Identical Preservation and Its Implications for the Evolution of Maghrebi Medinas: A Study of Constantine's Old Town in Eastern Algeria

Roukia BOUADAM [*1]

[1]Institut de gestion des techniques urbaines (IGTU), University of Constantine 3
roukia.bouadam@univ-constantine3.dz

Received : 2025-02-26 Accepted: 2025-07-16

Abstract: The medinas of the Maghreb represent intricate urban entities deeply embedded within complex historical, geographical, and political trajectories. Frequently marginalized within contemporary urban frameworks, these historical districts, exemplified by the old city of Constantine, embody profound architectural and cultural significance that transcends conventional preservation paradigms. Current heritage conservation approaches predominantly employ standardized methodological interventions that systematically neglect the contextual nuances and unique morphological characteristics intrinsic to each medina. Our research employs a comprehensive methodological framework integrating comparative historical analysis and extensive ethnographic field investigations to interrogate the multifaceted dynamics of urban transformation. The findings reveal that colonial-era urban interventions and standardized preservation paradigms have precipitated substantial structural and socio-cultural transformations, fundamentally altering the developmental trajectories of these historic urban landscapes. The intrinsic economic potential and remarkable diversity of attributes exhibited by Maghrebi medinas necessitate a sophisticated, context-sensitive conservation strategy. Traditional homogeneous preservation approaches are demonstrably inadequate for addressing the complex spatial, social, and cultural dimensions of these urban environments. Instead, a nuanced, adaptive methodology is imperative, simultaneously safeguarding distinctive heritage values while facilitating meaningful integration within contemporary urban ecosystems. By prioritizing contextual specificity and recognizing the dynamic nature of urban heritage, this research advocates for a more nuanced approach to Medina conservation. Such a paradigm shift would not only preserve architectural and cultural integrity but also support the sustainable revitalization of these historically significant urban spaces.

Keywords: Context, old town of Constantine; specificities; standardization; consequences.

Introduction:

A substantial body of scholarship has demonstrated that urbanization in the Maghreb has frequently entailed a devaluation of medinas—whether located in city centers or on their peripheries—despite the considerable heterogeneity of their circumstances (Masri, 1975; Signoles et al., 1980; Masfer, 1984; Cote, 1974; Bouadam, 2002). Nonetheless, medinas continue to epitomize the traditional city, even as their architectural and urban heritage is too often overlooked. The French colonial project in the Maghreb further shaped the evolution of these Arab towns by instituting economic, political, cultural, and social systems that decisively configured urban space (Signoles et al., 1980; Masfer, 1984; Cote, 1974; Bouadam, 2002; Beguin). Finally, the imposition of Western values has been

* Corresponding author

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

identified as a key driver in forging an urban dichotomy between modern and traditional cityscapes, both within extant medinas and in the older, vernacular districts.

In contrast to the traditional Maghrebi medinas, colonial urban settlements in Algeria exhibit a significant comparative distinction. Colonial intervention followed two distinct implementation models: either partial or complete superimposition upon the pre-existing medina fabric, resulting in its demolition and subsequent disruption of its original urban functions, or, as exemplified by the paradigmatic case of ancient Mila, an ex-nihilo establishment on an undeveloped site located approximately two kilometers west of the historical nucleus (Çelik, 1997; Lesbet, 2006). This spatial dichotomy reflects the territorial planning strategies implemented by the French colonial administration, manifesting a morphological and functional rupture with traditional North African urban structures (Bouadam, 2002; Semmoud, 2003).

In contrast to the medinas of the Maghreb and Algeria, the traditional city of Constantine, corresponding to "Le Rocher" (the Rock), has experienced a markedly divergent trajectory (Bouadam, 2002). European settlers gradually integrated into this space, contributing to the development of a distinctive urban entity. Unlike other traditional urban centers, Le Rocher has maintained its vitality by preserving the essential functions characteristic of a major urban agglomeration (Cote, 1974).

Nevertheless, these elements have been incorporated into the national heritage based on a set of analogous values relating to their typical architecture, history, and artisanal activities which Reigl (2003) terms "commemorative value" without adequately accounting for the contextual and functional particularities and specific cultural values intrinsic to these areas.

Currently, the old town has been designated a protected area through Executive Decree no. 5-208 of 26 Rabie Ethani 1426, corresponding to June 4, 2005, which establishes and delineates the protected zone of the old city of Constantine. This regulatory development raises significant questions regarding the impact of such protective measures on the area's future development trajectory.

This article aims to illuminate the characteristic elements of the old town of Constantine, emphasizing the importance of reassessing the values underpinning its protection. The primary objective is to analyze the repercussions of this conservation strategy on both the functionality and built environment of this historically significant urban space.

1. Research methodology

The research methodology for investigating the urban dynamics and heritage preservation of Constantine's medina adopts a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach that integrates three fundamental research strategies. Initially, a comparative historical analysis was conducted, systematically reviewing seminal works on Maghrebian urban spaces and critically examining existing scholarly research on medina transformations. This theoretical foundation was complemented by extensive empirical field research, which involved on-site observational studies, systematic documentation of urban morphology, and detailed photographic and cartographic analysis.

Documentary investigation formed the third pillar of the research methodology, encompassing archival research, in-depth analysis of historical texts, examination of archaeological reports, and critical evaluation of historical narratives. The research employed qualitative research techniques, including structured observational protocols and in-depth contextual analysis, drawing from diverse

data sources such as academic publications, historical archives, archaeological documentation, and urban planning reports.

The analytical framework was strategically designed to facilitate a nuanced understanding of Constantine's medina. A contextual comparative analysis was implemented to systematically compare the medina with other Maghrebian urban cores, identifying unique architectural and social characteristics and evaluating historical continuity and transformation. Simultaneously, a critical heritage assessment was conducted to analyze conservation strategies, evaluate preservation interventions, and assess heritage management approaches.

Recognizing the inherent challenges of such research, the methodology also acknowledged several methodological limitations. These included temporal constraints of field research, potential biases in historical interpretations, limited access to certain archival materials, and the intrinsic difficulties of documenting intangible cultural heritage.

The research structure was bifurcated into two primary sections. The first section focused on contextual characterization, examining Constantine's medina within the broader context of Maghrebian urban landscapes and analyzing its distinctive heritage characteristics. The second section engaged in a critical preservation analysis, evaluating conservation strategies, assessing the impacts of urban interventions, and critically analyzing preservation methodologies.

This multifaceted approach provides a comprehensive and nuanced framework for investigating the urban dynamics of Constantine's medina, successfully integrating historical analysis, empirical research, and critical interpretation to generate substantive insights into urban heritage preservation.

2. Fundamentals of heritage and conservation

2.1 International and local interest in cultural heritage

The formal recognition and protection of heritage emerged in the 19th century through the establishment of systematic legal instruments (classification, registration, etc.) and the development of specialized conservation professions. Since this foundational period, heritage policies have evolved considerably in response to emerging intellectual paradigms, resulting in two principal theoretical orientations.

The first orientation manifested as a romantic and nostalgic veneration of ruins, predicated upon their antiquity and evocative capacities (Babelon and Chastel, 2000). This perspective prioritized the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of architectural remnants, emphasizing their ability to elicit historical consciousness and cultural memory.

The second approach reflected a scientific imperative to systematically categorize architectural heritage through comprehensive inventories. This methodological stance privileged taxonomic organization and documentation, establishing an empirical foundation for conservation practices.

Since the latter half of the 20th century, there has been a pronounced intensification of interest in heritage preservation, accompanied by a significant expansion in the conceptual parameters of what constitutes "heritage" (Babelon and Chastel, 2000). This broadening of definitional boundaries has facilitated the inclusion of diverse cultural expressions and artifacts previously excluded from conventional heritage frameworks, reflecting a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of cultural significance.

2.2 The Conceptual Evolution of Heritage and Its Protection Mechanisms

The concept of heritage, initially circumscribed within the familial, economic, and legal frameworks of a stable society anchored in specific spatial and temporal contexts, has undergone substantial enrichment and continuous evolution. Originally characterized as a "very old word," the conceptualization of heritage has expanded dramatically from isolated architectural monuments to encompass sites, urban ensembles, and landscapes, all of which collectively constitute the repository of human activity and memory.

This conceptual expansion has been accompanied by a proliferation of qualifying adjectives (genetic, natural, historical, etc.) that have transformed heritage into what Choay (2004:9) describes as a "nomadic" concept, one currently experiencing another significant renaissance in academic and policy discourse. The concept of heritage is fundamentally intertwined with the processes of transmission and valorization (Chaudoire, 2004:1).

It is imperative to recognize the parallel evolution of heritage policies, the development of legislative instruments for protection (such as classification, inscription, and restoration protocols), and the emergence of specialized conservation professions (Bouadam, 2010). While the historical focus privileged buildings of exceptional symbolic significance, contemporary approaches have broadened to incorporate natural, historical, and physical attributes as integral components of heritage.

The necessity of protecting historic urban centers has gained international recognition, evidenced by the formulation of numerous foundational documents, including the 1934 Athens Charter, the 1964 Venice Charter, the 1976 Warsaw-Nairobi Recommendations concerning historic areas, and the 1987 ICOMOS Washington Charter. These international frameworks collectively establish normative standards for urban heritage preservation while acknowledging the complex challenges inherent in balancing conservation imperatives with evolving urban dynamics.

2.3 UNESCO World Heritage Recognition and Evolution of Algerian Heritage Legislation

Following the adoption of the World Heritage Convention by UNESCO on November 16, 1972, numerous global initiatives have demonstrated the significant value of heritage enhancement (UNESCO, n.d.). The World Heritage List has expanded continuously, incorporating diverse cultural assets including vestiges, historic towns, parks, archaeological sites, and monuments, with notable inclusion of several Arab and North African medinas.

Specifically, numerous North African medinas have achieved recognition through inclusion in national heritage inventories. Egypt (historic Cairo in 1979), Tunisia (Tunis in 1979, Sousse in 1988), Morocco (Fez in 1988, Marrakech in 1985), and Algeria (the Kasbah of Algiers in 1992, the M'Zab Valley in 1982) have all received acknowledgment as cultural landscapes of exceptional significance (UNESCO, 2022). For inclusion on the World Heritage List, sites must demonstrate outstanding universal value and satisfy at least one of the ten established selection criteria. Protection mechanisms, management frameworks, authenticity, and integrity constitute additional essential considerations. Since 1992, significant interactions between human populations and their natural environments have been formally recognized as constituting cultural landscapes (UNESCO, 2023).

In Algeria, paralleling developments in most nations, the institutional and legal frameworks incorporate the expanded conceptualization of heritage into comprehensive policies for safeguarding and enhancing cultural assets (Anonymous, 2016). Algerian heritage legislation has undergone significant evolution, marked by the transition from Ordinance no. 67.281 of December

20, 1967, governing excavations and the protection of historical sites and natural monuments, to the more comprehensive Law no. 98-04 of 1998 concerning the protection of cultural heritage (Algerian Ministry of Culture, 1998).

Ordinance No. 67-281 established specific criteria, classification hierarchies, and procedural mechanisms for site designation, while also identifying the administrative bodies authorized to implement such classifications. This ordinance functioned as the predominant regulatory framework for cultural heritage management in Algeria until the enactment of revised heritage legislation. The promulgation of Law No. 98-04 of 1998 represented a paradigmatic shift in the legislative approach, transitioning from policies protecting historical and natural sites and monuments to a comprehensive cultural heritage protection framework directly influenced by UNESCO principles and standards.

2.4 Sustainable Urban Preservation: A Theoretical Framework

Sustainable urban preservation represents a multidimensional approach that integrates historical conservation with contemporary socioeconomic and environmental concerns. This framework has evolved from purely aesthetic considerations to a comprehensive paradigm that views urban heritage as a living entity (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012). According to Rodwell (2007), it operates at the intersection of cultural significance, economic viability, and environmental sustainability—what he terms a "trivalent approach" to heritage management.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) provides a foundational doctrine for this framework, advocating for the integration of conservation into broader urban development goals. This approach embraces Pendlebury et al.'s (2009) concept of "conservation through change," recognizing that adaptive reuse enhances historical structures' relevance in contemporary settings.

The framework acknowledges heritage as social capital contributing to community identity. Throsby (2017) argues that cultural value in historical environments transcends economics, fostering social sustainability through collective memory and place attachment. Smith (2006) reinforces this by conceptualizing "heritage as a cultural process" rather than static artifacts, emphasizing community engagement in preservation decisions.

Economically, sustainable urban preservation challenges the notion that conservation opposes development. Rypkema (2008) demonstrates that heritage conservation generates benefits through tourism, jobs, and property value enhancement. The concept has recently incorporated circular economy principles (Foster & Kreinin, 2020), viewing historical buildings as repositories of materials that can be repurposed rather than demolished.

Environmental sustainability forms the third pillar, with studies by Bullen and Love (2010) showing that adaptive reuse typically produces lower carbon emissions than new construction. Jackson's (2005) concept of "embodied energy" provides environmental rationale for preservation, while traditional urban forms often exhibit intrinsic sustainability features (Vefago & Avellaneda, 2013).

2.5 **Legislative Framework for Cultural Heritage Protection in Algeria**

The primary objective of this legislative act is to establish a comprehensive definitional framework for the nation's cultural heritage, to articulate the fundamental principles governing its protection, preservation, and enhancement, and to delineate the specific conditions for the practical implementation of these principles (Article 1.2).

Contemporary legislation has significantly expanded the conceptual parameters of heritage to incorporate "historic centers" while simultaneously establishing the regulatory category of the "safeguarded sector." The legislation mandates the development of a "permanent safeguarding and enhancement plan" for such designated sectors, complementing the existing mechanisms for registering immovable cultural property in the supplementary inventory and its classification as a specific protection measure.

Article 41 of the law provides a comprehensive delineation of sectors subject to safeguarding measures, encompassing urban real-estate ensembles, including Kasbahs, Medinas, and Ksour, among other traditional urban formations. These protected urban configurations are distinguished primarily by their predominance of residential functions and are accorded historical significance based on their coherent architectural uniformity and aesthetic unity.

This legislative framework represents a substantial advancement in Algerian heritage protection policy, establishing more nuanced and contextually appropriate mechanisms for preserving the distinctive urban fabric of traditional settlements while acknowledging their continued habitation and functional complexity.

3. Interpretation of results

3.1 Current Context of Ancient Cities: "Medinas"

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, transformations of medieval urban centers occurred simultaneously with a phase of urban expansion corresponding to the emergence of competitive capitalism, intensification of commercial activity, and development of manufacturing. This period constitutes a critical historical juncture with profound implications for the trajectory, whether survival or decline, of historic city centers throughout the Maghreb. From a spatial perspective, colonial intervention catalyzed the establishment of "new towns," which emerged either in juxtaposition or intertwinement with pre-existing Arab urban settlements, manifesting in diverse morphological configurations (Hermassi, 1975).

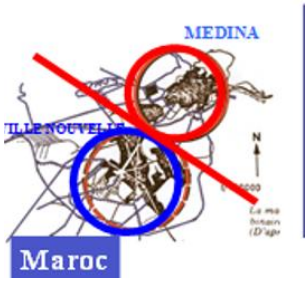
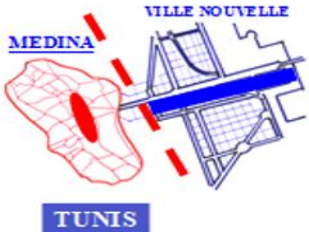
According to Hermassi's (1975) analysis, the colonization process in Morocco generated "new towns" that were systematically juxtaposed with historical medinas. In most instances, these traditional urban cores remained physically intact but were deliberately separated from colonial settlements by designated non-buildable zones, resulting in extremely gradual deconstruction processes. Notably, the medina of Fez has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1981, acknowledging its exceptional cultural significance.

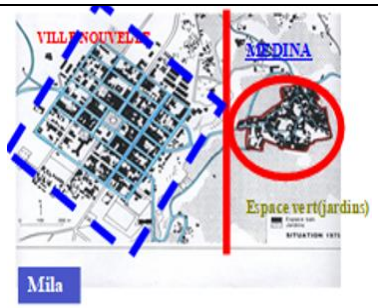
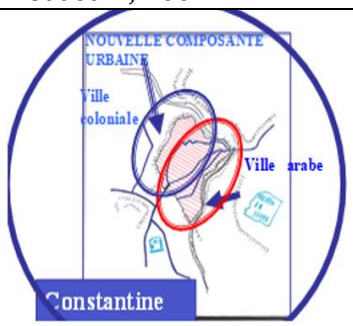
In Tunisia, the urban configuration demonstrates greater structural coherence, employing primarily one architectural-urban instrument: the Kasbah. For instance, the Kasbah of the Tunis medina served as the foundation for establishing administrative authority (Signoles et al., 1980). This integration into the broader urban system reflects a utilitarian approach whose impact persists contemporarily, exemplified by the continued utilization of the Kasbah-Porte de la Mer axis for tourism development. This evolutionary trajectory represents a significant departure from its original traditional function, as previously documented by Masfer in 1984. Consequently, colonial settlement generated a novel urban nucleus with distinctive characteristics that proliferated rapidly through the expansion of new urban development.

In Algeria, however, the form of domination was comprehensive, characterized by complete military subjugation. In certain urban centers, the repercussions of these domination forms on the urban environment manifested through the establishment of European zones within medinas, creating a spatial division wherein all administrative, social, and infrastructural components were

colonial (exemplified by Algiers). The colonial occupation of Algiers in 1830 precipitated a series of profound urban transformations. The initial phase of occupation was characterized by the systematic destruction of its original spatial organization, as documented by Béguin (1983). The Kasbah, representing both a symbol of Algerian society and a significant architectural expression, experienced substantial neglect during this period, losing its function as the center of colonial power, a role it has only recently reclaimed. The urban development that occurred distant from its historical site, coupled with the stagnation of its spatial utilization, effectively diminished its functional role within the urban context. This circumstance was dictated by the emergent economic and political imperatives characteristic of the industrial era, reflecting broader patterns of colonial urban restructuring throughout the region (tabN1).

Table 1: The current context of the medinas

Nature of conservation From the historical core	**Form of the implantation of the colonial component/Core**	**Degree of conservation of traditional urban fabric**	**The integration of the medina into the urban area**	**The current function of the Medina**
MOROCCO Fez World Heritage since 1981	 Source : MSFER , 1984 cited by Bouadam, 2002	Fabric preserved in its entirety	Separation between the two components	Secondary Tourist Center
TUNISIA World Heritage Since 1979	 Source :1984 cited by Bouadam, 2002	Fabric preserved in its entirety	Development of the new city next to the medina	Secondary Tourist Center
ALGERIA **The Casbah of Algiers Heritage of humanity**	 Source : background map casbah workshop cited by Bouadam, 2002	Partially Consisted Fabric Fabric	Development of the news on a part of the casbah then the evolution took another direction	Classified as a World Heritage Site Habitat

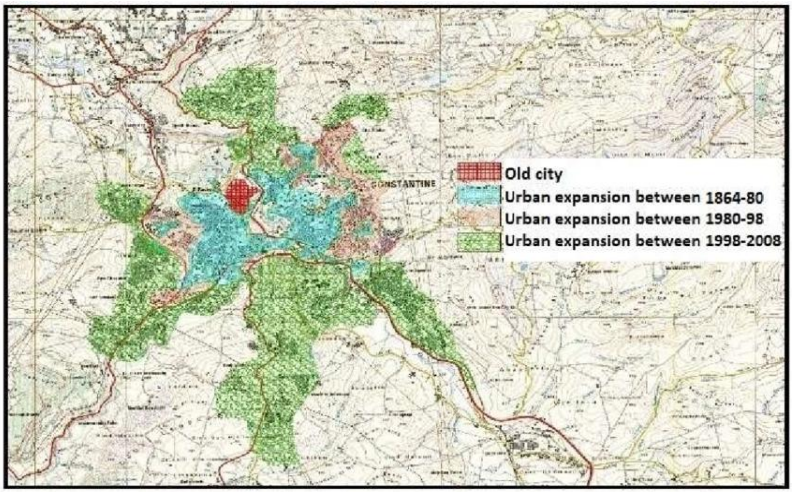
ALGERIA **The old town of Mila established as a protected area in 2009**	 Source : background map cote , 1974 cité par Bouadam, 2002	Urban fabric preserved in its entirety	Development of the new city far from the medina	Habitat
Old town of constantine		Nesting, juxtaposition and fusion of styles	perfect integration into the urban environment	Heritage and city center at the same time

Source: (Bouadam,2002)

3.2 The Context of the Old Town of Constantine

In distinct contrast to the Maghrebian or Algerian medinas, which typically exhibit comprehensive spatial and functional segregation between traditional and modern urban components, Constantine's medina has followed a markedly different developmental trajectory (Bouadam, 2002). The traditional city of Constantine, colloquially known as the "Rock," has experienced a unique historical evolution characterized by gradual integration rather than segregation. European neighborhoods progressively assimilated into the urban fabric, culminating in the formation of a distinctive urban entity (Bouadam, 2002). Constantine's historic center maintains its primacy as a focal point for both contemporary inhabitants and modern urban functions (Pagand, 2005; Bouadam, 2002). This persistent centrality can be attributed to the area's multifaceted significance—strategic, historical, commercial, and physical. The old town of Constantine occupies the most central geographic position within the city and represents the oldest stratum of Constantine's historical development (fig N1). The medina is integrated into the surrounding urban fabric. The rock's original axes are extended by newly built bridges, which become the city's principal expansion routes and confer a strategic role on the rock. From a functional perspective, the Rocher has successfully maintained its urban vitality by preserving what Cote (1974) identifies as the "vital functions" of a substantial conurbation. It continues to exert influence throughout Constantine's expanding urban framework, firmly establishing itself as an essential urban nucleus (Bouadam, 2011).

Figure N 1: position of the old town of Constantine



Source : URBACO, 2008

From a morphological standpoint, the implementation of the ordinance of June 19, 1844, which facilitated French settlement in the upper section of the rock, signified the initial fragmentation of this unified urban entity. The old town of Constantine comprises several distinct sections, each manifesting unique morphological characteristics and activity patterns. The upper section, designated as the "Casbah," constitutes a relatively homogeneous district comprising residential dwellings alongside administrative and military facilities, predominantly characterized by Western architectural typologies. The central district encompasses the historical core of the Arab city, where the urban fabric bears the imprint of Constantine's complex historical evolution, interwoven with both traditional urban models and subsequent Western architectural interventions. The district of Souika, situated at the lowest elevation of the city, is widely regarded as one of Constantine's most traditional quarters. It is distinguished by its irregular street configuration, substantial building volumes, unembellished façades, and a pedestrian-oriented circulation network deliberately designed to exclude vehicular traffic. This distinctive urban morphology (Fig. N2), (photo N1, N2 and N3) reflects Constantine's unique historical development, characterized by integration and adaptation rather than the stark separation observed in other North African urban centers.

photoN1 Overview of the old town of Constantine from the Sidi Rached bridge



Source: Author, 2024

Figure N2: Complex morphology, fusion of styles

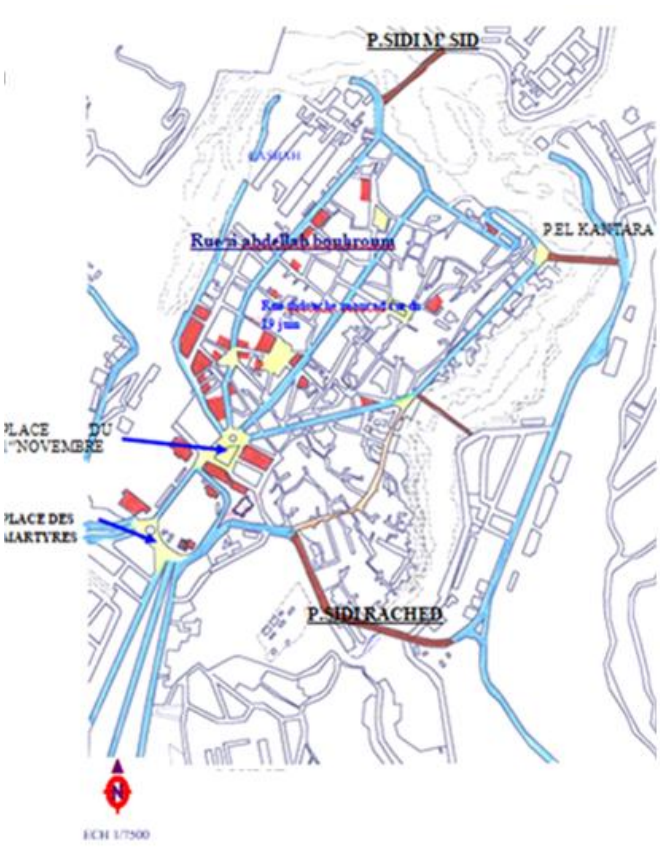




Photo N2 traditional style



Photo N 3 Western style

Source: bouadam, 2002

3.3 The Permanence of Urbanity and Morphological Renewal

The peculiarity of Constantine's urban landscape stems from its unconventional geographical context, which, as Alexandre Dumas famously remarked, evokes the imagery of Gulliver's flying island (A. Berthier and R. Goossens, 1965) (photo N4). "Clinging to the side of the Rhumel ravine, between the gigantic stone bridge of Sidi Rached and the daring footbridge thrown over the vertiginous abyss, framed by verdant mountains, Constantine seems to have been built by a publisher of illustrated postcards" (La Fourchardiere). The old town of Constantine is strategically located at the heart of the city and region, and it also has a long history. Indeed, Constantine is among the most ancient cities in the world, with a history that dates back to the earliest periods of human settlement (Badjadja, 2007). The city's persistent existence on its original site serves as a testament to its historical significance. The old town of Constantine serves as the foundation upon which the history of society has been inscribed, and it is also a product of the society that inhabits it. The city's enduring existence on its original site bears testimony to its historical significance, with each element bearing the traces of numerous civilizations (Photo N5, N6 and N7) . This makes the old town of Constantine a unique and invaluable source of historical and cultural information.

Photo N4: the particularity of the Constantine site





Photo N5: the old Roman bridge under the current Baba El Kantara bridge



Photo N 6 : Caesar's Baths (Roman period)



Photo N7: Traces from the Numidian period

Source: N5 Author and N6, N7 culture direction

The city of Constantine has been continuously occupied, undergoing recurrent morphological metamorphoses (renewals) throughout the course of numerous civilizations. The city has been rebuilt on itself dozens of times, and its superimposed rubble, buildings, streets, and squares bear witness to continuous rebirth. This phenomenon, as articulated by Corboz (1983), can be conceptualized as a "palimpsest," perpetually marked by the actions of erasing, modifying, and reusing its underlying layers. This dynamic process of transformation and reuse is a testament to the city's resilience and its continuous adaptation to changing circumstances. This phenomenon can be likened to the concept of a "palimpsest," as articulated by Corboz (1983), wherein the city's layers of history are continuously erased, modified, and reused, resulting in a perpetual state of transformation. This perpetual cycle of disappearance and resurgence has rendered this space more resilient than its inhabitants, continuously disappearing into a past which subsequently resurfaces (Ibn Khaldoun, in D., Chabane, 1889). The city of Constantine has exhibited a capacity for autonomous evolution, a phenomenon attributable to its possession of elements of substitution. These elements encompass a duration characterized by constant substitution, evolution, and adaptation across diverse civilizations. Concurrent with this process is the evolution of buildings, uses, and all urban elements (Lemas, 1998). This continuous transformation of the city's morphology has enabled its adaptation to the evolving demands of its inhabitants over time, thereby introducing diversity into its urban and architectural composition. This ongoing process has also contributed to the durability of urban structures within the same geographical location (Bouadam 2011).

The distinctive nature of the urban fabric of the old town of Constantine is manifested in the amalgamation of urban designs, characterized by both rectilinear and sinuous street layouts and plazas, and architectural styles influenced by Arab and Western influences, drawing upon the

vestiges of earlier civilizations (Numidian, Roman, etc.). The outcome of these metamorphoses is manifest in the urban form, architecture, and reuse of materials from one era to the next (Photo N8, N9). Furthermore, a diversity of functions is evident, with traditional squares complementing the rectilinear axes that were regularized during the colonial period, showcasing a rich variety of functions and styles (Bouadam, 2012).

Photo N 8 and N9: The use of materials from the Roman era (stone and columns)





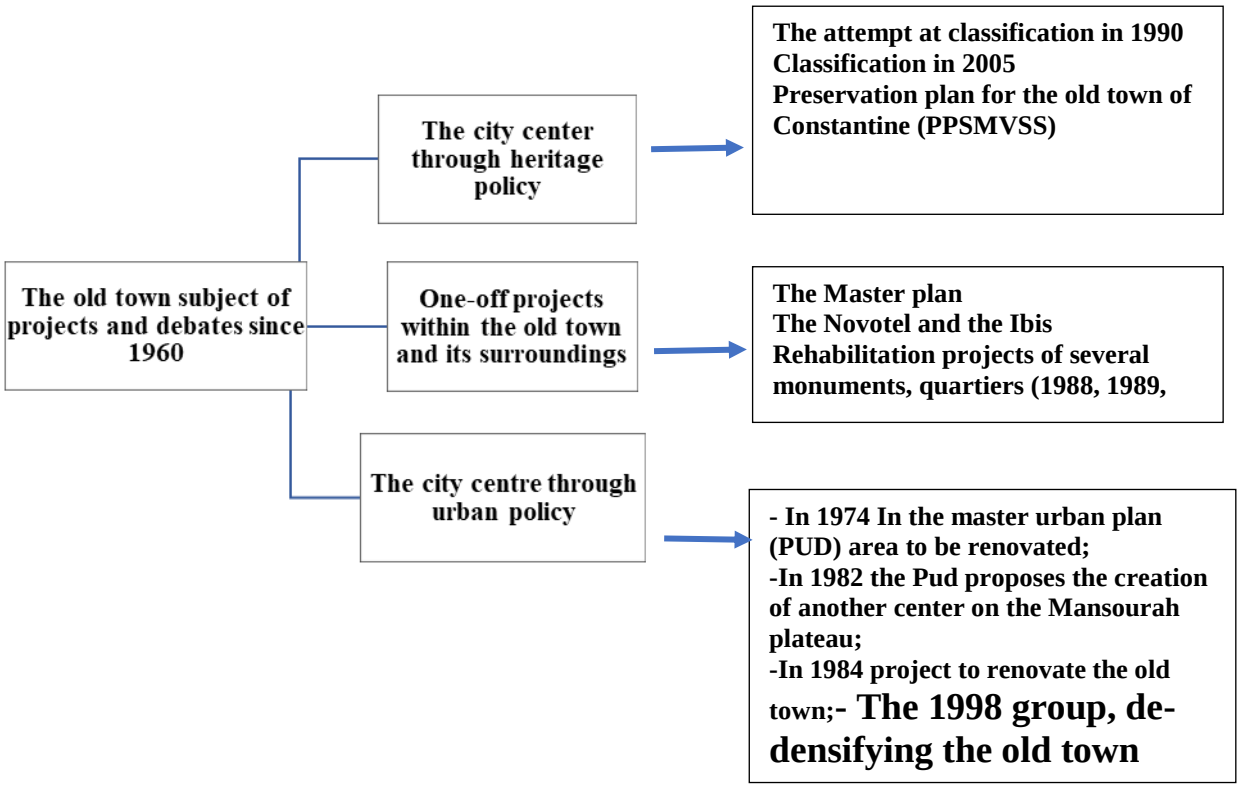
Source: Author , 2011

3.4 The Old town, a space torn between its role and its status

The manner in which this historical heritage has been addressed has historically entailed an accumulation of studies and attempts at identical interventions or operations, a practice that has been widely criticized for its lack of consideration for the particularities of the heritage in question (Bouadam, 2002; 2010). This challenge in comprehending the complexity of the phenomenon has the potential to result in unwarranted excesses. The old town becomes a space torn between its role as an urban center and its heritage status. The consequences of this tension include advanced deterioration, spontaneous renewal, and the concentration of commercial activities, albeit in an anarchic fashion (Bouadam, 2011). This dynamic has had far-reaching repercussions on the latter through several effects and at several levels. At the stakeholder level, conflicts arise between innovators, who perceive this space as functional, and conservatives, who seek to categorize it as heritage exclusively based on its historical and architectural characteristics, emulating the Maghrebian or Algerian medinas. The debate persists, and its realization is impeded by several factors (Bouadam, 2010).

At the policy level, the absence of a coherent project has led to a fragmentation of thinking between urban and heritage policy, resulting in a state of reflection that is both confused and fragmented, and at times, contradictory. For a considerable period, the future of town centers has been a subject of concern for public authorities, local communities, and planning specialists. Analyses from that era indicated the necessity, scope, and urgency for intervention. Some proposals regarded the rock as a space to be renovated, neglecting to consider its historical and symbolic significance. Conversely, alternative proposals advocated for the development of a modern center, a strategy that was previously implemented in the development of Fez and Tunis. The subsequent diagram (Fig N3) offers a synopsis of the array of projects and reflections that have emerged concerning the old town since 1960.

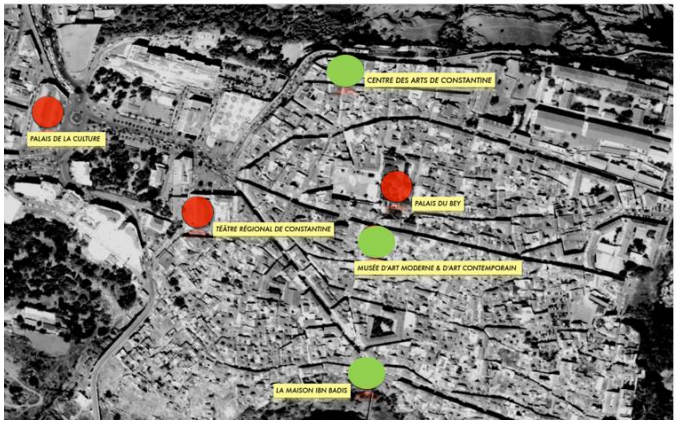
Figure N3: Fragmented projects and thinking



Source: Bouadam, 2002

The conceptions of the old town are oriented towards a transformation in its function, seeking to transition it from a central role to a traditional city, emulating the Maghreb medinas (e.g., Fez, Tunis). This concept resurfaced during the year 2015, when the city was designated as the Capital of Arab Culture. In that year, a decision was made to bolster the cultural activities of the Rock by converting certain buildings from their original uses (Fig N4). For instance, the former MONOPRIX building was transformed into a Museum of Contemporary Art, the Résidence de Wilaya was converted into an Arts Centre, and the Mederssa was repurposed as a center dedicated to Constantine's historical and cultural figures. Despite this promising trend of spontaneous spatial and functional evolution of the city center, contemporary thinking runs counter to this striking reality, moving instead towards the establishment of a cultural center or artisan city.

Fig N4 Functional mutations of some buildings



Source: wilaya of Constantine, 2015

3.5 **The old town, a built heritage at risk**

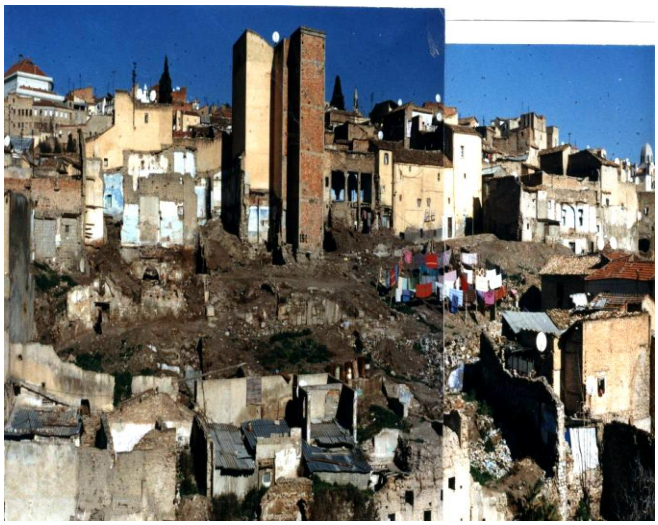


Photo N10/Taken In 2002



Photon11/ Taken In 2010



Photo N 12 Taken In 2010



Photo N13 /Taken In 2010



Photo N 14/ Taken In 2025

Source : AUTHOR

The failure to act and the abandonment of the central area, in conjunction with the inability to regulate this phenomenon, have the potential to result in unwarranted excesses. These excesses manifest in real estate and land speculation, social excesses that lead to the deterioration of its built environment, functional anarchy, and shanty towns (see photos N10, N11, N12, N13, and N14). The latter is characterized by the advanced state of deterioration of its built environment and abandonment. This phenomenon has been thoroughly documented in all projects and studies related to this area since 1960. For instance, a survey conducted in 1960 by the B e r u for city planning revealed that the housing stock on the rock was in an advanced state of disrepair, with 67% of buildings being dilapidated (Bouadam, 2002). This state of the built environment was also highlighted in the 2002 ICOMOS report on the state of Algeria's heritage, which revealed that interest in the latter was marked by rare action on the part of the public authorities, on the one hand, and the gradual awakening of civil awareness, on the other. However, it is crucial to note that the assessment of this awakening cannot be considered in isolation, as it is inextricably linked to the state of awareness among those entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding and enhancing heritage. The report emphasizes that despite legal sanctions for offenders, heritage has been subject to flagrant violations by both public authorities and private citizens. A particularly salient concern pertains to the deliberate integration of historic centers into precarious housing estates, akin to shanty towns. A salient example is the old town of Constantine, which, despite being catalogued in the national inventory, was overlooked in the initial version of Constantine's Master Plan for Urban Planning and Development (ICOMOS, 2002).

Conclusion

In the context of contemporary urban agglomerations, a notable exception to the predominance of modern commercial and industrial developments is evidenced by the presence of historic centers, known as medinas, that have retained their traditional function at the heart of these urban centers. Constantine stands as a remarkable exception to this phenomenon. As both the city center and embodiment of urban heritage, as well as a hub of modern industrial and commercial activity, it remains the busiest area of the city. Its appeal is unrivaled.

The old town of Constantine has a multi-faceted role that can be attributed to the city's distinctive configuration, whose bridges span the entire region, linking it to its vibrant and varied central activities. The old town of Constantine, a prominent feature of the city's urban landscape, distinguishes itself from other similar landmarks by its central and prominent role in the city's urban life. Its capacity to evolve in response to contemporary demands and practices has contributed to its function as a catalyst for urban vitality.

The site's unique configuration, coupled with historical and political factors, has contributed to its integration within the urban landscape and its consequent significant role in both the city and the wider region.

The old town of Constantine has been classified as a national heritage site based on a set of values similar to those of other Algerian and Maghrebian medinas, with no consideration given to its specific features. The most decisive factor for any intervention on historic areas with high heritage and functional values is similarity in studies. In the absence of a consensus between the relevant stakeholders, the urban fabric of the center cannot be considered the product of a rational overall plan, but rather as the result of spatial and functional mutations, as well as a multitude of ad hoc projects initiated by political decisions.

Reflection on the future of the medina is characterised officially by programming, while in reality, it is characterised by spontaneity and abandonment. This identical preservation approach, coupled with the difficulty of mastering this phenomenon, has the potential to result in drift. The city's core is thus caught between its role as an urban hub and its status as a heritage site, resulting in advanced deterioration, spontaneous renewal, and the concentration of commercial activities in an unregulated manner. This has had far-reaching repercussions for the area across multiple levels.

The conservation and future development of architectural heritage cannot be examined in isolation from the broader urban context and the complex role such structures play within the metropolitan framework. This principle becomes particularly evident when considering Constantine's historic core, commonly referred to as the medina. Unlike conventional categorizations applied to North African historic centers, Constantine's medina represents a distinctive case that defies standard classification parameters.

The old town of Constantine does not conform to the archetypal model of traditional North African medinas; rather, it functions as an integral component of the contemporary city center. Its spatial configuration, functional integration within the urban fabric, and morphological characteristics diverge significantly from comparable historic districts found throughout Algeria and the broader Maghreb region.

Consequently, both conceptual frameworks and operational interventions directed toward such historic environments must be formulated in response to the site's specific complexities. This necessitates a departure from standardized preservation approaches that fail to account for the unique conditions of each heritage site. Future conservation efforts must therefore embrace methodologies that acknowledge the distinctive character and urban integration of Constantine's historic core

Bibliography List :

1. Babelon, J. P., & Chastel, A. (2000). La notion du patrimoine. Paris : Levy.
2. Badjadja, A. (2007). De Cirta à Constantine : la permanence d'une cité antique. Consulté à l'adresse http://www.constantine-hier-aujourdhui.fr/LaVille/cirta_constantine.htm
3. Bandarin, F., & Van Oers, R. (2012). The historic urban landscape: Managing heritage in an urban century. Wiley-Blackwell.
4. Beguin, F. (1983). Arbisances. Paris : Dunod.
5. Berthier, & Chive, J. (n.d.). Constantine 1837-1937, Constantine son passé, son centenaire.
6. Bouadam, R. (2002). La particularité et le devenir de la médina de Constantine [Thèse de Magister].
7. Bouadam, R. (2009). Le devenir du centre-ville de Constantine : Une histoire de controverse. Al-Bahit Al-Ijtima'i, (9), 7-18.
8. Bouadam, R. (2010). Le centre-ville de Constantine : Projets accumulés et contraintes de réalisation. Revue Sciences et Technologie (Constantine), (31), 33-44.
9. Bouadam, R. (2011). Le centre-ville de Constantine, patrimoine et renouvellement urbain : Réalités et réflexions [Thèse de doctorat].
10. Bullen, P. A., & Love, P. E. (2010). The rhetoric of adaptive reuse or reality of demolition: Views from the field. Cities, 27(4), 215-224.
11. Chabane, D. (2003). La théorie de l'umran chez Ibn Khaldoun. Alger : Office des Publications Universitaires.
12. Chaline, C. (1980). Dynamique urbaine. Paris : PUF.
13. Chaudoire, P. (2004). Patrimoine, mémoire et identité [Note de synthèse]. Millénaire 3, Conseil de Développement de l'Agglomération Lyonnaise.

14. Choay, F. (2004). L'urbanisme : Utopies et réalités. Paris : Seuil.
15. Corboz, A. (1983). Le territoire comme palimpseste. Diogène, (121). Consulté à l'adresse https://www.ville-ge.ch/geneve/amenagement/patrimoine/rappel.htm
16. Cote, M. (1974). Constantine. Encyclopædia Universalis.
17. Cote, M. (2005). L'Algérie : Espace et société. Constantine : Media Plus.
18. Cote, M. (2006). Constantine : Cité antique et ville nouvelle. Constantine : Media Plus.
19. Çelik, Z. (1997). Urban forms and colonial confrontations: Algiers under French rule. Berkeley : University of California Press.
20. Foster, G., & Kreinin, H. (2020). A review of environmental impact indicators of cultural heritage buildings: A circular economy perspective. Environmental Research Letters, 15(4), 043003.
21. Eichelbrenner, M. B. (n.d.). Constantine : La conquête et le temps des pionniers.
22. Hermassi, E. (1975). État et société au Maghreb : Étude comparative. Paris : Éditions Anthropos.
23. ICOMOS. (n.d.). Charte internationale sur la conservation et la restauration des monuments et des sites. Consulté à l'adresse https://www.icomos.org/fr/informations-pratiques/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/171-charte-internationale-sur-la-conservation-et-la-restauration-des-monuments-et-des-sites
24. INGEROP. (2004). Études de faisabilité d'une ligne de tramway à Constantine.
25. Lemas, P. (1998). René. Projet Urbain, (15).
26. Marcel, R. (2011). La Médina, ville du futur ? Consulté à l'adresse http://carfree.fr/index.php/2011/04/09/la-medina-ville-du-futur/
27. Mercier, E. (1903). Histoire de Constantine.
28. Ministère de la Culture. (1998). Loi n° 98-04 relative à la protection du patrimoine culturel.
29. Morisset, L. K., & Noppen, L. (2005). Le patrimoine immatériel : Une arme à tranchants multiples. Téoros, 24(1). Consulté à l'adresse http://journals.openedition.org/teoros/1500
30. Msefer, J. (1984). Villes islamiques : Cités d'hier et d'aujourd'hui.
31. Oudin, B. (2000). Plaidoyer pour la ville : Pour un urbanisme qui réconcilie la ville et la vie. Paris : Éditions Robert Laffont.
32. Jackson, M. (2005). Embodied energy and historic preservation: A needed reassessment. APT Bulletin, 36(4), 47-52.
33. Pagand, B. (1989). La Médina de Constantine (Algérie) : De la ville traditionnelle au centre de l'agglomération contemporaine.
34. Pendlebury, J., Short, M., & While, A. (2009). Urban World Heritage Sites and the problem of authenticity. Cities, 26(6), 349-358.
35. PDAU Intercommunal de Constantine. (2010). Révision, première phase : Diagnostic.
36. PPSMVSS. (2008). Plan permanent de sauvegarde et de mise en valeur des secteurs sauvegardés : Phase diagnostic.
37. Ravoisie, A. (1846-1851). Beaux-arts, architecture et sculpture : Exploration scientifique de l'Algérie. Paris : Firmin Didot.
38. Riegl, A. (1984). Le culte moderne des monuments. Paris : Seuil. (Ouvrage original publié en 1904)
39. Rodwell, D. (2007). Conservation and sustainability in historic cities. Blackwell Publishing.
40. Rypkema, D. D. (2008). The economics of historic preservation. National Trust for Historic Preservation.
41. Signoles, P. (2001). La centralité des médinas maghrébines : Quel enjeu pour les politiques d'aménagement urbain ? Consulté à l'adresse https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.11100
42. Smith, L. (2006). Uses of heritage. Routledge.
43. Throsby, D. (2017). Culturally sustainable development: Theoretical concept or practical policy instrument? International Journal of Cultural Policy, 23(2), 133-147.
44. UNESCO. (2022). La liste du patrimoine mondial. Consulté à l'adresse https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/

45. UNESCO. (2023). Les critères de sélection. Consulté à l'adresse https://whc.unesco.org/fr/criteres/
46. Vars, C. (1899). Inscriptions inédites de la province de Constantine.
47. Vefago, L. H. M., & Avellaneda, J. (2013). Recycling concepts and the index of recyclability for building materials. Resources, Conservation and Recycling, 72, 127-135.