

Knowledge as Power: Communication/Visualization of Urban Planning in a Mediatized (Global) Age yet Centralized (Local) Context

Towards Socio-Spatial Visual Justice in Egypt

Overarching research project

This thesis is part of the intercultural interdisciplinary research project: The Mediatization of Urban Development Planning and Changes to the Public Sphere (MedPlan). MedPlan is a Third-party funded project by Leibniz-Gemeinschaft in which a team of 3 professors, 2 PhD students, 1 Post-Doc student are working on the intersections between media and urban planning.

What is this paper about?

This is not a scientific article. This paper is the introduction of my 5 paper cumulative PhD thesis in which I introduce my dissertation and provide an overview on the included articles.

Outline

- Introduction and scope
- Conceptual framework: the agency of visualizations
- Research context: the local yet global Egypt
- Research topic
- Research problem
- Research objectives and questions
- Research methodology

Key words

Urban Planning, Mediatization, Planning Education/ Planning Knowledge Construction, Communication of/in Professional Planning (knowledge/projects/practices), Cairo, Egypt

Introduction and scope

In the current globalized/mediatized age, the popular media's image of the city hardly represents the majority of citizens' everyday city experiences or perceptions of their future. This misrepresentation of urban conditions in media on one side creates processes of visibility and invisibility for the city among not only the general public but also urban planners who get enrolled in the process of producing these city/ies (images). On the other side, this effects and facilitates marginalization, disablement as well as socio-spatial injustices and the further exclusion of vulnerable groups from services and infrastructure. In Egypt, these vulnerable groups form the majority of the population.

The focus of this cumulative-PhD is accordingly to investigate how planning knowledge is *constructed* and *communicated* in a mediatized age yet centralized planning context like Egypt; how urban planners are educated and how plans are communicated in order to keep (certain) political and economic agendas and ruling bodies in operation. The research aims to investigate the position of media and how it is employed in city planning in Egypt. This is to understand what role can mediatization (communication and visualization) of planning play in facilitating social/spatial/visual justice within the constraints of a centralized planning system.

This is done in an attempt to understand and review urban planning *theory, process* and *practice* in the politically/economically affected context of media and academia. Using Egypt as the empirical setting for this investigation, the position of media and visualizations in planning knowledge construction, communication, and power (re)structuring is discussed with a particular focus on;

- (1) the education of planners and the (re)construction of the *Academic City* which is on one side, exclusive to large scale urban projects , on the other side, largely dependent on visual and graphic tools;
- (2) the public visual communication of planning and the (re)construction of the *Mediatized/Professional City*; how the public are targeted yet excluded from the planning process as well as from the process of producing these public visualizations, and what this implies for the planners who are enrolled in the process of constructing these visualizations;
- (3) the influence of these Fata Morganas (narratives) on the perception of the general public and on the visual culture(s) of Egypt's urbanization;
- (4) in the end, it is aimed to interrogate and unlearn the assumptions of/in planning about urban futures to generate a planning theory driven from the role of mediatization in enabling inclusive urban development in a centralized setting.

The following diagram outlines the research scope.

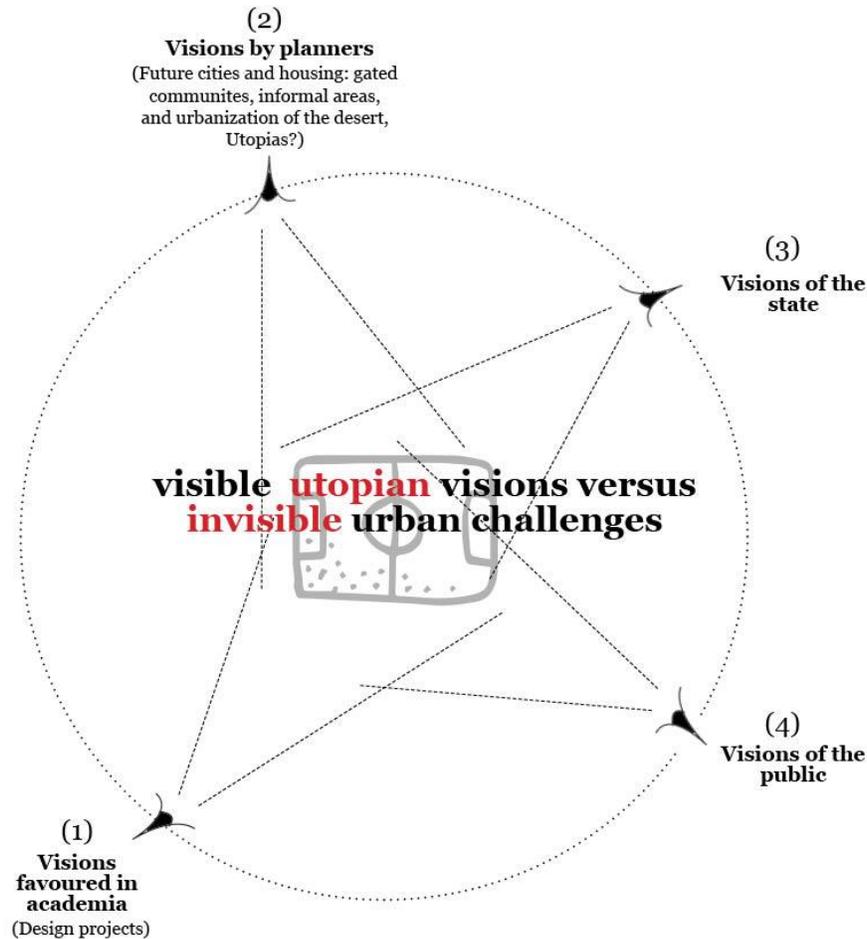


Figure 1 Research scope (the perspectives of the cumulative thesis)

Conceptual framework: The agency of Planning Visualizations

As an urban planner in a highly mediatized age, producing visualisations of urban futures had become a part of my daily activities. By visualising urban futures, I relate more to a time that is not yet present. During this process, I become more able to see that it is as near as possible. In the process of producing these visualizations, it is easy to import various icons from elsewhere to the local context I am working on. Relevant or not to the field, in the process of transferring these icons, knowledge is transcended, and city planning is transnationalised. We - planners- as we produce those visualisations, they redefine us as well as our profession.

From this point of view, I think there is a something that could be observed from working on and with these visualisations. Relating to epistemology: What 'knowledge' after all, is required to produce these visualisations? and what messages are present or embodied in/through it?

Using Actor-Network-Theory, urban visualizations and media are perceived as both the method for my research and the method for understanding planning academic and practice and planners' role accordingly. The thesis in general studies urban planning through analyzing the communications adopted, the media tools employed, and the media assemblages created instead of merely studying the employment of media in urban planning. To give a simple example of how different media enroll network partners/the public differently, a two-way interactive media tool, such as the use of digital platforms that allow customer feedback, entails a participatory planning process, while a one-way media tool like TV advertising or street billboards reflects a classical planning process.

The research inquiry is accordingly developed through adapting an assemblage ontology and using Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). ANT was developed by Bruno Latour and Michal Callon in the 1990s as a methodological approach that draws on assemblage philosophy to analyze the interaction of human/social elements and non-human/material/technological elements in a network. According to Latour (2005), "A good ANT account is a narrative or a description or a proposition where all the actors do something and don't just sit there" (Latour, 2005: 128). In this sense, the actor is defined as "any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into the language of its own" (Callon & Latour, 1981: 286). This therefore allows the consideration of agency in all elements or in other words, the elements' power or ability to impact the process (Carroll, et al., 2012; Ratnayake, et al., 2016; Sun, 2015; Healy, 2013). Nevertheless, ANT has been criticized for giving agency to non-human actants. It is claimed that maybe non-human actants have affordance and can invite potential action, not that they can totally act independently. This is considered the main critique of assemblage theory in general and ANT in particular (Storper & Scott, 2016). Moreover, ANT is criticized for its apolitical and descriptive nature as it fails to explain events or processes and does not show causes and effects. Furthermore, while ANT explains the relationships within a network, its claimed that it does not explain how or why they emerge (Chavarría & Stollmann, 2018). However, it is important to mention that making all human and non-human elements active in the network provides new insights not only on the network but also on its elements. In fact, by paying attention to the material world and acknowledging the agency of both human and non-human actants, planning visualizations are investigated in this paper from a new angle. Accordingly, the extra value of using ANT in this paper is that it makes it possible to perceive the agency of the various mediums used in communicating urban planning (among and outside planners), which cannot be grasped through traditional media analysis in the public space.

What is interesting about looking at world through an ANT perspective is that first the products produced by planners are viewed with an agency to reproduce planners themselves as well as other networked products. Secondly, the idea of diffusing the divisions between human and non-human actants could be taken further in breaking

down other divisions like for instance the social-spatial divisions, the global-local divisions and the north-south divisions. In fact, whatever is global involves a local dimension, and whatever is local also embodies a global influence.

Research Context: The Local yet Global Egypt

In a way or another, we are living in a time where the world is shrinking. Contexts are different yet similar, diverse yet uniform, open yet exclusive. The current time is usually described as the age of globalization and mediatization (see Friedmann, 2005; Healy, 2012; Healy, 2013; Hepp 2013; McLuhan, et al 1967; Watson, 2016). "In short, media are defined as technologies that make it possible to extend human communication in time, space and modality. Media make it possible to communicate in text , sound and images (different modalities) over long distances (space), and to store communication for future use (time)" (Thimm, et al., 2018, p. 67). At the same time, it is apparent that the conceivable results of "a changing media environment" is affected by the context it is working in (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018). According to (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018), " the quantitative spread of media and technology in all field of society, and the qualitative impacts arises accordingly in reconstructing these fields and hence the social reality". Egypt for example could be perceived as part of the global village for example through social media in 2011, the public could access and become part of the international public sphere.

Although this study could be coined to the currently named as global south field, it is intended to withdraw from geographical generalizations on the global south scale. By looking at Egypt as a local yet at the same time global context, the findings of this research can be of contribution not only to the local context of Egypt but also to global discussions about planning. It is intended to stay away from geographical literature divisions like north-south and east-west. In this sense, this study is not about contextual divisions but rather about development in space, media and time.

Research Topic: Communication of urban planning in a mediatized age

"As a consequence of the spread of media across all domains of society, it would be inappropriate to continue to understand 'media' as a separate sphere of society"
(Livingstone 2009: 2f.)

In general, urban planning traditions or practices can be classified into three waves, generations or groups: physical traditions, applied traditions, and transformative traditions. The physical traditions which deals with city problems in a physical manner (Shetawy, 2004). The applied planning traditions emerged after the Second World War and refers to conducts of planning that appropriate their analysis from other disciplines like Sociology and Political Science. Until this point in time, every new planning tradition aimed at either dealing with a specific challenge (physical, or social, or

economic) or adds a new layer on top of a previous practiced tradition. However, the current challenges facing planning practice are interconnected and have to be dealt with in an integrated manner demanding “new planning traditions that are able to cut across all existing ones” (Shetawy, 2004). This led to the emergence of the third group of planning traditions; the transformative traditions which appeared during the early 1960s as an attempt to “deconstruct planning practice” (Shetawy, 2004, p. 73). Transformative planning aims to not only deal with physical, social, and economic issues, but also issues of diversity and “communicative actions (Healey 1996). In the current digital and information age, there are many rising assumptions that urban planning will change dramatically demanding democratic and communicative planning practices (Douay, 2018). At the same time, there is an increased association with the potential role of media in the research and practice of urban planning (Douay, 2018; Borton, 1967; López-Ornelas, et al., 2017).

Similar to changes in planning, media and communication fields had witnessed four main development eras: the pre-verbal era, the writing or printing era, the mass communication era and the current age of information. Some media scholars refer to the current time as the mediatization age (Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007; Hepp & Hasebrink, 2013) referring to an advanced stage of the use of media in societies. Winfred Schulz explains mediatization as a relation between communication media and social change that also replaces face to face interaction (Schulz, 2004). In addition, Friedrich Krotz defines mediatization as a man-made continuous process of historical developments where the change in communication media influences social changes (Krotz, 2007).

On one side, Media simply refers to any means/forms/devices/systems of transmitting information like printing press, telegraph, penny press, film, radio, TV, and the internet (Danesi, 2009). It is perceived to come in various modes of communication: visual, vocal or textual. On the other side, urban planning as a place making and highly visual field, needs to respond to the changes in media and the corresponding chances and challenges among not only urban planners but also authorities, investors and community members (Petrosyan, 2010; Kunze, et al., 2012). Over the time, that different media tools were released, they changed the process of planning from an analogue process to a digital one (Figure 1). Through media tools, especially in the field of urban planning, people now are able to easily visualize places that may not exist at all in the comfort of their own couches. Due to such adaptations to media developments, Stig Hjarvard explained mediatization as a process through which humans in a society become increasingly dependent on media (Hjarvard, 2008). It is this claimed that "through the appropriation of new media people can extend their capabilities as autonomous human beings" (Jansson, 2018). This extends the communication as well as the mediatization. of planning from drafting and presentation to coordination and

participation. The following figure maps the shifts of communication in parallel to the shifts in urban planning.

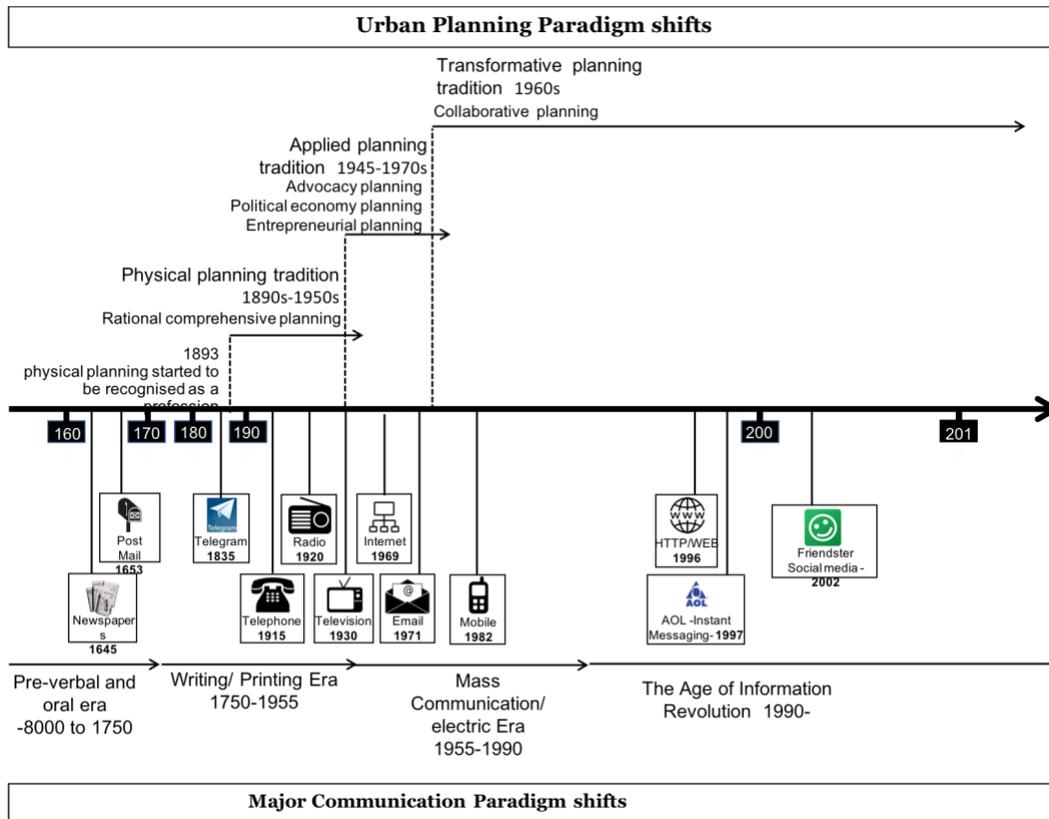


Figure 2 Changes in urban planning traditions and in media (Author)

Moreover, Figure 3 maps the media tools used in planning overtime. It is shown that digital media tools in planning started for the purpose of facilitating architecture drawings through the release of AutoCAD in 1982, followed by the release of Illustrator and photoshop in 1986 and 1990 which contributed to better graphical presentation, then the release of 3D-max, Rhinoceros and Google SketchUp in the same decade which changed the way 3D imaged are presented. Afterwards, digital media tools were used in planning for coordination purposes through the usage of Revit to coordinate between projects and disciplines and later for communication and participation purposes through the integration of e-participatory tools like the usage of mobile applications and social media analytics in city planning (i.e. (López-Ornelas, et al., 2017) to facilitate participatory planning. Currently, in a lesser time a 3D rendered image of the dreamt reality can be produced reflecting the vast amount of time spent on production which was spent previously on the process of planning itself. Simultaneously, these changes in tools affected the products of planning communicated by planners as shown. Photoshoped images had become so real which makes some cultures intend to make it abstract or to artificialize it in order to allow participants see a room for modifications.

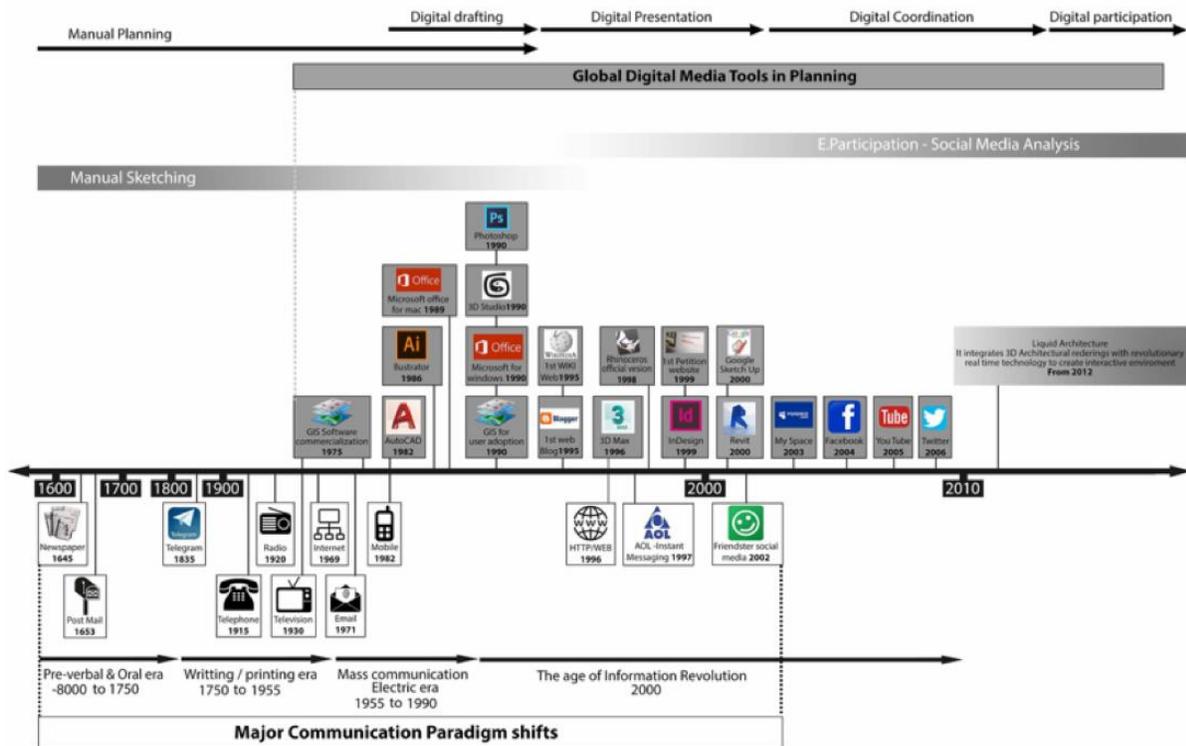


Figure 3 Media tools used in urban planning over time

In this context, this study deals with forms of digital planning in the present and their consequences in shaping planning in mediatized future. The research is consequently concerned with communication of and about urban planning.

Research problem: Communication/visualization of urban planning in a centralized context/controlled public sphere

"the role of media in Egypt is to advertise urban projects, not to open discussions about them" (An interviewed media expert)

The normative idea of the public sphere is its view as an ideal space/place for free conversation/discussion and change of information, ideas, opinions...etc. Habermas defined the public sphere as “network for communicating information and points of view” (Habermas, 1992/1997, p. 360). In this sense, it was about having definite physical meeting area for discussions and sharing ideas, but with the development of communication modes and the spread of internet, the concept of public sphere changed from being physically bound to include virtual communication structures (Splichal, 1999; Habermas, 1992; Habermas, 1992; Dahlgren, 1991; Habermas, 1992/1997; Barlas & Çalışkan , 2006). . In his book, 'The Transformation of the Public Sphere' (1989, originally in German, 1962), Habermas portrayed the emergence of a new model for public sphere that is primarily liberal, which resulted in the decline of the previously mentioned ideal/physical one due to the continuing emergence of commercialized

media systems. By this development, new meanings for public sphere were constructed (Barlas & Çalışkan , 2006). Hence, over time, the concept of public sphere became dependent on the context it is part of, the political system and the type of leadership (democratic versus autocratic regimes) which surrounds it and the medium of communication/media available

Acknowledging the remarkable "increase of mediated communication in modern societies", (Bondebjerg, 2015) view media systems as mediators between the general public (audiences) and those in power (politicians). However, it is still under question whether this facilitates a true public deliberation or not. Accordingly, in order for free conversation to take place, two-way communication is a significant feature of a public sphere (World Bank, n.d.) where decisions are made collectively (Neijens & Price V., 1997). That's why the concept of public sphere is highly linked to participation, democracy, good governance, accountability (World Bank, n.d.). In this respect, the concept of public sphere originates on the assumption that the actors involved in the process are educated, and hence have a valid opinion of how to be governed.

Technological and media development doesn't only lead to changing the definition of the notion of public sphere, but also reshaped the actors who are supposed to take part in discussions. Accordingly, minority groups were given more access. (Bentivegna, 2002; Marx Ferree, M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. , 2002). This resulted in perceiving technology from an environmental long term view angel instead of only being instrument used (Shirky, 2011) in (Kalathil, 2011). In this token, it is claimed that "Access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation," (Shirky, 2011) in (Kalathil, 2011).

However, in centralized /state managed (media/planning) contexts, technology advancements are seen as instrumental tools to hinder engagements in public spheres by for instance blocking certain websites, or to censor certain information which overlooks the long-term impact of technology (Shirky, 2011) in (Kalathil, 2011).Accordingly, it is hardly questioned the different practices, cities, publicities created by the new and multiple media assemblages. In this sense, it is argued by an interviewed media scholar that media in Egypt the is used for the purpose of mediation (communication and interaction via media) not mediatization (structural change, where institutions become more dependent on media) (Stig Hjarvard, 2008) (Interviewee 1, 2018).

Similarly, while in general the public sphere is fragmented, and different sub-groups contribute and impact it (public, public officials, civil society, media, and private actors), where some groups are stronger than the other depending on their power. In a centralized context, the public sphere is consequently formed and managed by the state presenting a narrower version of the public sphere (Meringolo, 2015). Within this view, El-Kholei and Odeh (2016) notes that Arab countries "are enmeshed into a web of global

financial and economic dependencies. The urban elite consider modernization and westernization as synonymous; and align the interest of their social stratum with that of countries at the core against the collective interest of the nation, hence neglecting traditions and losing cultural identity. The public sphere, within which decisions are made, is not in accord with the public opinion resulting in an unregulated, chaotic public space" (El-Kholei & Odeh, 2016).

In Egypt, despite the trials to implement strategic planning for more than 25 years aiming for decentralized planning participatory processes, urban planning is still following classical traditions; being physical, centralized although involving multiple actors, large scale, top-down and known by its entrepreneurial nature (Hamrouni, 2013; Hendawy, 2015; Shawkat & Hendawy, 2016; Dorman, 2007). This led to dispatched planning processes inducing gated communities and mega-projects that are highly proclaimed and praised by all kinds of media platforms and channels reaching its peak in this information and technology revolution era; the 21st Century (Sanjay Kumar Pal, 2008).

From cigerates named after Toshka development project -a promoted mega urban project in Egypt - in the 1990s to the 3-D rendered digital visualizations for the imagined future in the currently promoted new administrative capital city mega urban project, media had played multiple roles from promoting to propagating urban projects. However, In the current (global/northwestern) view of the current age as the time of deep mediatization (Hepp & Hasebrink, 2018), media is perceived to be playing new roles like; enhancing participation, datafication etc. Through such tools, especially in the field of urban planning, people now are able to easily visualize places that may not exist at all in the comfort of their own couches. It is this claimed that "through the appropriation of new media people can extend their capabilities as autonomous human beings" (Jansson, 2018). This extends the known notion of the public sphere as a sort of space which mediates between the state and society from being physical to virtual, manual to digital, massive to social and from even being a space to being a networked sphere, where all boundaries are porous (Çela, 2015; Habermas, 1992; Habermas, 1992/1997). Subsequently, the public sphere becomes no more a given and it is claimed that it cannot be taken for granted that „the public“ even exist. It is perceived as a construction, actively or unknowingly created constructed (MedPlan meeting October 2017). Conversely, in a context of centralized planning system like Egypt, it is hardly questioned the different practices, cities, publicities created by the employed and multiple media assemblages.

Accordingly, the role of media as a two way communicative platform is inactive. In this context, media role is limited to (1) communicating state's version of urban projects and (2) the marketing of urban projects through various media channels. In other words, mediatization in a centralized planning context aids authority in communicating

neoliberal urban agendas. This dominance of narratives and imaging in design and planning education towards the exclusive, formal city and the masking-out of the needs of the majority of the population has a major impact on professional practice and education of urban planning. Which in turn is argued to reinforce marginalization of the general public.

Research objectives and questions

The research aims to investigate How media ‘structures’ the way urban planning is communicated, and How the way planning is communicated via media is reflected in urban planning. Moreover, in addition to the questions regarding the position of media and visualizations in constructing urban futures, it is also questioned how media structures or restructures both; urban planning and power relations.

This thesis follow the cumulative styles for Phd with four papers addressing mediatization of urban planning from four perspectives: (1) planning education, (2) public communication of planning and planning practice, (3) the public perception of these communication, and (4) power implications. The fifth research article involves the over-layering of the four papers towards theory generation through addressing the role of the mediatization of urban planning in facilitating spatial/social/visual justice within the constraints of a centralized planning system. Each paper involves 2-3 research sub questions that stem from the general research question (Table 1). The following table summarizes the sub questions of the four articles

| Paper/ Research focus | Title | Authors | Research (Sub)questions |
|---|--|----------------------------|--|
| 1 Planning Education | [In]visibilities: The Academic City versus Everyday Cities Mediatizing Planning knowledge in Egyptian universities | Me | Which Academic City is made visible for students of planning? How does the use of media in education privilege certain imaging/imagining over others? |
| 2 Planning practice | Visual Communication and the Mediatized/Professional City: From Street Billboards to Offices of Urban Planning in Cairo | Me | What planning knowledge is communicated to the general public (on street billboards in Cairo)? How is this knowledge constructed (in planning offices)? What is the influence of the constructed media assemblages in these processes? |
| 3 Planning culture and context (The state perspective) | State Mediatization of Urban Planning Projects and the Public sphere: A representation of Public Spaces? | Me and <u>Rana Riad</u> | one should ask about the role of mediatization in communicating urban projects and whether it had a role in creating a common ground among all stakeholders? Has it been able to aid the authorities communicating a clearer image to the public? And to what extent did mediatization influence the dynamics of the |

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|---|
| | Case of the administrative Capital City, Egypt | | public sphere(s) around this project and the dynamics of Egyptian public spaces in general? |
| 4 Planning culture and context (The public perspective) | Fata Morgana: The Visual Culture(s) of Egypt's Urbanization | Me and <u>Jörg Stollmann</u> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. what kind of public sphere is produced from the mediatised Fata Morganas? 2. Does these Fata Morganas act as a reassurance for certain prerogative segments that the future will be better? Do they have an effect on the social and psychological stability of these segments and at the same time marginalize more the lower classes? 3. How far these illusionary images affect the Egyptian housing culture affecting dreams of the middle class to look for living in a gated community for example because as communicated in the media; it is safer and have more greenery? |
| 5 Planning theory | Towards Socio-Spatial Visual Justice a Mediatized age yet Centralized Planning-Media Context Case of Egypt | Me and <u>Hanan Badr</u> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the relationship between Socio-spatial justice and Visual representation? 2. How can values like socio-spatial justice be employed in a mediatised age yet centralized planning-media context? and what can be the role played by Visual representation in this process? |

Research Methodology

In general, this thesis is a qualitative exploratory study. The following table summarises the methodology adopted in each paper.

| Paper/ Research focus | Conceptual framework | Scope of Media and Public sphere | Methodology |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 1 Planning education | Empirical and analytical study based on McLuhan concept of 'Medium is the message' | <p>Planning: education</p> <p>Media: the production process</p> <p>Sub-Public: planners produced to deal with the public</p> | <p>Qualitative inductive reasoning approach.</p> <p><u>Data collection and analysis:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The education materials in one of the three public planning programs in Egypt - Semi-structured interviews with 10 planning professors and 4 planning professionals; - Facebook poll in June 2018 attracting 71 planning students and graduates - Focus group with 5 teaching and lecturer assistants in September 2018; another focus group with a planning practitioner and architecture student in October 2018, - another Facebook poll in October 2018 attracting 28 planning graduates, - Online survey that attracted 16 planning students/graduates, 7 teaching and lecturer assistants, and 5 professionals. - Review and analysis of literature about urban planning education, urban planning communication , and media and communication studies. |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <i>The collected data is analyzed by human coding and thematic analysis of interviews and surveys, as well as the content/visual analysis and process documentation for samples of students' projects.</i> |
| 2 Planning practice | Case of Professional planners and the construction of billboards Based on ANT | Media: the production process and the produced product Sub-Public: planning product/images produced | Qualitative exploratory methodology. <u>Data collection and analysis:</u> - participant observations - visual analysis of Cairo billboards on the sides of 6th of October bridge as a case study - Interviews with media experts - Interviews and field visits to planning offices in Cairo |
| 3 Planning culture and context (The state perspective) | Empirical and analytical of the State's mediatization of planning projects | Media the making of the product Sub-Public: state | <i>The collected data is analyzed and presented using the approach of Actor Network Theory.</i> Qualitative exploratory methodology (Burns & Bush, 2006) using the case study of the administrative capital city project in Egypt. <u>Data collection and analysis:</u> - Press news about the project (archive of Ahram newspaper, duration between March 2015 (Launch of the project) until Jan 2019) - Interviews with media and urban planning experts in Egypt The collected data are then classified by human coding of the news headlines for media content analysis. However, given the limitations of focusing only on headlines, texts were also looked at to deconstruct the headlines and explore the meanings within. |
| 4 Planning culture and context (The public perspective) | Empirical and analytical study for the housing dreams of the middle class | Media the preception of the product Sub-Public: middle class Egyptians | Qualitative exploratory methodology. <u>Data collection and analysis:</u> - interviews with a sample of middle class Men and women living in existing built environment or new cities (inside and outside gated communities) - Interviews with taxi drivers |
| 5 Planning theory | Theoretical paper towards theory generation | Still undecided | Still undecided |

