

GLOBALIZATION FACING IDENTITY: A HUMAN HOUSING AT STAKE - CASE OF BAB EZZOUAR IN ALGIERS

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ABSTRACT

The commune of Bab Ezzouar is situated in the nearest periphery of Algiers and symbolizes a residential zone par excellence. The commune corresponded to a big place of accommodation with a predominance of rental public housings, social participative housings and particularly renting-sale housings realized by Housing Improvement and Development Agency (AADL). The aim of this housing policy is to establish equity and social cohesion. Nevertheless, it appears difficult to escape a repetitive architecture, considering the rigorousness of the economic system of the construction and the constraints due to the prefabrication process. The ideology of globalization would like that sooner or later no one escapes living in the same way, to satisfying some identical needs and to constructing similar cities. However, the real-life experiences prove to be more complex. Better, the inhabitants resist to the homogenization. Bab Ezzouar commune lets appear its fragility, the standardization proved to be maladjusted to aspirations of inhabitants. Does similar dwellings imply similar lifestyles and behaviours? Actually, the "standard" solutions led important modifications. The inhabitants have introduced transformations at the level of the internal distribution of the dwellings as well as the composition of the façades. Do some distinct identities suppose specific dwellings? This paper will analyze the pros and the cons of architectural and urban innovations in matter of housing in Algiers, while observing their effects on the local identities, but particularly on the conception of one's home.

Keywords : Identity, Globalization, Dwelling, Homogenization

1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria witnessed in the last decade significant construction development with the particular emphasis on housing projects. These housing developments aim for a better social cohesion and coherence in the intervention of the different public services in relation to institutions and populations. Currently enterprises and property developers investigate partnerships opportunities in order to achieve a common vision between the different actors and thus improve management of such projects. In that respect, housing became a major stake in terms of reflection and action. But can the territorial development only be defined according to institutional and economic criteria? Can housing be only the product of an interdependent system of actors? A quick survey of the multiple housing projects is expected to help to identify

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the different actors and beneficiaries and to recognize the existence of a particular setting of reference.

2. HOUSING IN THE CORE OF PUBLIC POLICIES

In Algeria, housing shortage prompts immediate political intervention to launch important programs of housing. According to the Ministry of Habitat and Urbanism, the first economic plan launched between 1999 and 2003 permitted the realization of 693.800 housings with almost a half million in rental-public housing units and social-participative housing, with an average rate of 140.000 housings realized per year. Nevertheless, the rate never exceeded 100.000 units per year. To face an estimated deficit of 1.1 million of housing units, the Government announced a new program that spreads from 2005 to 2009 with:

- 24.9% of rental-public housings, (a group of block of flats built with public money for low-income families).
- 20.9% of social-participative housings, (this category of housing is based on the claimant's financial participation: 30% advanced by the claimant, 30% as a banking loan and 30% as a non-refundable help from the Algerian State).
- 10.3% of renting-sale housings, (this category of housing allows the claimant to pay his dwelling by easy terms: 10% to begin, 15% when the block of flats is achieved, and the rest payable monthly during 25 years).
- 3.1% of promotional-public housings (realized by property developers, promotional housing is characterised by its high quality, its big surface and its good finishes, the access to this private property being truly out of range for a lot of households).
- 40.8% of rural housing, (a group of small homes built with public money to encourage low-income families to stay in the countryside instead of moving to the nearest towns).
- Without forgetting the private housings, otherwise said, the whole individual homes constructed by the Algerian citizens by using their own financial means.

The construction of more than one million housing units was expected by 2009 by the Ministry of Habitat and Urbanism (MHU). This ambitious program was included in the law of finances of 2005, at a rate of 70 billions of Algerian dinars (approximately 744 millions of euros). However, in the setting of a liberal economy, invitations to tenders have been launched by the MHU, the realization was therefore opened to foreign enterprises and thus to competitions.

The new quinquennial Plan (2010-2014) intended to reinforce the intention of the Algerian State to continue its intense answer to housing demand according to the speech of the President of the Republic. Another million of various categories of housings will be delivered during these five years. The new Prime Minister added on the 16th of October 2012 that a complementary program of 1.450.000 housings has been launched. In all, 2.450.000 housings are expected to be achieved during this

quinquennial (Figure.2). Graphs below were realized on the basis of data collected by the Ministry of Habitat and Urbanism.

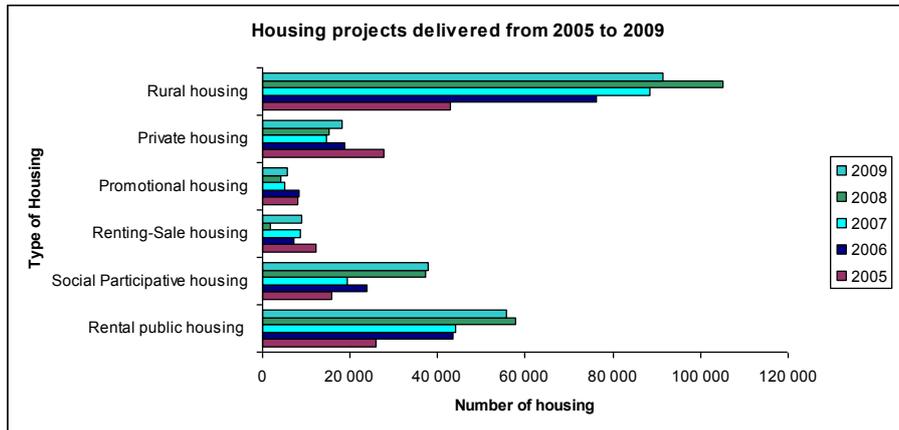


Figure 1 Housing programs achieved in Algeria (before 2009)

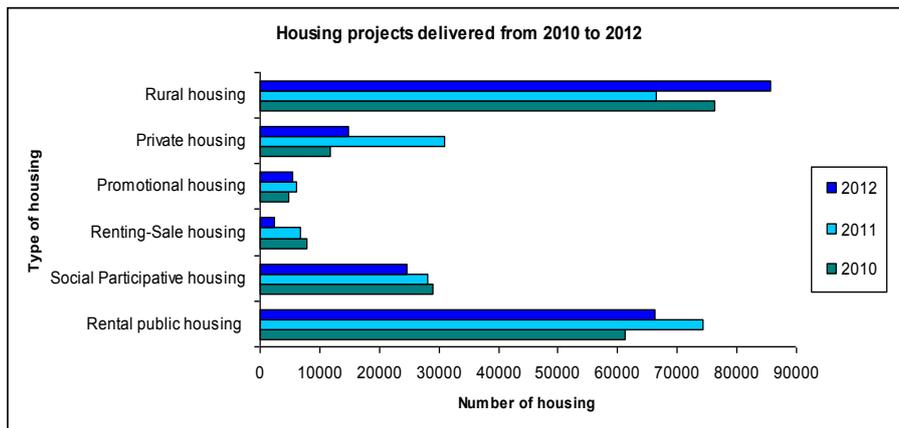


Figure 2 Housing programs achieved in Algeria (after 2009)

3. METHODOLOGY

In Algeria, the Ministry of Habitat and Urbanism put the emphasis on the realization of multiple quinquennial plans and that through all the territory. An intense real estate development advocates a collective habitat; which consumes less space and generates collective displacements, articulates itself around a setting aiming all social categories, promotes the diversification of housing models and encourages the participation of citizens, but who decides? Who are the actors that

lead these operations? And who are the beneficiaries? In Algeria, the variety of the housing offer is perceptible in construction sites and generates an important development. Under the double pressure of politics and citizens, the claimants are oriented according to their own financial means towards rental-public housings, social-participative housings, renting-sale housings, promotional-public housings and rural housings. Whether it is considered as a challenge for the instigators or an opportunity for the beneficiaries, housing welcomes nevertheless the social life, and is above all a fundamental territory for man.

Offering many dwellings, the new urban spaces in Algeria are supposed to respond to today's population needs, their construction capacity is important, they are aired and equipped with relevant facilities. But, are they really a place where people want to live, now and in the future? What about urban harmony and wellbeing in this case? This research analyzes firstly, the renting-sale housing realized in Algeria while focusing on the financial and administrative methods adopted by the Algerian State. This paper investigates secondly, the housing projects realized and their impact on inhabitants' welfare, by examining the case of Bab Ezzouar in Algiers, a representative example at the national scale when it comes to renting-sale housing. The investigation analyzed the city starting from its residents who reside, practise and live the space in a subjective and personal way, the objective being to seize the problems that inhabitants meet as individuals and as community in their built environment.

4. INVOLVING THE FINANCIAL MEANS OF THE POPULATION: WHICH STRATEGIES FOR THE DECISION-MAKERS?

The participation in housing sector is encouraged with the renting-sale housing which permits to subscribers to buy a real estate by easy terms with an initial contribution of 25%, the rest being paid monthly on a period of 25 years. This procedure was widely accepted since its launching in 2001, why? What are the advantages for the citizens? And what are the limits for the decision-makers? To understand this strategy and its socio-economic impact, an investigation is needed.

4.1. Strategy to Promote Renting-Sale Housing

Agreed to subscribers who don't possess in all property schemes a dwelling and who don't benefit from any financial help from the State, and who have a level of income that doesn't exceed five times the SNMG, the renting-sale housing widens the offer to the residence or to the high-class apartment. But, what was the procedure to follow, this time?

In accordance with the foreseen legislation and the authorized dispositions, every claimant of a dwelling in the setting of the renting-sale procedure fulfilled an initial contribution of 25% minimum of the housing price¹. The subscribers proceeded to the payment of the 10% of the global amount of the housing (a margin of 12.000 to

¹ According to the article 7 of the ministerial decree n°01-105 of April 23rd, 2001 fixing the conditions of acquirement of renting-sale housing

40.000 DZD), as a firm option of acquirement, and to the payment of 15% (between 200.000 to 300.000 DZD), once the dwelling was achieved. A notary has been in charge to prepare a contract indicating the amount of money that was due to be paid every month by each beneficiary for twenty five years.

The renting-sale housing was achieved by the Agency of Housing Improvement and Development (AADL) and realized on the budget of the State or on the one of the local communities, according to previously determined norms relating to surfaces and indoor comfort.

Their price was fixed on the basis of the final cost of the construction while integrating expenses of the land acquirement and expenses of the technical and administrative management, the whole lot calculated on the period preceding the transfer of property, the latter being not executed until the payment of the totality of the selling price.

Consequently, the evocation of renting-sale housing, the setting up of this strategy of participation, on which numerous expectations are based, would justify the encouragement of mechanisms of consulting, of association and of implication that it supposes, but what about their realization?

4.2. Beyond the Strategies of Participation, a Feasibility in Question

According to the Minister of Finance, the hundred public corporations were not able to participate massively to the programs. Therefore, the Government took deliberately the position to intervene on behalf of foreign operators like China State Construction & Engineering Corporation for instance, present since 2001, to construct renting-sale housing in the big cities like Algiers or Constantine; where the qualified manpower for the realization of these building blocks being lacking.

Another problem raised by the Minister of Finance, was the availability of construction materials. If the local production is important for the brick, it is on the other hand insufficient for the wood, the cement and the steel. The irregularity of supply entailed many delays in construction sites, from where a decrease of housing deliveries; e.g. in 2007, 19.478 renting-sale housing units were built.

On the 31st of March 2008, the balance sheet of housings established by the MHU emphasized 460.000 housings assigned and 544.000 others under realization, with realization rates varying from 10% to 70%. However, the accumulated delays did not worry the Minister of Habitat who affirmed that all construction sites passed the long and coercive period of the administrative procedures.

In fact, 9.043 renting-sale housing units have been delivered in 2009, 7.777 delivered in 2010, 6.816 housing units delivered in 2011 and only 2.422 renting-sale housing units have been delivered in 2012. Indeed, many construction sites in the setting of renting-sale housings have made long delays of deliveries and the concerned citizens have made many protests to show their discontent.

The Algerian State has taken the commitment to achieve renting-sale housings programs dating from 2001 and 2002, and all the remaining subscribers have been accommodated by the Minister of Habitat and Urbanism in Mars/April 2014.

This fact doesn't prevent the Housing Improvement and Development Agency (AADL) to launch in June 2013 new programs of housing at the national scale, and

thousands of subscribers have used the Agency website to make their demand.

In Algeria, the acuteness of the residential crisis doesn't stop persisting despite the efforts of the State to attenuate it. Indeed, 199.179 housings have been delivered in 2012. In the same way, the Algerian State launches every year new housing projects, for instance, 484.061 housings have been launched in 2012 (Figures 3 and 4).

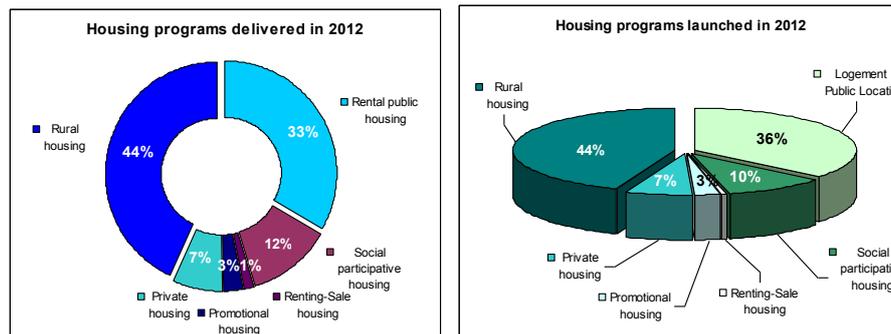


Figure 3&4: Statistics concerning achieved/launched housing programs in 2012

However, the appreciation of the quality of life in these housing projects cannot be associated to the only assignment of housing and to the only logic of its market, except to accept a reduction of its complexity. The perception of the new built environment is bound to the logics of action and interests of all concerned actors, from where the difference between inhabitants and the other users.

In order to realize many housing projects in a very short time, urban planning had to adapt itself to politics. Public private partnerships have been created. A decent habitat develops thanks notably, to a regimentation of prices of construction materials. But, is it necessary to suppress differences between ways of life? And to construct similar residential spaces in order to all homogenize? Today, in a period of globalization, the 'local' still produces culture. "Globalization" is a historical process, the result of human innovation and technological progress. It refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labour) and knowledge (technology) across international borders. There are also larger cultural, political and environmental dimensions of globalization. It is a fact, populations that occupy a singular place in which they live and construct a singular world are integrated completely in a vast system.

The conception of housing is usually marked by the full/empty ratio, in other words to open for reasons of aeration or ventilation, lighting and sun, to close in order to preserve the comfort of each member of the family and its intimacy from all kind of impropriety. This dialectic concept considers as well the relationships between individuals as the physical devices that unite or divide the private, collective and public spheres of the habitat. Architecture is a tool that offers different levels of intelligibility, e.g.: volumes, façades, exterior/interior ratios, dynamics or

statics, integration into the environment. Doesn't one has to promote the protection and the valorisation of some ways of constructing and some ways of living the space, in order to aim at an enrichment and not at uniformity?

5. BAB EZZOUAR: A COMMUNE FACING THE UNIFORMITY OF CULTURES

Globalization has been made possible by the progressive dismantling of commercial barriers and the mobility of capitals, as well as by the technological progress and the regular decrease of the cost of transportation, communications and data processing. Advantages of globalization are manifests: sustained economic growth, more elevated standard of living, increased innovation and faster diffusion of technologies and techniques of management, new economic perspectives for individuals as well as for countries. However, the globalization of the economy goes together with a global standardization of the architectural production. According to Jean-François Dortier, the West had colonized the world previously by strength, producing thus ethnocides. Today, westernization develops mainly by acculturation, a voluntary adherence (Dortier, 2007). Thus, if all big international cities have the tendency to look alike, it is because globalization produces certainly homogeneity, but also creates diversity, crossbreeding and identity, because the cities develop continuously cultural diversity. Is it then, today, completely obsolete to worry about the urban and architectural shapes?

In Bab Ezzouar, the residential spaces let appear obvious maintenance difficulties. The inhabitants denounce the formal and architectural poverty of these innumerable buildings made of concrete and don't hesitate to ask plumbers or masons for help, in order to renew the inside as well as the outside of the apartments. An investigation to understand better the present context is needed.

According to the interviewees: *«the balcony is exposed to the indiscreet looks of passers-by [...] a veranda will allow us to make use of the balcony, in all intimacy»*. Otherwise, it is not rare to see that the balcony is not anymore autonomous but became a part of the living room or the kitchen, without thinking about problems of thermal insulation or humidity.

The inhabitants call into question the image of Bab Ezzouar in general and of its apartments in particular: *« the depreciation of the locality, when this one is not chic, doubles itself of the one of a concrete-city compromised by the illegibility of places [...] and other burrs that badly sign the concrete and the coat of plaster»*.

As voluntary urbanism example, the commune of Bab Ezzouar is confronted to difficulties that it must surmount. Some dissuasive measures have been taken to thwart the alterations worked out by the new residents and to warn them about the risk of damaging the building structure which can get unsafe. From our interviews to the AADL Agency, it emerged that: *«services of the AADL don't have the right to go inside the apartments, in order to estimate the damages [...] only a report done under control of a process-server is necessary to estimate the acuteness of the deteriorations [...] several families have been told, after intervention of a process-server, that it is forbidden to add a window or a veranda and therefore to modify the façades, a*

dissuasive measure for all the neighbours who expected to transform their balcony ». It is difficult to have an exact evaluation of the number of inhabitants who have remodelled their apartment, without any authorization. Several families have been told, after intervention of the court, that it is forbidden to modify the façades and of course to modify the inside. The judge stipulated that tenants have to put back the balconies in the state in which they found them and to pay a fine. That is why the inhabitants didn't allow us to take some pictures of their apartments, anonymity being thus respected.

While examining the conduct of inhabitants concerning dwellings and the one of the AADL control services, the investigation has demonstrated that no sociological survey has been led beforehand, and that if one applies the standardization of lifestyles, it is translated by a ceaseless need of change for inhabitants. Otherwise, the architectural conception of buildings in Bab Ezzouar is so rigid that it would be erroneous to believe that many transformations are possible, according to how the inhabitants feel, and that because of prefabricated walls in reinforced concrete impossible to pull down.

For the meantime, it's the ground-floor spaces that are lived as elements of identity because one finds out under arcades a set of small boutiques, recalling Algiers and its powerful commercial device composed of a juxtaposition of stalls and shops. Therefore, one can regret the absence of a feeling of adherence in a newborn territory. Beyond the supposed assets to make of it a place of exchange and urban life, the local registration is, in the context of Bab Ezzouar, the key of the local cultures renewal and the permanence of their specificity. *«The possibility to identify ourselves positively to a place [...] to develop the pride to live in»*, this is the essential stake for the new residents. It is therefore a question of personality. People lack a picture of reference, a proof of identity and anchorage in their territory. For everyone, the images evoked by one's home and town are inextricably linked to processes of identity. The image of the new town is linked to how it is used by the residents from the moment they move in, whether by choice or constrained by circumstances.

Our position is not attached to the past. It neither defends the historic city nor praises a kind of architecture in particular. We merely want to seize dimensions making possible to act up, but not to brush an ineluctable and irreversible future. We try, on the contrary, to adopt another stance facing the contemporary city. Globalization must be much more than the expansion of markets. One would not consider the economic domain as independent from the social and political context and to accept that it is only subjected to its own logic. To survive and to prosper, the world economy must settle on shared values and steady institutional practices and must serve more equally ambitious social objectives. Let's recall that the urbanism goes beyond the simple material dimension and also includes the social, economic and political matters. The real-life experiences, in the context of Bab Ezzouar, have proved to be much more complex than they appear. Since, the population resists to all shapes of homogenization. In our point of view, the architectural and urban field must focus more on the local, for localized contemporary cities, tempting to refute this ideology of globalization. In the objective to preserve identity and financial aspirations, architectures must be referred to precise places, by constructing multiple

faces, alternative to the totalitarian features of the so-called global city.

5.1. Beyond the Dwelling, Living in One's District

Beyond the simple addition of housing, of activities, of services, of streets, the city defines itself by its districts and its characteristics, the animation, life that results from the combination of all these elements. Every year, thousands of lodgings are taken in site in the new town. For their occupants, to lodge is necessary, but not sufficient. Around that, they expect to find a district, with its exchanges, a town full of life. The worry for the dwellers' welfare in their new environment is accompanied by a willing to endow every district with sufficient collective services. According to the interviewees, what was missing lies in: « *public spaces, true streets with sidewalks, places edged with boutiques and arcades to take shelter [...] a garden where to stroll or to eat lunch, a market where to go shopping; places of meetings and exchanges, crowded day and night [...] well planted trees, correctly fixed lamps, well laid fences ...all that has been neglected* ». The idea that inhabitants adapt themselves with difficulty to life in Bab Ezzouar has imposed qualitative interventions that aim at the improvement of living conditions in the new districts, in order to make some fully-fledged life places.

The deterioration observed in these districts (deterioration of the public space) leads to asking questions under another angle than the one of the formal and architectural relevance of the residential spaces; the perception being bound to the logics of action and interests of all concerned actors, from where the difference between inhabitants and the other users. The supplying of appropriate public services implies a great concern. Planning presented clear layouts that might suppose that the realization was going to be simple. The rational character of these plans corresponded to the idea to give the new generations a balanced environment. Urban planners having thought that a satisfactory life quality got itself thanks to a strong population density, solely capable of guaranteeing services, transportation and animation of the district. Today, as the city tries to define its role, it undergoes periodic adjustments, taking into consideration the social disparities and lifestyles, makes feel itself more and more. According to the interviewees : « *the too linear volumes, of an immediate proximity, let appropriate themselves with difficulty, too many discontinuities and hollows subsist leaving a flavour of incomplete, [...] without forgetting the absence of collective spaces management* ».

The local authorities have made the bet to give them more than a dwelling, an urban environment thanks to a dense network of tertiary facilities and big projects next to the university of Bab Azzouar, the arrival of financial and commercial activities in a substantial number can entail the creation of new atmosphere. Wanting to create an attractive urban setting in which nothing should lack or nearly, but again and particularly an urban and social life, the local authorities meet difficulties to manage the time factor. The commune of Bab Ezzouar is supposed to respond today's population needs. Its construction capacity is important. It is aired, endowed of important facilities. Certainly, its dynamism and interrelations that it will have to

tie with its environment plead for the pursuit of its development.

However, the 21st century urban life cannot be considered without taking into account the globalization because it offers extensive opportunities for truly worldwide development. With globalization, one can have access to more capital flows, technology, cheaper imports, and larger export markets. But markets do not necessarily ensure that the benefits of increased efficiency are shared by all. Therefore, all the question is to know if globalization that finally puts in competition economic and social systems, is likely to take into account a society where the social tie would be exclusively merchant, or on the contrary, to consider societies that estimate indispensable to preserve "non merchant" cultural spaces, valorising thus the cultural capital of societies, because that one does want it or not, the identities construct themselves, even today, essentially in a territorialized dimension.

6. CONCLUSION

The local life and the spatial dimension being a privileged support of identity, the evolution of Bab Ezzouar commune must start from the needs of its inhabitants, their motivation to participate in adequate organizations expressing their life conception; this in relationship with the economy, the culture of the country, the choice of local construction materials, aiming a human architecture rather than a fashionable one. At the present time, one realizes that this commune is progressively affected by regional, interregional, national and international economic conditions. Crossroad of expertise and initiatives, stimulating support for education and innovation, it encourages the economic take-off. This reality becomes more and more striking if one evokes globalization, since the financial markets push subtly toward uniformity, including architecture. This tendency consists in making everything similar because that is less expensive. What about respect for cultural diversity in habitation in this case?

The case of Bab Ezzouar pushes to the critical judgment, to the definition of the pros and cons, to a hold of position towards these big housing projects and the challenge that they raised. To build blocks of flats is, for the Algerian decision-makers, a good answer to housing shortage, despite the fact that the inhabitants denounce the architectural poverty of these multiple buildings of concrete. In Bab Ezzouar, the built homogeneity is defined by its identical blocks signaling paradoxically who lives there and why. Actually, it seems difficult to escape a repetitive architecture, due to the constraints of the prefabrication process. Certainly, housing being above all an object defined by its spatial dimension, it is characterized by three attributes: the metrics, the scale and the substance. Nevertheless, housing constitutes also the concrete matter of the social space and contains the material contexts of the social life.

The analysis of our investigations and interviews indicates that the representations of the residential spaces of the inhabitants depend closely on their experience at the same time personal, social and spatial. Consequently, constrained by inhabitants' attitudes, housing projects cannot conceive themselves outside of their context and must define themselves according to the will of the local actors and their prerogatives certainly, but also and especially according to the inhabitants needs. The

construction, design and type of housing are critical to the long term quality of life for the inhabitants who will live in these spaces. Therefore, greater efforts must be done to build inhabitants' participation into all steps of the development process. If inhabitants are given a feeling that they are able to contribute to decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children, friends and neighbours, the housing projects in general and Bab Ezzouar in particular will become more sustainable.

Creating buildings and urban environment that people enjoy living in and working in requires therefore, best practices at the same time economic, social and environmental. Building and strengthening a sustainable community imposes as well, to improve the quality of life of the population and to consider the longer term implications of decisions. For the present as for the future, the local authorities must learn to put the inhabitants first, not fees or speed of construction, while going beyond the simple information of the population, while accepting to approach "topics that annoy", while admitting the contradiction and while accepting to be disavowed sometimes, because that they do want it or not, the adherence of citizens to projects that concern them is, in the present context, the key of a strong local identity. Henceforth, and beyond its appearance, that everyone can appreciate in his manner, it contains the capacity to be renewed, while leaning on its internal dynamics, made of tensions, like any dynamics. Let's join André Bruston to say that: « *it is not the new that matters, but its capacity of future* ».

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