

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture (Rehabilitation and Revaluation)
Honors theses

Siem Reap - Urban and architectural shapes of trade

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This thesis was realised in collaboration between the Politecnico of Turin and l'*Ecole d'Architecture de Paris Belleville*, and in particular with the IPRAUS (*Institut Parisien de Recherche Architecturale, Urbaine et Sociale*), a department which is specialised in South-east Asia.

Siem Reap, in Cambodia, is the nearest town to Angkor, the ancient Khmer capital, whose archaeological site has been included in UNESCO patrimony since 1992. Consequently, the tourism growth has induced a fast development of Siem Reap as a town for international reception.



Urban tissu with trade function along the National Route n.6, a structuring axe of Siem Reap

The XIX century sources (The sources related to Siem Reap are scarce. Some plans was drawn by explorers and French researchers between the XIXth and the XXth century. In particular, our analysis is based on the plans dated 1863, 1939, 1960 and 1993) describe villages on Siem Reap's site, built in vegetal materials and organised along the river (The river as the same name of the town. It flows from the Phnom Kulen mountains (north) to the Tonle Sap lake (south)). During French protectorate (beginning of XXth century-1953) it becomes a provincial town thanks to colonisation's interventions which, among others things, introduce brick, create infrastructures, realize a commercial and administrative centre...The Red Khmer occupation (1974-1979) empties the town of his inhabitants that are displaced in the countryside. Afterwards the town restarts developing, with a bigger intensity since the nineties, thanks to the country opening and the Angkor success. However, according to us, tourism is often unable to valorise Siem Reap's resources; on the contrary it's compromising them.



Buildings in the Old Market neighbourhood, a colonialist foundation

Starting from a one month stage *in situ* (February-march 2005) a question arose: which is the role of trade in the town development?

Thanks to a diachronically approach we considered different scales of the space (the town itself, the urban tissues, the buildings) dealing with the parallel development of the town and the trade. We passed through different themes of analysis: the promoting role of the population in urbanisation processes; the coexistence of the “weak” shapes of villages with the “permanent” town built with bricks; the constancy of some structuring elements (such as trade roads and markets) and of schemes of commercial town organisation; permanency and transformations of architectural typologies linked to trade; the capacity of tourism of engendering urbanisation in continuity and/or in rupture with the existent tissues and established practices.



Degradation in the outskirts' fringes in the Psar Leu neighbourhood: school built with fortune materials

During the stage we chose the Psar Leu market, placed in the east part of the town, as the site for a project of valorisation and urban expansion. We started from two actual and urging problems: the augmentation on inhabitants, mostly immigrated in search of a work in tourism, and the degradation of the outskirts fringes. We traced an “urban scheme”, that could be reproduced in non-urbanised lands in function of new residents number. The project ideas have been inspired by practices and buildings' characters noted in the research on trade's urban shapes.

We created a realistic scenario that includes: a global plan for the area, based on space units doted of infrastructures and main services (e.g. the works for draining monsoon's rains); some constructive rules that foresees the intervention of different actors; the realisation of buildings according to the needs encountered in the population. We "played" the urbanisation process collaborating with new residents.

These thesis constitutes of departure base for doctoral researches in collaboration between the Politecnico of Turin and the Paris VIII university, in order of which we are preparing a project on: "Places of international tourism: Siem Reap, Bali".

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