

The Recent Extensions of the Town of Jijel : Aspects, Factors, and Impacts

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Abstract

The environmental quality in general and in the urban area in particular represents a major preoccupation for the public authorities of independent Algeria as much at the central level as for the local actors. The environmental restrictions revealed in the legal arsenal governing the territorial planning and environment protection within the sustainable development frame reinforce this fact. However, it should be noted that the urbanisation perimeters extensions never cease to cause negative impacts on the environment with all their natural and human components.

In order to highlight the whys and wherefores of this reality, we would like, through the present scientific article, to expertise the aspects and factors of the recent extensions of the town of Jijel at the East of Algeria and the impacts caused upon the environment. For the purpose of better determining this problematic, we chose the Rabta city at the North-West of the town of Jijel.

Key words: Rabta city, land use, mutations, environment, impacts.

INTRODUCTION

The conciliation of socioeconomic development with the environment and coastal area protection in Algeria has constantly represents a challenge since the beginning of the 1980's. The will is to win this challenge declines through a set of regulatory texts and territorial planning proactive and restrictive stances.

The urbanisation perimeters situated in the coastal strip of the province of Jijel has never been on the margin of control-over natural resources strategies and the territory projects (Province Planning Plan, Planning and Urbanism Orientation Plan, Coastal Planning Plan). Nevertheless, the reality in the town of Jijel though capital of the province since 1974 is rather different. In fact, its North-Western part (the city of Rabta) has been viewed subject to an anthropisation of which the environmental impacts are far from being mastered. The overpopulation, the hectic urbanisation, the landscape fragmentation, the pollution, and the decrease of natural spaces have become salient facts in this particular natural fringe. The expertise of impacts, factors, and perspectives of division between the inventory of fixtures and the principals of the good land and environment governance in the territory under study is at the heart of this reflection.

PROBLEMATIC

The town of Jijel, notably its North-Western part (the city of Rabta), has not progressed at the margin of the environment protection regulations in force across the nation. The effective implementation of texts governing the territorial planning, the urbanism, and the coastal zones has to make nearly all this space permanently inconstructible. In fact, the preservation of this fringe has constantly represented a key issue in the successive tools of planning that have been elaborated under the commune of Jijel to which it is administratively attached. At the end, this coastal fringe, which counted but **2150** inhabitants in 1998, is now housing more than **10261** inhabitants according to the statistics of General Census of Population and Housing / Popular Communal Assembly office of Jijel 2021.

Even though the local actors have attempted to implement plans of orientation planning and control over land use (Urbanism Master Plan, Partnering Urban Project, Planning and Urbanism Orientation Plan, and Land Use Plan), those spaces, which were only ponds, forests, dunes, and fields dedicated to the agricultural activity before 1980, have been densely and disproportionately occupied by building and tertiary activities.

THEME AND RESEARCH METHODS CHOICE

My observations on the progress of the inventory of fixtures across agglomerations of the province of Jijel have given me pause to reflect upon the discordance of inventory fixtures and the land use with the spirit and the rigor of the texts in force. My experience in the combined management of land and urbanisation in the province of Jijel from one hand and the antagonism of the environment and urbanisation protection from the other hand have enthused me for the choice of the theme and study territory. My ambition, through this research, is to highlight the importance of the land dimension for the territorial planning.

This research is based upon my observations and investigations on the field, the legislative texts, the data from the general census of the population and housing (GCPH) as well as the technical and administrative documents of planning projects planned at different stages of Rabta site progress, urbanism master plan (UMP), planning and urbanism orientation plan (PUOP), and land use plan (LUP).

It is structured through the analysis of physical, historical, and socioeconomic aspects; witnessing elements of the environment protection will; and the de facto state factors and their environmental impacts.

PRESENTATION OF THE TERRITORY UNDER STUDY

Our reflection is set in the town of Jijel and precisely the site of Rabta, one of the important capitals of the province more for its occupied surface area (136 hectares) than for its geographical, historical, physical, and socioeconomic characteristics. It is situated at the West exit of the town of Jijel between the sea from the North and the National Road 43 linking Jijel to Bejaia from the South.

It is bordered by the military zone and the Mediterranean Sea from the North, by Mustapha village and the city of Haine from the South, by the national road 43 from the East and Southeast, and by the Moutas wadi and the city of Bourmel from the West.

AN UNFAVOURABLE SITE AND SITUATION FOR URBANISM

As it is illustrated in the extract of Djidjeli map below, the territory under study makes part of the coastal plain of Jijel that is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea from the North, by the Tellouda Mountains from the South, and by Mezghitane from the Southwest. It is marked by its irregular topography with salient slopes upstream and plainly flat fields that end with the dune downstream. Actually, apart from the surface area which used to belong to the old airfield, the eastern part used to be but swamps.

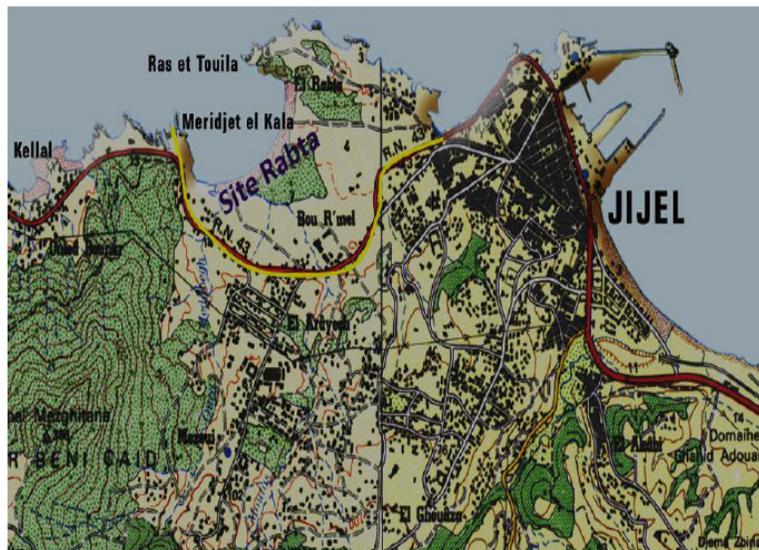


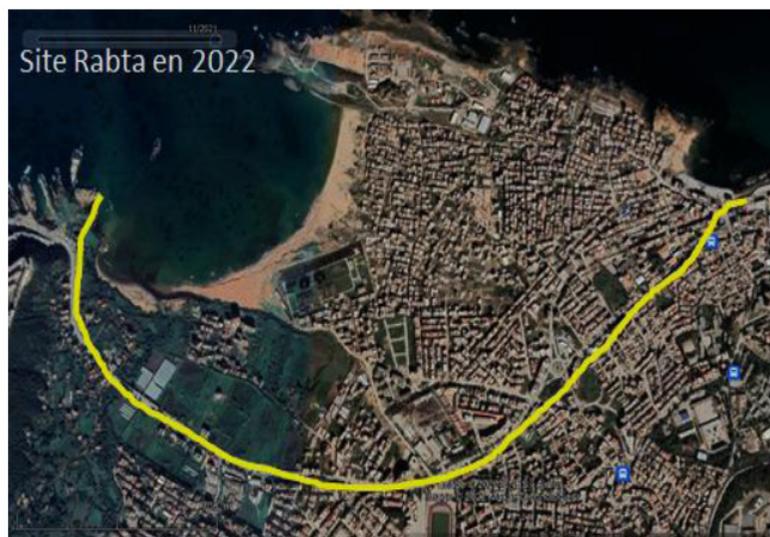
Figure 1. Town of Jijel and Site of Rabta Source: Topographic map of Djidjeli at the scale of: 1/25000

The site of Rabta is essentially formed by muddy or sometimes sandy clay. The union of the waterproofness of these formations with a terrain sometimes under the level of the sea makes the sanitation of rain waters or sewage very difficult in spite of the existence of a treatment plant. Actually, the periodical formation of marshes and floods represents a significant phenomenon of the site.



Satellite Photo 1. Inventory of fixtures of the territory under study in 2006. Source: Google Earth 2006

Given the general rules of urban planning, construction norms, the environment protection, and the risk prevention, these areas are plainly unfavourable to the urbanism. The extent of favourable fields to the construction implementation is very limited in comparison with the total surface area. Nevertheless, the reality is rather different because the restrictive stances of land allocation and occupation are successively exceeded and revised.



Satellite Photo 2. Inventory of fixtures of the territory under study in 2022. Source: Google Earth 2022

In spite of the projection of the touristic expansion zone (TEZ) in the coastal strip since 1988, these areas are completely urbanised and neither could have been saved nor used as basis for touristic facilities structuring of the influence area territory of the town of Jijel. In this same context, the ring road projected from the North of the territory under study by the direction of public works of Jijel province (DPW) could not have been achieved due to the uncontrolled occupation of its layout. Otherwise, the town of Jijel has been denied a factor of economic and touristic dynamic and control over the mobility and the circulation, notably during the summer period.

In addition to the seismic hazard, the natural constraints, which formerly restricted the largest part of the site, are represented mainly in the swamps, the streams, steep slopes, and the maritime domain given the proximity to the sea. As a reminder, the recent history of the town of Jijel is marked by the earthquake and the seaquake that have completely destroyed it in 1856.

Therefore, the proximity of Rabta site to the sea and to its low level constantly predisposes it to the submersion of waves in case of instability factors. This vulnerability is supported by the disappearance of dunes which represented a natural defensive wall against the advancement of the sea.

Furthermore, the residential function is continually exposed to different annoyances and industrial risks related to facilities which are older in existence than the city of Rabta. As an example, the cork processing unit, situated now inside the urban fabric, represent a potential risk of fire, explosion, and pollution (smoke, odours, dust,...) generating a diversity of diseases.

A RECENT URBANISATION

Until the beginning of the 1980's, the Rabta site has remained swampy except from an old airfield from the South of the site, the military area from the North, and a cork processing factory (National Cork Company) along the NR43 linking Jijel to Bejaia.

The start of the urbanisation dates back to the beginning of 1990's coinciding with the conditions of political insecurity and instability. The will of imposing restrictive rules and norms of construction through the development of land use plans LUP by the commune at the beginning of the 2000 decade has not been successful.

AN UNBRIDLED OCCUPATION

The constructions of collective housing occupation realised by state services are generally well disposed and admissible from alignment point of view, Floor Area Ratio and Land Use Coefficient. Nevertheless, the surface area dedicated to this type of accommodation is very low owing to the legal nature of land, which is predominantly private. The site is dominated by the disordered individual housing and by the storage and construction material selling depots.

The public authorities never cease working to improve the life frame of the inhabitants of Rabta site. The impact of these actions appears at the level recently planned crossroads and esplanades. However, the lack of green areas and parking lots is significantly weighing upon the displacements, the circulation, and the leisure. This deficiency is due to the unavailability of state-owned and communal land. As a reminder, besides the ring road, facilities and programmes that have been projected by the local authorities within the frame of several goals (mobility, facility, tourism, economy, ...) have not seen light for different reasons, notably the legal nature of layout which should be subject to just and prior pre-emption and compensation right.

AN IRREGULAR STREET PLAN

The topography and the spontaneous occupation influence the form of networks crossing the site. With the exception of the national road 43 and the Rouibah boulevard that are well planned, equipped with the street lighting and storm drainage system, the rest lacks a regular street plan.

Although the local actors are confronted with regulatory constraints to provide the entire city of Rabta with urban amenities, the majority of the Rabta city is connected to different networks (drinking water supply, city energy and gas, telephone).

A HARD-TO-MANAGE AREA

Given the dominance of the spontaneous structure of the city of Rabta, the local actors find difficulties to improve the urban transport network which remains marked by different deficiencies including: absence of buses and parking stations, absence of traffic sign, difficulty of bus accessibility in different compartments of the city. The quality of the built environment is not without impacts on the protection of the environmental heritage, the waste management, the maintenance of different networks, and the prevention of social ills.

INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC FACTORS

The nature of the recent extensions and the environmental impacts in the Rabta site and the difficulties faced by the authorities in order to set an urban order conforming to the territory planning and urban rules and the construction norms give pause to reflect upon the factors and perspectives of this reality.

A Population Never Cease to Grow

Although the Rabta site has to be strained with the formal interdiction of construction, the population and the constructions have not ceased to notably increase throughout the last decade. The GCPH of 2008 and the statistics of the communal census board (table No. 1) reveal that this site, which used to house a population of 4984 inhabitants and 842 constructions in 2008, has been occupied by 10261 inhabitants and 3047 housings in 2021.

Table 1. Population and Constructions at Rabta site - between 2008 and 2021

Designation	2008	2021
Population	4984	10261
Constructions of Residential Use	842	3047

Source: GCPH PCA Office of Jijel

The territory under study spreads over a surface area of 136 ha _that is, only 2.2 % of the Commune of Jijel_ but houses 6.34 %of its population. It is marked by the elevated density of its population (75 inhabitants/hectare), that is, 3 times superior to the registered average in the commune of Jijel (27 inhabitants/ha).

Table 2. Number and Density of the Population in 2021

Designation	Population	%	Surface Area (ha)	%	Density (Inhabitant/ha)
Commune	171209	-	6238	2.6	27
City of Rabta	10261	6.34	136	2.2	75

Source: GCPH PCA Office of Jijel 2021

If the population of the community of Jijel has increased by 26% between 2008 and 2021, that of Rabta city has increased with 131% for the period from 1998 to 2008 and with 105% for that from 2008 to 2021. The downward tendency might be definitely justified by the overload of the site, the efforts of the local administration to stop the uncontrolled occupation, but also the peace and the control over thesecurity situation in the entire country.

Table 3. Progress of the Population between 1998 – 2021

Dispersion	1998	2008	%	2021	%
Commune	117506	134839	14 %	171209	26 %
City of Rabta	2150	4984	131 %	10261	105%

Source: GCPH 1998, 2008 and GCPH / PCA Office of Jijel 2021

Mutations and Unlawful Land Transaction

Situated in the north-western outskirts of the town of Jijel, the city of Rabta occupies an attractive position due to its proximity to the sea. Nearly all the land of the Rabta city belongs to the private domain. Given that the landlords have property titles in undivided ownership, allotments have been created and the plots have been sold to individuals without deeds of transfer. This type of transaction no longer allows obtaining construction license.

This phenomenon is supported by the absence of regulatory allotments and the lack of urbanisable land at the level of the town of Jijel.

The situation during the 1990's is aggravated by the security situation related to the national tragedy; the proximity of the Rabta site to the military zone has promoted the massive outflow of populations in search for security.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND PERSPECTIVES

The region of Rabta in general has been until the end of 1980's marked by its landscapes, animal and plant life, swamps, soils with high agricultural potentials, and rural economy.

The industrial pollution which is essentially represented in diverse types of waste generated by the cork processing factory. Furthermore, the sewage plant SP initially implanted far from the population is now surrounded by tens of unlawful constructions in which the occupants are exposed to different types of notably olfactory annoyances.

What is more, the two beaches in which the site of Rabta is disposed, that of Boussaadoune in the East and the other of Zaway in the West, remain closed due to sewage and toxic wastes from the tannery situated in Elhadada upstream from the town of Jijel. To these impacts, the floods, which represent a major risk for the population, the possessions, and the environment, are added.

CONCLUSION

The Rabta site, which represents a large part of the town of Jijel capital of the province, is subject to the accumulation in the disorder of all the functions and activities (housing, facilities, and services) throughout the last two decades. This tendency, of which the impacts are different and multiple, implies a rigour in the environment and vulnerable zones protection. Also, the land dimension has to be a key element in every approach targeting the problematic of planning and urbanism across the town.

Nevertheless, in light of the specificity of the Jijel town outskirts, the environmental concerns have to be taken into consideration in every urban and land planning operation.

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