

Editorial

Transformations of North African cities

North African cities have witnessed major transformations during the last century with the juxtaposition and tension between different urban morphologies: the Islamic medinas; the colonial interventions; and the post-independence developments. French colonial and military planning has had a strong influence on the shape of many cities in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. These cities have continued to transform rapidly during the post colonial era and had to deal with a huge increase in population and acute shortages of housing. Planning and building regulations inherited from the colonial period were very slow to change and the proliferation of slums and informal settlements has meant that the cities have grown in an unplanned fashion. This situation has been further aggravated by land speculation and the lack of clear and consistent urban planning policies.



This issue of GBER presents the cases of Algiers and Cairo as two North African capitals undergoing rapid urban transformations.

Dr Abada's paper discusses the fragmentation of the urban fabric of Cairo. Serious problems have resulted from the severe deterioration of the historic urban fabric and the introduction of insensitive new urban morphologies and architectural typologies. Replacement of the historic urban fabric has taken place in a fragmented fashion that ignores important intrinsic qualities of the Islamic urban morphology such as hierarchy, homogeneity and a high level of urban integration. Whereas different historical layers of the urban fabric have managed to integrate well with each other in the past, contemporary interventions have failed to do so, resulting in disorder and chaos. These contemporary interventions are typically piecemeal and ad-hoc developments which contribute to the further fragmentation of the urban structure. Dr. Abada argues that reproducing traditional urban and architectural forms is not an option. Instead there should be synergy between what remains of the old fabric and new interventions.

In the paper "*The Impact of the French Colonial Legacy on Algiers' Present Urban Development*" Naima Chemrouk retraces the history of Algiers' urban development since the French occupation in 1830 until today. The paper highlights the major early transformations that have occurred with extensions of the city being based on military requirements as well as a concern for monumentality, embellishment and hygiene. The monumental sea front façade, created by the Chasseriau Plan in 1858, is still an important landmark. It is interesting to note that major town planning laws were introduced, specifically for Algiers, as early as the 1920's and that the 1930's witnessed the introduction of modern Architecture with several proposals developed by Le Corbusier himself. Political instability in the 1950's brought about by severe social and economic disparities between the Algerian and French population has resulted in the implementation of large scale medium to high-rise housing projects. The paper also analyses the major events that have shaped the city of Algiers after the independence in 1962, highlighting their relationship to rapid political and socio-economic changes. The change from a political system based on socialist principles to one based on a free market economy has resulted in the reduction of public investments and the proliferation of the informal market. This has had a significant negative impact on the quality of the built environment in Algiers.

The paper of Nadia Daoudi investigates the colonial urban fabric of Algiers city centre at a more detailed urban level. Concentrating on the perimeter urban blocks built in the 1900's the author argues that there is a strong relationship between the Paris urban development plan and the urbanisation of colonial Algiers. This hypothesis is tested through the identification of the principle sanitary decrees that have shaped the urban perimeter blocks organised around courtyards or atriums. These decrees, which came about as a result of major epidemics of various diseases, clearly defined building and street dimensions by establishing fixed proportions between building height and width of streets, as well as proportions of courtyards and light wells. The analysis of one atrium building dating from 1905 supports the hypothesis put forward in this paper.

The last paper in this issue discusses the history of tourism development on the west coast of Algiers. It sheds some light on why and how coastal tourism has failed to develop in Algeria despite its rich and beautiful Mediterranean coast. Taking the case study of Sidi Fredj, a tourist resort designed by the French architect Pouillon, the authors attempt to measure how sustainable such development is. Such measurement is based on a " Sustainable Tourism Architectural Matrix (STAM) developed by Fadli as part of his PhD research .

Magda Sibley