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Islamic urban heritage in Constantine - challenges and prospects

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Abstract. Scientific research on heritage is many and varied, because it represents a collective historical and cultural repository that expresses essentially identity. Among the areas of heritage, we distinguish the urban and architectural heritage that reflects the true identity and the civilizational dimension, which today the process of preserving it has become a historical responsibility and a national and national duty that stops specialists in all parts of the world. In light of the growing interest in the concept of sustainable development in various fields, the care of heritage in its comprehensiveness emerges as one of the major axes of this development, and an area that falls within the framework of a comprehensive policy to preserve the diverse world heritage. There is no doubt that the general problem with regard to ancient urban tissues lies in their ability to respond to the modern requirements of architectural urban development and provide an environment in which the balance between man and his surroundings is not disturbed, and to preserve the prevailing social and human dimensions, and to overcome purely economic approaches in comparing modern projects and conservation projects. In this context, we have the right to ask whether it is possible to protect and breathe life into heritage urban tissues, without this being an attempt at temporary revival. Is it possible to achieve sustainable urbanization in light of the predominance market rules? This research mainly aims to visualize an urban project that aims to achieve two basic things: - Protecting the Arab-Islamic architectural and urban identity of the city of Constantine, the capital of eastern Algeria, which has been subjected to cultural obliteration and attempts at Westernization over more than a century of French colonialism. - Adopting a practical methodology during the course of the approach

Keywords. Identity, Urban Heritage, Protection, Constantine, Urban Project

Introduction

Specialists do not disagree on the importance of urban and architectural heritage in all regions of the world. In 1840, Ruskin discovered the historical value of home architecture and gave it the same value as monuments, followed by Camille Sitte in 1889 to sense the value of ancient areas and buildings. They were later surpassed by the Italian Giovanni in 1913, when he developed means to take care of ancient urban fabric (Rifaat Jad Raji, 1980).

There are many definitions of heritage urban tissues, from which we have chosen what they say represent the group of buildings and structures that have continued their originality and value in the face of continuous change, and provide them with acceptance and respect and have

become a living record and a visual reference that embodies human relations and his environment (Sayed Al-Touni, 1988).

These areas are affected by many variables and surrounding conditions, including:

- High population density
- Heavy urban expansion and sagging

- Gross negligence on the part of officials, and the poverty that dominates the social groups residing in it.

- Hence, it requires intervention for appropriate protection by specialists in order to avoid manifestations of chaos and randomness. It should be noted at the outset that the programming of interventions to preserve the urban heritage of the old cities or part of them, and to integrate it into the path of total spatial development is not an easy process, but is based on a set of complex arrangements and continuous procedures.

Materials and methods

Reasons for protecting urban heritage or challenges

Despite the importance of the impact of natural factors resulting from the impact of time on the heritage urban tissues in the world, the Second World War, with its mass destruction that led to the disappearance of many ancient buildings and the demise of important parts of ancient cities, served as an alarm that awakened the human conscience at the global level, and prompted questions about the fate of urban and architectural heritage in light of the major challenges it faces. This has been a reason to focus attention on possible protection, rescue and maintenance" (Sheyab Ismail, 2005).

Algeria, which has known destructive wars that lasted for nearly a century and a half, the reasons for interest in preserving and protecting heritage lie in - in addition to the previous factors - what took place after independence of attempts to develop and modernize the unstudied urbanization, which led to the disappearance of some buildings and heritage urban areas in the cities of Algiers, Constantine, Oran and Annaba... and others, which has become a threat to its identity. These cities must "reconsider their future and define their identity more precisely, clearly and explicitly"(Amin Nourhan, 1991).

In the city of Constantine, which has a distinct and authentic urban history, these buildings were demolished in order to make way for the extension of the road network, the construction of necessary public facilities, infrastructure, housing projects and some industries. Moreover, the remaining parts of Islamic buildings were left vulnerable to neglect, natural erosion and multi-source pollution, until some of their parts and many of their aesthetics were lost and became hotbeds of poverty and marginalization.

Over time, the old city, with its Islamic urban heritage and many architectural treasures, has gradually lost its identity and originality, and has become surrounded from all sides by extraneous urban tissues dominated by the Western urban and architectural character. Since UNESCO has emphasized that "peoples and nations derive from their tangible and intangible natural heritage the defining features of their identity and the source of inspiration, the city stops specialists defending the authentic cultural identity of society to preserve, maintain and develop it " [Unesco, 2019].

The problem of preserving the Islamic urban heritage

The preservation of urban heritage in all countries of the world is a human civilizational responsibility that aims mainly to prolong the life of the landmarks of the past and keep them as long as possible. There is no doubt that the Islamic world has architectural

landmarks and urban heritage that require special attention to preserve them as they reflect the civilizational identity of its peoples and indicate the bright ages of the Ummah "nation".

Despite the fact that those interested in the importance of the process of preserving and preserving the ancient urban tissues of our cities are almost completely convinced, the activation of attempts still faces challenges represented in the requirements of contemporary life and the needs of development and urban expansion. This problem arises within the framework of the main problem related to authenticity and modernity.

In Algeria, which has suffered from attempts by the colonial civilizational metamorphosis that has tried hard to obliterate its Arab-Islamic identity in various fields, and to link it to the Western world, the promoters of the modernist Western urban project claim that any call to preserve the Arab-Islamic urban tissues in our cities is an obstacle to attempts at modernity and development. This trend is denied by Western theorists themselves, with one arguing that the desire to break free from historical heritage is a meaningless choice that loses us an inexhaustible source of experience and knowledge accumulated for hundreds of years (L.KRIER ,1981).The proposals in the urban project adopted by the state came according to these premises, with a linear and inflexible methodology. "This approved general plan gives priority to programming the current and future needs of the population in terms of housing, facilities and infrastructure... and others. The process is carried out without paying attention to the past and paying it the slightest attentionMinistry of Urban Planning (Algerian Ministry of Urban Planning, 1996).

The Study Area

The city of Constantine is located in the northeast of Algeria between the Gulf of Annaba and the high plains of the Sétif region. It is considered the capital of eastern Algeria and the cultural capital of the country, as it is full of architectural and urban treasures that reflect the succession of many civilizations, the most important of which is the Ottoman urban heritage, which is the dominant feature of the city. (Figure 01).

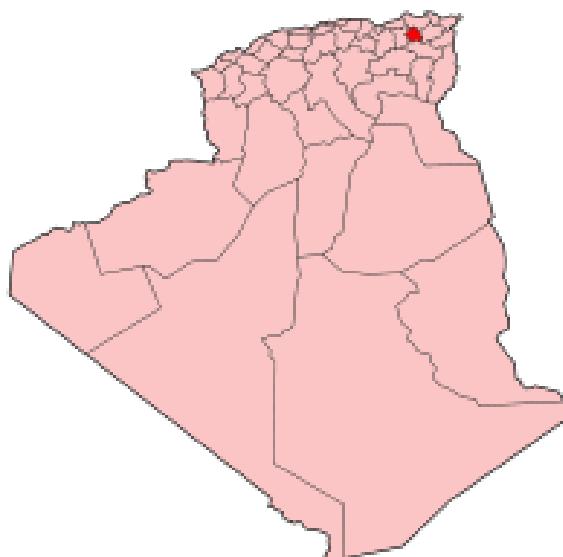


Figure 01 : Location of the city of Constantine In Algeria

Source : <https://fr-academic.com/dic.nsf/frwiki/1380175> le 25/12/2022

The heritage importance of Constantine

The importance of Constantine lies in the fact that it has an Islamic heritage architectural treasures of high value. Successive civilizations have taken over the city since its establishment in 1450 BC as Eartha and then Cirta. It was capital of the Numidians until the third century BC. The Roman occupation, in which it was rebuilt by Constantine the Great and known by its current name.

The heritage city, or ancient rock as it is locally called, was originally built in the twelfth century AD after the Great Mosque built by Prince Hammadi Yahya bin Abdul Aziz in 1036 AD. Important parts called the Kasbah were added to it during the Ottoman era, most of which are still standing today (Figure No2).

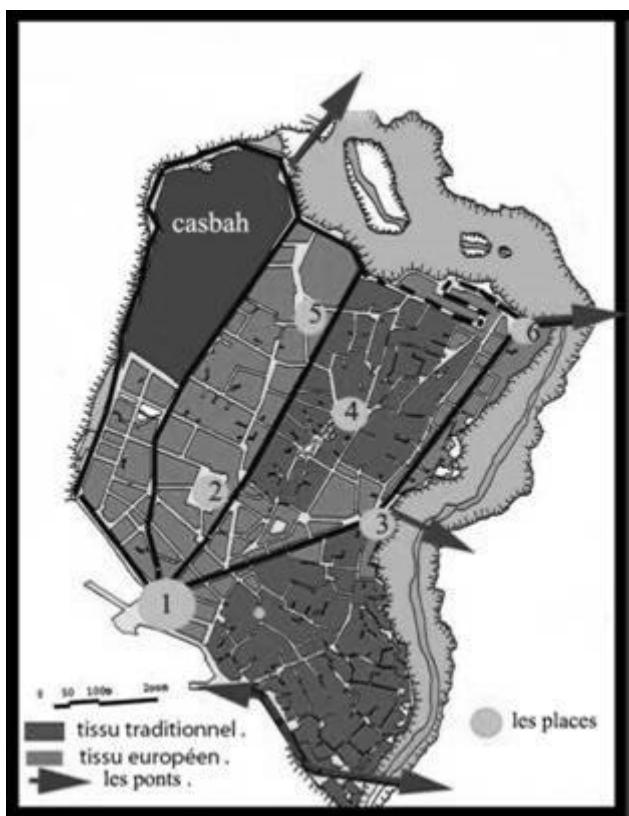


Figure 02: The Kasbah and the ancient urban fabric of Constantine

Source: Ancient Urbanism Workshop of constantine, 2003

The city has an urban heritage, and among the monuments, the historical style is considered a choice without meaning that loses us an inexhaustible source of experiences and knowledge accumulated for hundreds of years. Distinctive features, including:

- Qantara Bridge built in 1304 AD
- Sidi Lakhdar Mosque
- Sidi Kettani Mosque, built in 1776
- Qadiriyya Zawiya, restored in 1769
- Kettania school built in 1775
- Various baths built between 1600 and 1850 AD

- Spacious dwellings and shops of wool, peduncle and kasbah built in the Turkish era and the French colonial era.

In view of the cultural and artistic importance of these historical monuments (Fig 3, 4), and the challenges they face, we decided to study how to preserve them in light of the rapid developments and changes in the world through mechanisms that take their strength from the sociocultural and economic components of Algerian society.



Figure 3: Sidi Lakhdar Mosque
 Source: Ancient Urbanism Workshop of constantine, 2003

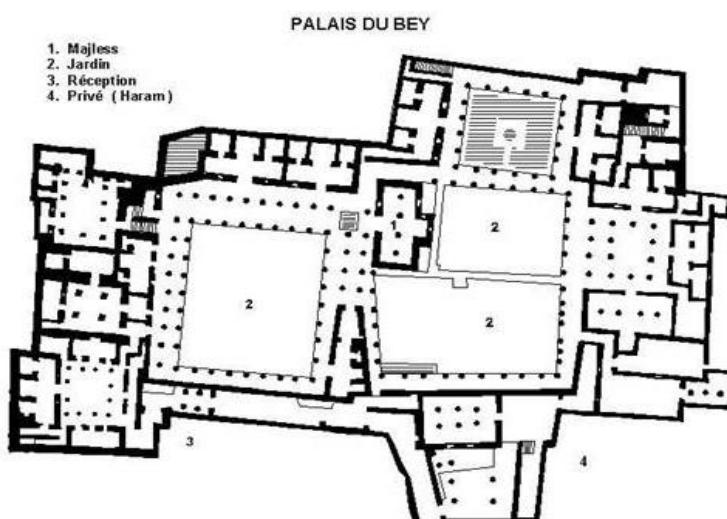


Figure 4: Bey palace
 Source: Ancient Urbanism Workshop of constantine, 2003

Methodology

This research is based on an Italian urban approach. It was prepared under the supervision of architects (V, SPIGAI) and Levy (A, LEVY) in the Department of Urban Conservation (D.P.A) of the University Institute of Architecture of Venice (I.U.A.V) between 1982-1984. Field studies were conducted in the city of Marostica, and the intervention methodology was built in two main phases:

Analysis phase

This stage is a cognitive stage in which « the urban structure and the components of the built framework »(A, LEVY et V SPIGAI, 1989), are determined. It is based on reading and analyzing the formal and structural elements that make up the total urban area of the city, then the formal and typical features are classified according to the principle of differentiation between the fixed and the variable. After that, a diagram is prepared showing the elements that require rehabilitation and degrees of change for each component.

Project preparation phase

To prepare an integrated urban project, the study was based on three levels of analysis, covering the region, the city and the intervention area. After that, several scenarios were conceived for intervention according to predetermined objectives, and after discussion, a plan was chosen, which assumes the ability to restore life to urban tissues threatened with total disappearance or partial destruction. « Therefore, this stage is considered special in its formal aspect with a practical and normative dimension »(R. Bocchi et S. Rochetto, 1980). This approach aims to preserve the old city of Constantine and to adapt it to the new requirements of life without compromising its essence and distinctive aesthetics. The order answers the following questions:

- How do we intervene in urban tissues without compromising the general form, building principles and aesthetics of the view? And how do we integrate add-ons on what's ongoing?

- How do we maintain the privacy of the place and the interests of the owners?

Before answering questions, we reviewed the one of the pioneering experiments in the field of intervention on ancient urban fabric in Italy.

Discussion of results

We took the beginning of a sample from the study area, the advantage of which was that they had known a continuous and homogeneous growth. After that, we conducted an analytical study on its architectural components, especially housing. We also studied the existing situation and the abuses that occurred on it, and it was found through a study carried out by the City Rehabilitation Cell according to this method that the number of dwellings specified at 1301 dwellings, divided into the so-called Master Plan (City Rehabilitation Cell, 2003) as follows:

Table 01: Status of Housing according to Master Plan 2003 [11]

	Medium	Poor	Very poor
Number	300	631	370
Percentage shelter	23.01	48.55	20.44

Source: City Rehabilitation Cell (Master Plan) in 2003

For comparison, we take into account the data of various collapses of buildings before this period, which are approximately 460 dwellings, or more than a third, and a number of non-residential buildings from the previous period until 2003. And do not forget that about 70% of buildings suffer from impacts, which we summarized as follows:

a. Internal changes to adapt to the size of the families in the dwelling, which negatively affected its structural integrity

- b. Changing the facades and causing aesthetic damage to the shape by adding or removing some elements
- c. Changing the original colors of the buildings by using randomly and inappropriately for greasy materials, which made the facades lose the essence and true spirit
- d. Random connection to various networks of electricity and sewage, and the addition of some equipment that does not fit with the general shape of the fabric
- e. Changing the original use of some buildings, and using them inappropriately
- f. Cracks and corrosion in the walls from environmental pollution and the impact of transportation that cause vibrations, water leaks... and others.

After This stage, the intervention plan is based on the development of the details of the plan for the conservation, restoration and upgrading of the Islamic urban fabric of Constantine, in cooperation with the concerned municipality. But there are multiple obstacles and details about which differences are still made:

- Determine the level of total and/or partial preservation according to the different conditions within the fabric
- Avoid conflicting decisions of the custodians
- Ensure the adequacy of the financial envelope or seek other sources of funding
- The exercise of the right of pre-emption over real estate by the entity responsible for supervising the process
- Ensure the participation of the population
- Drawing up a practical plan for urban intervention in the populated parts of the textile, indicating the size of the process and the conduct of the transitional period required by the intervention, i.e. the housing places concerned if the works are to extend inward. There is no doubt that this necessitates the division of the intervention area into small, manageable zones and a gradual chronological organization in order.

Final results:

In this case study , we benefited greatly from quoting the Italian experience according to the specificity of time and place. The following results were reached:

- Preparation of a detailed and accurate inventory of urban tissues in Constantine, and all heritage cities in Algeria
- Intervene quickly to stop random interventions that distort the aesthetic landscape of the city
 - 1. The city of Constantine is one of the few cities that resisted colonialism even with its architecture, and it should be the cradle of self-restoration projects.
 - 2. The challenges of enhancing the sustainability of the authentic urban project need innovative solutions
 - 3. The current and profound transformations at the global level impose new challenges on the schools of rooting urban projects, and here we put forward practical proposals for the protection and maintenance of urban heritage.
 - 4. Using the digital revolution in the future to support such actions
 - 5. Accreditation of an institution specialized in monitoring useful competencies for such problems

Conclusion

This research was able to lead to convincing results for the conservation of the Islamic urban fabric of the city of Constantine. We were inspired by a famous Italian approach based on visual analysis, Study of the components of the urban fabric, and Adjusting the intervention plan based on the development of the details of the plan for the conservation, restoration and upgrading of the city. This can serve as a model for the preservation of the old urban fabrics in the different Algerian cities and especially the ksours.

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