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# URBAN RENOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY:

## Case of the "Citadel" Park in Setif – Algeria.

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### Abstract:

This paper deals with the renovation process of urban spaces in Algerian cities. Diversity is one of their main features expressing the nation wide experience along with its successes and failures. The spatial quality of some public spaces provided them permanence and "sustainability". The aesthetic values of architectural and urban spaces are often determinant factors for the urban environmental quality.

In general, new urban spaces in Algeria seem to be dislocated, drawing a socio-spatial mosaic dreadfully lacking unity. Negative, monotonous and anonymous open spaces are characteristics of the mass housing areas. Nevertheless, several successful urban spaces in the country present interesting cases to study, like Setif where some positive urban spaces are offering better conditions for a sustainable environment and engraving the contemporary history of the city. The "Citadel" Park of 36 hectares in the historic centre used to be a military camp. After being a twilight zone for a decade, this space had finally been renovated in 1986 to avoid the heavy burden of high density alternative praised by developers and speculators.

In fact, our research strategy combines the study of spatial practice and usage to the analysis of design quality. The method employed is qualitative interviews, observations and walking tours with the public space users. An amount of data is collected for environmental assessment. Obviously, it is necessary to approach the issue of heritage and patrimony in a different way where every actor can play his role and participate in shaping his living environment.

The rejuvenation of urban spaces is a promising experience contributing socially, economically, physically and aesthetically to regenerate the local urban environment and leisure activity. The sustainable urban development provides city designers with criteria of social and ecological rationality that are different from those available in the market. Consequently, the concept of sustainability becomes the keystone of the urban development process.

Key words: Urban Space, Sustainability, Usage, Renovation, Heritage.

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### I- Introduction:

Algeria is a huge country, but the viable space remains very limited. The transitional period towards democracy put all urban centers facing different problems. Today's challenge for our cities is management and urban development: urban space, environment, urban identity and usage.

In fact, "the urban center becomes not only a place of consumption, but even takes itself a value of consumption. Exported or rather deported to the suburbs, producers come back as tourists to the center from which they have been dispossessed, expropriated" [Lefebvre, 1989] (1). Today's suburban populations are back to the city center as their place of leisure and free time.

The rapid demographic growth, during the last four decades, led to urban expansion through new allotments and collective housing areas, and recently through public and private estates development. Due to these factors, the urban development was limited to new constructions neglecting thus the preservation of existing buildings in the historic center.

### 2. Concept of sustainability

Sustainable development has been used to refer to the "environmental protection to meet the need of the present and future generation (2). Other definitions on the other hand have incorporated the human perspective in explaining Sustainable Development that is not simply a call for environmental protection. It is a development that should be economically, socially and ecologically sustainable.

In the beginning of this millennium, there is a need for a new urban ethic, based on the concept of social sustainable development that integrates the notions of social equity, environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, social integration in a multicultural context.

Emmitt (3) claims that something must be done to change the way in which we develop, use and recycle buildings so that our natural environment is both protected and enhanced. Contribution to sustainable development will surely come from those actors and users concerned with the project and its close environment. Eventually, to implement a sustainable strategy, it is necessary to involve the different actors in the process of production and management of the city.

Basically, the sustainable urban development provides the city planners with new criteria of social and ecological rationality different from those offered by the market. Consequently, the concept of sustainability becomes the keystone of the urban development process.

#### 2.1. Permanence and Sustainability

Permanence and sustainability become a keystone for the urban development process. Permanence is more concerned with "memory" and identity to avoid shocking urban changes. The recent awareness of central and local Authorities concerning the necessary preservation of the eco-systems and sustainable development requires more attention and a better understanding of these notions. The OECD, for instance, mentioned in a report entitled: '*Environmental Policies for Cities in the 1990's*', that: "The challenge posed by this concept of necessity requires cities individually and collectively to contribute to sustainable global development. Cities must therefore always frame their short term policies in this long-term perspective of evaluating whether and how initiatives contribute to the future development of the global environment..." (4)

Taking the example of the Highlands, a comprehensive approach of socio-cultural identity, both locally and within its wider territory, seems to be necessary and prior to any future sustainable development in order to provide a series of socially and ecologically rational criteria that substantially differ from those offered by the free market. Relatively balanced and in terms of territorial influence scale, the case of the

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urban network in Setif gives the region a leading role, at the national level, as a sustainable urban system for the territorial development; despite the lack of prospective studies concerning the urban form in Algerian cities.

### 2. 2. Theoretical framework and methodology

The need to plan for the sustainable city is expressed all over the world. But what would the ideal sustainable city look like? Until now there is no definite answer. On one hand, we have the proponents of the compact city which implies a strategy of concentration and increasing urban density (to minimize the need for transportation). On the other hand, we have the proponents of the green city which implies a strategy of deconcentration and spreading out. So we are confronted with two strategies seemingly irreconcilable for the sustainable city. This may be called "the density paradox". (5)

The issue of urban quality and urban form is no less confused. Leading theorists of urban planning and design during the twentieth century (for example, Le Corbusier, Raymond Unwin, Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch and Christopher Alexander) proposed different ideal solutions: high-density, low or medium density developments and different urban models. Some of them defended high-rise buildings and large open spaces. Others advocate traditional grid-iron plans, streets and compact blocks, or small-scale garden suburbs. Evidently there is no consensus on the question of urban quality and urban form.

There is a great confusion in the fields of quality and sustainability in urban planning. According to Radberg (1996), much of this confusion stems from the fact that the theories are formulated on a very general and abstract level. There is a need for empirical facts, observations. In particular, there is a need for a theoretical framework concerning these empirical observations. Systematic descriptive classification of the urban structure on the microlevel is required in order to process the collected data on existing urban environments.

The compact city or the green city are both stereotypes, they are virtual. In reality, cities are not homogenous. The urban density is not uniform. The modern city is composed of small pieces, districts, blocks which differ from each other, in terms of urban form, density, types of buildings, urban quality, etc. We can identify some frequent types of developments: the urban core, colonial houses, suburban dwellings, the mass housing areas, the industrial enclaves and institutions. In reality, we have to consider cities as complex entities made of urban elements on the microlevel.

The urban strategies should focus more on the local level. One reason, according to Radberg is that the existing urban structures are very permanent; it is very hard to change the macrolevel. However, on the microlevel, - the urban block level - strategic adjustments (rebuilding, restructuring of the ground) are much easier to implement.

Urban form as an important factor has an impact on the urban environment where the issue of quality primarily relates to the local level, such as the urban blocks in the city. Evidently, in every city there are more attractive and less attractive residential districts.

Recent research suggests that the degree of vandalism and other social problems is linked to certain aspects of urban design: the number of storeys, the number of flats in each building, the relation of the buildings and the entrances to the streets and the surrounding open spaces (6).

A theoretical framework is necessary to study the small elements in the urban structure, the urban blocks, or groups of buildings. But let us keep in mind that the statistical averages for a whole city or a whole region are not very informative and may even be misleading.

The typo-morphological approach allows us to undertake urban analysis that is different from the functional typology, upon buildings that are studied in context, together with the surrounding public

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and private spaces. The object of such analysis could be a cluster of buildings and open space, the building lots, or the street-pattern.

Basically, these are only the first steps of typo-morphological urban research, as Radberg wrote it, in the future it may develop along several lines (7):

- As a tool for description of the existing urban structure. The classification into urban types will provide a basis for description of the existing urban structure in a specific city, in terms of characteristic urban typologies.
- As a tool for analysis. It can provide deeper insight into the "sustainability" of the different urban types: by gathering basic environmental data. It will also be possible to evaluate the relative attractiveness of the different urban types, by gathering socio-economic data.
- As a tool/or planning and design. In providing a deeper understanding of the urban types, of sustainability and quality, a better description of the existing built environment, it will pave the way for a better planning practice.

The analysis approach combines the study of spatial practice and usage to the analysis of design quality, the method employed is qualitative interviews, observations and walking tours with the public space users. An amount of data is collected for environmental assessment. An insight evaluation of this urban environment may help to identify 'value indicators', allowing a contemporary vision towards this heritage.

### 3. URBAN SPACE IN ALGERIAN CITIES:

Diversity is one of the main features concerning public space in Algerian cities. It is expressing the nation wide experience along with its successes and failures. Morphologically, in some new collective housing areas, there is neither a clear layout connecting the urban fabric to its surroundings nor a clear relationship between its different components. The resulting open spaces suggest consequently a confusing and very limited usage.

The issue of open spaces and their management in the Mediterranean region had been evoked in a written report by a French team of architects in 1958: when the contemporary urban planner designs a housing cluster project, under the influence of Le Corbusier's theories, badly understood in general, he raises a series of very spaced buildings with more or less happiness, depending on his talent, and draws gardens between his constructions: sun, space, greenery. In temperate climate, things happen almost well. The park is thin in the beginning of course, but with a minimum of care it grows because the vegetation is generous in these regions. In Mediterranean countries, things happen otherwise. We 'baptize' on our plans green spaces which will be only dusty desert, torrid in summer and swept by brutal rains in winter under this climate. In order to let this vegetation grow, an abundant watering is necessary during the long dry periods. Water is scarce and expensive. On the other hand, the Mediterranean man has few respects to the vegetation and common spaces. His indoor space could be meticulously clean, but he will smudge without shame all that is public place. This is why the organization and maintenance of parks in this area prove to be extremely costly. (8)

Regarding the spatial organization of the city, the colonial period brought up new architectural and urban forms to the existing national context. The interest and study gradually carried out on "native housing" (9) by some artists, anthropologists and administrators have allowed some landmarks to be more valued (palaces, mosques mainly), then finished with a reflection on the old urban quarters: the "*Medinas*". This tendency brought inspiration to some colonial architects and urban planners to come up with a new style in their constructions, known as "*arabisation*".

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The historic centers in colonial origin cities have particularly been facing various urban transformations since Independence in 1962. These centers, previously designed as cities for French population, are now appropriated by Algerian population and become down towns in today's cities.

The colonial city preserved its commercial function after the Independence and substituted the middle class to the elite who left to residential quarters. The existence of central amenities, public transportation and traffic network with other factors contribute to make of it a central place.

Hence, the socio-cultural changes - changing ways of lives, values - of the last decade with the advent of the market economy in Algeria produced a new built and social environment. Basically, this environment is a result, among many others, of the inhabitant's non-respect for the existing building rules.

### 4. Sustainable development and urban policy in Algeria

The key words in Algeria today are: liberalism, market economy, privatization, private investment. The government is drastically reducing its role at the economic level because it gave up any further development policy. The local Authorities are imperatively and mainly responsible of making and managing the public amenities and basic infrastructures.

The existing Master and land use plans, as urban organizing tools universally recognized, actually concern only the means of urban development. These plans do not care so much of the quality and urban form of the living environment.

One of the obvious breakdowns of such tools is the lack of effective concerted action between the actors in order to realize a complex project. In fact, the urban composition could stand for this specific and fundamental device, the operational planning and urban composition have only to be articulated. (10), asserts that the plan as projection will never assign the future, but will rather be a consignment of the past, as a memory for updating the reality.

### 5. Housing environmental quality

Public spaces in old cities have a functional quality, indeed the compact traditional fabrics are moderated by a number of small places, markets and commercial alleys. These spaces may appear today tiny and geometrically imperfect, with winding alleys and small places limited in width and length, they have however been of a great importance for inhabitants in the past. Besides, these spaces had been managed by pre-established codes and social rules, sometimes very strict. Hence, inhabitants know their itineraries, defend their territories and respect the others'. Whereas, the stranger knows his limits, if not the spatial layout will make him understand it. Open and welcoming spaces surrounding the city contrast completely with the narrow and sinuous alleys generating an impression of discomfort and embarrassment.

With the colonial occupation, a new shape conveying and representing a new culture is superposed to the old public space. North in the country, many parts of the compact fabrics in the Medina (historic city) have been severely transformed, particularly their layout patterns: large streets and spaces appeared. In the South, the colonial act was less aggressive and public space closely took place beside the ancient without change but proposing thus a new way to live the public space. With the street frontage, access to houses is easier, and traffic is more fluid and faster. Therefore, the colonial public space completely changed the principle of communal and public life.

Nowadays and morphologically there is, in some new collective housing areas, neither a clear layout connecting the urban fabric to its surroundings nor a clear relationship between its different components. The resulting open spaces suggest consequently a confusing and very limited usage. (11)

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Alike other urban space components, the public space across the whole country appears to be distorted, dislocated, drawing a socio-spatial mosaic dreadfully lacking unity. The huge amenities usually include, between their buildings, large open spaces which are non organized, monotonous and anonymous. (12)

The contemporary public space in Algeria is completely different, not only in its form but also in its usage. Indeed the rapid urban growth combined with industrialization, as a mean for a fast economic development, encouraged the import of foreign know-how to solve various social and economic issues. Unfortunately, such imported processes, despite the good intentions they convey, were imposed to the populations far away from their culture and identity.

## 6. Urban Spaces in Setif

### 6.1. Background

Historically, Setif is a Roman city (called Sitifis). The French decided to found their city on the ruins of that holy site and took the Byzantine tower and the existing fountains as "pre-existences". Unfortunately due to the factors mentioned above, today's historic centre has become a mostly decaying inner-city, particularly inside the blocks where squalor is hidden. However, the original urban form still exists with its permanent structures.

Describing the public fountain *Ain Fouara*, (13) mentioned that: "in the center, there is a beautiful and monumental fountain springing water from its four sides. Moreover, it is surrounded by the Town Hall, shops, cafés and the Mosque – pretty building ornamented with arabesques and dominating the whole city and its environs with its high and thin minaret."

Until 1926, the city of Setif was enclosed in its walls with four gates around: Algiers, Constantine, Biskra and Bejaia Gates. There were then two important parts in the city: the civilian quarter in the South and military quarter in the North (14). This typical colonial center, of a regular plan, has still today large shopping streets, arcades, squares and public gardens.

The Independence has only suppressed the ethnic dichotomy, without deleting the business character: outskirts and countryside areas remain directly dependent on the down town and by extension the colonial core (15). Commonly called "*Bled*" in the popular language, this old core remains the dominating center with a kind of symbolic value acquired along its history. This is not only a city center at the local level, but also at a regional scale. Its urban fabric is characterized by a dense iron grid frame.

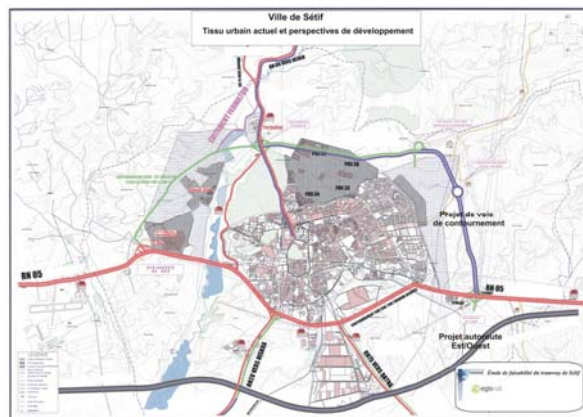


Figure 1: The existing urban fabric & development perspective of Setif



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Currently with nearly 300 thousand inhabitants, Setif is the sixth city of Algeria. With its geographical position at the crossroads, between the South and North, the East and West, Setif has developed, in addition to industrial and agricultural activities, commercial and administrative functions.

### 6. 2. Urban Transformations in Setif

A regular shape traces the perimeter of the '*intra-muros*' city in order to provide the same regularity for the site layout and streets pattern. The example of Setif, clearly shows the importance of the walls as a programme element of the city, where ordinance and obvious tracks on the territory are closely put together to define the limits between rural and urban space.

The military quarter (on the Roman historic site of the city) has been transformed to a central attraction park since 1986 and hence lost its initial layout – except the North-South axis that is preserved as a pedestrian precinct. The civilian quarter conserved its iron grid as the main structuring elements. This regular urban fabric is composed of three superposed elements: streets and places, blocks allotted into plots and buildings.

First, forming the *Decamanus* and *Cardo* axis, the two main streets with arcades structure the city layout; where public buildings (city hall, banks, theatre, church and mosque, school, etc.) are located.

Second, today's transformations, concerning the initial plots subdivision, affect mainly the parceling of inherited plots between the family members; in some cases the plot drastically reached 5m and even 3m wide.

High density, at the horizontal level, is essentially of the main transformations affecting the city centre. The ground-floor and sometimes the underground spaces accommodate commercial activities. Administrative and cultural amenities were concentrated in the old city, but their 'recent' expansion imposed their relocation elsewhere in the city and left behind them buildings transformed to appendices with the same type of function. However, commerce and services dominate now the activities of this central area.

The urban form of this center, though threatened by the proliferating squalor, allows various imbrications and articulation of functions, facilities and attracting services. Although, the spontaneous renewal in Setif is perceptible and even very punctual in some constructions here and there, where the typologies are diversified and often respecting the requirements of alignment.

### 6.3. The Central Park

The "Citadel" Park in Setif is a holy site telling the entire history of the city. After being a twilight zone for a decade, this space had finally been rejuvenated to avoid the heavy burden of high density alternative praised by developers and speculators. This rejuvenation is contributing socially, economically, physically and esthetically to revitalize the local urban environment and activity of tourism. Such a remarkable experience, combining together tourism and history, deserves a thorough comprehension and investigation.

In 1986, Setif successfully got its first attraction park in the midst of the city centre. This genuine lung, occupying 35 hectares, gave the city a national ecological reputation. Keeping the Citadel as a public space in the heart of the historic district was a very welcomed idea by the city and its inhabitants. People and especially children from Setif and all over the region come daily to enjoy themselves at this leisure place. However, the social and economic impact of this park on the city and its "influence" or surrounding territories is great.

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### 6.4.1. Project Design Guidelines

#### Environmental Enhancement:

- Create and preserve pedestrian views over the city and to the important buildings.
- Create pleasant views from some buildings.
- Reinforce the pedestrian character of the park
- Provide formal and informal outdoor areas for relaxation (leisure).



Figure 2: children leisure place

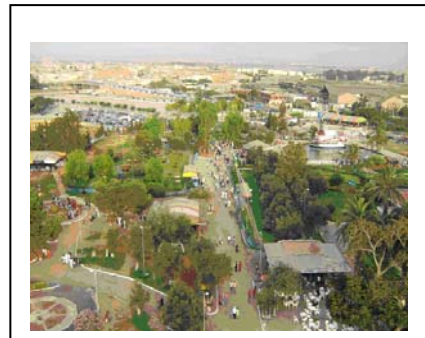


Figure 3: The Pedestrian Walkway

#### The Pedestrian Walkway Network:

The design does not only provide the elimination of the traffic confusion but also the elimination of motors noise and the smell of exhaust fumes within the quite natural area by keeping the vehicular traffic on the outskirts of the park.

#### The Artificial Lake:

Whereas to capitalize on the uniqueness of the historical site and its ruins; the artificial lake was created as a symbol and a unifying element that gives a personality to the park.



Figure 4: The Artificial Lake



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### Buildings Layout:

The "light" construction of the buildings allows more flexibility to adapt them to new needs.

Obviously, the park might have been well designed if a comprehensive study, including the interaction of this area with its surroundings, had been carried out and the users had been involved in the design process. In addition, an adequate preservation of the Roman ruins and historical vestiges could have provided a supportive physical and socio-cultural environment where people find recreation. Nevertheless, this park has been attracting people from Setif and all over the region. These users come to visit and enjoy themselves during weekends and vacation days. Therefore, this recreational park is more than a large natural green space with its olden trees. It is a distinguished meeting place.

## 7. CONCLUSION

More consideration should be given to the management and development of cities: urban space, environment, urban usage. For memory, the old quarters and down towns would not be conserved and integrated into the contemporary life unless their new destination complies with their morphology and scale. (16)

One of the reasons why so many interventions for urban development and regeneration continue to fail lies in their focus on the physical dimension. Any overall strategy for dealing with the development of urban systems should reconcile policies concerned with social processes which take place in the city with policies designed to change its spatial form. It is this kind of view, looking in the direction of both space and society, which has so far lacked in conceptualizations of urban development.

Many cities in the developing world countries, including those of colonial creation, have reserved, now or in the past, enormous urban areas for military purposes. These areas continue to exist as negative space in the old centers. Such a situation, when these spaces are recovered, offers invaluable opportunities to put the city on the ecological order. The fact that these urban spaces are large and central is already a unique opportunity for these cities in order to produce a "Lung of oxygen". Contrary to business centers, like El-Ali Tower- type, the revitalization of this area requires special consideration which may culminate in physical expression. We must also recognize always the need to undertake such projects with appropriate consideration for the users and the historical site. The rejuvenation of such an urban space is a promising experience contributing socially, economically, physically and aesthetically to regenerate the local urban environment and leisure activity.

Preserving this urban heritage does it not act against one of the major objectives of sustainable development which is urban densification? To densify by increasing housing supply and facilities in the attractive city centers may face the idea of preserving the inherited old quarters. The principle of "rebuilding the city on the city" may contradict the desire to preserve the urban heritage.

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