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# Social and spatial integration of the Guéliz neighbourhood in the contemporary Marrakesh (Morocco)

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## Introduction

Nowadays, attention and interest in the development of 'recent' patrimonial spaces are rising. We are in a stage in which the statute of these assets is being reorganised, sometimes towards an awareness of the potential heritage value, sometimes not.

In this article, we wish to take into consideration the complex regional approach to the spatialisation of the heritage, question which underlines the subjects of the appropriation of spaces by contemporary societies, the links between tourism and heritage, but also the interaction between spatial entities and collective imagination. We will try not to forget that, by its nature, the heritage we observe has direct links with urban policies – both those of heritage management and those of effective (sustainable) urban management – and the will of development.

Beginning by picturing Marrakesh under its' unconscious touristic light, we will progressively discover what the concept of historic urban landscape has given to enlarge the heritage panorama of that city. Using the example of the Guéliz neighbourhood, we aim to analyse the relationship and possible interactions between the specific spatiality of the so called 'recent heritage' and the one of the current city. The relationship, not yet fully assumed, between historicity and contemporaneity is the main topic of the existing quarters, which deal with the difference between the spatial order that produced them and the one they currently experience every day.

Marrakesh is a worldwide known tourist destination, based on the built heritage of the old Medina and (more recently recognized) on the intangible heritage components of the JemaâEl Fna square. Marrakesh is a city since a long time totally devoted to tourism; during the Protectorate period, the colonial authorities deliberately built this destination and forged the collective imagination. Yet, Marrakesh also hosts one of the ten new Moroccan cities by Henry Prost, called the Guéliz, and the legacy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has recently entered the list of recognized heritage assets, as evidenced by some UNESCO inscriptions on the World Heritage list. The magnitude and importance, both in terms of urban design and architectural heritage of the Guéliz, are not (or not any longer) as monumental as some others (especially Casablanca and Rabat) but the structure of the area is of some importance as testimony of an era, and of the successive appropriations by different categories of people.

The 'disregard' for the architecture of the turn of the century, being likened to the period of the Protectorate, the desire to modernize the country, the emergence of a ruling class with important economic resources, the phasing out of Medina from the wealthier classes..., submitted the district to a high housing pressure that has caused significant changes, in the absence of any regulatory protection tool (except the 'building by building', restricted to monumental emergences); of any strategic planning tool allowing a safeguard policy for extramural areas; of any public policy of protection, at least partial, of this urban area.

The epochal change introduced by the concept of Historic Urban Landscape is expected to allow reconsidering urban balance. And, possibly, to include the preservation of the heritage value of certain features of the Guéliz in the (sustainable) development strategies of the urban area.

We will describe a test operation conducted in 2013 by some French researchers aimed to increase local (of both inhabitants and authorities) awareness of the Guéliz heritage added value, through identification and description.

## Marrakesh as a 'traditional' inheritance world heritage site (both tangible and intangible)

The heritage of the Moroccan town of Marrakesh is worldwide well renowned in particular thanks to the World Heritage UNESCO's site of the Medina of Marrakesh (inscribed in 1985) and the Cultural

space of Jemaâ El Fna Square (inscribed in 2008 on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity). Both of these heritages belong to the category that we could define as historical, ancient, traditional and vernacular. The Medina of Marrakesh, '*which gave its name to the Moroccan empire, is a completed example of a major Islamic capital of the western Mediterranean*' (Criterion iv) and represents '*an outstanding example of a living historic town with its tangle of lanes, its houses, souks, fondouks, artisanal activities and traditional trades*' (Criterion v), as well described in the UNESCO's candidature file. The image of the town, of its red ramparts, of its gardens, of its architectural masterpieces, of its handicraft activities is well established in collective imagination of both international travellers and Moroccans. During the last decades, the evolution of heritage notions allowed even the formal integration of intangible components as the traditional of story tellers of the Jamaâ El Fna Square. This renown has evidently positive and negative impacts on the spatial and social tissue of the Medina and of the town itself. The growing number of restored buildings, the economy implemented by the tourist market, the improvement of living conditions faces the expulsion of inhabitants from the Medina, the growing difference between poor and rich, the 'invasion' of wealthy Europeans.

Following a precise protectorate policy, Marrakesh has become a tourist destination. The constantly evoked codes of orientalism, the possibility of touching a close 'elsewhere', the myths built around all of it, 'condemned' Marrakesh, identified with the Medina, to correspond to the idea that foreigners have. This pressure to match with tourist attempts, the acquisition of many traditional intra-muros houses with gardens (generally called Riads) by foreigners and the touristification of practically any activity inside de Medina, ended up expelling other fragments of Moroccan society, as well among the poor than among the rich, that spread out of the walls and massively took possession of the rest of the urban area, including the Guéliz. At the time of its conception, the Guéliz did not directly impacted the Medina, but it changed already the global perception of the urban area.

## **Recent and mutual heritage**

As said, out of the well identified heritage sites, Marrakesh also harbours one out of the ten Prost's Moroccan 'villesnouvelles', well representing another type of heritage that we could call 'recent heritage'. As a matter of fact, during the French protectorate period (1912-1956), existing major towns in Morocco were doubled by a 19<sup>th</sup> century foundation town designed by the French renowned architect and urban planner Henry Prost, often seconded by Michel Ecohard and under the supervision of Maréchal Hubert Lyautey, that personify the French presence in Morocco. The part created according to the development plan, what we are led to call the new centre, is of a qualitatively remarkable urban design. The area integrates all the styles of the period, from late Academia to Modern Movement, without forgetting Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

This situation is not so uncommon, different regions of the Mediterranean show the existence of a rich and multiple cultural inheritance originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that is still largely underestimated and partially unknown. This cultural inheritance is the result of the mutual interaction of many different cultures and cultural fragments that have integrated local and international knowledge. Endogenous and exogenous skills have merged, giving rise to a specific production which is the result of this interaction.

The several architectural and urban inheritances that European colonization spread out all over the world recently – during the last two or three decades – burst into the heritage issues, mainly because of the heritage collective imaginary image, and because of the time buffer zone dividing today and the colonization period. This is well readable in the recent inscription on the World Heritage list of 20<sup>th</sup> century towns like Brasilia (Brazil, 1987), Tel Aviv (White City of Tel-Aviv - the Modern Movement, Israel, 2003) and Le Havre (Le Havre, the City Rebuilt by Auguste Perret, France, 2005), as well in the inscription of some colonial heritage like St. George's of Elmina Castle (Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions, Ghana, 1979), Ilha de Mozambique (Mozambique, 1991), El Jadida (Portuguese City of Mazagan - El Jadida, Morocco, 2004), Fort Jesus of Mombasa (Kenya, 2011)...; and perfectly resumed by the inscription of Rabat named 'Rabat, Modern Capital and Historic City: a Shared Heritage', inscribed in 2012: '*Through its urban ensemble, its monuments and its public spaces, the modern city of Rabat shows respect for, and draws*

*inspiration from, the earlier Arabo-Muslim heritage. It bears outstanding testimony to the diffusion of European ideas in the early 20th century, their adaptation to the Maghreb, and in return the influence of local, indigenous styles on architecture and decorative arts' (Criterion ii); 'The city constitutes an outstanding and fully realized example of modern town planning, for a 20<sup>th</sup> century capital city, achieved by functional territorial organisation which incorporates the cultural values of the past in the modernist project. The synthesis of decorative, architectural and landscape elements, and the interplay between present and past, offer an outstanding and refined urban ensemble' (Criterion iv).*

The architecture and urban framework of the last two centuries have produced spaces with significant potential value that can be developed to lead them to become almost proactive players in the achievement of land development strategies. These situations often reflect specific vital social and economic configurations, opposing to what one could imagine seeing the approximate and often insufficient attention to the preservation of their material quality.

Contrary to what is often maintained, this vast heritage was not only produced by western colonial expansion, something that would make it much less interesting than it really is, but it often coincided with endogenous modernisation processes tending to integrate new situations that were making the traditional space conformations, both private and public, partially obsolete.

Today, the definition of the perimeter of the field of action of spatial planning in this type of neighbourhood goes beyond the simple tangible field and interacts with factors that are intangible and symbolic. Urban modernisation operations have a constitution process that, from a certain point of view, recalls that of the establishment of the monumental value. Some operations, often in a colonial situation, start as significant and polarising. This is true also for the central avenue of the Guéliz that has an intrinsic aesthetic monumentality in addition to a role of clarification to the eternal memory of the power of the coloniser.

## **The global stake of the Historic Urban Landscape**

This type of complex and complete historic urban landscape is increasingly involved in processes of patrimonialisation: recent heritage starts to be seen as the context, the territory in which people were born, inhabit and experience life. But this heritage is also considered as 'colonial', since built under the French protectorate and mostly originally reserved to French citizens.

The concept of Historic Urban Landscape<sup>1</sup> is based on the fact that we should be able to control how contemporary development (contemporary architecture included) impacts the historical cities considered as heritage and their surroundings. The idea is to promote a global and integrated approach, in terms of planning and management that can take the environmental, economic, social, cultural and sustainable aspects involved into consideration as far as the management of the evolution and of the mutations is concerned.

The debates raised by the Vienna memorandum (2005) on the 'historic urban landscapes' demonstrate *'the importance given to the relationships that exist between the physical space, the social space and the interaction between society and its environment - which is considered to be the product of a long-term history'*<sup>2</sup>. Reflection has led towards an increasing need to take the physical aspects of the built heritage and spaces into consideration as well as the multiple concepts that are connected to the values, relationships, rituals, construction practices, local know-how systems and other forms of intangible heritage.

The 'historic urban landscape' specifically needs considering as heritage sites that occupy big surfaces and obliges highly complex measures. This approach clearly requires influencing the public policies on sustainable development to make sure the preservation of the heritages is included within their strategies.

## **The Guélizneighbourhood**

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<sup>1</sup> Whose definition has been enriched to include the notion of Urban territories as intensive forms of interactive demonstrations between man and his natural environment

<sup>2</sup> Daniele Pini, *Patrimoine partagé - conscience sociétale et conservation*, p. 26, in : Emilie Destaing et Anna Trazzi (ed.), *Consciences patrimoniales/Heritageawareness*, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2009, n. 1, pp. 25-36

As the representation of a significant historical and still undervalued period, the recent inheritance requires specific recognition that can help to preserve the forms and features of these neighbourhoods. Similarly, it imposes awareness of its value and need to be considered as an asset for sustainable local development. From this point of view, the study and recognition of this recent inheritance is made difficult by the implicit need to understand a notable series of different technical and cultural models that were temporally and spatially co-existent, producing, among others, frequent cultural and non-cultural conflicts.

In any case, the urban forms and architecture of the recent period are significant reference points in our contemporary cities, but their central location also often means that they are standing on an extremely high valueland. Today, this modern neighbourhood of Marrakesh, is subject to rapid changes related to its vital activities.

As to have a more precise idea of what remains, in which conditions and with which possibilities of survival, we started by drawing a first inventory (i). During 6 weeks, helped by a group of urban planning students of the Ecole Polytechnique of the university of Tours, we furrowed the surroundings systematically registering all the available information on each building: date of construction, state of conservation, elevation, type of building (from the isolated villa to the tenements), actual use, activities, vacancies (abandoned buildings)... The register file we employed is a specific register file designed starting from the crossing of several register files in current use in France. This method was of course crossed with the available statistical data. A systematic register of the existing items must be created to make progress in the development of interpretational theories with respect to the conception, transformation and consistency of this recent and shared heritage. Current research on post-colonial territoriality considers the transformation processes with more interest than the profoundly descriptive work of the register. Of course, in the absence of up-to-date and correct registers, the effective-quantitative position, the quality and that of recognition of the state of existence is still arbitrary; the reflections are, therefore, necessarily approximate.

This first recognition originated (ii) a data base and (iii) a GIS cartography that help us to preconize some possible interventions. The basic idea we followed is that we cannot hope for a complete conservation of the entire urban and architectural feature, and it probably will not make sense anyway. What we wanted to arrive to was to draw a strategy toward conservation that would have taken into account the global environment of the Guéliz, the socio-economical as well as the spatial tissues, the on-going dynamics and the relationship with the rest of the urban area and in particular with the ancient Medina.

The first assumption was that the contemporary integration of the area in a vital society must prevail on the architectural conservation but that the reasoned conservation of certain features could constitute an added value. Starting from crossing the typology of the building, their location and the location of the major economic activities and infrastructures we started visualize where the land pressure was higher, where the suitable sites for the upper classes were located, where the already realised transformation had almost nothing left of the original plan. So, the strategy is organised around different test zones representing a sample of the variety and diversity of situations. Three test zones were selected: 1. A small islet of villas, apart from the city traffic and relatively homogeneous; 2. A section of the major road (corresponding to the strong axis established during the protectorate even from a visual point of view) on the Medina side, quite transformed, where the architecture is constitute by late protectorate multi-storey buildings and where the economic activities are very well established; 3. And another section of this main axis, on the Guéliz hill side, where the architecture dates back to the beginning of the protectorate and where the buildings are at maximum at two floors (the general tendency of the neighbourhood being five floors).

The strategy is conceived as a strategic planning tool that foreseen specific attitudes and specific protections according to different criteria and managing possibility and opportunity: for example an isolated abandoned villa along a major traffic axis, surrounded by multi-storey buildings would not be protected, while an isolated villa along a major axis hosting an elegant restaurant would.

## **Social and spatial integration; problems of appropriation of recent and mutual heritage**

Even if there is a break with the past, contemporary acumen tends to maintain links with the history and allow reconsidering value judgments and to see ancient balances from new perspectives. The relationship with the past needs to be (re)invented; historical disciplines multiply expanding their field

of action but the relationship with the humanly sensitive component of the societies is gradually reduced with the growth of their scientific level.

It is impossible to think of spaces produced in the last two centuries without wondering what their current use is, just as how the societies of today use these space resources. The built heritage is an excellent observation point to become aware of the different situations produced, impregnated by local economic and social specifics but also by global (and globalising) spirit and will. Every approach to these spaces must start from the promotion of the awareness process and appropriation of this specific production, a different inheritance and differently inheritable, which is still steeped in the conflictual links which generated it. The intangible aspects of local memory impregnate these recent spaces and often condition the reading, limiting action, understanding and development. In fact, alongside the effective conflicts linked to colonisation, modernity introduced its own conflicts linked to the transformation of traditional spatiality, called into question by the production of new public and private spaces - multi-storey buildings, railway stations, cinemas and modern ports, whole areas of cities that have revolutionised the habitual configurations of space.

Another order of specificity arises from the 'memorial' look at these spaces, thus at the relationship set up with recent heritage, not yet ancient but no longer contemporary, which is still not separated from - but not even linked to - our current productive time. It is a past that is certainly no longer present but that has not yet found its collocation in time past. This specific heritage is in rapid and continuous transformation. Some demolitions certainly sadden us but, at the same time, they mark the need and desire to change these extremely vital spaces.

We are moreover aware that we are evolving precisely in the sphere of a stage of heritage construction and that, in fact, we are narrating a space that has a lot to do with the processes of territorial constitution and (re)construction. If on one hand we recognize the ongoing transformation of the concept of colonial architecture, on the other hand this particular architecture cannot hide its alien character and its lack of relations with the context in which it was born.

It is, therefore, necessary to approach this heritage by seeing it through its belonging to the present-day life: social and spatial integration pass by the understanding of its current (heritage) value, which includes its complex political and social journey from past to the present.

## Conclusions

The 'violence' of the souvenir of the protectorate period and the contemporary economic 'post-colonialism' make recent and modern spatiality too close to us to be observed in full. More, it's impossible to totally escape from the questions linked to the manipulation of heritage, the influences of the various ideologies, politics, identity claims and cyclical influences. Still, recent and shared heritage is, indeed, a specific component of the contemporaneity and is often in danger. From an urban as well as from an architectural point of view, it contributed to create the modern conception of street and of the relation public/private space, and it's physically different from the historic pre-modern and pre-colonial city, so, by its nature, it needs specific descriptive and analysis tools.

The transformations introduced involve not just the development of inhabited spaces but also the relationship with the material entities of the past. Modern cities play this role of spatial and social accelerator so well that we can observe them as the motor of future transformations, but we're erasing the fact that they are also a component of the past, and we're emending this lack of respect by focalizing on them a new heritage attention. The need for empathy that we seek with our times - past, present and future - and which can no longer be ensured by the more or less intuitive system of the ancestral tradition, is bypassed by the heritage fact.

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