010, September). Building Resilient Communities: A Preliminary Framework for Assessment. *Homeland Security Affairs*, 6(6). <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/81U>
- Maller, C., Townsend, M., Pryor, A., Brown, P. & St Leger, L. (2006). Healthy nature healthy people: 'contact with nature' as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations. *Health Promotion International*, 21(1), 45–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dai032>
- Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities (MHUC); United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) & United Nations development Programme (UNDP) (2012). *Greater Cairo Urban Development Strategy*. [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/greater\\_cairo\\_urban\\_development\\_strategy.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-05/greater_cairo_urban_development_strategy.pdf)
- Mourad, N (2011). *Al Qursaya movie* [movie]. Youtube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_sfHy-DzNo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_sfHy-DzNo)
- Napoleon. M. (n.d). **Including Al-Qursaya and Manial Shiha. Learn about the 37 islands whose control was transferred to the armed forces.** <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=25012022&id=1af89515-5ab3-47d8-9485-7b8f15f6f2d6>
- Network Monitoring (2023). **Residents of Al-Qursaya and Dahab islands fear the fate of Al-Warraq Island** [movie]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmN2g2s8y24>
- Raworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* . Random House.
- Sayigh, Y. (2019). A Military Unbound: Transformation in the Sisi Era. *Owners of the Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt's Military Economy*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Shanahan, DF, Astell–Burt, T., Barber EA, Brymer E, Cox DTC, Dean J, Depledge M, Fuller RA, Hartig T, Irvine KN, et al. (2019). Nature–Based Interventions for Improving Health and Wellbeing: The Purpose, the People and the Outcomes. *Sports*, 7(6), 141. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sports7060141>
- Sonn, C. C. & Fisher, A. T. (1998). Sense of community: Community resilient responses to oppression and change. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(5), 457-472. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1998-10784-005>
- UNDRR (2015a). *Sendai Framework 2015–2030*. Sendai, Japan. [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf).
- UNDRR (2015b). *Proceedings: Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction*, 14–18 March 2015, Sendai, Japan. [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/45069\\_proceedingsthirdunitednationsworldc.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/45069_proceedingsthirdunitednationsworldc.pdf).
- UNESCO (2013). *The Hangzhou Declaration Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies*. Hangzhou, China. <https://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/images/FinalHangzhouDeclaration20130517.pdf>.
- UNESCO (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.
- UN-Habitat (n.d.). *Egypt*. Retrieved from: <https://unhabitat.org/egypt>
- United Nations (UN) (n.d.). *Water, food and energy. UN Water*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-food-and-energy>
- University of Washington & USDA Forest Service (n.d.). *Green Cities: Good Health*. <https://depts.washington.edu/hhwb/>
- Van den Bosch, M., & Bird, W.(eds.) (2018). *Oxford Textbook of Nature and Public Health. The Role of Nature in Improving the Health of a Population*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780198725916.001.0001>
- WHO Regional Office for Europe. (2016). *Urban Green Spaces and Health. A review of evidence*. <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2016-3352-43111-60341>

كل الشكر و الامتنان لاهل قرصاية اللي فتحولنا بيوتهم وشاركونا حياتهم

**Team:**

Olivier De Gruijter	TALLER Architects
Marwan Rasmy	Julian Restrepo
Hatem S. Hamdy	Sven Hoogerheide
Melisa Restrepo	Daniela Duarte
Salma Zakaria	Andrea Calvo
Salma El-lakany	Juliana Fonseca
Rana Mohey Eldin	Carlos E. Santamaria

This book has been created in collaboration with **creative industries fund NL**

All photographs were taken by our team members during visits to the island.

ISBN: 978-628-96482-0-1

Printed in Bogotá, Colombia. August 2024.

For more information about the tools and methodology used, visit: [www.tallerarchitects.com](http://www.tallerarchitects.com)





An aerial photograph of a long, narrow island, densely packed with buildings and a winding river. The island is oriented vertically, with its tip pointing downwards. At the very tip of the island, a small wooden boat with two oars is positioned. The background is a light gray grid.

# Qursaya Island

Resilient communities along the Nile

ISBN: 978-628-96482-0-1



9 786289 164820 1