

# Urban Interventions between Temporality, Spatiality, Heritage, and Perception of the Inhabitants: The Case of the City Centre of Constantine and its Surroundings

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## Abstract

Intervention on existing fabrics is a way for metropolitan territories to adapt to current requirements (Linossier et al. 2004) in a process of rebuilding the city on the city. The term used in political discourse is urban renewal, which is applied to depreciated, degraded fabrics that have a recognized heritage value. In Algeria, although planning policy is concerned with occupied sites of historical character, it adopts urban sprawl on free land for housing projects. In the case of Constantine, despite its classification as national heritage, it continues to lose some attributes through the alteration of its physical setting.

Urban interventions on historic centers present difficulties due to several factors and the plurality of actors. Since 1960 until today, there have been many safeguarding plans, many Algerian and foreign actors, many studies, thesis, lectures and a few small concrete interventions. This article describes these projects in chronological order, identifies the reasons why they failed, explores whether Constantine's historic center's heritage presents a significant disadvantage relative to its surroundings, which are undergoing new urban renewal initiatives as part of large-scale projects, and gauges Constantine's residents' perceptions of the steps taken to protect the industry by assessing the response to those steps. The aim is global; the approach is based on historical and survey methods, with investigative techniques (content analysis, questionnaire, in situ observation).

**Key words:** urban interventions, urban renewal, heritage, perception of the inhabitants, city center, surroundings, Constantine.

## INTRODUCTION

For Algeria, urban interventions on existing historic and heritage fabrics are a challenge, especially as the urban planning policy in large cities is oriented towards the periphery with the creation of new cities (Côte 2006). Despite all the attempts to rehabilitate the old historic centers (law 90-29, art. 10), they still suffer from a process of degradation. Since 1975, the Master Urban Plan (PUD) designates the historic center of Constantine as an intervention zone. Constantine has been classified as a national heritage site by Executive Decree No. 05-208 of 4 June 2005 concerning the creation and the delimitation of the protected sector of the old town. Several attempts at rehabilitation have been made, through the realization of some punctual operations, but the implementation did not guarantee the objectives prescribed for each intervention, and the effect of failure was omnipresent.

The event of Constantine, capital of Arab culture in 2015, registered a range of intra and extra-muros projects of the medina that have remained frozen. The causes of the blockage in the rehabilitation are multiple, the allocated budget has been consumed and the result, a total abandonment of the registered sites.

Although the surroundings of the protected sector are experiencing a change of urban aspect towards the path of modernization of the city of Constantine, one wonders if the old city of Constantine is being renewed from its surroundings instead of starting the process from its altered heart? How do the inhabitants react to the attempts made by the local

authorities? What are these interventions? What are the causes of failure? The issue is to know if the urban heritage, by its very existence, poses a problem to urban renewal.

This article deals with the genesis of the different interventions registered (temporality), highlighting the realization of some of them (spatiality), explaining the failure observed (observation), evaluating the degree of satisfaction of those concerned and their involvement (perception of the inhabitants) and questioning the valorization of the disused spaces (the process of patrimonialization).

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

Firstly, we look at the subject of heritage and urban renewal in historic fabrics, and how it has been dealt, then, we relate the chronology of actions undertaken in the study area, touching on our own survey of residents and their reactions to actions undertaken in the site.

### **Reference Framework and Supporting Research**

#### ***The Challenge of Using Urban Renewal in the Face of the Heritage Process***

The synergy between urban renewal and the process of heritage enhancement is particularly evident in historic fabrics. The process of heritage enhancement refers to the transition from a potential heritage to a heritage recognized as a collective asset characterized by its economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions (Vernières 2011). The process of patrimonialization aims to reinvest and revalue disused spaces, for the reconstruction of a resource (Veschambre 2007), by being associated with forms of mobilization and conflict (Gravari-Barbas and Veschambre 2003). The revaluation of disused property and its transformation into a resource is the driving force behind this patrimonialization: “a sure value to a place, symbolic, economic” (Bourdin 1992). Several stakeholders are involved (local authorities, civil society, inhabitants on an occupied site and associations). These stakeholders constitute the framework of heritage enhancement based on the process of reinvestment and revaluation of degraded spaces (Norois 2000).

Depending on the nation where it developed, the idea of renewal has been interpreted differently over time. Urban reconstruction (1950), based on master plans for the physical modification of existing structures through reconstruction and expansion, urban revitalization (1960), for the structural modification initially introduced for social objectives, urban renewal (1970), for the application in situ with its development in the plans of the surroundings, and even of the periphery, urban redevelopment (1980), and by programming flagship projects in situ with social objectives 2019 (Galdini).

Urban renewal, is especially necessary for territories in dysfunction (marginalization, exclusion, relegation, but also deprivation, devaluation, even abandonment) (Linossier et al., 2004), whose related strategies have evolved from the bulldozer approach, which aims to clean up slums and remedy the physical deterioration of specific sites, to the renovation approach, which emphasizes the improvement of neighborhoods and social well-being. (Yung & Sun, 2020).

The two concepts (heritage and renewal) interact for a single objective, that of rehabilitating a devalued area, reinvesting it with consideration of its heritage weight and strengthening it, to mark its impact on the development of the area and to make it an attractive center.

### **In Situ Observation and Field Survey**

For years, researchers from all disciplines have been interested in the dilapidation of the old city of Constantine, the historic center until now. The chronology of operations on the site is based on the various research studies carried out by universities and design offices.

The work is based on the survey method with its techniques of «in situ observation and questionnaire», to grasp the degree of knowledge and satisfaction of the inhabitants of the old city and the population of Constantine in general towards the public actions carried out during the event of Constantine, Capital of Arab Culture 2015, designated by ALESCO.

The sample is random and is made up of people who are present in the city during January 2021. Of the 400 copies distributed, 127 were collected, of which 56 were residents of the old town and 71 were users. We analyzed the responses

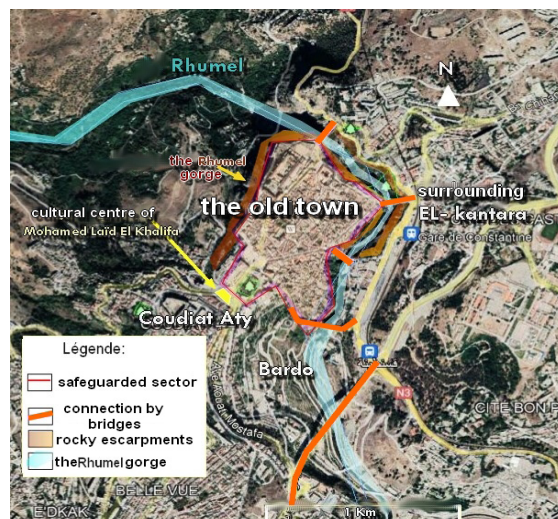
using sphinx software (Dataviv'). The self-administered questionnaire includes semi-open questions and is divided into sections based on the theme. It asks about the current state of the residents' living environment, specifically in the Old City, as well as their knowledge of urban interventions related to the 2015 Constantine, Capital of Arab Culture event, including the details of the permanent safeguard plan.

## RESULTS

### Spatial Context of the Old Town of Constantine

Constantine is the third largest city in Algeria due to its strategic economic weight. Capital of the Algerian Eastern part, it also constitutes the node of a metropolitan area by its historical and cultural value. The current context of the old center reveals a critical state of degradation, the old city (2500 years of existence, a peninsula) extends over a rock of 85 hectares delimited by:

- North, northeast and east: The Rummel Gorge;
- North-west and west: rocky escarpments;
- South-West: Mohamed Laïd El Khalifa cultural centre located at the Place du 1er Novembre 1954
- South: Bardo district.



**Figure 1.** Situation of the old town in its immediate environment. Source: Map background: Google earth + personal processing

Also called the «rock», it accumulates the superimposition of the strata of civilizations because of its strategic and defensive positioning. Since the Ottoman period, the old town of Constantine was a complete composition of its urban elements. The French colonization generated upheavals in its urban structure. The urban fabric has changed, resulting in a city with two facets, one extroverted in the colonial style with frontal urbanism and buildings along the large Haussmannian openings, and the other introverted, where the fabric is traditional Arab-Muslim, with its narrow streets and trees. These two aspects formed a mixed fabric, hybrid houses, with two architectural styles, set in a setting overlooking the Rummel gorges and the ravine, which is a natural obstacle but of great landscape value. Later, the French military engineers crossed the ravine and built the European town on the promontory of the Coudiat Aty hill and on the other bank. Over time, the approaches to the rock still provided a physical and functional link despite the physical constraints of the site. Two cities are juxtaposed with two vital centers.

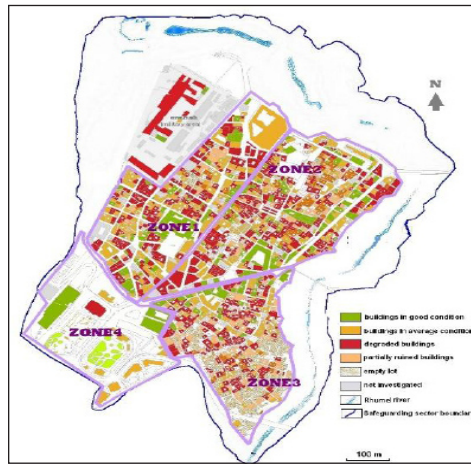
### Factors of Deterioration of the Historic Center of Constantine

#### *The Built Environment of the Safeguarded Sector in an Alarming Situation*

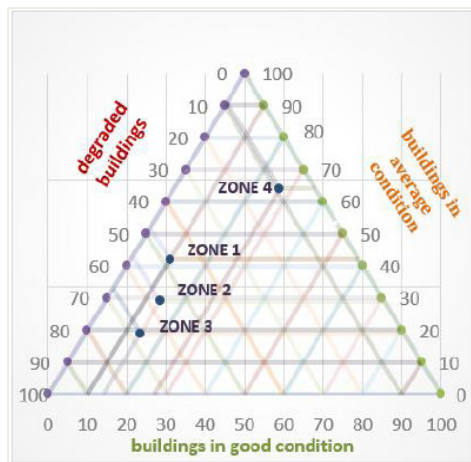
The division carried out in the permanent safeguarding plan of the old town of Constantine (PPSMVSS, 2012), determined the most affected zones, designated by an emergency plan, manifesting itself in the lower part of the medina (zone 3), whose fabric is of traditional Arab-Muslim character. The houses often share common walls, where the collapse of one



leads to the domino effect of altering the others, accentuated by the physical overload (sloping ground). Zone 3 is the most ruined part of the medina (figure 6.). The rate of deterioration is higher, highlighting the danger of this zone. The dilapidated aspect visible in the whole of the rock, produces hollow teeth with vacant, neglected buildings and plots of land reoccupied by illicit constructions.



**Figure 2.** Map of the state of degradation of the built environment of the protected sector of Constantine. Source: PPSMVSS 2012 + CTC expertise (technical construction control), author's treatment



**Figure 3.** Triangulation scheme on the degraded state of the built environment



**Figure 4.** Aspects of degradation in zone 3 (the Souika neighbourhood). source: authors, 2021

### **Legal Status in the Old Town: Stagnation of Property Succession**

In addition to the ageing of buildings, their legal status is complicated by the fact that land and property ownership in the historic fabric of Constantine are dominated by private ownership (76.1% of the urban stock of the Rock) (PPSMVSS 2012). Co-ownership is undivided and the absence of property succession paralyzes any attempt at urban intervention. The example of the lower Souika, where the private property stock made up 80% of the total during the colonial period, is a witness to this. Land tenure is characterized by 'extreme legal complexity', because of the indivision legally supported on the basis of Muslim law which prescribes succession and sharing between heirs, where local tradition favors 'oral practice', and of which the transcriptions recorded were only 2.2% between 1917 and 1986, (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010). As the 'single' private property is disappearing over time, the management of real estate has become impossible between the co-owners, although the only way to have an income is to rent out their property for a long period, at a modest price. The tenants in turn participate in the process of degradation of the built environment, by their voluntary destructive actions of the parts in the structure of the houses, in order to have access to new social housing in the peripheral cities. The failure of the sale is due to the complexity of the private status that generates a major challenge of transaction and succession of the property for the local managers (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010).

**Table 1.** Legal status of real estate in the old town of Constantine. Source: PPSMVSS, 2012

Private Property	State Property	Mixed Properties (State + Private)
76,1 %	20,9%	3%

### **Public Interventions in the Safeguarded Sector, between Political Discourse, the Limits of Urban Planning and Failure to Achieve them**

(Salah-Eddine Cherrad et al. 2007), underline that the city center of Constantine, especially the old town, was a concern for the public authorities in terms of its safeguarding and rehabilitation. The studies conducted were successive, the safeguarding actions started in the 1960s, and they were incorporated into various urban planning tools. The recourse to urban intervention in this site is to try to slow down the degradation of the built environment and to improve the living environment of the inhabitants. Table 2 shows chronologically the studies and the interventions carried out by the public authorities, with the content and the planning orientation, whose operationalization of the registered projects remained mainly on paper.

**Table 2.** The different studies and public interventions in the city of Constantine. Source: (PPSMVSS 2012, PMMC2007, Benabbas-kaghouché2010, OPGI 2008); authors' treatment

Period/ Spatial Context	Study/ Intervention	Content/ Orientation	Workdone
1960-1961 City of Constantine	Study of J.H CALSAT[1], Study of BERU [2]	Taking the European Centre out of the rock. Improving the conditions of the habitats.	None
1975 Municipality of Constantine	the Urban Director Plan (PUD)	the Urban Director Plan Delimited the old town as an "Renovation zone"	Prohibition of all construction and repairs, by blocking building permits
1982 Municipality of Constantine	Updating the PUD	Demolition of a minimum of buildings to reduce the occupancy rate and decongesting the old center by: - Displacing some functions. - Decreasing the density of housing. - Restricting mechanical circulation.	None

1984 The old town	Study of URBACO	The study is based on an exhaustive survey on people and about the state of buildings, besides two proposals for restructuring and renovating the city center, in order to protect the urban fabric which is a bearer of cultural and historical values.	None
1988 The old town	Project of « Médina » by the Wali (Governor)	Dividing the city into 08 subdivisions, and allocating funding for the operation. Two commissions were in charge of the intervention; one is cultural, responsible for: - Selecting monuments with historical and artistic interest (a list of 127 buildings was presented; - Specifying and demarcating the districts that necessitate an urgent intervention. While The other technical commission is responsible for: Following the proposals of the cultural commission and those of the Urbaco, and stepping in.	None
1989 A part of the old town	The renovation study by BEIS	Renovation of the two districts (Souika et Charaâ)	None
1992 The old town	Creating a classification body aiming to classify “the Medina” as a historic site (O.J No.22, March 22, 1992).		
1993 The old town	The study of the resorption of precarious housing,	As part of an APC – IAU agreement, the proposals aimed for: - decreasing the density of houses in good and average condition in the lower part of the Souika, - The evacuation of dilapidated houses, - The cleaning of empty spaces.	None
1994 The lower part of the old town	POS of the lower part of the Souika,	By the APC – IAU agreement, an educational exercise was carried out by students at their end- of-course for the rehabilitation and renovation of the lower part of the Souika.	None
1995 The old town	Constitution of a league	- To classify the Medina at the international level in the short-term future.	
	Realization of a call for tenders by the SEAU[3]	-For the cleaning works of the old city including the program of the improvement of the housing condition, -To stop the massive degradations and to prepare the empty grounds for an urbanization.	
	The study done by the DUCH[4]	An operation to register 53 dilapidated buildings that need rehabilitation in the lower part of the Souika	

The wilaya of Constantine (the province)	The PDAU	Follow the instructions of the PUD for the renovation and restoration of the old town	
1996 The old town	The renovation project by the AADL [5]	-Renovation of the districts of the old town by an only operator responsible for an integrated rehabilitation of two blocks -Guaranteeing the financial package, landscaping, destruction, reconstruction, settlement.	None
2000-2003 (1) 2003-2007(2) 2008 (3) The wilaya of Constantine (the province)	Experience of the wilaya of Constantine In the field of the rehabilitation of Buildings: by the OPGI [6] and the DLEP[7]	(1) The rehabilitation of 37 buildings, (2) The Rehabilitation of 68 state-owned buildings, with The renovation of facades concerned 115 buildings, (3) The rehabilitation of 58 buildings. The operations affected all real estate in co-ownership with the OPGI, or private property in the old town, and even throughout the wilaya , Rehabilitation of equipment by the DLEP which was divided into 8 projects.	The rehabilitation operations have been completed and delivered
2003-2005 The lower part of the old town	The Master Plan	A partnership between Algeria and Italy to “give a major boost to historical and cultural heritage”, its main proposals for Souika are: - The creation of a new pedestrian bridge spanning the Rhumel gorges, from the multi-storey car park and the rock, to Mellah Slimane street in order to facilitate access to it. - The reopening of the car park and the creation of another one near Tatache Belkacem street (Charâa) - The creation of an open-air theater and pedestrian walkways in the lower part. - The creation of new squares, gardens and tourism infrastructure in the lower part.	None
2005 The old town	Executive Decree No. 05-208 of June 4, 2005 states the creation and delimitation of the protected sector of the old town of Constantine.		
2007 The protected sector of the old town	the Mellah Slimane Street project	The project was Launched by the university of constantine then taken over by the wilaya, it is a program of a rehabilitation and experimentation process of Bab El-Jabia Square, as well as on occasional rehabilitation projects on the Mellah Slimane axis	4 houses have been completed



2007-2016 The Wilaya of Constantine (the Province)	The Modernization Project of the Metropolis of Constantine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The open-air theater</li> <li>- military hospital</li> <li>- CNRB.</li> <li>- The Ali Mendjeli university center</li> <li>- Structuring link equipment: the cable car</li> <li>- Structuring link equipment: the tramway</li> <li>- 3 luxury hotels (private)</li> <li>- University town</li> <li>- Motorway infrastructure</li> <li>- Structuring link equipment: the 8th bridge (or the President's bridge)</li> <li>- Central bus station</li> <li>- Sports Complex</li> <li>- Sports City</li> <li>- restructuring of the Boudraa Salah district</li> <li>- State Residence</li> <li>- Congress Palace</li> <li>- Exhibition center</li> <li>- The Bardo Viva - City</li> <li>- The city of communication</li> <li>- New seat of the Wilaya</li> </ul>	<p>The open-air theatre</p> <p>the military hospital</p> <p>The Ali Mendjeli university center</p> <p>Structuring link equipment: cable car, tram</p> <p>Motorway infrastructure East-West Motorway Constantine section</p> <p>University town</p> <p>The 8th bridge</p> <p>The central bus station or multimodal station</p> <p>High standing hotels</p> <p>The bardo viva - city or business center in progress</p> <p>New seat of the wilaya</p> <p>The place of "la brèche"</p> <p>- restructuring of Krikri Square</p>
2009-2011 The protected sector of the old town	The Permanent Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan for the Old City of Constantine PPSMVSS	The interventions concern the following axes: Roads and Various Networks, traffic, economic structure, restitution of the key elements of the old town, enhancement of singular elements and listed monuments through tourist circuits, intervention on the fabric (built environment, the residential, classification of buildings with historical value, reconversion of buildings and injection of new equipment, creation of contact areas (squares and open spaces), interventions to preserve the environment	Study approved
2013 The wilaya of Constantine (The Province)	A cultural heritage restoration program as part of Constantine Capital of Arab Culture 2015	The rehabilitation of streets, squares, car parks, mosques, zaouïas, hammams, derbs, singular monuments and equipment, the casbah, the reconstruction of the facade of the lower Souika with its gardens, archaeological excavations, construction of new cultural infrastructures ( a large 3,000-seat performance hall, an exhibition pavilion, an art and history museum, an upper urban library, construction and equipment of 6 annexes to the cultural center in satellite towns, construction of a 5* luxury hotel	<p>Delivery of two mosques in 2017</p> <p>Rehabilitation of the theatre, the culture palace,</p> <p>Construction of the library and the performance hall, rehabilitation of the facades of Didouche Mourad and Larbi Ben M'hidi streets,</p>



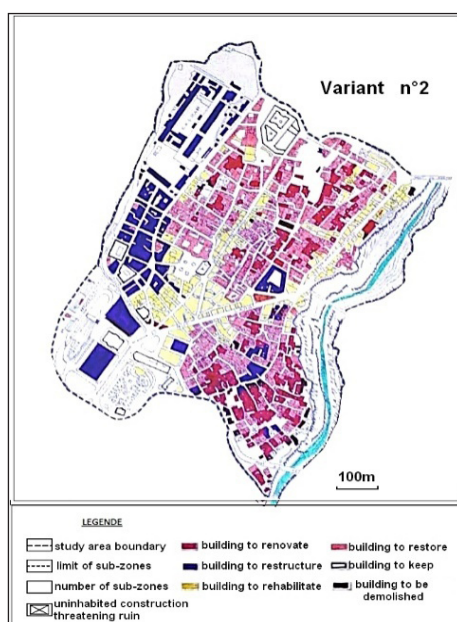
## **Critical Reading and Explanations**

### **From 1960 to 1984**

Since the first study by J.H. CALSAT, and BERU 1960 - 1961, the objective was to bring out the European quarter of the rock. After independence, the aim was directed towards the renovation of the old town. According to the PUD of 1975 and in the same reflection for the renovation, the wali of the time opted for a demolition on the site and a renovation through the implantation of towers with sample operations of rehabilitation of some houses. The updating of the PUD in 1982 by the regional directorate of the National Centre for Urban Studies and Implementation (CNERU) continued the reflection and favored the decongestion of the center, but the action was not carried out, being limited only to the diagnosis phase without any concrete results (PPSMVSS 2012).

### **From 1984 to 1994**

The guidelines of the 1984 URBACO study aimed at structuring and renovating the old town in the context of preserving the urban heritage with its cultural and historical values, by proposing two variants.



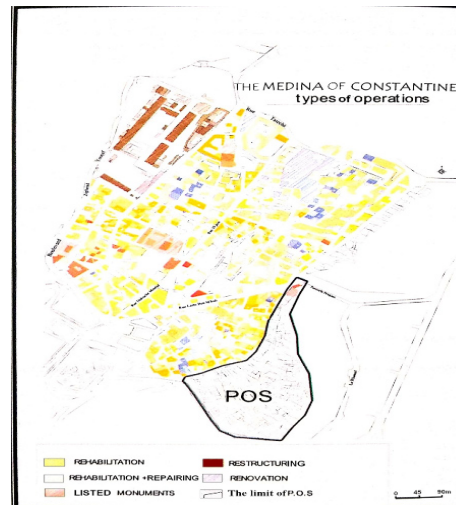
**Figure 5.** The URBACO intervention, second variant. Source: quoted in PPSMVSS, 2012; authors' comments

The Ministry of Urbanism, Construction and Housing (M.U.C.H.) brought reproaches against the study by demanding detailed proposals that were not included in the budget, leading to the study's financial abandonment (PPSMVSS 2012). The URBACO study was also a reference for other subsequent studies, such the case of the «medina» project launched by the authorities, where it continues to emphasize the rehabilitation of the old town, by delegating two commissions, one cultural and the other technical, with a budget allocated to finance the intervention, and yet no realization has been achieved. The same applies to the study of the renovation of the two districts of Charaâ (Jewish district) and Souika (Muslim district) in 1989, which were considered to be the oldest districts, with a pronounced historical value. The study was completed in 1989, but the implementation was blocked for financial reasons (PPSMVSS, 2012).

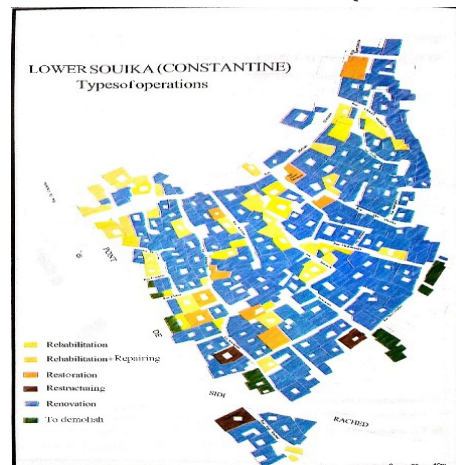
Since the opening of a procedure for the classification of the old town as a historic site (J.O N°22, 22 March 1992), the effect of blocking interventions was still omnipresent. As an example, the study for the resorption of the precarious housing in 1993, where it was envisaged to clean up the empty lots, with a densification of the houses in good and average condition, by evacuating the dilapidated houses.

### **From 1994 to 2015**

The 1994 POS aimed to rehabilitate and renovate the lower part of the Souika district in agreement with the Constantine Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (IAU). The study with its development proposals was approved but not implemented.



**Figure 6.** Types of operations in the medina of Constantine. Source: (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010); authors' treatment



**Figure 7.** The POS (land use plan) of the Lower Souika in 1994. Source: (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010); authors' treatment

- Until the period 2000-2008, the experience of the wilaya called “the rehabilitation of the housing stock of the wilaya of Constantine”, where the old town benefited from the largest part of the operation, was born. The projects were provided by the ‘special fund for the rehabilitation of the housing stock of the wilaya of Constantine’ (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010). The operations registered affected residential buildings of private status or in co- ownership with the OPGI (office for property management), in different streets as well as facilities located in the rock.



**Figure 8.** Buildings rehabilitated by the OPGI. Source: OPGI, 2008



The work was finished despite the challenges, as listed by the OPGI, which included: challenges related to the buildings' geographic location; a very dense urban environment; a large number of participants; the complexity of the actions to be taken; a lack of specialized labor on the market; the challenge of intervening in a populated environment; and the lack of materials to be used because small craftsmen were not present (OPGI 2008).

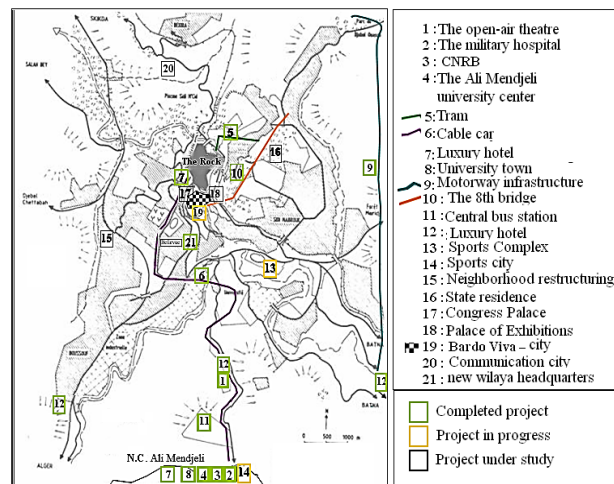
- The master plan in 2003 came as an experiment of Algerian-Italian economic partnership, which is considered as an operational device, aiming at the physical requalification of the old buildings according to the local specificities able to consolidate and renew themselves in time and space (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010). Following the executive decree n°05-designation 324's of the old town as a safeguarded sector in October 2005, the sector-level intervention must be recorded in a permanent plan of safeguarding and development of the safeguarded sectors (PPSMVSS) (Fantazi and Zehioua-Hecham 2018), and in accordance with its objectives, the direction of development follows the study's objective. However, the master plan document provided a flexibility that could be adapted to the operational situations of the project according to the evolution of the economic and social context, by providing restructurings to be put in place in order to favor the tourist and artisanal functions (Bouadam-Ghiat 2010). Despite the fact that the parceling out does not follow the same geometry, the plan's limitations had an impact on the investigators' fieldwork. Additionally, the cadastral plan did not correspond to the medina's existing parceling out, which necessitated complex measures to be presented to the Minister of Justice, Finance, and Domains in order to correct this anomaly. Indeed, the lack of knowledge of the terrain may have put an end to this study (Benabbas-Kaghouché 2010).

- For the Mellah Slimane Street project in 2007, only four houses had the privilege of rehabilitation at the level of Bab el-Djabia, and the project is at a standstill until today. The reasons given are financial.



**Figure 9.** Mellah Slimane project: rehabilitated houses Source: authors, 2018

- The Modernization Project of the Metropolis of Constantine (PMMC) is defined as a sum of voluntary actions, some of which have already been undertaken. It is a reflection that attempts to give legibility to the different structuring projects, an overall coherence on the territorial plan of the metropolis, an active and enterprising articulation between the different fields and sectors. The outcome of this vast and profound undertaking is 'Le Nouveau Constantine' (CHERRAD et al. 2007). The territorial scale corresponds spatially to the notion of Greater Constantine, which is composed of the mother city Constantine and its satellite cities (Zehioua-Hecham 2010). The rate of intervention is positive, through the realization of structuring projects throughout the wilaya, providing an image of modernity for the metropolization of Constantine. While focusing on the modernization of the center from the edges of the protected sector, with the development of the sizable Bardo park, the construction of the 8ème Constantine bridge, and the insertion of the tramway. The intervention in the old town only affected the locations bordering the protected sector, such as the Place de la Brèche and the Place Krikri. Every project in the immediate area of the medina contributes, in turn, to the decongestion of the city center by enhancing its dynamics and allure by utilizing planned infrastructures for economic, social, and cultural development that reach out to satellite towns, by guaranteeing this urban area's overall urban coherence through the urban renewal of the greater Constantine area (CHERRAD et al. 2007).



**Figure 10.** Projects under the PMMC. Source: (CHERRAD et al. 2007), personal processing.

- The Permanent Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan for the Old City of Constantine (PPSMVSS) plays the role of the Land Use Plan (POS) for the safeguarded sectors. It is a legislative tool (N°323 - 03, of October 5, 2003), enacts particular protection measures, notably those relating to the cultural and real estate assets registered on the supplementary inventory, pending classification or classified, located in the safeguarded sector” (PPSMVSS, 2012). It is implemented according to the law n°98-04 of 15 June 1998 relating to the protection of cultural heritage, following the classification of the old town of Constantine as a safeguarded sector by the interministerial decree n°05-208 of 4 June 2005. The objective of the comprehensive study of the safeguarded sector is to upgrade and find solutions for the degraded historic center of Constantine. The study was approved in 2012, and is considered the roadmap for any project.

#### **From 2015 to the present day**

Since the nomination of Constantine as the Capital of Arab Culture for the year 2015, during the 21st General Assembly in Tunis, by ALESCO in December 2012, the government has launched a cultural heritage restoration program in 2013.

The initial investment of 7.7 billion Algerian Dinar, for 18 operations of 75 projects grouped in 9 intramural zones, in the rock, and 3 extramural. The operations occupied a large area of intervention, covering the built and unbuilt environment, so that the event would take place in an environment well qualified for such an event on an international scale.

After seven years of the event, the planned projects are running into difficulties, while others are frozen for an indefinite period. The study and implementation contracts were awarded by mutual agreement, and the time period identified seemed sufficient to host the event within the predefined timeframe, but in reality, only four projects were inaugurated, pending the continuation of work on the other projects



**Figure 11.** Rehabilitation of cultural facilities: The Mohamed-Laïd Al Khalifa Palace of Culture and the Mohamed Tahar El Ferguani Theatre. Source: authors, 2018





**Figure 12.** Rehabilitation of residential buildings on Taatache Belkacem Street and Aban Ramdane Street. Source: Housing Management, 2018

According to the 2018 progress report, the constraints to the implementation of the programmed projects are manifested in: Problem between partners; problem related to the rehousing of families; important presence of illicit trade disturbing at the level of streets and public spaces to be rehabilitated; constraint related to salvage excavations at the level of certain projects (mosques Sidi Afane and the place Tatache Belkacem); lack of provisional approval required to the foreign BET «by the order of the architects».

Our general observation on the state of progress of works reveals recurrent administrative constraints: stoppage of the works because of a lack of companies, lack of renewal of visas for the continuation of the works by the companies as well as for the groups of Algerian/foreign BET, cancellation of contract with the BET managed by (civil engineer/contractor) and not by an architect, lack of visas of works because of a relaunch of the study considering the importance of the building (non qualification of the study), non-delivery of the study phases because of the lack of approval for foreign BETs by the order of architects, frozen projects because of the withdrawal of the BETs and the absence of qualified companies, re-launching of the tender for a new designation of a BET by the simple mutual agreement mode after withdrawal of the foreign BETs, negotiation of the prices with companies, non-delivery of all the phases. As a result of the constraints already mentioned, there were two requisitions from 2018 until 2020, with the renewal of the contracts as a consequence of their expiration. On the occasion of the day of knowledge 16 April 2020, a presidential order was announced for the restoration of mosques and zaouias in the country, the Sidi Lakhdar mosque in Constantine was further concerned (Imane FANTAZI, 2021).

### **Personal Results**

After the presentation of the results of the first part of the research, it was a question of relating the facts chronologically with interpretations based on the studies already carried out. Our personal contribution was to research the opinions of the population in the face of all these operations that had been started and not yet completed.

### ***The Perception of the Inhabitants, Assessment of the Survey***

We have reinforced the research to highlight the level of knowledge in relation to the PPSMVSS study and the recent urban interventions, within the context of the event of Constantine as the capital of Arab culture in 2015, in order to learn the perceptions of the population of Constantine and of the inhabitants towards their living environment as well as the constraints encountered on a daily basis, their opinions on the study of the PPSMVSS and the recent urban interventions.

### ***State of the Living Environment***

On the status of the old town, a section of questions was designed for the inhabitants of the old town, who make up 42% (or 56 people) of the total number of respondents. The status of the inhabitants who are owners and co-owners makes up 70% of the inhabitants, although the inhabitants who are tenants make up only 30%.

In order to measure the degree of involvement of the owner inhabitants in the maintenance of their property, we obtained 61% of positive answers although 39% of the owner inhabitants do not get involved in the maintenance of their houses.

Degree of Involvement of the Inhabitants

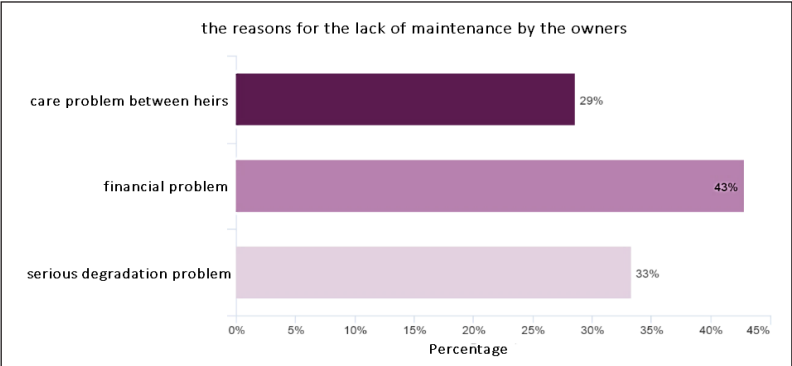


Figure 13. Reasons for lack of maintenance by owners. Source: Authors, 2021

In the case of renting, only 7% of owners take care of the maintenance of their property. Generally, the problems and types of deterioration affecting the houses are manifested in the existence of cracks in the walls, waterproofing problems, humidity and lack of sunlight and ventilation and the existence of ruined neighbouring houses with drainage and water infiltration problems.

Difficulties Encountered

Concerning the general living environment in the neighbourhood, the difficulties encountered on a daily basis are presented as follows:

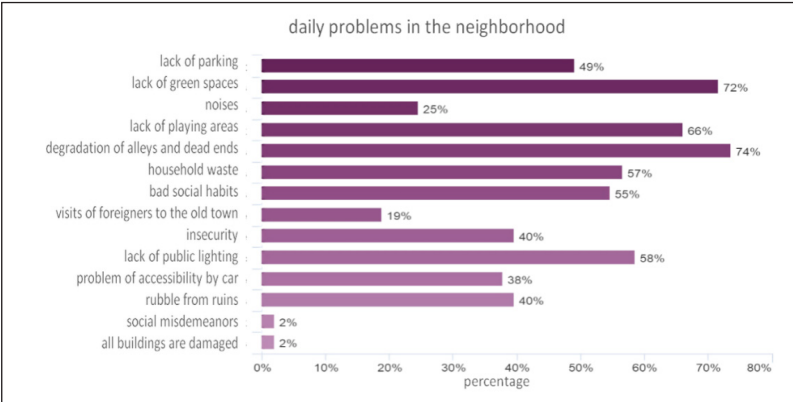


Figure 14. Problems encountered on a daily basis in the neighbourhood. Source: Authors, 2021

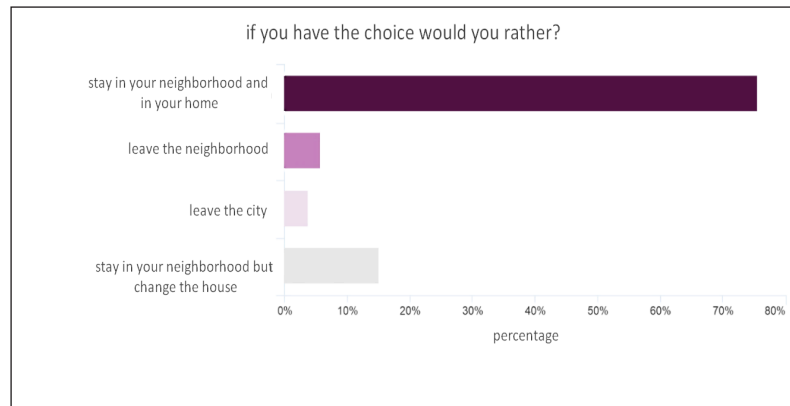
The residents’ complaints are expressed in terms of the deteriorated condition of the alleys and dead ends, as well as the density of the built-up area, which evokes the lack of open space for playgrounds, green spaces, and parking with the difficulty of accessibility by car, pointing out the lack of lighting and insecurity, cleanliness, and the problems with cleanliness and debris from ruined houses.

The perceptions of the inhabitants expressing their relationship with their neighbourhood from the point of view of its popularity, its proximity to commercial and administrative services, describing it as “life”, “the best neighbourhood in Constantine”, “birthplace”. The good neighbourliness is also described by expressions such: “The love and respect of the neighbours for each other”, “The neighbours are very nice”, noting the historicity of the neighbourhood; “A popular neighbourhood, one of the oldest”, and the particularity of the architectural style, “The houses are typical of the original Constantine house, an expression of the material heritage”.

To Stay or to Leave?

After having noted the constraints and the appreciations of the inhabitants towards their district, the question to be asked was on their choices to leave or remain in their city, the answers were as follows:

More than 75% are in favour of staying in their houses, more than 15% want to change their houses but stay in the same neighbourhood, the remaining 10% prefer to leave the neighbourhood and even leave the city.

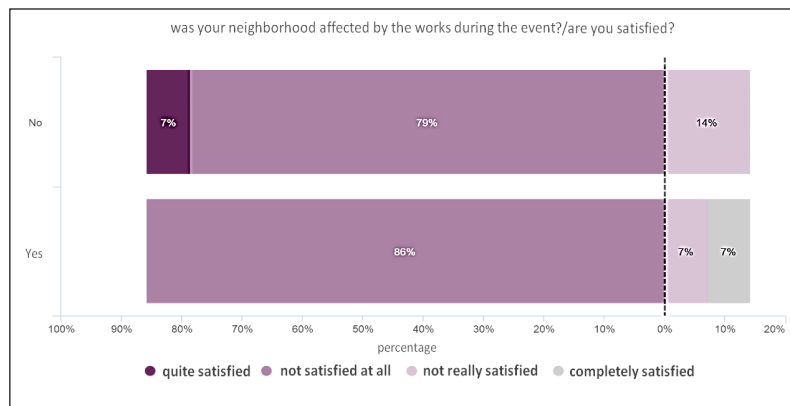


**Figure 15.** Residents' choice to move. Source authors, 2021

### ***Degree of Satisfaction of the Inhabitants with the Interventions***

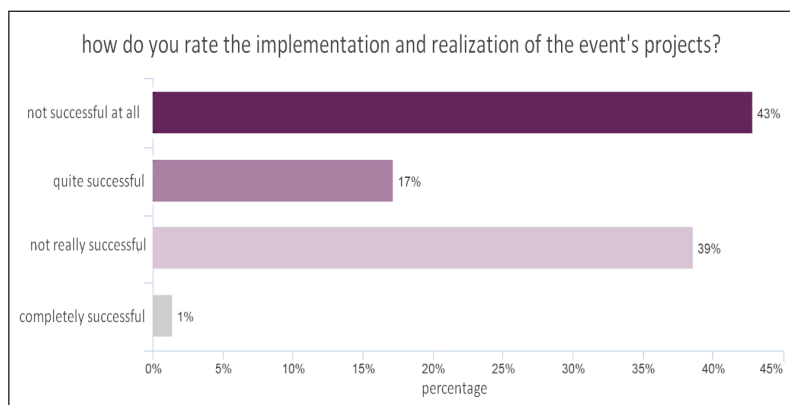
The degree of satisfaction with the work and the overall assessment of the event as a renewal and enhancement experience was highlighted.

For the inhabitants of the old town, the question asked was: was your neighbourhood affected by the works during the event? 75% of the answers were negative, but 25% of the inhabitants answered yes. By crossing this answer with the degree of satisfaction, the graph is as follows:



**Figure 16.** Level of satisfaction with the work in the neighbourhood during the event. Source: Authors 2021

The majority of the inhabitants are not at all satisfied, judging that the state of the old city after 5 years of the event is rather degraded (69% of the answers), or rather that it has not changed (25% of the answers). The population of Constantine, whose implementation, expressed the same opinion and realization of the event's projects was judged as unsuccessful.

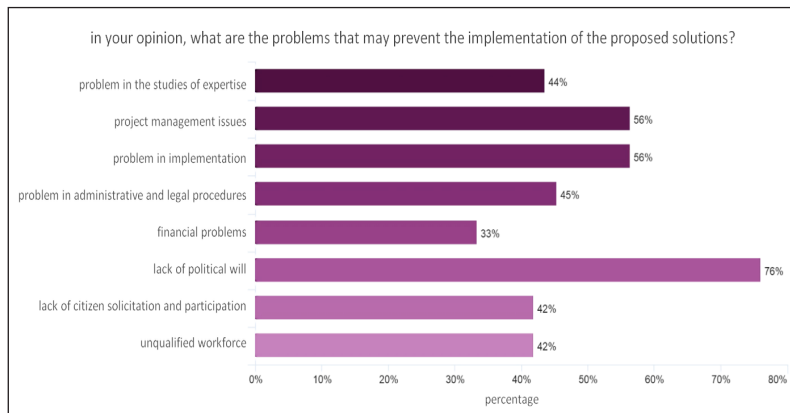


**Figure 17.** The general evaluation of the implementation of the projects by the population. Source: Authors 2021

### ***Inhabitants' Level of Knowledge and Heritage***

The degree of knowledge of the population of Constantine on the classification of the old town as national heritage is 75% positive. However, 74% of the population are not aware of the existence of a permanent safeguarding and enhancement plan for the Old City of Constantine (PPSMVSS). To this end, 94% of the respondents showed their interest in knowing what measures and projects were planned, and we observed a majority consent on the actions to be carried out in the permanent safeguarding plan, designating them as priority and important actions. The general idea of the interventions prescribed in the plan to provide solutions for the old town seems to be a higher priority and possible task for 74% of the respondents, of which 26% of the answers consider these actions as impossible to carry out.

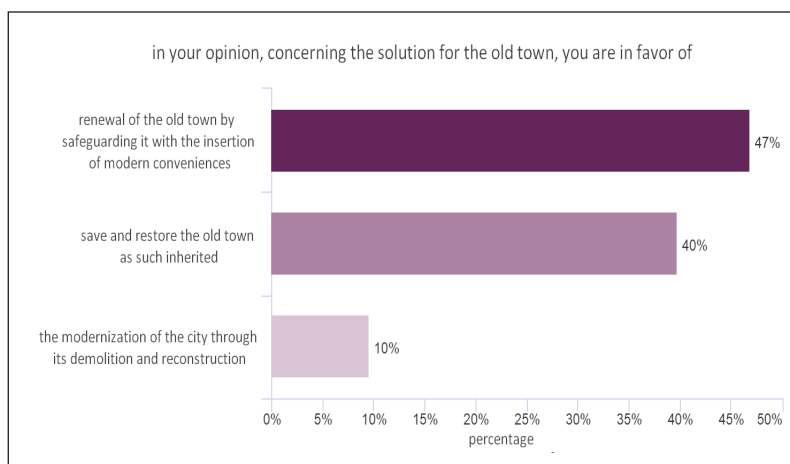
The level of awareness of the population on the constraints and problems that may prevent the implementation of the plan's interventions can be summarized as follows



**Figure 18.** The estimation of the constraints of urban intervention in the historic center by the population of Constantine. Source: Authors, 2021

### ***Degree of Involvement of Inhabitants and Contributions***

We wanted to evaluate the respondents' level of involvement in aiding in the restoration of the old town out of an interest in interacting well with them. In favor were 89% of the responses. The majority of respondents, 47%, said they would renew the old city by preserving it and adding modern conveniences. However, 40% of the respondents said they would choose to preserve the old city as it was and restore it to its original condition. Just 10% of respondents support modernizing the city (by demolition and reconstruction).



**Figure 19.** The opinion of the population of Constantine on the appropriate solution for the old town of Constantine. Source: Authors 2021

### ***Residents' Views***

Aspiration of the population of Constantine to see into the future, the answers were as follow:





## **DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATIONS**

Urban intervention on an occupied historical site in the same situation in the center of Constantine is quite complex and difficult.

The process of rehabilitating and renewing the city center of Constantine has gone through several trials, given its state of degradation and the legal complexity of the land and the property situation. The continuous process of degradation is only a consequence of a lack of action and abandonment, becoming a drift of land and property speculation (Bouadam-Ghiat 2010).

During the period of French colonization, urbanization was 'abrupt and brutal', superimposing colonial urban organization on the existing fabric by means of a 'clean slate'. According to Tocqueville's report, it is easy to implement a model of land use planning by military engineers in '...a territory where individual and patrimonial property does not exist and where common property is not based on any title. It is easier to introduce a new population into a territory that is owned only in common than into a land where each inch is defended by a particular right and interest' (Boudemagh 2021). Such a justification has had a disruptive effect on the initial urban fabric of Constantine. In the current context, the existing urban heritage suffers from a lack of property registration and management, leading to a process of general physical, functional and economic decline as the recycling of properties no longer occurs, with inaccessibility to real estate and land, and the non-commercialization of land making the market frozen and the center no longer a welcoming platform for private investors, due to the obscure image attributed to it

According to the inventory of the interventions mentioned in Table 2, the constraints on implementation are of different types. Financing has been a problem in the majority of cases, but also the existence of other problems concerning the non-validation of some studies following the reproaches on the orientation of development dictated, such as renovation by demolition and reconstruction of new towers, in the project of the wali in 1975 which envisages changing the identity of the old city of Constantine by renovation, of which demolition constituted a major tool in his policy. The latter has been criticized worldwide not only for its financial complexity (such as rehousing through massive displacement of populations and introducing change in social structure), but also for its recourse to modernization associated with land speculation, without taking into consideration the historical value and conservation, opposing the notion of rehabilitation which privileges qualitative action over quantitative action (Garrec 2006)

The same problematic in the case study of URBACO 1987, Benabbas affirms that the study did not raise the question of land, nor the financing of operations, but that it is of great interest, despite the disruptive vision for a bold structuring of the fabric (Benabbas-kaghouché 2010). (Kherrouatou 2011) adds that the core of the problem is due to the lack of articulation between the diagnostic phase and the intervention strategies with a contradiction of political decisions. (Fantazi and Hecham-Zehioua 2018).

In fact, any attempt to rehabilitate and to develop the city of Constantine is dependent on the legal status of the property and does not go beyond the phase of plans and studies. Only the experience of the wilaya between 2000-2008, where the private status of the rehabilitated buildings was in joint ownership with the OPGI, succeeded, facilitating the task of intervention despite the technical complexity (materials and labour), and the existence of anomalies in the operationalization of the works, linked to the management of projects in a dense and inhabited urban environment.

The inadequacy of the study to the realities of the ground was one of the obstacles of realization, in the case of the Master Plan 2003, the Algerian-Italian partnership did not succeed because of the lack of knowledge of the ground following the non-availability of the necessary basic plans. This technical constraint was not the only one, but it is considered as a problem to be posed around the quality and the reality of the diagnostic studies of the current state of the old city of Constantine.

The reasons for the failure and the non-completion of the intervention of the Mellah Slimane 2007 project are manifested in the concerns of scientific researchers, among others, according to (Boufenara 2008), the problem revolves around the non-definition of tasks and missions for each actor. (Azzaza 2014), adds several types of constraints: technical by the non-qualification of artisans, managerial by the lack of joint work between actors with an absence of technicality in the field and even financial, such as the cost of materials. (Merouani 2015), adds the indetermination of the roles of each actor by the law. (Fantazi and Hecham-Zehioua 2018).

The PMMC modernization plan, considered as a large-scale project, aims to enhance the city center, which is «in a state of undervaluation»; by improving «the brand image of the city by linking the new urbanism to the historical urbanism» under the name of «New Constantine» through its major infrastructures such as the tramway, the cable car, the giant bridge, and the multimodal station, which ensure proximity, accessibility, connection and service to the city center (Hecham-Zehioua and Labi 2009), the deficiencies have been revealed. However, the discontinuity is clearly visible with regard to the historic center, which is continually suffering from neglect, and is awaiting a more global aim to link the two urban entities of the center and its surroundings, which require a sustained urban planning vision and political will.

The event of Constantine as the capital of Arab culture revealed the failure of the government's approach, despite the success of new cultural and tourist infrastructures. Event policy must master the combination of social justice, quality of life and environment, preservation of resources and participation of all actors in the decision-making process (Soualah and Benabbas-Kaghouché 2017).

-On the other hand, the will to involve the inhabitants in the renewal of the old town was clear in the answers of our survey, other studies have supported the involvement of the inhabitants in the rehabilitation, and this is the case in a part of the old town (zone 2 of the PPSMVSS). The actions taken for the house rehabilitation show that the number of houses rehabilitated by the residents (70 houses) is more significant than that of the state (9 houses), where there were issues with the requests of the private owners for the house rehabilitation, which were denied because the only actor designated for the house rehabilitation is the state (Seguia and Cherrad 2020). In spite of the fact that it primarily affects them as inhabitants and users who live in a depreciated physical environment, and that the majority of the population does not prefer to leave their homes, the household survey of the PPSMVSS, exclusively for the residents of the lower part (Souika district), the most depreciated physical environment, shows us that the only actor is the state.

The aspirations of the population of Constantine have thus affirmed their belonging to their city, and to their experience. A feeling of disappointment and regret towards their city is mentioned in their answers to the question on their aspirations for the future of the old city. Expressions such as «I want to see it as it was in the past», «Better than it is now», «May the spirit and vitality return to it», but without losing hope for the future of their city, and with their suggestions and proposals which express their great attachment to their heritage and historical legacy. 94% of the respondents consider Constantine's heritage wealth as a development factor,

but their only recommendation is to have a modern and contemporary life, answering: «It is one of the most beautiful and oldest cities in Algeria, its history should be studied for current and future generations in history books and in schools», «I want it to be sophisticated while preserving its authenticity», «A traditional city with international specifications». This confirms their interest in their heritage and identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The urban renewal constraints of the historic center of Constantine mentioned do not refer to the existing urban heritage as a problem in itself, however there are several factors that have accentuated the complexity of intervening in the historic center of Constantine as heritage. The Algerian government prefers to intervene in empty land that is easy to access, by encouraging urban sprawl towards the periphery, which provides huge areas for the creation of new cities in order to meet the primary needs of the population (housing production).

The challenge is to use the existing heritage as a lever of local development through flexible legal and operational tools, supported by a political will that is present and genuine, by introducing the social component, by involving citizens in the participation and even the decision-making process, by promoting sustainable development and economic development, and by achieving the goal of urban renewal.

In the case of Constantine, it is recommended to have a well-defined strategy for the historic center in a more global and coherent spatial context in connection with the surrounding urban area to ensure continuity and union with its satellite cities.

In order to better build the metropolis of Constantine, it is essential to reclaim the historic center, in logic of open access to the land market, according to adequate legal mechanisms. Otherwise there will no longer be a real urban dynamic, and the continuous «laissez-faire» obviously causes a falsified image of the existing heritage, by designating it as a constraint for any urban intervention, instead of using it as a lever of evolution and a resource for revalorizing the territory.

## Notes

- [1] J.H.Calsat. (architect-town planner), the urban survey in Constantine, Atlas of Constantine 1960.
- [2] BERU: Office of studies and urban projects, pre-study for the development of the Rock of Constantine 1960.
- [3] SEAU: Architecture and Urban Planning Studies Company
- [4] Direction of urban planning, construction and urban planning
- [5] AADL: National Housing Improvement and Development Agency.
- [6] The rehabilitation unit of the OPGI (Office of Property Development and Management).
- [7] DLEP: Housing and Public Equipment Direction.

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