

Seminar Report

Architecture, Urban Quality and Local Governance

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The front page of Morocco's daily newspaper *Le Matin* of 6 May 2002 reported on a recent architecture conference held at the University of Chefchaouen, a town in northern Morocco. A full-page feature on page two of the newspaper included three interviews and two features. The two-day event brought together an impressive gathering of specialists, including architects, town planners, economists and engineers, who discussed their differing perceptions on city politics and management.



Since its independence Morocco has worked to reconcile architectural styles which both respect tradition and espouse modernity. Galloping population growth has pushed urban planners to revise their schemes and to consider the future with urgency. They have not been able to stem the continued rural exodus, and the emergence of unhealthy illegal housing has become the number one urban problem in Morocco.

In 1999 a new concept in integrated urban planning was introduced. This considers political, economic, social aspects of society within a coherent resource management strategy. This conference posed questions about who should govern cities, and reopened debates on decentralisation of decision making.

Chefchaouen is a small picturesque Moroccan town, founded over 700 metres in the northern Atlas Mountains to stop Portuguese and Spanish invasions. It is set against a magnificent backdrop of wooded mountains. Its ancient fortifications and important place in the history of resistance create much of the city's character and make it well liked by both Moroccans and tourists. From April each year it attracts over 4000 French, Spanish, German and Italian tourists per month.

However there are concerns that Chefchaouen's present development is not that well controlled. Some speculators, by design or ignorance, seem about to destroy its historic monuments. The Secretary of State is calling for protest groups to mobilise in action to save the sixteenth century medina and mosque. A fundamental question is who determines priorities, who makes decisions, who considers the different interests, for example of those in society without a voice, like the handicapped. As in other Moroccan towns Chefchaouen has peripheral shanty settlements which lack basic infrastructure, health provision, drinking water or electricity. The municipality has little to spend, as the regions' economic productivity is based on agriculture, small to medium craft industry enterprises and tourism: there is no industrial fabric. City governors are working with civil societies, national and international organisations, notably Spanish, Italian and French, on projects to manage the transport infrastructure and develop HEP. Fishing villages and ports at the coast 50 km away could also provide jobs. Development requires the co-operation of all, administrators, elected representatives and NGO's. Debates and meetings have been set up. Good city governance is based on participation, partnership, performance and prioritising, with well defined responsibility and transparency.

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A further seminar on 12-14 June 2002 in Casablanca, in collaboration with the World Bank will consider the question of what kind of housing to provide for the most destitute, and will aim to produce a 10 year plan of action.

Summary of the Interview with Mr. M. M'Barki, Moroccan Secretary of State for Housing.

"The time is right to create a Royal Academy of Architecture"

The interview conducted by Hassan Alaoui with Mr. M.M'Barki, the Secretary of State for Housing, highlights the following points:

Chefchaouen has been chosen this year to host the fourth session of the Architecture Spring University because the town has a strong architectural character with an important historic medina and a sixteenth century mosque and both suffer from an advanced state of disrepair and therefore need to be urgently safeguarded.

An agreement has been signed with the Governor of Chefchaouen, which will allow access to a small derelict part of the historic urban centre of the medina in order to improve its infrastructure and sewage system. Another initiative involves repaving the streets in a way which reflects the local architectural character.

The Spring University event has been increasingly successful and provided a much-needed forum for discussion on architecture, urban quality and urban governance. There is a lack of formal debate on architecture, urban space and the built environment and for this reason alone there is a real need for a Royal Academy for Architecture to be established so that there is a proper formal forum for such a debate to take place.

Also, policies and programmes tackling the problems of informal housing need urgently developing, and the provision of housing for people on low incomes also requires the development of proper policy and development also. These issues will be raised in the Casablanca meeting of 12 and 14th of June 2002, which will be attended by representatives of the World Bank and USAID.