

# REGENERATION CHALLENGES IN THE MEDINA OF TUNIS

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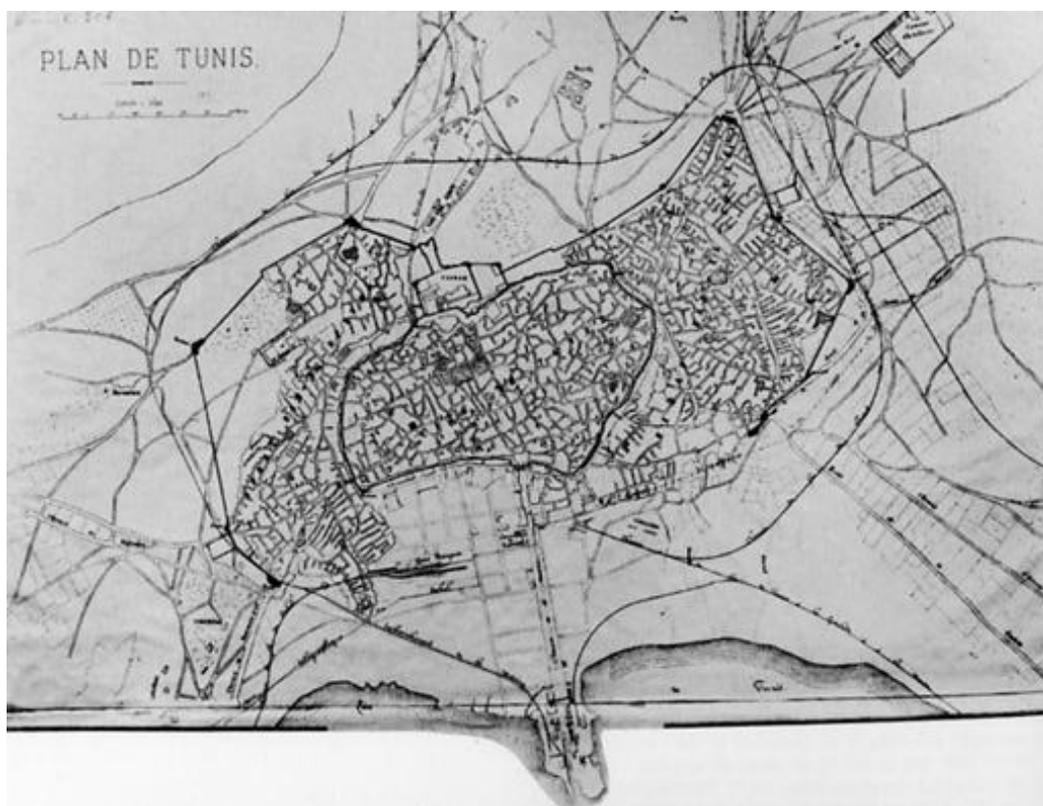
## Regeneration challenges in the Medina of Tunis

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## Acknowledgement

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*Map legend: historical map of the Medina of Tunis, from ASM Tunis archives*

## **Abstract for case study**

Historic City centre of Tunis called 'Medina' has through its history seen migrations that coloured its local culture through continuous redefinition of its socio-urban reality. Today Medina's urban degradation is on one hand blaming on internal migration settlement pattern, and a general lack of home and urban maintenance, negatively affecting the Medina today; on the other hand, absence of institutions that have the will to facilitate or implement inclusive urban development project, which take a holistic approach to urban development not only architectural. This paper looks into institutional practices, real estate management, and socio-economic impact, that make important territorial marketing events, provide only short-term urban impacts. Nevertheless, the Medina is currently undergoing a positive transformation, thanks to social entrepreneurs, urban activists, and its own youth, that invest their time, advocate for the Medina's heritage preservation, conduct territorial or regional promotion and silently push for institutional and urban transformation, that have long-term impacts, but probably are more sustainable as they emerge from the bottom up, respect to local culture.

## **Background**

Modest but important historical building restoration and repurposing, take place at Tunisia's Medinas, which often are businesses that close down or give hope as a spark for urban regeneration, but the spark shuts off with little snowball effects. This paper, outlines the various, complex ecosystems that hinders urban development in the historical quarters of Tunis, called Medina. Despite abundance of public space, its collective management and sharing is often a challenge; which is mainly due to administrative, political and economic difficulties. Civil society has been unleashed since the 2011 resolution, nevertheless the public space is still considered by many, as a property of the state, a space that is not part of a citizen responsibility. Cultural tourism is also another important tool to create a new socio-economic dynamic, which needs to be inclusive of local community, empathetic to local cultural dynamics and creates shared economy with local businesses in order to prevent gentrification through community participation in decision making, and also economic benefits.

Medina was founded in 698, spread over about 296 hectares and is a UNESCO heritage site since 1979, with about 23,000 inhabitants today. The Medina witness's continuous erosion of historical buildings, which impact urban attractiveness and urban preservation. This paper examines the role of institutions, challenges facing investors by taking into account the phases of gentrification, as described by Dr Clay, MIT urban professor, (Clay, 1979) and why each phase is hindered by the actual practices of the Medina. This paper then moves on to describe other informal practices, led by non-urban practitioners, that are encouraging an inclusive ground up approach to historical urban quarters preservation. This paper, by documenting the actual practices and relationships between Medina preservation institutions and residents and restoration investors, argues that the management of heritage assets of the city must acknowledge the new role of civil society and social entrepreneurship, as key partners to institutions, to build a more resilient historical urban quarter, that is empathetic, inclusive and sensitive to local marginalized community.

This paper is a result of writer's 10 years of attempting to create an ecosystem that could spark a slow, improved urban preservation in the Medina, through many individually led initiatives that are sensitive to local culture and even more sensitive to community involvement. There are three main parts of this paper: the first outlines traditional economic dynamics in the Medina, by analysing the socio-economic changes impacting the traditional souk ecosystem; the second part analyses the impacts of capital investments in the Medina,

the path to owning, restoring a home or a business location in the Medina; the third part describes three cases of small initiatives that spark urban attractiveness.

### **Craft Souks, historical dynamics and current reality**

Historically, Medina's artisans, were the masters of trade and commerce, and controlled the socio-economic dynamics of the medina. Five words described the entire urban commercial system which regulated Medina's artisans and their trade: "Orf", is a collection of dos & don'ts for each craft, including the quality of production, to trading behavior. "Souk", a word to describe the physical space in which the artists can/should produce and commercialize their crafts and products. "Amin", a master artisan who is appointed/elected as the head of an artisanal corporation; with very high ethical standards and masters all aspects of the craft he belongs to. 'Amin' also can decide who can become part of a corporation, ensures 'Orf' is respected, resolves disputes concerning matters of commerce and production and regulates the trade within the 'Souk'. "Maallem", or a master craftsman who masters all details of production. To reach this status, Maallem has to prove a certain level of quality, ethics, leadership and sense of belonging to the corporation. Finally, "Sanna", or "apprentice", employed by a Maallem to work under his supervision. The Sanna learns everything by doing, and investing years at his Maalem's workshop; if the Sanna is very good, he could become a Maalem, but many never reach that stage. (Ben Gacem, 2016)

This model functioned as the basis of socio-economic ecosystems in historical cities, which were commercially dynamic. Today, the situation in the Medina looks quite different. Socio-economic changes have caused the development of a tremendous gap between the expectations of master craftsmen, who are comfortable with the traditional corporation model, and the younger craftsmen, who are eager to break Orf, move away from the Souk, compete with Maalems and refuse to be a Sanna.

The traditional relationship between a Maalem and his Saana, was a paternal, involving a strong sense of loyalty. Jumping from one Maalem to another could even harm the reputation of a Sanaa. This might have worked in a world where Maalem were masters of the trade, while complying with Orf, which forced the whole souk to produce identical products. The corporation created a collective monopoly with boundary restrictions to challenge penetration within the Souk.

Today, young artisans prefer to learn quickly, find opportunities and use traditional techniques to create new products. The new globalized world, requires adaptation to strong market competition caused by the floods of imported goods. As a result, Maalem's of today struggle to get the expected loyalty and commitment. The few Amins and Maalems left, work in shrinking Souks, and struggle to keep their Medina production workshops alive.

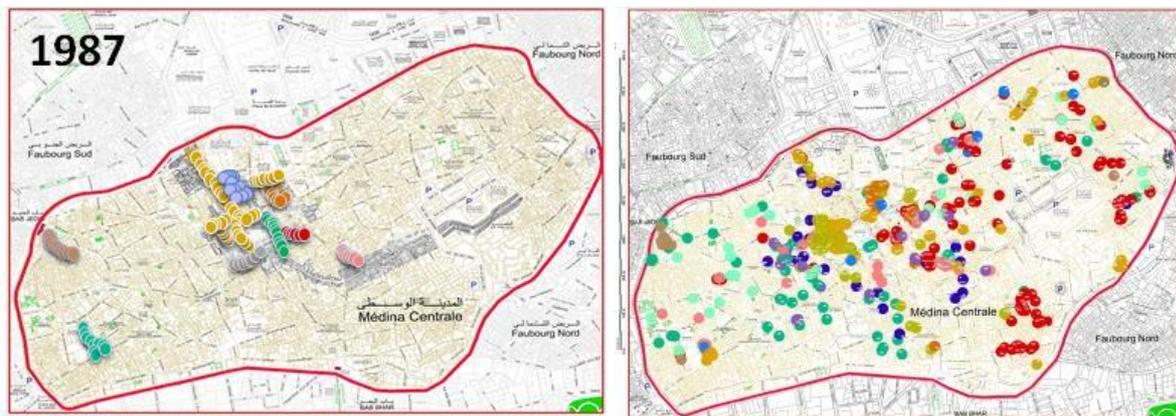
As the craft corporation model, fades away, "new-comers" to Medina's trade and souks, have created a new shared economy model, far from the traditional hierarchical system. Supply chains are now more horizontal, with individualistic workshop, united for shared economic benefits, scattered in the Medina, depending on low rent or squat opportunities, rather than the traditional souks. 'New commers' consider Orf suicidal in free markets, where clients have lower purchasing power, forcing artisans to produce lower quality products and use cheaper raw materials. New artisan workshops in the Media today, heroically maintain traditional crafts, under very difficult economic circumstances, unprotected, under-mentored and side-lined.

According to MEDNETA project outcomes, (Funded by ENI CBC MED, implemented in Tunis by ASM Tunis, 2014) for which the author of this paper was a lead field researcher, aimed at evaluating the status of artisan workshops based in central Medina. The study included

extensive background research, a complete situation analysis, of the Medina as well as meetings and interviews with artisans of all professions.

The study located a total of 525 artisan workshops operating in the Medina today, practicing over 30 different professions. This shows the continued importance of craftsmanship in the Medina of Tunis today as is illustrated in its high density of artisans in a 100ha area. Creative industries have throughout the Medina's history always been an important source of trade, cultural exchange and certainly plays a significant part in the shared economy of the Medina sharing in its sustainability. Nevertheless, craft industry types, have changed through the years, with the migration of new cultures, market shifts and socio-economic change within the city and from outside.

These crafts range from copper, gold and silver smiths to weavers and milliners to saddlers and ceramists (the first being the most frequent and the last two of which only 1 workshop was located). The majority of workshops continue producing the same traditional products which have been produced in the Médina for decades. These include the traditional *chéchia* (Tunisian fez), *balgha* (traditional slippers), *jebba* (male dress) and *sefsarie* (Tunisian women body wrap).



*Map 1 & 2 legend: The 2 maps above of the Medina of Tunis, show artisan production locations. Each craft type is represented by a color: red dot is a shoe making and leather crafts workshops; dark brown dot is an ironsmith workshop; green is for carpenters and woodwork workshops... The map on the left shows how craft souks were dedicated to a specific craft. The map on the right is a result of 2014 MEDNETA project mapping, and show how craft workshops are now spread all over the Medina, as the craft/souk system collapsed.*

Of the 525 artisan workshops 34% are located in *oukalas*. These are production houses, with several artisan production workshops, operating in unsafe restoration needing buildings, sometimes those buildings use to have other functions, and today artisan squat to save workshop rent. The main crafts which can be found in *oukalas* are metal workers (35%), goldsmiths (27%) and cobblers (13%).

Artisans who participated in the MEDNETA survey ranged from ages 21 to 81. The majority was however between the 40 and 60 years-old. Only few artisans are still active in production after the age of 70 years old, yet might chose to stay in the workshop of function as a mentor for younger artisans. The general tendency among artisans currently active in the Medina is to have over 16 years of experience in their craft. A few masters have over 46 years of experience. It can be noted though that only a small proportion of the artisans has less than 15 years of experience, indicating a decrease in apprenticeship.



*Figure 1: Master artisan Fitouri, at his Medina Balgha making workshop, at souk el Blaghjia*

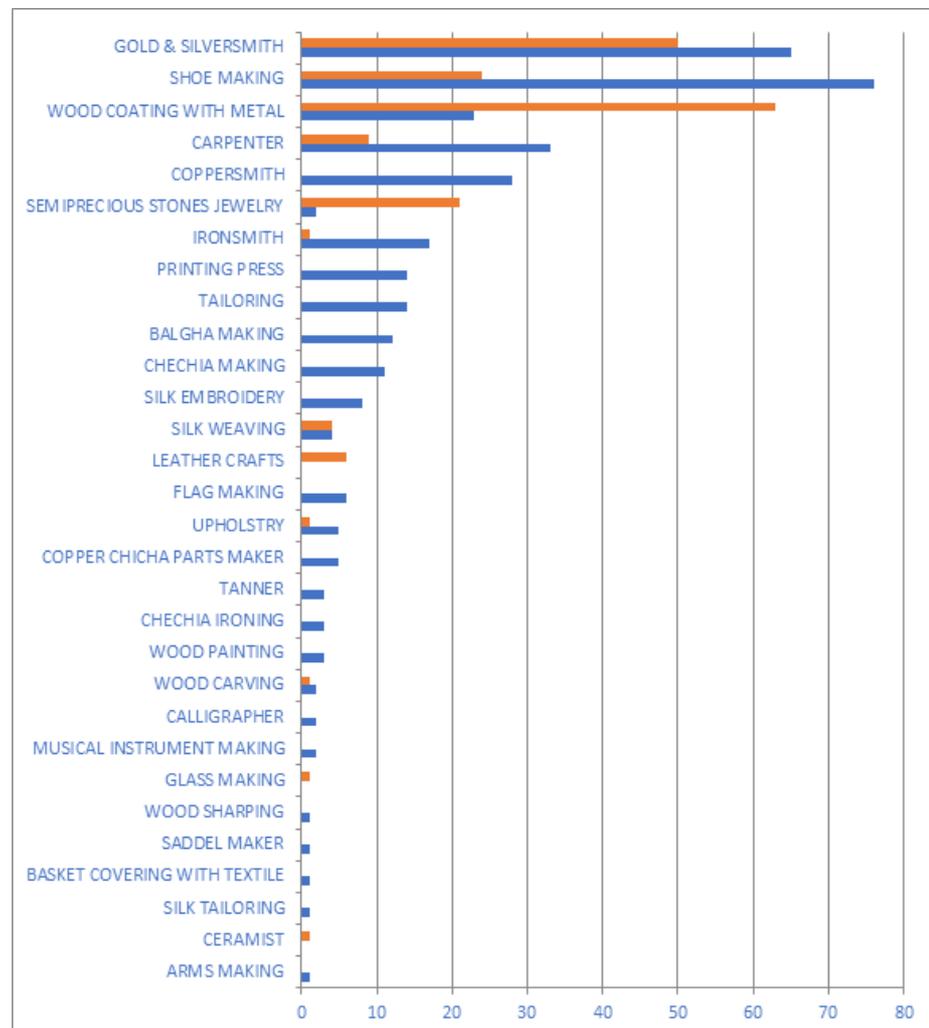
The far majority have not completed any form of tertiary education and even less have received vocational schooling (roughly 5%). The largest section of artisans has only completed primary education. The majority of artisans have learned their craft through traditional transmission lines such as through family or by apprenticeship with a master artisan, with only a few having learned on the job or by vocational training. Most commonly the workshops in which artisans are active are rented from other property owners, although it has to be noted that a good third of the artisans are property holders themselves. Workshops, often passed down from father to son can at times be generations old.

Some general outcomes that are interesting to highlight from the demographics of the artisans surveyed are the minority of vocationally trained craftsmen, the generally low educational level, and the low numbers of youth (18 – 25) active in arts and crafts. The first two seem to be relatable, for craftsmanship was traditionally passed on through apprenticeship with a master artisan from a young age. This made for a lot of young apprentices who did generally not follow the traditional education system, nor get special vocational training at a school but learned on the job. The decline of this traditional form of transmission might also be the explanation to why there are fewer young artisans.

Of the 525 workshops located, 255 workshops (49%) were active in the production of value products such as jewelry and precious stones as well as gold and silver works. Among the strengths of metalsmith artisans is the increased demand for precious metal works as well as metal coating. This is however strained by the increase of cheaper illegal products entering the market as well as the abundance of impure raw materials (such as silver). On the positive side, this product group has the capability to easily adapt its production depending on the raw materials available, yet lack of vocational training creates an unstable production quality. However, overall number of metalsmiths in the medina decreased, due to artisans leaving the trade, due to difficulty in finding quality raw material, with devaluation of local currency, and

decrease in business profitability. Artisans are often qualified, but underpaid, causing them to leave the craft for other jobs.

*Graph legend: List of all identified artisan production workshops in the Medina of Tunis, through ASM Tunis 2014 survey. Workshops in blue are on Medina's streets and souks, while those in orange are workshops in 'oukala' (abandoned buildings)*



The second largest group of workshops (119 of 525) is those active in the production in leather. The majority of artisans in this group are shoe-makers, whereas a smaller group specializes in traditional slippers, fine leather works and saddles. Needed leather raw materials are easily available, and the prices have not increased to the same extent as for metal crafts, nevertheless the purchasing power of local market, and decrease in tourism sector, forced artisans to work with fake leather, to bring product prices down. Quality seems to be in decline, as well, due to increased competition from the Asian market, which produces much cheaper products, and the export of high-quality Tunisian leather, leaving artisans to work with lesser quality leather.

On the positive side, the dense network of leather shops, wholesalers, retailers and client-based hand-made products provides a stable market atmosphere. The down side of this fact is however the lack of health and safety conditions in the workshops. Lastly, the demand for saddler goods has plunged in the last few years, to the extent that only a single saddler can be found active today in the Medina.

Clothing artisan workshops, are 12% of 525 workshops in the Medina; this includes a vast variety of crafts ranging from milliners, embroiders and silk weavers to regular tailors and

dyers. The practice of traditional tailoring finds itself in a geographic concentration of related crafts such as spinning, weaving, trimming, embroidery and sewing. This shared space of expertise allows for high quality and a good reputation of the trade, due to ease of availability of these crafts, and the stable demand as well as a business that is still relatively profitable, despite decreased market demand. The only craft in this category which seems to be struggling however is that of the Chachia, a product with a decreasing demand in local market, but has a high export potential, especially to the African continent.

Both traditional tailors as well as Chachia artisans, face the problem of a decline in qualified craftsmen. The lack of innovative business opportunity leads to a limited integration of young artisans. The tailors at the same time cope with high prices of quality fabrics and the availability of silk is fluctuating. Possible threats to the craft are the lack of professional vocational training in traditional tailoring, weaving and embroidery. The difficulty in finding quality raw materials and their increased prices, due to local currency devaluation, also causes strains on the market. Lastly, weaving seems to be a disappearing craft for it is labor intensive, can easily be done by machinery and has little handover to the youth.

In the field of construction crafts, artisans are not only active in the production of accessories but also in the creation of construction related products. This group, existing for the largest part of carpenters (63%) and blacksmiths (27%) counts 67 different workshops in the Médina. The Médina itself is a repertoire of traditional architectural techniques and styles, ranging from traditionally nailed doors to iron windowsills. Due to the revitalization of the Médina and the increase in restoration projects the construction crafts, are in growing demand for their expertise. However, there seems to be a lack of networking, making it hard for these craftsmen to be located since the majority are home-based informal businesses. The supply chain of raw materials is also very unstable since the demand is only need based. Some of the traditional construction crafts face competition from industrial production, such as ironworks. Another risk factor is the underpaid foreign labor which pressures the market prices. The increase of prices of traditional construction work and the often-occurring delivery delays discourages customers as well.

In general, the Medina is logistically convenient for artisan workshops, due to the presence of raw material suppliers, distribution networks as well as vendors and customers all being geographically centralized within the Medina. This combined with the rich inventory of various know-how and vast network of workshops in such close proximity makes for a creative products hub. Some obstacles that do occur within the Medina are the outdated artisan unions, the rising raw material prices and decrease in their availability, as well as the lack of product innovation. Artisan corporations do exist; however, they have become outdated by the current socio-economic situation. The market has changed significantly over the past few decades, yet the corporations, which function of a large part on ethics and customs, have not developed with the time.



*Photo legend: rooftop view of a Medina Souk 2018*

The issue of financing lies in the lack of inappropriate loan systems, which are often complicated to obtain, but also in the increase of raw material prices as well as the lack of quality control and random availability of necessary materials. These large fluctuation in these variable costs, which should be expected to be rather stable, makes it difficult for artisans to plan ahead in production and also causes prices to vary for the customer. The third real issue, which cannot be overlooked, is the lack of product innovation. Most artisans are producing today the same, or at least similar, products that have been produced in the Medina for decades. The maintaining of traditional production techniques is preferable, however the products produced need to be able to adapt to changing market demands. This problem might be due to the lack of vocational training, and the little focus placed on entrepreneurial training. Lastly, the market is also coping with a flood of smuggled and fake products which are often indistinguishable of the authentic products, causing the problem of visibility.



*Photo legend: Medina of Tunis rooftop view of homes, workshops and alleys.*

### **Medina of Tunis, anti-gentrification process**

For internal migrants, moving to the capital Tunis, in search of jobs and a future with better opportunities for their children, the Medina of Tunis offers many advantages. The historical urban quarter is strategically located, at the heart of the capital, with a high concentration of jobs, that are walking distance including nearby souks and markets, cafes, restaurants and small businesses at Bab Bhar (the sea front gate of the Medina). Also located in the Medina are public sector offices in the northern outskirts (Mc Guinness, 1997). The underserved urban quarter, with under maintained historical buildings, provides low rent, and a community that protects each other, creating almost a village within the capital, inhabited by a community that has a common social pact of 'we are in this alone and together'.

Every tourist and cultural investment in the Medina of Tunis, brings hope is a potential urban revival, but concern over a potential gentrification process, which could take place, but seems

unlikely to occur. Prof. Phillip Clay, urban studies professor at MIT, published what is known as the four phases of gentrification. (Clay, 1979) Despite the fact that Dr Clay's phases of gentrification are a result of his observations of the gentrification process in American cities; his process does provide a good basis to analyse the Medina of Tunis's gentrification potential. We argue that important strategic and planned urban policies, make the Medina of Tunis gentrification difficult, and we herewith provide the Tunisian prospective, and hence the rational that hinders the potential of gentrification.

The first phase of gentrification, according to Dr Clay is when good hearted pioneers, move in to a poor area, with no support, to renovate a home. The Medina of Tunis, has many stories of good-hearted people, who want to move in and settle in. Their desire is often based on the charm of living in a historical building, and undergoing the heroic act of restoring a historical home. Of those with such desire, very few a able to complete a finished home.

Buying a home in the Medina of Tunis, requires finding a home where all owners are known. Since Tunisia applies strict Shariaa laws (Islamic inheritance law), the result for homes that are over hundreds of years old, is that all descendants of the original owner have a share. This often includes a distant cousin from an unknown relative, also gets his share, otherwise the sales process is incomplete. For example, near rue du Pasha, there are three known abandoned family homes, that cannot be sold due to family disagreements. In Tunisia, the government can only confiscate undeveloped land after 50 years of inactivity on the property. However, constructed property is owned by of all the heirs, including completely collapsed buildings and structures with half a wall standing (Code du Patrimoine, Tunisia).

In the rare occasion, where all owners are known, the process of buying from siblings and cousins, requires more than 'good hearted pioneers'. In the last five years, at least four buyers on Rue du Pasha gave up due to an overly complex sales process.

Medina home buyers prefer not to start the restoration process before finalizing the lengthy bureaucracy of the purchasing process. Purchasing a property could take years, during which the home will further degrade, and in some unfortunate circumstances, a squatter may unlawfully move in and claim this property as thier home. This means that after the purchasing process is complete, an expensive legal complaint against the squatters must take place, otherwise the buyer has gained an unexpected housemate. There are no squatters' rights in Tunisia, but removing a homeless family from an abandoned home, is a social decision, where few law officials have the courage to take on. On Rue du Pasha, there are two known home buyers, who had to find alternative solutions to evacuate, their new homes.



*Photo legend: a Medina home undergoing restoration by private investor, near Rue du Pasha*

Once purchasing process is complete, and all official real estate registrations have been made, the restoration work can start. Since the Medina is a UNESCO heritage site, Medina building restorations are subject to many permits and regulations, from the municipal committee that is composed of municipal architects, such as the INP (Institut national du Patrimoine) and ASM (Association de Sauvegarde de la Medina). It is totally legitimate to have a committee of restoration professionals to approve any restoration work in the Medina, in order to protect the authenticity of the buildings as best as possible. What is not as justifiable is the unclear architectural protection specifications, that are not documented nor published. The restoration permission committee, has in the past provided urban developers restoration permits to demolish and rebuild the Medina's historical landmarks, But this same committee could make the 'good hearted pioneer' spend many months redoing restoration proposals and plans, because an original window was requested to be enlarged. These unclear standards, result in having a large majority of Medina's inhabitants, restore without applying for a building permit.

Once restoration permit is acquired, often the restoration process is almost double the cost of the home purchase. The execution time is unpredictable, as it is dependent on the construction expertise of restoration master artisan. , With little market demand and they are paid by the day and fond of stalling out the restoration process.

Dr. Clay's second phase of gentrification is when real estate people notice a trend, and see the high return on investment, by investing in construction at a specific urban area, and move in to transform it. In Tunisia, both real estate developers and local government urban plans are almost always directed towards new undeveloped land. For real estate developers, who will have to go through the same described process of buying and restoring a home in the Medina, return on investment is very slow process.

Urban rehabilitation of historical quarters, requires community involvement. Often for municipalities, if the community is stereotyped, or composed of internal migrants, the urban quarter often suffers from economic disinvestment, or an absence of security and policing. Local governments have been recently newly elected in post-revolution Tunisia, and most officials are having a difficult time adapting to city council board agendas with different city goals, and from public freedom of speech that now scrutinizes their every move. In the meantime, there are many discussions about private-public partnerships, as a priority for local governments, but that is very little real implementation. The municipality of Tunis, owns more than 50 properties within the Medina's 100 hectares. Four of those are accessible public buildings, the other historical monuments have collapsed and in serious need of restoration and reuse. These city owned property have the opportunity to transform the Medina's landscape, if only the city council board could agree on a repurposing strategy.

The Tunisian Ministry of Tourism, is responsible to classify the county's territories into 'Tourism Zones'. Once a territory is listed as a Tourism Zone, the area benefits from better maintenance, security and territorial marketing. The Medina of Tunis, and all other Medinas in Tunisia, are not listed as Tourism Zones and do not receive any security benefits. This makes tourism investors in the Medina, responsible to provide their own private security services and street maintenance and cleaning.

Dr Clay's third phase of gentrification, is when gentrifiers start taking prominent roles in the community. The fourth stage is when gentrification takes place and the urban space becomes wealthier, where vacant spaces have been transformed in luxury apartments. Taking into account the Tunisian reality described in the first two gentrification phases, very few 'early pioneers' reach this stage. In fact, the Medina's gentrification potential, taking into account Dr

Clay's phases, has been stuck at the first phase now for over 50 years, as there has been a constant turn-over of 'good-hearted pioneers, that get discouraged by the whole process.

In his book 'How to Kill a city' P E Moskowitz (Moskowitz, 2018) describes the importance of government will, which facilitates the whole process, and initiates its phases. Whereas in the Medina of Tunis, despite important urban maintenance work previously done on Rue du Pasha and Rue des Andalous, the process was mainly beautifying alleys and restoring historic homes and building doors and windows, taking special considerations of historical architectural specifications of each urban quarter. The process was key to initially attract



visitors, Instagramers, social influencers and some modest heroic investments, but it lacked the perception of the urban fabric, as an integrated ecosystem. Hence even if a door looked nicer, the families behind the door were not part of the process, nor did the lives of those asking for a restoration permit improve, which reflects government's perception of Medina preservation.

*Photo legend: a municipal property, on rue des Andalous, collapsed in the Medina of Tunis, and blocked neighbour's home entrance. The urban area witnessed important urban rehabilitation, and a wall was built in front of this collapse, to hide it.*

*Mapping of some historical buildings in the Medina, by National Institute of Heritage. Most of those are closed in need of restoration, and cannot be visited; and those open are often government offices or government archives, and are very hard to access as a visitor. Private sector proposals for their revival often take years, with endless meetings and paper work. (INP, 2014)*



### **Networks for Urban Resilience**

Tunisia's revolution biggest achievement is the initiation of an important active civil society, finally able to share resources and expertise with its own government. As socio-economic challenges grow, government finds itself lacking the necessary tools and execution speed to design solutions and administrative changes much needed for today's dynamic cities. In post-revolution Tunisia, heritage preservation is low on the list of government priorities but thanks to the emergence of civil society, modest attempts have shown positive results.

The Medina has over 70 government owned historical building, most of which are closed to the public in urgent need for restoration and repurposing. One important building repurposing case study, Rachidia, was established in 2015 is an association initiated in 1934 for the preservation of traditional Tunisian music. Civil society and social entrepreneurs collaborated to preserve and document traditional music and also the building Dar Lasram where the organization resides in. The project took over 2 years, for the benefit of the legendary Rachidia and united young organizations such as Aswar el Medina, Carthagina, Collectif Creatif, ENAUVATEUR & ARC, the social enterprise organization Blue Fish which led and managed the project institutions and governmental organizations including INP, Ennajma Ezzahra, Bibliotheque National and ASM Tunis.

The project goals were to digitalize Rachidia's paper and recording archives, and create the first open digital library for Tunisian traditional music. After many meetings to harmonize the project vision between the different project partners, a crowdfunding campaign was launched, where 38 generous contributors, all of which are Tunisian living abroad, donated for the initiation of Rachidia's digital library. Later, two more donations were received, the first from the association Le Pont Genève, an association of Tunisians living in Switzerland, and a generous contribution from expatriates living in Tunis.



*Photo legend: Photo on the left shows Dar Lasram II, publicly owned building, which was totally restored by volunteers and through crowdfunding. Photo on the right shows a poster, that was saved by the same project, announcing a Malouf musical concert 5 June 1935 at 2pm, at Municipal Theater.*

The initial use of the funds was dedicated to the important sorting mission of over one ton of paper archives from 1920's, which were a mixture of artist contracts, student registrations, musical manuscripts and phone bills, where all pulled together at Dar Lasram II location. Architects and architectural students generously gave their time to recommend building restoration needs with important collaboration with INP (Institute National du Patrimoine). The collaboration with INP lasted throughout the project implementation, as there was a verbal agreement on government building restoration, using INP's labor and crowdfunded money to

buy all restoration raw material and supplies. This collaboration was crucial in maximizing the return of crowdfunded money, as important savings were done in labor costs.

Once archives were sorted, collaboration with Ennajma Ezzahra enabled the digitalization of all audio archives, some are musical performances over a century old. The collaboration with Bibliotheque National enabled the shared digitalization of paper archives and maintenance of historical manuscript musical teaching books. Thanks to private sector representatives Astral, a paint manufacturer for the donation of paint and Ooredoo, a telecom company for donating ten computers.

Today the project has been completed, a historical government owned building has been saved and Rachidia's century old Tunisian traditional archives have been digitalized and published online. This new much needed space in the city of Tunis, which was closed for half a century, is now a digital library and performance space open for the public and for youth to express themselves, discover their musical heritage, interact with professionals and add an important and much needed socio-cultural dynamic into the Medina.

The project proved that a social enterprise business model could be a solution for a more efficient and inclusive historical public building management, which balances building preservation as well as economic and cultural dynamic within its urban community in a way that is independent from government funding; sensitive to heritage preservation needs while securing public ownership.

In Tunisia the private – public partnership law was signed and passed in 2015; but it remains extremely difficult to implement, as it offers a very general framework but nothing specific that can be used by the private or the public.

The management and repurposing of city's historical building stock, could be a great private-public partnership story, especially if managed as a social enterprise. Nevertheless, even with the absence of a clear government framework permitting the sustainability of the above achievements, private-public partnership, requires a belief in the importance of sharing knowledge and resources and requires honest intentions in building harmonious cities. This brings hope to our youth, and helps them create and seize opportunities in their communities.

### **Dar Ben Gacem, guesthouse social enterprise**

The structural challenge faced by craftsmen in the Medina, lies mainly in the fact that Tunisian tourism does not promote Tunisian crafts, since governmental territorial marketing is detached from the craftsmen legacy. The tourism sector in Tunisia, is often cut off from the territory and the jobs created are not part of local dynamics either. Most tourism sector jobs, are on the coast in hotel complexes, which push workers far away from regions in the interior of the country, far from their homes, for low-paying jobs that do not value the communities they are in.

Dar Ben Gacem, a social enterprise guesthouse (Faleh, 2019) in the Medina of Tunis launched in 2013 when the project leader saw that it was difficult for craftsmen to market their products without an ecosystem that promotes their businesses in a sustainably, respectfully manner while integrating it with territorial marketing, that could create a global dynamic in the territory of the Medina. As a social enterprise, Dar Ben Gacem is also an example of a more holistic approach to inclusive urban revival, as its main aim is creating cultural tourism opportunities, that improves the medina's socio-economic dynamics, through better promotion

and advocacy of Medina's wealth of historical buildings, artisan souks and overall urban magic, which results in better youth inclusion and respectable local jobs creation.

Dar Ben Gacem, aims to offer an authentic cultural tourism experience in the Medina with a shared economy and clusters of initiatives, that includes artisan workshops and small stores in the neighborhood. This creates positive storytelling, positive impact on the territory, and contributes to a more resilient economic dynamic, that provides decent work opportunities for communities and urban revival. Urban revival for Dar Ben Gacem is not just about socio-economic dynamics, but also creating important content related to Medina's culinary heritage, civilisations and cultures that added colours to the Medina. In addition Dar Ben Gacem offers calligraphy work embedded in historical buildings and the digging into the national archives to identify all the owners of Dar Ben Gacem building.



*Photo legend: photo on the right of Dar Ben Gacem 38 Rue du Pasha courtyard, a guesthouse launched in 2013; and on the left Dar Ben Gacem, 16 Rue du Kahia courtyard, a guesthouse launched in 2019 after a restoration that was financed by profits generated from the first DAR. Dar. Ben Gacem -Kahia- was purchased from 32 owners, and the restoration licence for Dar Ben Gacem -Pasha- took over 2years to acquire from the municipality of Tunis.*

From the start, the business DNA of Dar Ben Gacem required hiring staff from the community, creating services that involve shared economy with small businesses in the neighborhood, where all profits are to be reinvested in the Medina by either in restoring and repurposing historic buildings and creating new opportunities for youth in the community. Tremendous effort has been made to promote the Medina to all sixty-three nationalities of guests that have stayed at Dar Ben Gacem. The Dar provides important job skills to young people from the community that join the Dar Ben Gacem staff and team.

In-kind support has also been provided to cultural NGO's such as the Tunisian Association of Calligraphic Arts, which celebrated the 1000 birthday of the Kairouani Arabic calligraphy font script, as well as workshops with Carthagina, that uploads Wikipedia articles about Medina's historical buildings, souks, mosque, madrasas, shrines and palaces.

This work has permitted to establish important networks of collaborations, between micro-businesses based in the Medina, which motivated the initiation of an economy lobby of the Medina, called 'Mdinti'.

### **Economic Lobby for Medina's urban revival**

M'dinti is a newly founded economic interest group, a union of private sector businesses based in the Medina of Tunis. M'dinti today includes tens of micro-businesses, covering a wide range of products and services, who decided to mutualize their efforts through M'dinti. M'dinti's members are united to improve the Medina's urban resilience, territorial branding and economic dynamic. The main aim is to build an economic lobby that can advocate for the Medina's urban development through its own resources, which include tangible and intangible heritage through local community inclusion which could better sustain the businesses of the members and brings prosperity to the Medina. M'dinti members wish to initiate small scale, diverse and alternative education initiatives in the Medina. This initiative will be sensitive to the Medina's youth needs and integrated with the communities needs to create a new sense of value, a different sense of expectations. The outcome is to revive the Media communities, and bring positive urban rebranding in a community inclusive way.

M'dinti aims at uniting dormant Medina opportunities, to unleash new possibilities for youth and for communities. But also to invest in urban opportunities, that could generate inclusive cultural tourism jobs, self-employment and improve social harmony, hence security and community development.

Mdinti aspires to mobilize young people, and give them hope for their future, by making them participate in projects of common interest. Young people in the Medina need alternative learning and opportunities, and to become integrated in the economic dynamic. Such opportunities can be tour guides, urban events management and leisure industry jobs.

Over the past decade, a new relationship to crafts and skilled manual labor has emerged in the form a "makers" or "DIY" movement across the globe. This movement is the result of both new rapid prototyping technologies; renewed interest for manual skilled labor, and an urgent need for circular economy to protect the environment. M'dinti, aspires to make the Tunis Medina part of this global makers' movement and to advocate for sustainable consumption and promotion of circular economy dynamics in the Medina. The movement aims at building a more sustainable production and design process, as well as a community urban space repurposing. This philosophy is also linked to promoting an engaged global democratic citizen that is aware, educated and proactive about both international and national issues.

Since 2020, Covid-19 exacerbated the already fragile socio-economic situation of Medina's craft trade ecosystem; which is currently leading to closure, as they struggle to pay rent due to lockdown and absence of tourists. Nevertheless, important number of master artisans reside in the Medina and could become an opportunity for alternative education, creating self-employment opportunities.

In a survey by the Municipality of Tunis, it was found that the municipality of Tunis owns, through expropriation, 39 historical buildings in the Medina of Tunis. Those buildings are either owned by foreigners with no inheritors, or given as a donation from families to the city. The city of Tunis might not have the means to repurpose these properties, but more importantly, public institutions do not have the technical knowledge to design or manage a financially sustainable model for community spaces. Nevertheless, M'dinti members met with the Mayor of Tunis, who was more than willing, open and eager to collaborate on revival projects which include municipal properties.

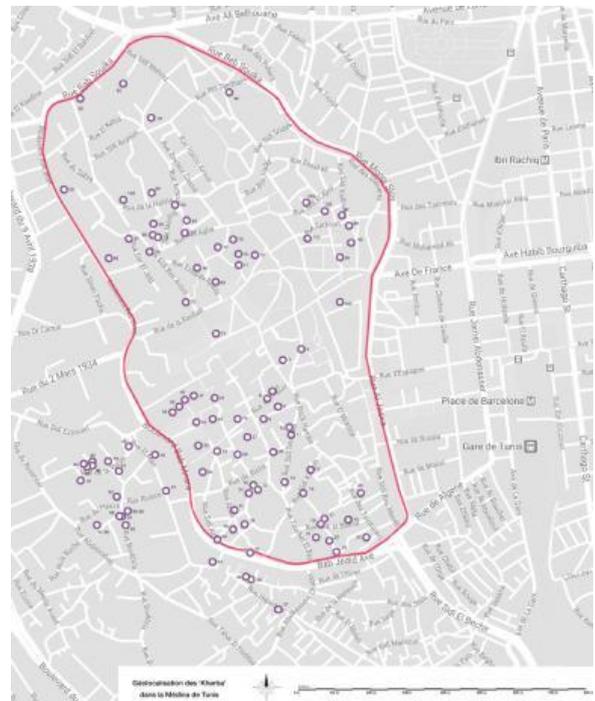
Finally, the rapid pace of destruction of urban heritage has prompted the emergence of civil society initiatives. Heritage has emerged as a key issue of urban citizenship. Urban heritage can be a real force for social harmony against a background of economic, social and cultural restructuring.

M'dinti, wishes to act as a catalyst, uniting communities, civil society and local government, hence creating a new climate of possibilities, that cherish and value the relationship between youth and their communities and to improve territorial marketing and the sustainability of resulting socio-economic development.



*Photo legend: a group of students visiting 'El Khirba' currently a municipality of Tunis' temporary public dump in the Medina of Tunis, as part of INNOMED-Up project (2019-2022 ENI CBC MED project, implemented by the municipality of Tunis), where collapsed historical buildings are being investigated for reuse ideas.*

*Map legend: mapping research by the municipality of Tunis, led by author, to map all collapsed historical buildings in the Medina of Tunis, 1/4 of which are Municipal owned. (Municipality of Tunis, 2020)*



## **Urban regeneration lessons from the Medina of Tunis**

The Medina of Tunis can offer opportunities for cultural tourism, when taking into account the important potential of historical building adaptation, urban space repurposing process, and territorial branding through the historical creative industries dynamics. Nevertheless, Tunisia's unclear restoration permit process, lengthy heritage management process, potential unprofitability of any leisure business based in the Medina, the historical urban quarters seem to be stuck with urban decay. The solution may be a diverse ecosystem within Medina's communities, that unites small targeted, cultural tourism projects, causing more positive branding and opportunities without the negative impacts of gentrification. Community development which goes hand in hand with urban development.

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