

Unsanitary housing in the old center

Right to live in the Medina of Tunis

INTRODUCTION :

The city of Tunis faces a complex migratory dynamic. Destination for international migration, Tunis also acts as a transit platform for migrants heading to Europe. Internal migration is another major facet of the city's migration profile. After the country gained independence in 1956, the city of Tunis attracted large numbers of migrants from within the country in search of employment.

It should be noted that the notion of precarious, spontaneous housing appeared from the 1940s in Tunis, in areas of low urban value and often unhealthy. This notion referred to unsanitary quarters of squatters built with salvaged materials.

In addition, the Medina of Tunis, until then sheltering a city-dweller, has been opening up since the 1930s to extra-urban migrations. Rural populations settled in the fondouks, the "Oukalas" and in the cemeteries both inside and outside the wall.

Au fil des années on assiste à une dégradation du tissu urbain traditionnel qui s'est manifesté par la prolifération des « Oukalas » qui se sont transformées en un habitat collectif sous-intégré, réunissant des ménages à faible revenu issus de l'exode rural.

These houses rented by the piece were called "Oukalas", a term hitherto reserved for hostels by the day or by the week to single workers. Indeed, the term "Oukalas" was used to designate any building housing 4 or more households and which have no family ties, during socioeconomic surveys carried out in the 1970s among the inhabitants of the Medina. The Medina offered a favorable reception structure with its large empty houses and a type of patio house that was very suitable for renting by the room. It should also be noted the existence of what were called "morphological Oukalas" and which developed at the end of the 19th-20th centuries, especially in the lower part of the Medina, I would cite as an example. 'Oukalas on rue El Kéramed, that of the impasse de l'Essieu or that of the rue des Teinturiers. This is another form of collective housing, individual dwellings organized around a patio.

In 1975, the old center of Tunis (medina and city of the 19th – 20th centuries) housed nearly a quarter of the capital's population. In 1994, this area represented only 7.2% of the population of the city of Tunis. And this phenomenon of depopulation of the medina has continued to increase since then. In 1956, the Medina of Tunis was home to 168,110 inhabitants, 109,725 in 1984 and according to the last census in 2014, the medina totals 98,000 inhabitants while it housed 140,000 in the sixties. The same phenomenon of demographic decline was observed in the city of the 19th – 20th centuries. The latest censuses show the growing importance of vacant dwellings in the central area.

This is mainly due to the government housing policy initiated in the 1970s which has encouraged residential movements to the outskirts of several social strata. The middle and better-off classes and thanks to bank loans and the creation of the housing land agency have moved to the northern and southern outskirts of Tunis where we are witnessing the emergence of several residential neighborhoods.

As for the underprivileged social classes, they have moved into illegal housing estates, which has encouraged the emergence of non-regulatory housing districts in the western outskirts of the city (Douar Hicher, Ettadhamen, Sidi Hasine).

Even the gradual acquisition of so-called social housing requires savings capacity and stability that are only possible for a population with a regular salary. In short, the poorest layers are excluded from the offer of this type of housing. The low and irregularity of their income, generally from informal work, does not meet the requirements of formal financing systems which include periodic repayments. These are day laborers, unskilled workers, seasonal workers, distinguished by unstable employment and often from recent rural immigration.

The eligibility criteria for this accommodation show that the target clientele is that of the middle classes rather than the low paid. The "social housing" in question here is essentially individual home ownership housing intended for the middle or lower middle class.

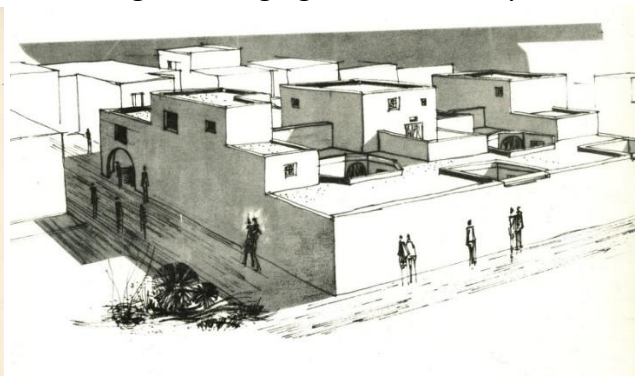
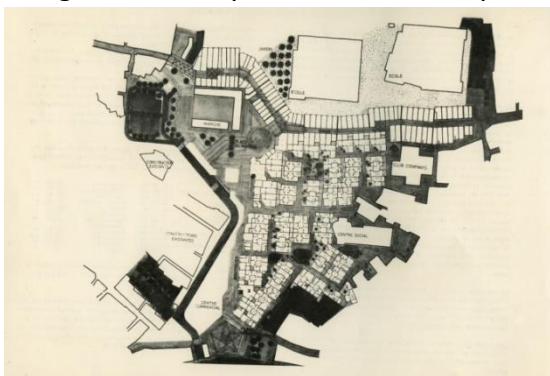
THE REHABILITATION OF THE OLD HOUSING AND THE REQUALIFICATION OF DEGRADED OR TAUDIFIED HOUSING:

From the 80s and in a general context in terms of housing which changed and during the preparation of the 6th five-year development plan 1982-1986, the Hafsia district which saw the first demolitions begin in the 1920s (from last century), then two waves of demolition-reconstruction operations in the 1930s, was retained by the World Bank. This is the former neighborhood occupied by the population of the Jewish faith and was called "Hara". From the first years of the French protectorate and the construction of the New City, the wealthiest families began to leave "Hara" for the new districts.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD RESTRUCTURING PROJECT WAS DONE IN TWO PHASES :

1st phase: Between 1972–1975, a construction phase had been carried out, comprising 100 patio houses and a hundred shops, restoring the "El Hout" souk which linked the Sidi Mahrez souk to that of El Grana. This operation, awarded the Aga Khan Prize for Architecture in 1983, had the merit of calling into question the previous town planning, with orthogonal roads and vertical buildings. Indeed, this section is made up of residential blocks. Main streets and side streets leading to dead ends distribute the housing. Each island has a plot where children can play freely and where cars are excluded.

Some units have a central patio, others have gardens on the ground floor or large terraces upstairs. Patio houses, while having the advantages of traditional houses, avoid open air traffic during winter. They all have a service yard for washing and hanging out the laundry.

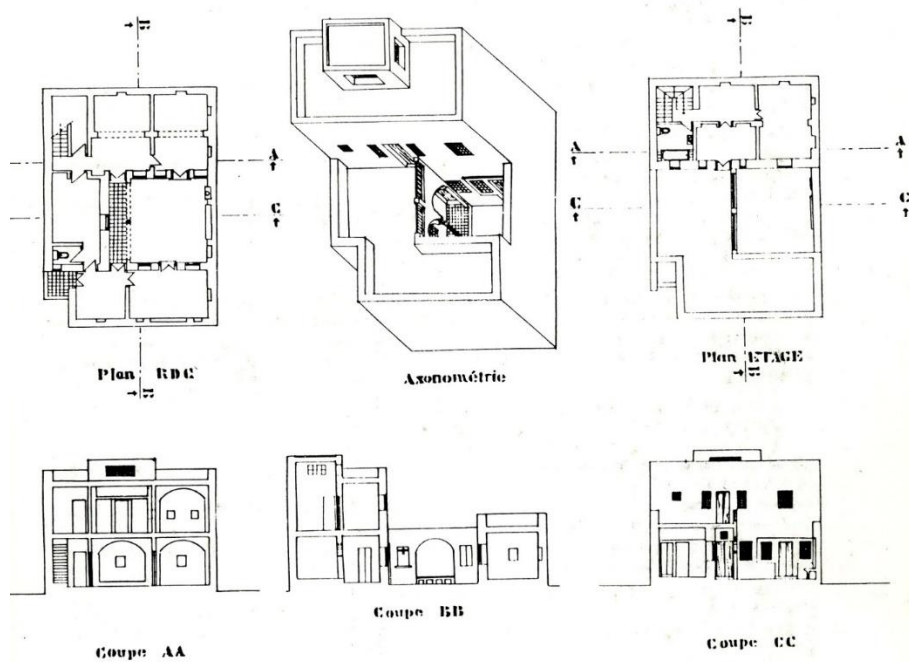


Neighborhood development plan, ASM 1975

2nd phase: it started in 1980, with the Municipality of Tunis, delegated contracting authority, ARRU and ASM as contracting authority as the contracting authority. This project was designed on the basis of a master plan which aimed to mend the road network and respect the typology of the habitat and the urban morphology. A homogeneity was ensured between the new construction and the old fabric which surrounded it by a double continuity: that of the planned and existing road system and that of the new and old buildings.



Architecturally, it constitutes an attempt to reinterpret the traditional patio typology and the architectural vocabulary of the Medina. The principle of the patio house is retained, but its architectural formulation is different since the ground floor is occupied by one apartment and the upper floor by another. To avoid passing through the patio (which is not always central), circulation inside the house is through spaces such as living room, distribution hall or bedroom.



One of the objectives of this project was the rehabilitation of existing buildings, after dedensification, aimed at providing each family with an independent living area of 40m², provided at least with a water point and a kitchen.

To do this, the project had benefited from a clever set-up, the principle of which could be summed up as follows: the new should benefit the old, the renovation should take care of the rehabilitation.

This was essentially an urban mending project: the construction of new housing for low-income households was financed in part by the sale of commercial premises also built under the project. It was the first time that such a financial package had been adopted in Tunisia in a historic district.



View of the neighborhood before and after intervention

But Who lives in Hafsia today ?

How is the neighborhood inhabited today ?



More than 70% of the housing has been transformed into shops, clothing workshops. Previously, home buyers were not mainly from the Hafsia district, as residents could not justify their income and did not have housing savings (CNEL: Caisse Nationale d'Epargne Logements,) were not able to become homeowners in their neighborhood. On the other hand, they were offered developed land in Douar Hicher but most refused to leave the Medina. And we found about twenty people who continued to live in the medina during the surveys carried out within the framework of the "Oukalas" project.

This project has the merit of initiating a new component, "Rehabilitation", it has made it possible to test the feasibility of this operation and the limits of the existing intervention mechanisms (legal, technical, financial, etc.) and the need for them. develop to make of it an adequate strategy concerning especially the old habitat.

Above all, it made it possible to draw attention to the perverse effects of legislation on landlord / tenant relationships, property managers, condominiums, etc. Today, a new law has been promulgated to overcome these difficulties (law December 1993) and to convince

decision-makers to continue this rehabilitation policy with the implementation of a new project concerning overdensified buildings (the "Oukalas" in the Medina of Tunis).

FIGHT AGAINST UNSAFE HOUSING: THE "OUKALAS" PROJECT

Since the 1930s, the Medina, which had previously housed an urban population, has opened up to extra-urban migrations. Rural populations settled in fondouks, oukalas and in cemeteries both inside and outside the wall. This exodus intensified in the aftermath of independence, as rural families seeking employment moved into traditional houses abandoned by their original occupants. These houses rented by the piece were called "oukalas", a term hitherto reserved for inns rented by the day or by the week to single workers. The Medina offered a favorable reception structure with its large empty mansions and a type of patio house that was very suitable for rental by the room.



The municipality of Tunis initiated the Oukalas project in 1991. Structured around two main objectives, **the project aimed to improve the living conditions of residents** of the médina, many of whom were internal migrants, while also renovating historic buildings.



The socio-economic surveys carried out have shown:

- **2/3 of low-income families** (not exceeding 200 Tunisian dinars), distributed as follows:

- 120 elderly people lived alone
- 30% of these families are headed by a woman (widow, divorced, divorced or her husband in prison)
- Most of this category is characterized by its economic and social vulnerability, because it belongs to professional and artisanal categories with little resources

and occasional (day laborer, hawker, domestic help, occasional workers, craftsmen, unemployed, etc.)

- **The 1/3 represents families with average incomes** (between 250 and 400 dinars per month).

As they have also shown that families are large, they are made up of 5 or more people, with a large percentage of people with disabilities.

The Oukalas project financed in part by a loan from the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) started in 1990, it was carried out in installments with two essential components : household rehousing and rehabilitation.

Although the project was initiated primarily to protect families living in buildings at risk of collapse, its broader aim was to improve the general living conditions of all residents and to promote the restoration of historic buildings and monuments neighborhood.

The project included:

- 1. The rehousing of families** living in the oukalas in 2,000 new social housing units equipped with access to basic services and infrastructure (electricity, drinking water, sanitation, roads, public lighting, schools, markets, etc.);
- 2. The demolition of old buildings** threatening to collapse and their replacement by new buildings constructed to accommodate groups and individuals living in the oukalas ;
- 3. The granting of real estate loans** to selected families for the renovation and rehabilitation of their apartments;
- 4. Restoration and rehabilitation** of public buildings and historic monuments ;

I/ Relocation of families :

In addition to providing safe housing and renovating historic buildings, the project also provided social assistance to vulnerable residents of the oukalas. These initiatives included :

- The construction of houses for the elderly living independently within the community. With a surface area of 25 m², the houses included a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen and a small garden
- Access to loans for the elderly, unable to access financial assistance through family or social support networks
- The granting of assistance to twelve disabled children, covering their education and health costs
- Granting of scholarships to enable local students to complete higher education
- Seasonal support to vulnerable groups to fund costs associated with observing religious ceremonies / or school year cycles. The activities were implemented in four phases. All phases included the rehousing of families living in inadequate and dangerous spaces and the renovation and rehabilitation of public buildings and historic monuments.





The project also dealt with the restoration of private buildings and encouraged owners of houses and buildings to renovate their properties through the provision of favorable mortgage loans.

The project also included several social components, regular follow-up with citizens after their relocation accompanied by social services, in particular the creation or extension of schools, high schools, youth and cultural centers in the new districts where the inhabitants of the medina have been moved in.

The Oukalas project had a significant effect on the medina, the people living in the oukalas and in the Municipality of Tunis. The project mainly targeted low-income households living in abandoned buildings in the medina of Tunis and then in the city's communal area. These households were almost exclusively of internal migration. The project prioritized vulnerable groups, defined as families living in buildings at imminent risk of collapse, very poor families, single elderly people, and female heads of household.

The results are visible both in local social and economic indicators, and in the urban development of Tunis. Indicators of the impact of the initiative could include:

- rehabilitation and revitalization of the medina;
- investment by owners in the maintenance, expansion and beautification of buildings;
- the increase in net migration and the economic recovery associated with the establishment of hotels, guesthouses and cultural centers;

In the early phases of the project, residents of the central oukalas were relocated to outlying neighborhoods, raising questions about the impact of these relocations on the social support networks of the residents of the oukalas and on their employment opportunities. From the 3rd phase of the project, the inhabitants of the oukalas were however able to be rehoused in the medina, in buildings constructed on the land freed following the demolitions of the oukalas. Residents were offered primarily to rent the new apartments (residents had to pay a price covering construction costs, with additional costs covered by the municipality and the government).

Before any intervention, an expropriation was initiated for the benefit of the Municipality. Interested owners could recover their property for compensation covering the costs incurred

by the Municipality of Tunis. Otherwise they were sold at public auction, some were rebuilt by the Municipality to relocate families.



II / Rehabilitation; Restauration; The granting of real estate loans

The second important component of this project concerns the rehabilitation of buildings through interventions of consolidation and rehabilitation of their structures. Emphasis was placed on the need to quickly launch rehabilitation operations, which should make it possible, on the one hand, to consolidate the building to avoid the risk of floor collapses threatening human lives and, on the other hand, to slow down the process of deterioration of real estate assets.

- The granting of real estate loans:

A line of credit for the rehabilitation is made available to building owners with a subsidized interest rate of 5%, repayable over 15 years and with free technical assistance provided by the Association Safeguarding the Medina.

The lines of credit were of interest to owners in general, not just Oukalas owners. This is how we have seen priority people rehabilitate their ancestral homes or those acquired on occasion to take advantage of credit and some have been converted into charming hotels, guesthouses ...



- Rehabilitation of municipal and state heritage:

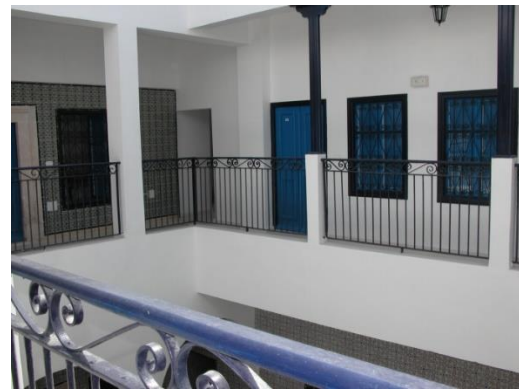
The inhabited buildings were brought up to habitability standards by redeveloping, after de-densification, to have housing units equipped with kitchens and private bathrooms for each household.

During the renovations, the households were temporarily relocated to housing drawers reserved for this purpose (old homes, disused schools, etc.).



- Office work :

Emergency rehabilitation operations on the private park and whose owners are recalcitrant or absent were carried out in office work: The Municipality takes the place of the owners carry out the rehabilitation work of the building and recovers the expenses incurred with tenants. As with municipal assets, households are temporarily relocated during the work.



- **Restauration :**

Buildings of architectural and (or) historical interest are offered for restoration according to a program of reallocation into cultural or socio-collective facilities.





CHALLENGES OF THE OUKALAS PROJECT:

Relocation on the outskirts of the city (even 5 km away and although housing is of better quality) often entails risks, such as loss of social capital or reduced access to employment and socio-cultural infrastructure, involving significant costs for already vulnerable groups. Regarding the rehousing approach adopted during the first phase of the project, the renovation of the buildings and the revitalization of the medina did not mainly benefit the people who lived there.

This prompted several young people, intellectuals and artists to acquire houses in the Medina and benefit from the credits.

Other problems were encountered regarding the accessibility of tenancies after the renovation, and the collection of fixed rents, in particular in the cases of needy families receiving social benefits.

Given the costly nature of the project and the associated financial burden that weighed on the Municipality and in particular following the revolution in 2011, the project was finally stopped in 2012. This problem also raises the question of the sustainability of the project and support provided to beneficiaries after their relocation to houses in good condition. It also raises the question of the continuity of credits through the creation of a special account for rehabilitation.

One could consider that the Oukalas project can be seen in a way as an urban intervention that tried to facilitate access to basic rights of internal migrants, recognizing their precarious living conditions. The aim of the project was to provide decent housing and access to services to all residents of the medina, regardless of their origin. The idea behind the project was that all residents should have access to an improved living environment and indeed, could it be seen as an attempt to promote the right to decent housing in Tunis ?

An impact study, regular observation and regular reassessment of the situation would be necessary.

In the case of the Oukalas project, it would be interesting, and useful for drawing lessons at the institutional level, to compare the experiences and well-being of residents relocated to the outskirts, and those of those relocated within the medina. An assessment of rehabilitation, restoration and conversion operations would benefit future initiatives to better capture a solid and inclusive assessment of the social repercussions of rehabilitation measures.

These types of renovation projects benefit from a broad conceptualization of the notion of habitat, which takes into account the density of social support networks that underpin many intra-urban communities. This approach paves the way for creative solutions to avoid the "false alternative" between the unsanitary conditions of the center and peripheral rehousing as the only options.

The project can potentially constitute an interesting solution to the problem of social cohesion and give new life to abandoned neighborhoods.

CULTURAL APPROACH:

Furthermore, during the 1980s, reflection focused on a cultural approach, in parallel with urban restoration and restructuring operations; This is how the medina festival was created and a tourist circuit was set up as a means of showing that the medina is also a place of culture and leisure. Its most significant impact is manifested in the space of the Medina; it attracts a large audience of all ages and all walks of life.

All these initiatives have had a significant impact on the Medina, in architectural, social and economic terms as well as in terms of heritage. So visitors rediscover this part of the city; which generates good business on the trade. Café Al-Anba (the vineyard), in Souk-Erbaà has become a must for young people, as has the pastry shop on rue Sidi Ben Arous (ice cream and Jawajem) or those on rue du Riche and rue du Pacha (fruit pies).



Other projects followed in the Medina of Tunis, the process initiated in Tunis for more than fifty years, focused primarily on issues of insalubrity, with significant investments in infrastructure, equipment and housing, restructuring projects for entire neighborhoods. Then a reflection was made on a new vision to be implemented which will certainly be in continuity and in addition to what has already been achieved or in progress, in particular the projects of social aims (Hafsia, "Oukalas"). This new vision is based on strengthening the safeguarding of Monumental Heritage with a readjustment towards cultural animation, urban beautification and a better revaluation of craftsmanship.

AS AN EPILOGUE:

According to the 2014 census, the number of inhabitants of the medina does not exceed 83,000, while in 1974 the medina was home to 180,000, in 1984 110,000 inhabitants and 100,000 in 2004.

However people very rarely leave the medina today, but there are some who leave and others come and some return. By the way, another category and another profile of people are looking to settle in the medina today. It is no longer the poor population of the early years of independence who sought to settle in Tunis. Currently it is more about young people, academics, artists and intellectuals looking to settle in the medina. There are also investors who buy old homes to build restaurants, hotels, art galleries.

The medina is "Between maintaining poor and average populations and an attempt at gentrification» ?

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