



HYBRIDITY AND INHABITED SPACE APPROPRIATION IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF CONSTANTINE

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Abstract

Throughout history, humanity has been neglecting the social effects of globalisation on their culture and identity. Humans have a sense of belongingness to space with which they are interacting. The intangible assets and movable elements weave with the space and those occupying it a strong bond. Though these spaces are valued by being occupied, their regeneration/re-appropriation is a hidden face of urban resilience. For a long time, experts have been debating the issue of saving the world's heritage, which is always subject to the challenge of mutations. Consequently, a concept borrowed from Botany is frequently used in all disciplines: hybridisation. Hybridisation refers to a new way of thinking, acting, and perceiving the cities by considering their resilient side. This study aims to analyse the effects of adopting this notion of "hybridity" in the appropriation of inhabited space in terms of urban well-being in the historical centre of Constantine.

Key words: hybridity, appropriation, inhabited space, urban well-being, resilient city, Constantine.

Introduction

After a long time of "human-space" interacting, from first connexions to the actual geostrategic system based on power and order [1], the humanity has been experiencing different systems of globalisation and living huge fears with "unexpected" daily threats of vulnerability as resilient cities. Nowadays, just as all communities, the most important cities of Algeria were living a big





transformations getting with new policies and attempting to adapt the trending side of hybrid and liquid life. In the act of “habitat crisis” and “urban mutations”, the functional use of the old buildings in city centres has seen a new boom.

Going from “exploitation for economic profit” until “diversity” in order to maintain a vivid and attractive centre, the mix has generated another level of use. Urban policies have found a new impetus in order to meet with urban requirements and the quality of life in old centre.

Several researches and projects had treated the societal transformations in the historic centre of Constantine on the lights of diversity “mixité sociale”, but our attention is diverted to a new concept, which expresses the transdisciplinary quality of notions and their metaphorical aspect.

The focus interest is given to the “hybridization” and “hybridity” of urban realm as sequel of globalisation. The purpose is to find an answer to this curial question; “has the ‘hybridity’ engender the well-being of the occupants and the identity aspect of the city?”

This essay highlights the semantic advanced in terms of shifted notions and concept through transdisciplinary and scientific intersolidarity.

The intention of this paper is to investigate the impact of the “functional hybridity” on the socio-economic side of a historical site by the degree of its vulnerability and therefore its resilience. It is about understand what is happening in terms of preservation of the old centre in view of the policy of rehousing and re-appropriation of the inhabited space.

Mutations or leaping out of our skin

«Each spatial structure has its own periodization» (Elissalde, 2000).

While territory is getting more complex, where both of transformation in its fashionable posture and the attractiveness of resources is the hub of urban regeneration, the perception will get another level and the conflicts reside in the future interaction “anthropized contexts / space-time consuming”. [2]

Constantine with its famous historical repertory was a field of urban experiences since the French debarkation and even more in the post-colonial period. [3] Many strategies have been applied to confront a double threat. On one hand, the authorities have to keep abreast of developments and the globalisation movement with their acculturation risks. On the other hand, the ultimate need to preserve its preeminent heritage with the hazard re-appropriation of inhabited spaces.





All the transformations that the city was a subject to, put out a several corollary involved in the creation of the actual landscape and the appropriation of each block of this ancient city. For that, the old city-centre of Constantine attempted to generate a symbiosis between preservation and its complexity and heterogeneity.

Through Diversity Toward hybridity

Diversity or “notion de mixité” for French is a kind of coexistence between new social variables and cultural elements of a community in a specific era. Rather « A trick word » (Vieillard-Baron, 2005), « Container-concepts » (Helluin, 2002) or «a vague notion, without precise content» (Jaillet, 2005), the common point is the collective desire of a society under the aegis of political instruments to share the territory in all conditions. First, it concerned social mix, then the housing mix and finally functional mix.[4] At this level of “diversity”, the semantic concept got another designation, “hybridity”.

Going back far into the past, “Hybridity” is a botanic concept by definition, appears with the Neolithic Revolution. Around 1820-1825 that we begin to use the words "hybrid", "hybridize", "hybridization", figuratively speaking in Romanticism. The fact that we began to give more interest to what is mixed and blended.[5]

Over time, the concept, in his metaphoric sense, becomes more used and more popular which allow a high level of urban interbreeding and abolishing borderlines « The notion of hybridity encourages us to investigate, (Theodore Zeldin, 2016).

Out of the box or losing control: from “Zoning” to “hybridity”

« Hybridity can only exist in opposition to purity; if we speak of hybridity, we must accept the existence of purity. » (Alain Rey, 2016).[6]

In fact, the culture and the customs give the mains characteristics of society, among its features; the occupation of the different parts of the historic centre of Constantine is the label that marks its specificity. The Hierarchy urban design of the city's road system was realised in very sophisticated way, from most public (place, souk...) to most intimacy one (rue, ruelle, impasse, derb).

It is about functional purity, this purity represented by an original system of zoning which respects the intimacy of the inhabitants by putting them far from anything that would harm their well-being.





Functional purity has been existed for a long time, since the creation of the city until the coming of French garrison in 1837. The colonialism had broken these rules of pure functional area by the first alignment and levelling plan of Constantine in 1857 for strategic reasons in order to ensure the control of the city. These urban transformations have permanently a deep impact on the organisation of the city and its landscape. The change imposed in order to meet with the needs of modern perspectives but it also occurred a conflict between the globalisation and the identity of the community. « Hybrid landscape represents the most efficient scenario for the urban transformation of our century ».[7]

Resilience or overcoming

« Urban resilience as the capacity of urban systems to recover rapidly from any event produced by natural or man-made disturbances. Its goal is to prevent an event from evolving into a disaster. » ONU-HABITAT

Cities are constantly in mutation and their ability to face challenges is increasingly getting more complicated. In front of a various risks, today its resilience aspect assessed by the level of urban well-being and the degree of safeguarding their identity.

Today, we are experiencing an era of urban regeneration intended to accelerate the current rehousing policy to the detriment of the re-appropriating inhabited space. This strategy of getting back the inheritance in order to use it for a new appropriation could keep it longer and preserve the collective memory of the city but lead to think about the consequences of residential mobility' strategies.

To overcome to build a good life (Tisseron), ours resilient city has found the issue in its hybridity style and the multidimensional actors and contributors in theirs urban policies.[8] Hybridity allow the capacity of adapt our feathers to do with and always in the suitable way through their wide alternatives. « Hybridity expresses a regard libre, un regard qui refuse les limites. » (Theodore ZELDIN).

Material & methods

To answer our questions, we proceed in this research by an empirical work based on analysing official documents such as urban plan, specialised literature and the data collected during our fieldwork.





In addition to a photo survey, we also used non-intrusive spatial observations to penetrate in the urban area case of study. During our investigation, an interview with inhabitants and different occupants of the buildings, in order to understand how they interact with their space, how they looked to their city and the value of its cultural identity. These tools help us to interpret the new semiotic social character in compassion with the traditional one and to find the most appropriate strategy in terms of the safety of cultural heritage and its protection.

Results

Living in a historical city and being aware of its cultural role is a complicated task and requires more attention to the strategies of inhabited re-appropriation and urban regeneration.

Walking through the streets of the European area of the medina, you can see the socio-economic transformations that the urban landscape reflected through the high level of hybridity by the presence of different activities.

- The ground floor, which initially reserved for trade, retains its commercial function.
- Many premises, houses and flats are closed.
- Anarchic organization of the commercial activity.
- The accesses of the buildings used for the illicit trade as along the street on the manner of the popular market of old times (Souk).
- Several houses used for the liberal function: medical office practice, lawyer's office and notary.
- The bazars occupy the first floor in several buildings.
- Companies are occupying entire floors (the inhabited space of more than one apartment).
- Some buildings have kept the residential function but by its temporary type between hotel and dormitory.
- Even many individual houses have adopted; in addition to their initial functions "residential", other use as liberal or commercial nature. (The ground floor is rented to a notary, an architect, a lawyer ...)





Discussion

The first results were unexpected and partly disappointing on the patrimonial level. Major of flats are adopting a new function and the inhabited space increasingly used for other functions.

In theories, the most effective strategies of urban regeneration is the consideration of social side of the area and referring to residential mobility as an assets, but the reality shows the high resilient level in the city-centre through the hidden face of the residential mobility and urban hybridity.

The disorder in the use of the inhabited space for other functions than living comes back to several causes as; family conflicts (legal disputes of the heirs in progress or the property is immobilized by a "habous" act), the lack of municipal control,

On other part, what really makes fears is the health status of the building; otherwise, some uses as medical office practice, lawyer's office, and notary that bring the crowd daily to the building of habitation will be able to attenuate its vulnerability and its authenticity especially for the wooden staircases. These overloads were not taken into consideration during the realization and the lack of maintenance accentuates the degradation.

With particular reference to the transition space between the external world (the street) and the internal world (inhabited space), one of filter elements had been broken by using the accesses of buildings for sales (commercial activity) and the stairs even more than the expected.

Concerning the close inhabited spaces or let to the abundant, which brings up fears, the reasons were the lack of privacy in view of the economic or liberal occupations of the houses of the floors above and/or below.

Certainly that the investigation helped us to better understand the current mutation facts and the new appropriations of the inhabited space but we encountered a several difficulties in the field survey either itself or the interviews with inhabitants.

As far as the data used in this study or the field survey, this has contributed to us time to complete this document and we were not able to integrate a certain number of actors that we felt were important.

According to the survey, the well-being affected by hybridity has caused serious cultural consequences to the historic centre:

Functionally anarchic (the functions do not respect the privacy of the occupants),

Economically: is an urban regeneration of the centre to the detriment of the preservation of its emblematic inhabited space,





Socially: increases the socio-ethnological segregation of the historical centre and puts the social integration in question.

Conclusion

Individual or collective, European or Arab style, the authenticity of the inhabited space is at stake and sinks to the bottom of obstinate vulnerabilities.

Urban well-being in historical centres closely linked to social well-being and to the degree of resilience of the city and to the measures put in place to fight against the excessive and unconscious exploitation of identity elements. In the ambiguity of the new urban conjunctures and universal tendencies, the city urged to draw up a socio-economic strategy for the appropriation of the inhabited space.

The maintenance of a vivid and attractive centre requires a "physical/moral" reconciliation, a "socio-cultural" integration and a "spatial-temporal" solidarity of the social communities in order to control the economic situation, to well managing the diversity and to realize the hybridization at the metaphorical and real level.

The perplexity that approaches the hostility between safeguarding of the local identity and the urban regeneration is the resilient face of the city that begins its progress and risks to annihilate its cultural emblem.

We have gone beyond the diversity by the meaning of proximity to reach a more complex level of mixing under the pretext of hybridization that has set the bar higher to resilient strategies due to inappropriate use of this shifted concept.

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