

1. INTRODUCTION

The urban transformations in the Algerian city have often attracted researchers in the field of urban planning, as they have been approached from various perspectives.

(يوسف، 1992، ص63)

The city is nothing but a form of closely populated, organized, and complex human settlement. It represents a fusion of spiritual and moral elements with material components, with the former inseparable from the latter.

Hence, the city both shapes and is influenced by change, reflecting the reality of societies that seek identity on one hand and struggle with the dilemma of modernization projects through the adoption of successive urban policies on the other hand. The urban transformations witnessed in the Algerian city are nothing but a reflection of the dynamism of both material and moral modernization, which began with the introduction of Western systems during the colonial period and accelerated throughout the past century due to the influence of comprehensive state regimes and their developmental projects. These changes continue despite the crisis of legitimacy in centralized top-down governance.

(خويص، 2011، ص170)

From this perspective, we can say that the management of urban policy differs from one country to another due to differences in natural, historical, economic, political, and cultural factors. Algeria has undergone several stages; a different urban policy with different administrative approaches characterizes each stage. In this context, a centralized approach was adopted in planning and implementation under socialism (1962–1989).

Starting in 1986, the state's resources witnessed a significant decline due to the decrease in oil prices caused by the global crisis. The events of October 1989 followed this decline and marked the beginning of the transitional period. This was accompanied by a partial dismantling of the centralized system ("Municipal and Provincial Law"), which gave

more powers to elected representatives. (عقاقة، 2010، ص03) Thus, Algeria moved towards having a decentralized administrative system for managing the provinces (cities and towns). This system became one of the aspects of modern statehood, directly linked to the distribution of its functions among administrative bodies through a decentralized approach, which distributes administrative tasks between central authority and local councils operating within regional scopes.

On the other hand, due to socialist and centralized governance, the Algerian city inherited a fragile economic and deteriorating social situation. This is manifested in aspects such as social fragmentation, chaotic expansions, transportation crises, suburban marginalization, lack of aesthetic and environmental aspects in most urban centers, deterioration of urban services, unemployment, drug issues, crime proliferation, and absence of security.

According to Mouawiyah Saiduni, the crises seen in Algerian and Arab cities are represented by a morphological and social reality that necessitates analysis and decoding. These crises primarily include the challenges of modernization and planning, as well as the issues associated with centralized and decentralized approaches to curricula and methodologies. Moreover, anticipating and keeping up with transformations and controlling the growth of fragmented morphological and social spaces suffering from homogeneity and integration despite surface modernity.

This necessitates research into the models and values of modern planning upon which the experiences of planning elites have been based, consciously or unconsciously, resulting in the Algerian city being two cities: a city envisioned in the minds of planners and decision-makers, and a living reality emerging from transformations and social and economic forces. (Boumaza, 2006, p27)

This has made urban policies face immense challenges in order to restore esteem and balance to the Algerian city by finding solutions to various urban problems. Proper use and exploitation of space must be done according to principles built on good scientific planning in order to achieve sustainable local development, away from improvisation and randomness. Therefore, urban planning is considered an interconnected process that links and integrates economic, social, political, administrative, and legal data in order to produce a specific pattern of use. (عفاقية، 2010، ص4)

All of these measures and urban policies have led to the formation of distinct urban areas, each with its own social, economic, and ecological characteristics. These urban transformations have prompted researchers interested in the city as a subject of scientific research to pose numerous questions about the factors and reasons that contributed to the urban growth process of the Algerian city. They also inquire about the role of urban policies in addressing this urban growth and the tools employed in controlling the urban growth of the city.

Based on empirical evidence, the urban growth of the Algerian city has led to an increase in urban problems, manifested by the emergence of many ecologically deteriorated urban areas. There has also been a spread of random urbanization and an increase in the phenomenon of fragile housing in old neighborhoods, alongside neglect of the historical neighborhoods of the city and archaeological sites that represent cultural heritage. The problem revolves around the core of national identity, as the city also suffers from several issues related to urban services.

All indicators point to the incapacity of service institutions to meet the basic needs of the population. This leads us to question the role of urban policies in producing democratically and functionally balanced urban areas, and their ability to meet the social and service needs of the population.

From this perspective and through daily life in the Algerian city, we can pose the question:

- To what extent do these urban policies influence the Algerian city?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of its legal system and the mechanisms of its implementation represented in development and reconstruction tools?

To answer these questions, it is necessary for us to examine a socio-historical approach first in tracing the roots of the crisis of urban policies, which dates back to the colonial period, passing through the chronological stages of its historical development after independence up to our present day (Part One).

Secondly, it is crucial to analyze the reality of these policies from a critical perspective by presenting the most important development and reconstruction tools currently adopted, as well as highlighting the main obstacles and challenges they face in practice (Part 2).

2. The conceptual framework of urban policies

Urban policy is considered an important means of organizing urban natural spaces, relying on methods and techniques of direct intervention, either through ideas or studies, with the use of implementation methods to regulate living conditions in population centers, whether locally, regionally, or nationally.

Before delving into the topic of urban policy, it is necessary for us initially to define public policy as a first step, then to identify its nature in terms of being a comprehensive policy that encompasses urban policies within its folds.

2.1 Public policy

It is any action or situation taken by the government, both directly and indirectly, aimed at addressing a public issue with the aim of reaching solutions believed to be in the interest of the collective, relying on scientific methods and best practices within its surrounding environmental conditions. (الفريوتي، 2006، ص130)

2.2 Urban policy

The state formulates urban policy, defined as the strategy to control urban development. (الفهداوي، 2001، ص60)

Urban policy is a composite of several policies: land development policy, real estate policy, housing policy, agricultural policy, etc. These policies constitute the sectoral policies of urban policy, with each complementing the others, where land development and reconstruction policy serve as the connecting and coordinating elements among them.

2.3 Urban planning

It refers to the methodology through which the regions of a country are prepared for the distribution of population and their resources in a geographically sound manner. It is considered a mechanism for implementing urban policies on the ground. Urban planning effectively influences the spatial distribution and arrangement of objectives, functions, and programs. (المنديل، 2008، ص06)

Urban planning aims to achieve a set of objectives that are a literal translation of social and economic needs, based on principles such as flexibility, participation, realism, and ease of implementation, relying on available human and financial resources for urban settlements.

3. Roots of the Urban Policy Crisis in Algeria

3.1 The Colonial Period (First Modernization Shock)

This era was characterized by the imposition of Western planning models on Algerian cities, as described by Achboudane. This resulted in the neglect and uprooting of the original city and the implantation of the colonial "other" city.

The new city destroyed the old one by making streets wider and demolishing the fronts of Arab houses because they didn't fit European preferences. Within this urban dynamism, there arose a need for real estate to accommodate civil functions. Thus, lands, houses, and properties were seized, and many mosques were converted into civil functions

and churches, symbolizing the transformation of the city from one civilization to another and possessing its spirit as an initiatory act for the European city. The transformation of ownership was not only economically forceful but also a symbol for violence, which continues to influence the relationship between individuals and modernity and urbanity to this day. (سعيدوني، 2016، ص15).

In the late 1950s, innovative urban development and regulation tools were introduced, notably the Guiding Urban Development Plan (PUD). During this period, the Algerian city witnessed an urban and industrial revolution that introduced it to the world of urban modernity (The Constantine Project).

3.2 The Evolution of Urban Policies after Independence

After gaining independence, the national state inherited ambiguity in urban planning resulting from colonial policies tailored to the needs of European settlers, most of whom left Algeria. Additionally, the post-independence period witnessed an explosion of population and mass migration towards urban areas. This has put urban policies in a challenging situation. We can divide the evolution of these policies into the following periods:

(خداوي، 2022، ص294)

3.2.1 The Stage of Centralized Urban Policy 1962/1979

The newly established authorities started creating preliminary urban plans for municipalities with populations exceeding 10,000 inhabitants. The institutional groundwork was established in 1965 with the establishment of the Ministry of Public Works and Construction to deal with urban development. However, urban management was largely chaotic throughout the decade until the emergence of new urban policies in the 1970s, based on centralized planning that encompassed all sectors. Algeria adopted an economic orientation aligned with this centralized planning.

3.2.2 The Stage of Urban Policy Reform 1970/1990

During this period, public authorities became aware of the fundamental issues within the urban sector and the growing needs of the population for housing, education, and healthcare. This led to a comprehensive reform direction, with urban planning being one of its broad outlines. The establishment of the Ministry of Planning and Urban Development was one significant step, alongside the creation of the National Agency for Urban Planning in 1980. In 1981, the National Agency for Regional Planning (NARP) was also established, with one of its responsibilities being the preparation of the national urban planning scheme.

(خداوي، 2022، ص296)

3.2.3 The Stage of Decentralized Urban Policy 1990/2010

One of the most significant aspects of this stage is the economic, political, and consequently social transformations witnessed in Algeria. Politically, Algeria embraced pluralism and democracy following the official introduction of the 1989 constitution. Economically, Algeria shifted towards a market economy, allowing private investment and privatizing public institutions, which resulted in workforce reductions, increased unemployment, and inflation. The lack of attention to areas inside the country made things worse. When the elections were stopped in 1991, Algeria fell into a cycle of violence and terrorism. This diminished urban policies' importance and status. However, efforts were noticeable during this stage at both the institutional and instrumental levels.

4. Current Approved Tools for Urban Planning and Development in Algeria

Since independence, Algeria has relied on various means to organize its urban space, known as urban planning and development tools. These tools encompass urban plans applied at the level of each region and district. They enable regulation and organization of the space and can be summarized briefly in what is currently adopted.

4.1 The National Urban Planning Scheme (NUPS)

This National Urban Planning Scheme defines the fundamental directions for

organizing and developing the national territory.

4.2 The Regional Urban Planning Scheme (RUPS)

It is a strategic tool for developing the national urban planning scheme, where it elaborates and clarifies the orientations and principles established in both the national and regional schemes.

4.3 The Provincial Urban Planning Scheme (PUPS)

Each province prepares the Planning Scheme for the Province (PSP) in accordance with the guidelines and principles outlined in the urban planning scheme and the relevant regional scheme. It elaborates, clarifies, and adjusts the different planning areas and key municipal directives, as well as development and operational directives for the province.

4.4 The Urban Renewal Plan

It is actually an annexed plan with financial allocations designated for cities, particularly large cities. It aimed at upgrading and maintaining their public urban assets, such as roads, sidewalks, green spaces, parks, public gardens, etc.

4.5 The Municipal Urban Planning Scheme (MUPS)

It constitutes the foundational entities and domains where urban planning strategies enact policies. In reality, these domains are the frameworks within which all citizens can tangibly contribute to consultation processes and investments related to urban planning policy. Popular councils lead these initiatives and collaborate with the provincial administration and economic and social agents in their implementation.

4.6 The Directive Plan for Urban Planning and Development (DPUP)

It is a means of spatial planning and urban management. It outlines the basic orientations for urban planning of a single municipality or several neighboring municipalities with common factors such as shared water supply networks , public urban transportation routes, etc. This plan was established to eliminates the individual technical character that

was defined by the boundaries of the urban planning directive and leaves no room for unregulated urban expansion.

4.7 The Land Use Plan (LUP)

It is the plan that specifies, in detail and within the framework of the directive plan for urban planning and development, the rights of land use and construction.

5. Critique of Urban Policies in Algeria

The utilization of land represents an urban culture in a world where statistical data calculates and backs every step. This indicates that the era of spontaneity has passed. There is no future for developmental projects carried out under pressure or executed randomly, as significant resources have been wasted and will continue to be wasted if proper planning mechanisms for these resources and capabilities are not put in place. (بركاني، 2006، ص12).

On the other hand, we find that the issue of urbanism is not purely a scientific and material matter but is closely related to the cultural aspect of the citizen, the characteristics of their society, and its urban heritage. This necessitates their awareness of their needs in this field and their participation in the urban decision-making process related to their living environment, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to their city.

5.1 The Land Use Plan (LUP) Between Reality and Prospects

Although the legislature introduced it as a means to ensure communication among various stakeholders in the city and to play a fundamental role in creating a homogeneous urban space that serves as a link between theoretical conceptualization and practical implementation through making decisions to organize and manage urban space, in reality, this plan faces several obstacles that hinder the achievement of its outlined objectives. Despite the ideal organizational foundation of land use planning, it remains confined to the theoretical framework and has not found its way into implementation. This has made land use planning just a formality. (بركاني، 2006، ص12).

On the other hand, the heavy legacy of bureaucratic practices in urban and spatial planning by the administration has led to the application of the same previous methods to land use planning. This has made it merely a new image of preceding mechanisms, as well as hindered its mechanisms and effectiveness.

Despite the legal strength inherent in land use plans and their theoretical obligation for implementation, we find that the main actor (the state) is often the first aggressor against this tool in terms of application. This is evident in the sudden political decisions that often do not align with the proposed planning without referring to the approved planning in the land use plan until it is reviewed to regulate and legalize all these violations.

The study team, consisting of specialized technicians in the fields of architecture, construction, urban planning, urban sociology, urban economics, etc., is often subjected to significant pressure from the administrative authority. This frequently leads to catastrophic outcomes that inevitably impact the quality of the study and its results. (مهور باشا، 2022، ص 47)

The role of the municipality in shaping its urban fabric is limited to expressing opinions. The Directorate of Development, Architecture, and Construction, as the project owner, is responsible for determining the planning and drawing its features, which often do not align with the local social and economic reality. Consequently, most plans take the form of administrative dictates that do not encourage other stakeholders to work positively.

The absence of citizens and their non-inclusion during the approval of these plans on the ground because the role of associations is often completely nonexistent in the studies due to their absence, and if they exist and express their opinion, it is considered merely a formal procedure that is not taken into account and is not binding.

5.2 Local Development and Urban Policy Obstacles

Urban policies have suffered from the absence of a unified strategic vision in terms of both conception and implementation. Each historical period has its own set of urban

planning tools and schemes. In the 1970s and 1980s, in alignment with the socialist development model, tools such as the temporary urban plan and the guided urban plan were employed. In the 1990s, new urban planning schemes were adopted, such as the guiding plan for development and urban planning (PDUP) and the land use plan (LUP).

According to urban management reports and urban experts, all these plans have failed to limit urban growth or control the urban expansion of the city due to:

Firstly, the irrational transition of plans from specific urban specifications to new specifications, which adversely affects the urban fabric of the city.

Secondly, most urban plans fail because they are prepared after many years due to the heavy burden of bureaucratic procedures and their complexity. (غواس، 2012، ص 45)

5.3 The Leniency and Tolerance in Implementing These Policies

Despite the fact that the Algerian legislature has put in place a substantial regulatory framework to address the issue of urban expansion in Algerian cities, reality proves the ineffectiveness of these rules for many reasons, including:

- The administrative bodies responsible for implementing laws and regulations often find themselves either complicit with violators or lacking the financial and technological means necessary to carry out these regulatory tasks with the required speed.
- The judiciary shares some responsibility because it doesn't resolve disputes quickly and legal procedures don't address urgent situations.
- There is a lack of training for judges in the technical and urban planning aspects.
- There is a widespread tendency to be lenient towards those who violate planning and development regulations. This leniency originates from various reasons, notably social and political factors, which aim to maintain civil peace.

6. CONCLUSION

After completing this critical study and delving into the roots of the urban policy crisis in Algeria through the historical approach adopted in our research, we can conclude that:

Despite all the efforts made by the Algerian state to enhance urban policies for the purpose of organizing and efficiently managing its urban domain, it has not reached the level of aspirations. This can be attributed to several reasons, including: historical colonial, economic, and political factors of the Algerian authority.

There are also social reasons related to the mentality and mindset of the Algerian individual. The current reality confirms the failure of these successive urban policies, as they have not addressed urban crises and problems related to housing, education, healthcare, transportation, etc.

The situation has caused Algerian citizens to feel disheartened, as seen in many protest movements in the Algerian streets. Additionally, the disparity between the northern and southern regions has led to an increased attachment to regional, local, and municipal affiliations over national belongings

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