

ANALYSIS OF URBAN RENEWAL ATTEMPT AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE: THE MEDINA OF MONASTIR AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The historic centre of the city of Monastir, commonly named "Medina", remains a typical example of traditional urban fabric with organic and compact morphology that did not succeed in keeping its original characteristics of the 8th century. Since its independence in the late 1950s, its urban morphology and historic landscape have been undergoing radical transformations following several demolitions, conversions, and reconstructions, which have turned the existing codes of vernacular architecture upside down and reformulated local urbanism. The former Tunisian president, ambitious to modernize the nation at that time, gave this mission to the architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub, who followed the presidential decisions to renovate the image of the historic centre and then proposed a new urban planning of a seaside resort and attractive city with contemporary landscape. After two decades of anarchic and unfinished operations, traditional architecture lost its authenticity and the project of urban renewal ended with unexpected results. It caused urban marginalization of the historic centre, disfigurement, irreversible loss of heritage value and monuments, affected local identity and until today multiple stigmata are still visible.

Our paper deals with this attempt at urban renewal, by highlighting its different steps and initiated operations. We also draw attention to detecting the involved actors and impacts on urban identity, heritage value and authentic landscape. Nowadays, the Medina of Monastir is no longer a city of fortresses as it has been suffering from obsolescence and depreciation for decades. Thus, strict heritage policy must be immediately implanted today to valorize its remaining historic monuments, heritage assets and landscape.

Key words: Medina; transformations; marginalization; renewal; identity; policy

Introduction:

The Medina of Monastir is a prototype of an ancient fortified Arabic city, a traditional urban fabric with a specific architectural heritage that keeps remembering its important role in the coastal defence system as well as past human activities in the region. For the local community, built heritage items, especially fortresses and introverted dwellings, reflect identity and associate spiritual and symbolic values [13, 20, 36]. Whoever mentions Monastir, ultimately mentions the city of fortresses by pointing directly to the Grand Ribat, the fortified monastery that combines military and religious functions (Figure 1). The Abbasid governor

Harthama Ibn Al-Ayoun built this commemorative monument around the 8th century. The Ribat is a multi-storey fortified monastery erected by the Mediterranean Sea next to the Great Mosque in the northeast of Medina. With its robust, sustainable, austere and imposing architecture, it influenced other constructions inside Monastir and other Tunisian Medinas [2, 26]. Other than the Grand Ribat, the Medina of Monastir is much known for its traditional sustainable architecture due to the use of local materials and specific construction systems, its organic and compact urban morphology enclosing historic monuments (shrines of saints, mosques, palaces...), earthen high ramparts, entrance gates, dwellings with inner decorated fronts of the courtyard, all kind of agricultural and every-day life equipment [20, 21, 26].



Fig1: interior view of the Grand Ribat, high tower, inner courtyard raising over many levels and various cells opening onto it. (Source: author's photo)

Unfortunately, this Medina did not succeed in keeping its original characteristics of the 8th century. Right after the independence of the country, urban renewal began to occur in the late 1950s as part of a global and national strategy directed towards modernization and better reconstruction of the vulnerable nation during the post-colonization. It was an ongoing process characterized by ambivalent decisions and anarchic operations.

In fact, urban morphology witnessed radical transformations after several demolitions, reconversions of historic monuments and reconstructions of multi-storey buildings, which turned the existing codes of vernacular architecture upside down and reformulated local urbanism [13, 20, 26, and 29]. All of these changes occurred following the decisions of the former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, a native of Monastir, ambitious to modernize the nation at that time, who gave the mission to the French architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub. The ambition was to renovate the historic centre, improve its image by proposing new urban planning of an attractive city with contemporary standards and all this by starting to discard traditional constructions [23, 36]. Given this context, it becomes important to carry out such research that aims to understand what happened in Monastir during the first two decades after the independence. Therefore, what are the steps of the transformation of the Medina of Monastir, which occurred through an attempt at urban renewal and who are the actors involved? What are the impacts on urban identity, architectural heritage and urbanization flow of the city? And how much did the policy process influence this urban transformation?

Based on data gathered from surveys and in order to understand more thoroughly the urban renewal conducted by the former Tunisian President right after the independence, our paper explores the different steps of the process, identifies the actors involved, stakeholders, spectators, initiated works and analyses how much this experience influenced the urbanization flow as well as shaped the actual urban and architectural face of the city of Monastir. Studying further, we draw attention to the impacts on architectural Arab-Islamic heritage and its value, the process of serialisation and the local urban identity of the ancient city of fortresses. After discussing our findings, we suggest solutions for valorising the historic centre of Monastir and mending its obsolescence nowadays.

Materials and methods:

Research method:

In order to collect primary data and argue the carried research, our choice is fixed on qualitative social method with a set of diversified instruments of survey conducted in the field. We chose to work with three techniques including participant observation, questionnaire and interviews. Repeated insertion and investigation in the Medina of Monastir for more than five years allowed us to gather diversified findings after discussing with both heritage professionals and the local community.

The survey project started with multiple preparations. At first, we fixed the subjects of our interviews and we classified them into two categories. The first targeted subject includes the local community, or the people who live, occupy, work, visit or circulate in the Medina whom we also call "users of the Medina" (U M). Moreover, this first category is divided between the native residents and the newly settled people in the Medina either for work or habitation. The second category concerns heritage professionals who belong to the two units involved in safeguarding and managing architectural heritage and historic monuments (HPro M), which are the National Institute of Heritage (INP) and the local association ASVM. To reach this, we prepared open and semi-directive questions, also classified into two types. The first type of questions was asked to the local community to seek their sensations, practices and opinions about the process of urban transformation, whilst the second type was established for heritage professionals and focused on the revitalisation process and conservation projects.

In addition, one of the methodological steps involves analysing written documents such as study reports, inventories, archives, statistics, legislative texts and graphics that we have consulted in the municipality of the city as well as in the library of the Association of Safeguarding the Medina of Monastir (ASVM)¹. Analysing archives represented a crucial step as it depends on two constraints: the existence of valuable documents and accessibility to the found references. For example, old materials like advanced study reports and urban diagnostics of the architect Cacoub established in the late 1950's and the 60's were lost and could not be found in any place. Most importantly, the data provided from these documents will allow further understanding of how the urban renewal was planned and executed afterwards.

In total, our analysis required three levels involving speeches, documents and on-site operations. The multiple collected observations have provided us with positive and negative

facts. In another level of analysing responses to questionnaires and testimonials, we discovered previous events and revealed opinions of locals as well as involved heritage professionals. We met nostalgic aged persons who lived during that period and experienced the different steps of urban transformation, and some of them were forced to leave their homes inside the Medina which were demolished thereafter. We also collected ancient postcards from a photographer and a resident of Monastir, drafts, some architectural layouts and project models of the architect in charge that allowed us to describe the urban transformation.

The city of fortresses: the original urban identity of the Medina

The Medina of Monastir is a particular historic centre, worth being explored because the experienced attempt at urban renewal, advantageous and insidious at the same time, caused much damage and stigmata that are still visible nowadays. In fact, until the independence of Tunisia in 1956, the Medina of Monastir which covered approximately thirty-eight hectares, was protected with high ramparts surrounding all its corners and had eight entrances (Bab Tounes, Bab Al-Gharbi, Bab Briqcha, Bab Ad-Darb, Bab Bnat, Bab As-Sour, Bab Al-Khoukha and Bab Al-Kram) [2, 26, 29]. At that time, its urban structure contained six districts or "Houma" (El Bled, El Djebbana, Ech'chrarka, Trabelsia, Bab el Gharbi and El R'Bat) which represented administrative units and historical divisions revealing the constitutional steps of the city, as each district dates back to a different century, between the 8th and the late 18th century [2, 20, 29]. El Bled is the first core of the Medina, rich with its traditional architecture and multiple historic monuments. El R'Bat is the last suburb, mainly formed with houses, mosques and various everyday equipment [26, 29]. The initial architecture is austere, with a dominant military aspect, which reminds me of the underground architecture of the Tunisian South (Figure 2).



Fig2: Bab Al-Gharbi at the west of the Medina, built at the beginning of the 18th century. (Source: archives of the municipality of Monastir)

Monastir, as an Islamic city or Medina, started to shape its morphology around the Grand Ribat and by the sea to attract the "mourabitounes", soldiers of the Berber dynasty and

large empire from Morocco and Algeria that existed in the 10th and 11th centuries. The extension of the Medina began with the construction of two other fortresses next to the Grand Ribat, « Ribat Essayda » and « Sidi Dhouib » [20, 26, 29]. Afterwards, from the 14th century, it knew uncontrollable urban extension. Many residences and buildings were constructed intramural to satisfy the growing needs of quick urbanization. Ancient ramparts surrounding the initial core were destroyed and replaced by larger ones to encircle the new urban grid. Similar to all the Medinas in the Islamic world, the Malekite mosque has a vital position and is often located at the heart of the city, the centre around which the city has developed its urban structure. In the case of Monastir, this « centrality » does not exist because its great mosque is not located at the centre, but stands at the eastern shore next to the Grand Ribat. Traditional Arabic dwellings with one or two courtyards represent one of the authentic architectural specificities, introverted with the contrast between sober exterior fronts and richly ornamented inner courtyards. Mosques, shrines, teaching spaces, oil mills, ovens, and baths were the basic equipment of the Medina of Monastir that created a hierarchy inside and specific spatial configuration of the different districts responding to the functional needs of past times [2, 20, 26, 29]

When examining the initial urban morphology, we discover interesting contrasts inside the six districts. Sometimes, it is rational, orthogonal, and has a regular grid with straight lines and clear geometric forms. However, most of the time, it is characterised by narrow and sinusoid lines, rare parallelism, absence of rectilinear and uncurving paths [20]. This contrast is also found in other Tunisian Medinas like Tunis and Sousse. Nevertheless, commonly, each district (Houma) has a spiritual value, special signification and social function, to which inhabitants remain attached and believe in it as an inexhaustible resource.

During the period of French Protectorate in the country, the limits and general urban morphology of the Medina of Monastir did not change. There were only the opening of new entrance gates (Bab Bnet in 1903 and Bab El Kechla in 1940), the construction of a church in the northern district El Rbat and a Females' college in El Blad, approximately in the centre of the Medina [20, 26]. In addition, no religious building or historic monument was destroyed, but on the other hand, economic and social decline was visible. Many crafts, manual professions and equipment were abandoned, increasing economic pauperization for a major part of the local population [36].

Unfortunately, nowadays, the landscape of Medina has widely changed and does not look like in the 1950's. Currently, the Medina covers less than thirty hectares, has a perimeter of two kilometres and has a local population of five thousand residents, mostly non-endogenous [13, 26]. The Grand Ribat as well as the Great Malikite Mosque of Monastir are the two emblematic monuments, which are located outside the remaining area of the Medina.

Urban evolution of Monastir: from Medina to integral city

From the Punic era until nowadays, Monastir has extended over a peninsula that is located 165 kilometres away from the capital Tunis. It remains a medium-sized town, previously called “Ruspina” by the Romans and known for its calm natural landscape and soft climate.

Starting from 1956, the Medina, introverted and folded on itself, has exploded after a brutal and quick renovation launched by the former Tunisian president, and since that uncontrolled urban expansion has begun. New districts were edified extramural, from the South and West of the Medina, towards the summer residence of President Bourguiba located ten kilometres away. In addition, the local population increased rapidly, at the same time with the diversification of urban activities. Monastir has become an important tourist destination, a coastal resort thanks to its new annexes Skanès and Dkhila (ancient agricultural lands). The infrastructure of the city was widely enhanced after building an international airport in 1968 [13, 20]. Industries of all kinds were implemented (wood, textile, velvet...), administrations increased their roles and recently Monastir became a university pole containing unique higher institutes and faculties that are not found elsewhere in the country. The following figure 3 shows the actual situation of the Medina inside the proliferated city of Monastir and how much the perimeter of the historic centre is nowadays a small fragment.

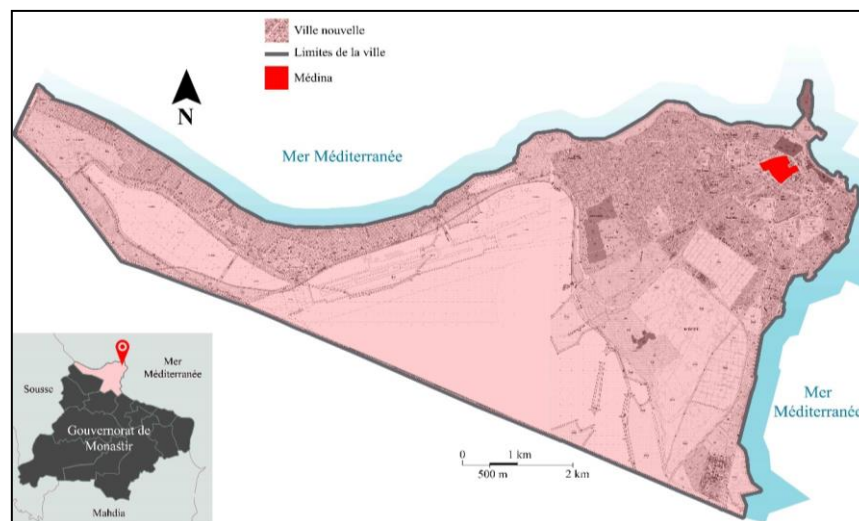


Fig3: current situation of the Medina in the city. (Source: map of the city of Monastir modified by the author)

At that time, President Bourguiba wanted his hometown to symbolise modernity and be a prototype for the other Tunisian cities. This explains how much Monastir received special attention and how urban policies have been conducted in Tunisia since then. The Medina could not escape from urban renovation and the beginning of projects started in the historic centre in 1958 [12, 23, 36].

Urban evolution started to have another aspect, very different from what was projected, making Monastir an integral city with some interest. Consequently, the Medina is now a small fragment but it stands as the city centre with the main commodities and equipment. The nearest districts to the Medina, from its three sides, are very dense with the regular urban grid. Further into the city, we find spontaneous residential districts that proliferate quickly without being controlled in order to satisfy the growing needs of the population. This harmed the homogeneity of the urban landscape and the authorities were not able to prevent this kind of extension.

Results and discussions:

Attempt of urban renewal: nexus with political decisions

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Right after the independence of the country in 1956, former president Habib Bourguiba's first strategy was to build a modern nation by ripping apart the existing social, economic, cultural and religious codes in the Tunisian cities. Propelled by his personal perception of modernity, renovation of large urban territories was set up quickly since then and the president represented the pivotal driver, the authoritarian responsible for the transformation of cities across the country and the multiple different-than-expected results. The magnitude of his decisions was clearly unveiled during the projects regarding the modification of urbanism and valorisation/ depreciation of architectural heritage. During that critical period that came right after the independence, we can admit that there were only a few actors involved in the attempt at urban renewal, among them the local community and the responsible architect Olivier Cacoub [23, 36].

Starting from that time, chasing all aspects of modernity has been progressive and has affected many equipment, infrastructure, administration and everyday life more [13]. In this context, the former president rejected all forms of traditional fabrics, like the troglodyte villages of Matmata in the south, or the compact and organic Medinas with their sinusoidal alleys. For him, urban morphologies of Medinas are obsolete and refer to indignity. Some interviewed aged persons, who lived at that time and had the chance to follow many events, repeated these words of the President when he described the Medinas: "These are primitive slums, and to move forward we must eliminate everything that has to do with the past, the vernacular, the traditional" [12]. Some Tunisian Medinas were able to escape from such radical transformation of their urban structure, but they were harmed after the proliferation of other hazardous threats like disfigurement and inappropriate reconversions of historic buildings. According to the former vice-president of the Association of Safeguarding the Medina of Tunis, at first, in late 1959, the president wanted to begin renovating the capital Tunis by starting to transform its Medina, a perimeter of over three hundred hectares. Nevertheless, the renovation did not take place because of the strong resistance of the locals of the Medina. This event led to raising the voice of a local association of Safeguarding the Medina of Tunis (ASM) that has become a specialized and active unit in preserving tangible and intangible heritage. Indeed, to renovate the urbanism of Tunis by starting to build a straight avenue through the historical core of the city, an "open International competition for studying the development of the city of Tunis" was organized by the Secretariat of State for Public Works in collaboration with the International Union of architects. Between 1956 and 1964, the State received many serious propositions from Polish, French, Dutch and American agencies of architecture and town planning [18, 23].

"What could not be fulfilled in Tunis, was done in his hometown Monastir", as testified to us during interviews with many native residents of Monastir. Studying this project allowed understand the approach of the President and the obsessive desire to raise his political power and take ownership of main territories. After this presidential project of urban renewal, the Medina of Monastir has experienced a singular scenario, unique in the country, with many steps, ambivalences and impacts.

Steps of the project:

The attempt at urban renewal was conducted in three phases without a main and clear strategy, a remarkable event concealed behind several trivial arguments related to traffic, hygiene, modernization of social codes and improvement of image. It started with the mass destruction of historic buildings after the expropriation of private properties. The second phase included new urban reconstruction and reconversion of historic buildings coinciding with the restoration of some historic monuments, mainly the Grand Ribat. The third phase, approximately between 1975 and 1980, was marked by the second transformation of the newly erected constructions after dissatisfaction with the President or response to other desires [13, 20].

Starting from the 1960's, the radical transformation of the Medina of Monastir was quick, continuous and brutal [13]. The major changes occurred in the original urban core of the 8th century that is located in the Northeast, the district El Bled (Figure 4), which irreversibly disappeared after demolishing more than one hectare of its surface (precisely around 1033 m²). Architectural heritage was brutally harmed because remarkable fragments of ramparts with two entrance gates and watchtowers were demolished among many urban palaces and religious buildings. These operations were the president's first orders launching the process and marking the beginning of a new urban vision. He saw the Medina as the city's burden and wanted to eliminate the limits between the vernacular and the modern architecture, says the architect and regional inspector of INP (National Institute of Heritage).



Fig4: ancient district *El Bled*, demolished in the 60's. (Source: archives of the municipality of Monastir)

On the other hand, minor modifications touched the western districts, « El Djebbana », « El Chraka » and « El Trabelsia ». These three districts were not considerably included in the project and succeeded in keeping their initial image.

Until the 1970s, operations continued and were not limited to demolishing religious and traditional buildings such as mosques, shrines of saints, oil mills, baths and private dwellings. New large boulevards and squares through districts were created to facilitate vehicle traffic; gardens were added to enhance the green landscape; restoration of some historic buildings and reusing monuments for exhibitions and cultural events as well as the

construction of multi-storeys buildings to be occupied by banks, shops, restaurants and administration, etc. Without running any risk, operations continued and the first concern of the pivot actor was to substitute the traditional image of the Medina and reconstruct it as a centre that gathers the main and new amenities of the city. But, authorities did not count on citizen participation during the different steps of the urban renewal and locals suffered from the expropriation of their properties inside the Medina. In addition, a commemorative monument in honour of the first president of the Tunisian Republic was erected in the Medina. It is the Bourguiba Mosque, constructed in the late 1960s after demolishing houses in the district « Ech'Chrarka » [13].

This important destruction of houses led to the transfer of the local population towards the new extramural districts erected in the 1960's, approximately more than half of Medina's original population. Concerned residents were forced to leave their houses inside the Medina, immediately doomed to demolition as operations of renovation continued to progress. Some of the ancient residents got indemnities and accepted the removal, whilst others were unsatisfied and unable to react against the president's decisions. At the beginning of the renovation, rehousing inhabitants came before demolitions, but then authorities started to evict them, expropriate their properties and in a few situations compensate the owners to buy lands and build their homes elsewhere in the suburbs. On the positive side, until the 1970s, we can admit that the destruction of traditional dwellings inside the Medina and the new constructions were simultaneous. At that time, the local population appreciated these efforts and saw the attempt of urban renewal as an important step that would give impetus to the modernization of the city and the whole country as well as representing an innovative solution to quick urban growth.

Forced removal of residents increased the abandonment of the Medina and its architectural heritage. The local population, ambitious and aspiring for a different lifestyle, urged the president's strategy and started to follow new standards of life. Consequently, many of them considered that continuing to live inside a traditional dwelling is a sign of misery that keeps holding them back. As a result, the newly occupied districts were very developed. Equipment of all kinds was progressively implemented and thus they became thriving urban attractions.

The current eastern area of the Medina of Monastir stands as the result of the quick and brutal demolitions, reconstructions and renovations of the 1960s and 1970s [13, 26, and 29]. These multiple operations, conducted by the French architect Olivier-Clément Cacoub, the consulting architect of the Tunisian Republic, in charge of accomplishing the requests of the President, were of topmost priority (Figure 5). His only concern was to satisfy these requests in order to move towards a new modern era that would certainly mark the history of the country. Adopting this policy ultimately led to a random process that was not further achieved as many operations were left unfinished.

It remains controversial that studies and operations were limited to the small area of the historic centre without considering a foreseeable extension of the agglomeration. Urban development was then uneven, creating many interstices inside the city. Moreover, according to some testimonies, urban renovation was marked by many volatilities. Initiated operations frequently changed following the commands of the President each time he visited the

construction sites, without consulting other town planners, experts or engineers for better perspectives.

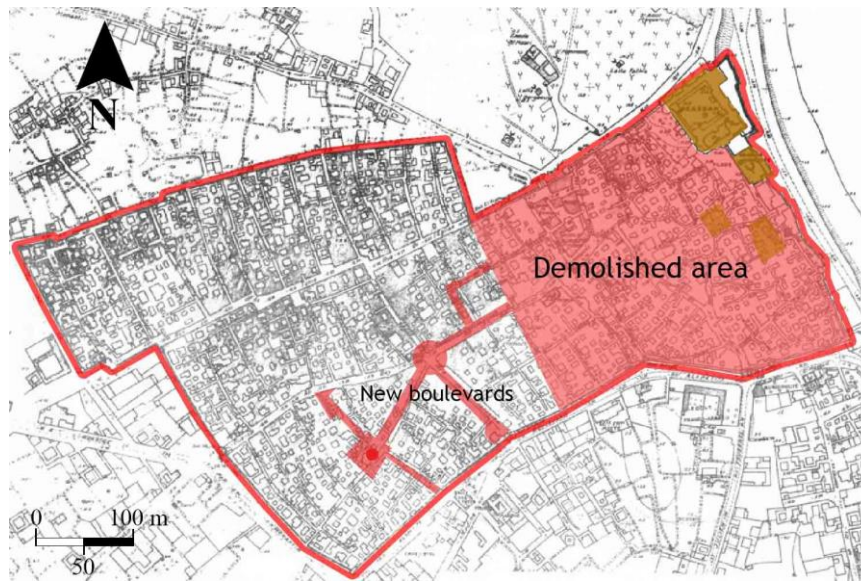


Fig5: transformations in the Medina of Monastir. (Source: map of the Medina modified by the author)

Impacts on architectural heritage and historic landscape:

Urban renewal was a quick process that occurred through a series of demolitions, reconversions and reconstructions involving few actors. Consequently, the historic centre or the Medina of Monastir is certainly very different from that of the 19th or early 20th century. Urban morphology was remarkable with both density and compactness, it enclosed more districts and was protected from all sides with surrounding high ramparts and entrance gates. Nowadays, the ramparts do not surround the four corners of the Medina, detached fragments remain. The traditional urban fabric no longer contains six districts and eight entrances, only five districts are served by five large gates, mainly Bab El Gharbi, Bab Tounes, Bab el Kram, Bab Brikcha and the new Bab Trabelsia that was created in the 1960s. To examine the urban renewal from the perspective of the local population, we admit that at first they supported the will of the former president and welcomed the project. However, in the following decades, civil society protests emerged, especially when the transformations caused unexpected results, especially the ruin of heritage as well as the deteriorating local landscape (Figures 6 &7).

Renovating the Medina of Monastir represented a double-edged arm generating totally opposite impacts, both harmful to the architectural heritage and advantageous to the development of a modern extramural city. Urban transformation radically changed the landscape of an introverted Medina and led to a shift from traditional fabric to controverted territory. Nowadays, the Medina is keeping some aspects of compactness and properties of an organic historic centre along with large boulevards that facilitate vehicular traffic and high buildings of a modern city. Here we can point to the creation of a new form of urban segregation within the same territory, an imbalance that prompts inquiry to the town planners today. The loss of key heritage assets and value is remarkable as well as the negative

repercussions on local identity. In fact, urban marginalization of the Medina of Monastir continued to rise with the disinterest of the local population, leaving architectural heritage in crisis and constantly in depreciation. Monuments and historic buildings continued to disappear, even after the end of the urban renovation. With the increasing interest in modern lifestyle, native residents preferred the new type of villas more than the traditional houses with courtyards. Some of them sold or abandoned their house inside the Medina, whilst others improved their housing conditions and adjusted the construction to be constantly adapted to the new everyday life's requirements.



Fig6 : the Medina in the 60's. (Source: collection of the photograph Anès Ben Nasr, «Monastir avant 1958»)



Fig7 : current landscape of the Medina (Source: author's photo)

On the other hand, the attempt at urban renewal was able to play a remarkable role in developing the Medina as the centre of the city, where essential commerce, crafts and administrative functions meet. However, the Medina stands as a poor urban settlement and the government concentrates their efforts on managing quick urban growth. Consequently, few means are allocated and the Medina lags in terms of access to basic infrastructures.

On the other hand, the modernization of the whole city was continuous and involved the creation of universities, numerous equipment, boulevards and many new residential districts with modern architectural styles and codes. Consequently, until nowadays, the city of Monastir represents a pole creating employment, an attraction and an urban destination for students, tourists and investors. Certainly, several urban aspects have been improved thanks to this attempt at urban renewal especially the regeneration of territory and landscape; however, we cannot deny the harmful and irreversible impacts on memory and urban identity.

Unfortunately, the project of urban renewal was realised without respecting the existing traditional architecture and the heritage envelope of the Medina. Modification of

urban structure, introduction of new incompatible vocabulary, and insertion of hybrid elements which falsified and disfigured authentic heritage have irreversibly dissolved heritage value. The personal interests of authorities, especially the former Tunisian President Bourguiba, and the functional needs of the growing urbanization came in the first place. All this prevailed over preserving heritage and going forward with the serialisation process. Traditional architecture was not revitalized, except for the two emblematic historic monuments. Hotels, restaurants and shops were erected on the remaining vestiges of two fortresses. Nowadays, the Medina of Monastir is no longer the typical city of fortresses. We talk about "slices or debris of a Medina" [2, 36], with the emergence of repetitive and standardized architecture that does not reflect the local identity. Nowadays, when we walk through the alleys of the Medina, we only recognise a few traces of past heritage items because the major changes affected local traditional architecture (Figure 8).



Fig8: the “environment square” erected on the ravines of the residential district *El Blad*.
(Source: author’s photo)

After developing outcomes and analysis, we suggest solutions involving heritage professionals and the local community, as well as including political and financial support to contribute to mending the urban marginalisation of the Medina of Monastir and revitalizing its remaining architectural heritage. The first urgent solution is relative to legislation. Existing laws and legislative dispositions should be revised with precise specifications relative to historic centres. The Tunisian heritage code was ratified in 1994. However, it is rarely applied during interventions on heritage. When heritage professionals acquire a solid legislative basis, they will have more powerful tools to guide conservation projects and control the practices of citizens. Moreover, institutional relationships should be reviewed to establish effective coordination between the public units (municipality, National Institute of Heritage...), local associations like ASM and other international organisms (UNESCO, ICOMOS, AFD, AIMF...) when they contribute.

The implementation of a sustainable strategy combining different approaches is essential today. The aim is to build relationships between economic, cultural, social and environmental dimensions involving more actors. Urban renovation and architectural

conservation can positively affect the axes of sustainability. Making the Medina of Monastir an attractive touristic destination multiplies financial revenues and gives more dynamism to the economic prowess of a developing nation like Tunisia. The economic impact strengthens whilst historic buildings are holding festivals, expositions and scientific manifestations. That's why, responsible units should promote cultural events inside the Medina to revitalize urban heritage and lead investment opportunities. On the opposite side, if the Medina is abandoned, it will certainly suffer from economic and urban decline and become an easy target for social decay and insalubrity.

Another solution relative to labelling the Medina is also important to mention. National and international recognition becomes essential in order to benefit from higher levels of protection. International organisms may be able to afford technical and financial assistance to initiate restoration works and to stop the degradation of historic centres.

All these proposed solutions can be effectively considered by the responsible units. Nevertheless, before starting any strategy or application, awareness of the local community must be raised to guarantee the successful achievement of goals. Every local community remains the principal actor directly related to heritage and manipulates the revitalisation of the Medina. This process begins with recognising the value of the heritage, includes conservation actions and is achieved with the initiatives of valorisation. In the case of the Medina of Monastir, this process is paralyzed because the heritage value is dissolved, the conservation projects are aleatory and revitalisation forms are rare because of the lack of allocated financial means.

Conclusion:

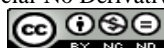
The attempt at the urban renewal of the Medina of Monastir was a process marked by ambivalence and increased primacy to political desires without much consideration of cultural heritage assets and serialisation. Radical urban transformation occurred through multiple operations of demolition, reconstruction, reconversion and restoration of historic buildings. The process began with the mass destruction of the initial core, once called El Blad, causing the irreversible loss of an array of historic buildings and religious monuments. The disappeared district El Blad was known for its valuable architectural heritage, but this quality did not prevent the former president from giving orders to demolish it to and arrange a green square and large boulevards on its ravines. The feedback of the local population and everyone who witnessed the urban renovation is divided between two points of view. Many people, welcomed the attempt at urban renewal of the Medina and saw it as an important step in directing the country toward modernization. Whereas others could not accept the destruction of historic buildings and irreversibly affecting heritage. Urban renovation caused a lot of damage that continued during the next decades, mainly paralyzing the revitalisation process of the Medina at a preliminary stage and the anarchic urban extension of extramural suburbs. Beginning with discarding the initial core of El Blad, the way of perceiving and preserving architectural heritage has changed. Disinterest of the local population increased and it continued to abandon and depreciate the Medina until nowadays. National heritage institutions have failed to raise awareness and promote the historic centre as an attractive cultural destination. They also remained paralyzed because of the lack of technical and

financial means to initiate conservation projects. In Tunisia, the absence of a heritage strategy represents a real obstacle to architectural conservation.

It is absurd to pretend that Monastir would stay forever as it once was. But certainly, we would have expected the renovation to be carried out in another way. The former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba represented the pivot actor who relied on the French architect Cacoub and was firstly supported by the local community of his native city. The analysis presented in this paper examined his role and initiatives that involved urban reconstruction and the strategy to eliminate what is related to the past. The changes that occurred in the Medina of Monastir are one example of urban policies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s. These policies were further enhanced in the next decades after involving specialized agencies and integrating modern approaches.

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