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## **Rehabilitation of the historic center of the city of M'sila, a situation to be taken care of**

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**Abstract.** Algerian cities, like other cities, the Mediterranean in particular, have not been spared the negative influence of certain factors such as weather, nature, and people (combined or sporadic) that have been imposed on them. Imposed, which has lost some of its momentum, their function and their sense of civilization. However, the old and historic urban fabric of these cities has experienced most of the impact. As in most Algerian urban centers, the city center of M'sila is part of the old residential districts which are experiencing a number of problems that have affected its urban and functional status, and which reflect the way of life of its inhabitants, which has led to the appearance of urban disorder and the dissemination of a distorted urban image of the architectural heritage of this region. Over time, he became unable to keep pace with developments and was far from his aspirations. In order to know the mechanisms necessary to rehabilitate its urban sphere and work to develop it and preserve this cultural heritage, and to contain this phenomenon, we had to seek to reform this situation with the aim of providing conditions of comfort to its inhabitants. In this study, we have therefore opted for the search for the most important causes which are at the origin of the problems encountered by the center of this city, and consequently to propose appropriate solutions to this situation, while preserving the ancient heritage of the city, which would correspond to its characteristics and ingredients and work for its development and promotion.

**Keywords.** M'sila - Historic urban fabric - Architectural and cultural heritage - Downtown - Old neighborhoods – rehabilitate

### **1- Introduction**

Algeria has inherited a considerable heritage real estate stock, which is integrated with almost all its city centers. This heritage is currently in a situation of very advanced degradation. Various efforts are made to achieve better management: In comparison with Ordinance No. 67-281 of December 20, 1967, Law No. 98-04 of June 15, 1998, relating to the protection of cultural heritage, reveals a desire to renovate the legal framework relating to the protection of the built heritage. This law extends the definition of built heritage to “urban ensembles” and strengthens the systems for the protection of built heritage by “saved sectors”. “ *Are set up as protected sectors, the urban real estate complexes [...] characterized by their predominance of residential areas, and which, by their homogeneity and their architectural and aesthetic unity, are of historical, architectural, [ ...] such as to justify its protection, restoration, rehabilitation and enhancement* ” (article 41). As a result, the bases of “protection” and

“enhancement” have been characterized as essential in the management of “historic urban ensembles”.

However, the rehabilitation of the housing stock of the old sites, a subject less pursued until now by local housing policies, appears to be an essentially topical issue. However, this ambition comes up against many obstacles and constraints: private control, a divergence of urban situations, variable specificities, quality of buildings, the multiplicity of actors, etc.

The interest in our subject stems from a significant reality of a historic center abandoned by its owner-inhabitants. Meanwhile, the transformations, additions, and misuse of housing still stand, and the various inadequacies of the building in commercial premises and other informal commercial activity spaces may of them, contribute to the deterioration of the building structures. which ends up perishing.

Certainly, this phenomenon is perceptible in the majority of our old towns, which reveal in terms of diagnosis, a poor state of conservation, which makes it more complicated and burdensome to take charge of this endangered heritage, its conservation, and its implementation. in value for its transfer to future generations.

The urban fabric of the old city of M'sila represents a case study that can be generalized for most of the old Algerian city centers. Our article focuses more precisely on the rehabilitation of the El- Argoub district, located at the level of the history of the city of M'sila. A site accumulated over more than two centuries, having retained its principles of permanence throughout its urban history, through its site, its urban morphology, and its architectural typology.

The houses still standing, built of rammed earth (toub), have reached a significant level of precariousness (Photo 01) following their overexploitation and the obsolescence of their materials (Photo 02) under the weight of the years. The road network (Photo 03) and plots, the main characteristics of the traditional fabric, dissipate under the remains, thus completely changing the morphology of the fabric, the landscape, and the historical, memorial, also symbolic burdens of an authentic heritage setting.



Fig.01: Precarious buildings      Fig. 02: Dilapidated materials      Fig .03: The street network  
Source: Taken by authors 2021      Source: Taken by authors 2021      Source: Taken by authors 2021

Our current concern is to preserve and enhance while respecting its physical and landscape components, this minor urban fabric, mutilated but carrying stratified authenticity revealed by the permanent elements of its built environment (architectural typology), its layout street, and its plots (urban morphology) and to preserve its fundamental integrity.

The conservation of the historic center begins with the rehabilitation of its physical component, in this case, the existing built environment (human action) which constitutes the support and whose alterations are multiple.

Consequently, the interventions too can range from simple maintenance to the heavy intervention of partial or total reconstruction in the case of filling the voids (pockets) resulting from collapse and which for the most part harm the stability of the rest of the structures still upright.

## **2 - Objectives:**

This study will focus on an objective at two levels: the first is of a cultural nature, and any action to be carried out on heritage must respect its integrity and authenticity.

The second objective is that which allows this heritage to collaborate in the management and development of cities through its incorporation into urban policies for the renewal of the country, the regeneration of fabrics, and social cohesion.

Through the approach, building in the built (or rebuilding) we aim to:

- Guarantee the functional and architectural continuity of this site to ensure the protection of the integrity of the neighborhood and its authenticity.
- Improve the quality of the living environment.
- Reactivate the socio-economic and cultural values reinforcing the rootedness of the inhabitants, social cohesion, and therefore sustainability.
- Enhancing the urban environment and buildings, preserving cultural heritage, and tourist values....

## **3- Materials and methods:**

*"The method answers the question of 'how' to achieve the objectives while the techniques indicate by what means"* (M. Angers, 1997).

We opted for the descriptive method in order to know all the architectural and urban characteristics of the case study, based on techniques for collecting information and data, namely observation, a study of plans, photos, diagrams, etc. For this qualitative, explanatory research, we proceed as follows:

- Through an integrated project approach, considering the historic center as part of a larger and non-landlocked territory, participating in the development of the city, and considering the political, economic, social, cultural, and technical dimensions, as a stakeholder in the rehabilitation process.
- By recovering the urban morphology of the traditional fabric, by restoring its road layout, its plots, and its architectural and construction typologies
- By analyzing the dominant architectural and constructive typologies, and urban morphology whose degrees of permanence remains (the plot, the road layout, and the built environment), the diagnosis of the built environment and its stages in a process of rehabilitation and by use of traditional building techniques.
- By the diagnosis by defining the perimeter of study: El -argoub district, compatibility of typological criteria (urban morphology and building typology) for typological adaptation in the reconstruction and the character of value to be preserved.
- Finally, by summarizing the main actions carried out to date in the historic center of M'sila (context).

## **4- Examples of built heritage renewal processes around the world (Fatima Mazouz, 2015):**

It is useful to learn about the way in which the renewal of dilapidated built heritage is practiced in other countries of the world, in order to position oneself in relation to the

experiences of various countries. For the cases briefly discussed here, the emphasis is on the process of management of the built heritage used by the States as well as on the involvement of civil society in this process.

*In Great Britain*, renovation operations in old neighborhoods have marked a setback, under pressure from public opinion and professionals. In 1974, legislation on town planning instituted “housing *action areas*”, which are exposed for opinion to residents and interested groups, in accordance with the law, which imposes it. Also, the sectors presenting a particular interest in the architectural and historical plan, are to be preserved or improved and can be declared “saved sectors (*conservation area*)”. According to a 1975 circular on the strategy of urban renewal - the “*gradual renewal*” – it must be done, in these sectors, in the English conception, and in a “gradual and continuous” way, in small steps and small pieces. It should be noted that, particularly in this country, private, individual, and associative initiative is at the origin of the movement for the protection of the architectural heritage.

*In Italy*, in the 1950s, the protection of old centers against renovation operations became a national concern. Intellectuals and urban planners defend the process of safeguarding all urban heritage, “of the type of the city” and of the “type of buildings”. In this respect, the training of architects is oriented toward knowledge of ancient architecture. Each major school of architecture (in Turin, Milan, Florence, Rome, etc.) provides specialized technical and historical education oriented toward old buildings.

However, the renovation operations carried out in the old centers have led to a change in the residential function, in commercial and professional activities.

*In Tunisia* the great wealth of the country's heritage largely contributes to the promotion of tourism. During the 1980s, the State initiated, with the financial collaboration and technical assistance of the World Bank, “urban development projects” ( *These projects covered 37 districts: the large historic districts of the 1940s and 1950s, then the recent neighborhoods of medium-sized cities in the interior, between 1982 and 1994* ), then, during the 1990s, the “national programs for the rehabilitation of working-class neighborhoods” ( *These projects covered 459 neighborhoods, between the years 1992 and 2001* ). These projects are designed as “integrated interventions” with several components, including the construction of new buildings. In addition, Law No. 94-35 of February 24, 1994 relating to the Code of Archaeological and Historical Heritage and Traditional Arts established the “protected sector”. Associations for the preservation of built heritage are numerous in Tunisia. The experience of the Mégrine association for innovation and safeguarding (AMIS), in a suburb of Tunis, deserves to be mentioned because its actions will quickly go beyond the framework of historical monuments to lead to proposals for intervention. integrated and on a sustainable safeguard policy including even the recent fabrics inherited from colonization and now considered as an integral part of the built heritage.

Practices for renewing dilapidated built heritage vary from state to state. For some, they consist of a change in the functions of the old urban fabric, over time, with a view to adapting it to new lifestyles. The residential function is then largely safeguarded and the built heritage is “preserved” and “modernized”. The objective is to reinforce the attractiveness of these fabrics, as a factor of “sustainable development”; this is the case in Europe.

For other states, “urban revitalization” favors profitability and investment, like the United States. In many cases, the “protected sector” is adopted as a tool for the renewal of the built heritage. This allows both the evolution of the existing urban fabric and the favorable integration of new architectural projects with the existing one.

## 5. Presentation of the case study:

### 5.1. Presentation of the municipality of M'sila :

The municipality of M'sila is located in the North-East of its wilaya, covers an area of 232Km<sup>2</sup> (1.27% of the total area of the wilaya), it is limited by:

- **North:** The wilaya of Bordj Bou Arreridj.
- **East:** The town of Marfa.
- **South – East:** The commune of Souama.
- **South-West:** the town of Ouled Maddy .
- **West:** the commune of Ouled Mansour.

The town of M'sila, located in the center of the commune, covers an area of 17.71 km<sup>2</sup> (7.635% of the total area of the commune).

It has experienced demographic growth, marked by many factors which have consequently led to significant extensions of its urban fabric. This urban fabric which constitutes the city of M'sila is fed by the explosion (demographic growth) of the districts: El-Djaafra , El -Kouche and El- Argoub .

### 5.2. Presentation of the case study: The “El- Argoub ” district:



Fig.04. Satellite image: Location of the El -argoub district in relation to the city of M'sila  
Source: Google earth pro-2022

Located in the old center of the city, next to the west bank of Oued El- Ksob, it existed since 1860. The "El-Argoub" district is spread over 16.09 hectares, with an estimated population of 2450 inhabitants (2018), it occupies an important position in the city of M'sila, so it is considered the historic center of the city, with its urban and architectural references. He saw the birth of the late **Mohamed Boudiaf** (Ex-President of the Algerian Republic).

#### 5.2.1. Limits:

To the north: RN 40 (rue Ben Boulaid), to the west: RN 45 Route de Boussaâda, to the east: Oued Ksob , and to the south: Oued Ksob.

### 5.2.2. Access:

The district has five (05) accesses, 02 main accesses: One in the North, the other on the West side (04 m- 04.5m wide) and 03 secondary accesses: 02 on the North side and 01 on the West side (03 m wide max). We were able to observe difficulty in terms of mechanical accessibility to the district.

### 5.2.3. Land use:

#### 5.2.3.a. Condition of the frame:

The building, characterized by homogeneity in form, occupies an area of 11.89 ha (73% of the area of the district) and is essentially composed of 527 dwellings and 04 facilities.

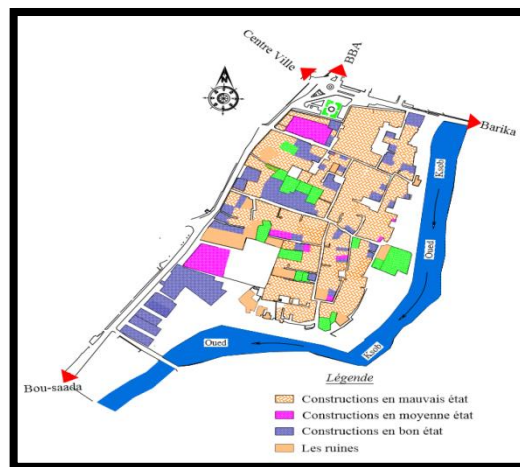



Fig.05. Condition of the built environment  
Source: The authors 2021

 **For homes:** The following table shows us that 67.55% of homes in the neighborhood are in poor condition:

State of the frame	Good	Medium	Bad	Total
number of housings	26	145	356	527
Rate (%)	4.93	27.51	67.55	100

Table n°01: State of the built environment of the district

- **Built and constructive typology of the domestic architecture of the district:**  
*a. The plots:*

The surfaces vary between 37m<sup>2</sup> for the small ones and 1000m<sup>2</sup> for the larger ones (with internal garden), their layouts are made in such a way as to avoid vis-à-vis.

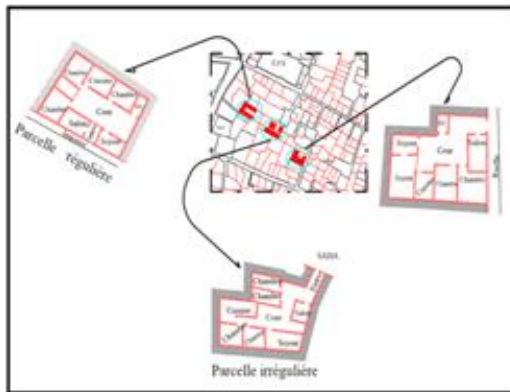


Fig.06: Types of plots  
Source: Established by the authors 2021

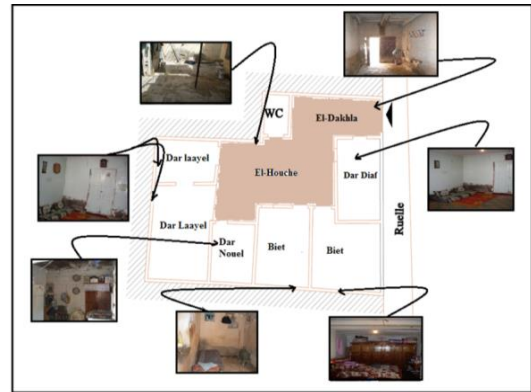


Fig.07: Composition of the dwelling  
Source: Established by the authors 2021

***b. The spatial elements composing the dwelling:***

- On the ground floor: there are very often:  
El dakhla ( sagfa ), Dar Diaf , El houche , dar nouel , dar laayel , Byouts .
- Upstairs: If the house has one floor, it is often reduced to a terrace and one or more rooms (GHORFA).

***For urban equipment and activities:***

- To the north of the district, there is 01 primary school, 01 hotel “Errahba”;
- To the east: “el -Benaya ” mosque;
- To the west: mosque “Abderrahmane bnou Aouf”.

Many businesses are located in the north and west side of the district.

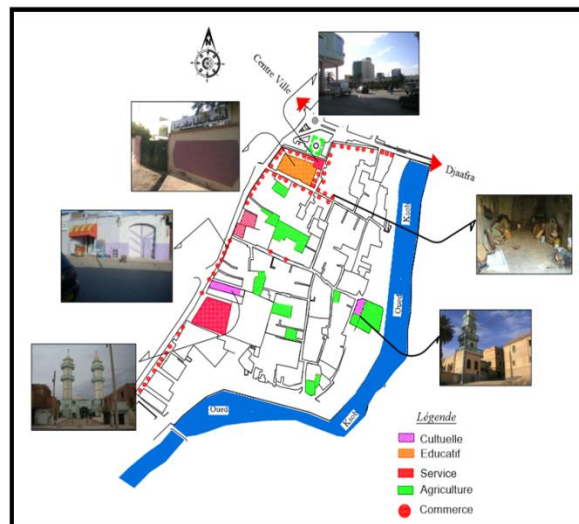


Fig.08. Condition of the built environment  
Source: Established by the authors in 2021

***Exterior facades:***

There are two types of facades which are distinguished by special treatments (according to their positions in relation to the type of road): Oriented towards the public space,



one towards the road to Bou saâda (Fig.09), and the other towards the road to Barika (Fig.10), characterized by the commercial aspect and heights that vary between R+0 and R+1.



Fig.09: The western urban facade (Bou saada roadside)  
Source: photo taken by the authors 2021



Fig. 10: The northern urban facade (Barika roadside)  
Source: photo taken by the authors 2021

 **Interior facades:**

Almost blind, they are characterized mainly by small and medium openings, for reasons of intimacy, climatic factors, and cultural and social factors.



Fig. 11: The blind interior façade  
Source: Photo taken by the author's



Fig. 12: Small or medium openings  
Source: Photo taken by the authors

**5.2.3.b. State of the unbuilt:**

The unbuilt surface of the district amounts to 04ha (27% of the surface of the district), composed mainly of roads, squares, squares, and green spaces:

### **1. Roads:**

It is characterized by a vernacular grid with a network of winding and narrow paths that end in open spaces. It is made up of streets, alleys, and dead ends:

#### **1.a. The street:**

Linear or tortuous shapes, widths varying from 3.5m to 4m. They run through the neighborhood on the EAST-WEST side. They are oriented in the direction of the slope (towards the wadi) and are covered with cut stones. There is a small trade intended for the needs of the inhabitants and for craft activity.

#### **1.b. The small street:**

Are the extensions of the streets inside the district, they constitute the transition between the public places (squares, mosques, etc.) and the private places, which are the houses. They have a linear or serpentine shape. They take this form to meet the requirements of privacy and climatic conditions. Their dimensions vary between 02m and 2.50m.

#### **1. c. The dead end:**

It is the passage between the public space (street, alley) and the private space, it serves a small number of dwellings grouped in **L, I, Y**, or irregular shape.

The role of the impasse, by its narrowing and its shape, is a kind of filter that selects the arrivals from outside. Its narrowing favors the meeting and the consolidation of social relations and forms a semi-public space; it also forms a psychological obstacle for people who do not live in the neighborhood.

#### **2. The square: (The square “Rahbet echouhada”)**

It is located at the intersection of two roads (Routes de Boussaâda and Barika), which after independence played the role of a daily market.

#### **3. The “Essaha” plot:**

Located inside the district, used by "La Djemââ" and constitutes the point of convergence of the inhabitants thus symbolizing family unity and even the unity of society.

### **6. Discussion:**

The analysis of the El-Argoub district, allowed us to raise the different types of degradation at the level of the built and non-built framework, which can be summarized in the following points:

- Demolition and deterioration of the built environment at the level of the houses.
- Deterioration and degradation of facades.
- Traffic, parking, and accessibility issues.
- The narrowness of streets, alleys, and dead ends.
- The urban fabric has undergone occasional transformations that distort the charm of the district.
- Absence of cultural and leisure facilities.
- Absence of different spaces for different age categories, especially children.

## 7. Conclusion

It is obvious that from what we have developed on this type of human settlement that is the "El- Argoub " district, and in the absence of an effective national policy in terms of preservation and management of the architectural and urban heritage, the current state of the latter tends to deteriorate more and more. Safeguarding this type of heritage is a task that requires not only large human and material resources but also political will based on a real heritage safeguard policy.

In this regard, it is imperative to highlight this type of neighborhood through the following points:

- The adoption of laws governing work within the medinas, or old quarters. These laws mainly affect on how to preserve the architectural and construction styles of these houses, to retain the distinctive character of the old quarters.

- The need to establish a higher council for the preservation of architectural heritage.

- The development of public policy in order to preserve the architectural heritage and the architectural perspective.

- The creation of a financial arrangement necessary to activate the mechanisms for the preservation of the architectural heritage.

- The need to activate the participation of the inhabitants and associations of the old quarters in the process of conservation, restoration, and management, also the formation of popular representative bodies of those involved in raising awareness of the population of the importance of heritage architecture.

- The creation of academic or professional specialties that support training in this area of rehabilitation of these old tissues.

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