

## Introduction

# Designers' Logic and Dwellers' Competence

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This issue is devoted to the appropriation of space by users and to living patterns and the changes they are undergoing in North African towns. The idea, however, is not merely to state these patterns or simply to highlight the trends of their development. The collection of articles directly or indirectly raises the question of relationships between designers and users in the North African urban context. This context is distinctly marked by decades of voluntarist town planning and by the search, through the application of rules and principles taking their main inspiration from modern trends and the Athens Charter, for an exemplary, modern, functional town where the concern about how it is lived in and about the users is reduced to the strict minimum. Sometimes minimum effort is required to adapt to the "indigenous" nature, as was the particular case of Morocco, at the end of the Protectorate; public interventions largely lost this preoccupation in the decades which followed when, on the contrary, the way to development and modernity was dominated by the negation of living patterns perceived as old-fashioned. A change of position occurred only at the end of the seventies: architecture was then called on once more to find the paths of authenticity through housing, monuments and towns. This latest trend was full of ambiguities: more often formal image (F. Navez-Bouchanine, 1991; D. Pinson 1992 and the article by M. Benslimane in this issue), it was in some cases also an imprisonment of the least autonomous peoples in reformalisations which are arbitrary, traditional and inappropriate for the current uses and forms of family and social organisation (Sanson, 1974).

This urban history which is different and yet so astonishingly related in the three countries of North Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) largely merits interest be shown in the fate of the inhabitants, in the way they appropriated the spaces imposed on or strongly suggested to them as well as in the spaces which they themselves produce, in particular, in the forms of spontaneous housing. We know that the phenomena of appropriation and marking of space are universal and can be taken to be the most interesting form of expression of living patterns (Proshansky, 1976; 1978; Raymond, 1984; Segaud and Paul-Levy, 1983. Nevertheless, this capacity for expression is extremely variable: the direct and indirect constraints of the

environment, the greater or lesser rigidity of the built space, the type of divisions between designers and users in the process of building housing, the status of occupation of the accommodation and the provisional or final characteristics of the installation, the type of relations which society as a whole has with the laws and codes established to direct it sometimes introduce important differentiations within the same society between types of housing or different social groups. Furthermore, this reality of reappropriation changes with time and the patterns also change as society changes. Looking for patterns in the housing produced and reappropriated therefore requires a qualified and prudent observation capable of reconstructing the main trends and constants (D. Pinson, 1983).

In other respects, we also know that appropriation can be the result of individual constructions tailored to individual needs, in which case its universal nature is mainly of interest to the psychologist and helps to explain one fundamental dimension of the action of living. It only becomes interesting to sociologists when they manage to find the mark of the community once again beyond the individual variations. Three socio-historical situations seem, in this respect, particularly redolent with meaning. The first concerns the appropriation of spaces occurring in forms of production which totally exclude the inhabitants and are designed according to a logic which is culturally alien to them and is the result of national, regional or social group differences. Appropriation appears then to be a cultural reappropriation: elements of a socio-cultural "type" can be read between the lines in the uses and reversal of uses of public space, in the sense understood by Raymond (1984), in the attempts made by users to adapt their private spaces to their customs, needs and representations. The second interesting case where the collective dimension of the phenomenon appears concerns societies undergoing profound changes. The transformation of cultural models and forms of economic and social organisation can lead to inappropriate spaces being produced including, in the recent past and by that same society, a lack of adaptation which, in the same way as the reappropriation of an exogenous production, encourages the custom of appropriating or reappropriating the former space to make it compatible with the new ways of living. Finally, there is a third situation where the pressure of depopulation and the desire for the town, together with a naturally very high rate of population growth, lead to the development of forms of housing called "spontaneous", which are outside any planning project or any form of traditional urban management. The observation of this type of settlement is extremely rich because it highlights the skills and limitations of the inhabitants. In comparison with the living patterns, one should not, however, expect to find anything more than can be drawn from other situations; the attempt at a naive translation of observed *de facto* living patterns must be avoided because, there again, the expressions are detailed and largely conditioned by the context in which the pattern evolves, in particular, the conditions of access to the land and the requirement for speed because of the illegal nature of the settlement. Furthermore, the aspiration to urban status and recognition as well as the anticipative search for legality may lead users to integrate a certain number of standards and

references from the legal sector. (Articles by N. Ben Abdallah and F. Navez-Bouchanine).

Towns in developing countries with a strong urban tradition, as is the case of the three countries in question, provide many examples of these three situations. The phenomena are interwoven to such an extent, however, that it becomes difficult to distinguish between what is a reappropriation consequent on the imposition of models from elsewhere, what is adopted by reinterpreting these models, or what is a "mere" survival of the tradition or a profound transformation of traditional forms, with the cultural substrate remaining true to itself and even the production of patterns borrowed from the traditional vocabulary but no longer having either the same functionality or the same meaning.

This situation makes it necessary to make many close observations of the forms, uses and meaning, as well as an interest without preconceptions - neither disregard nor angelism (abnormal desire to escape from the condition of bodily existence) - in the users and their housing. This is because it is possible to deduce from certain elements observed, for example, in the analysis of the façades and their extroversion, which has become a classic genre in North African research, that the lower social classes are the only authentic "carriers" of tradition whereas the upper classes are rather undergoing an important process of losing their cultural identity. Looking at the organisation of space and of family and residential strategies shows that matters are much more complex and that the tradition is sometimes re-read, re-interpreted, re-formulated and that these re-readings cohabit and are interwoven with the new and totally new elements. The two articles on Algeria are a good illustration of this.

Yet, North African decision-makers and designers still have very limited interest in these appropriation/reappropriation phenomena. The meagre effort devoted to living patterns remains entirely dominated by the search for and/or the affirmation of a cultural identity of the façade in the voluntarist context referred to above. Research into this is made by the marginal trends or consists of selective expressions which are certainly of interest but do not yield very much (Abouhani, Ameur & Navez-Bouchanine et al., 1988); neither of interest to the decision-makers nor connected with the professional world which, in the global context of the low level of financing for university urban research, condemns them to be forgotten or left aside. However, despite these unfavourable conditions, the persistence of the subject over the last thirty years, is a sign of the reality and persistence of the problem. The work of the CERF, in Morocco, interrupted at the beginning of the seventies and little used since; some work carried out in the sixties in Tunisia, in particular in the wake of work on the protection of the Medina in Tunis, has not extended into that of the younger generations of students and researchers. Yet, the question as to what is happening to the town, urbanisation and urbanity today in the countries of North Africa, as opposed to Western Europe, but also in Latin America and Black Africa, is still topical, as is shown by the development of research trends at a centre such as URBAMA (Tours), which is using it as a line of multi-disciplinary research. This

interest is not necessarily restricted to the trends in North African research or in research relating to North Africa. Thus, the skill of the inhabitants expressed in the districts of the towns of North Africa is examined by comparison within a seminar organised by the French Urban Plan; its initiators were persuaded of the interest in rediscovering the inceptive processes in the formation of towns in comparison with voluntarist large-scale planning. Finally, recent developments in Algeria and the essential urban base of the Islamic movement seems to be bringing this subject back into vogue today but without, it seems to us, the basic problems relating to models of town and society postulated by this movement really being raised (Belguidoum, 1994,; Hadj Ali, 1994).

Finally, the last characteristic of the context of North African research into these questions is the low level of circulation of works and ideas in this area between researchers in the three countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) who do have more and more contacts elsewhere. Yet the relationship of certain developments, which have nevertheless appeared in considerably different political, economic and social contexts, call for a more systematic comparison of the hypotheses, the environment and the results. Despite some attempts of this kind which are given concrete expression in the publication of books with a very wide urban spectrum published in Paris, Aix and Tunis (cf. bibliography), no process of concerted research into this subject has yet come to light.

It is within this context that this issue is being produced. The selection of articles contained in it necessarily went into the subject arbitrarily. Thus, alongside works on private space and bordering spaces, which provided the oldest contributions on the question, the current bibliography now contains references on how public spaces in towns are appropriated and lived in. However, it seemed impossible to tackle all these spaces simultaneously as they involve quite different problems of approach. We have therefore restricted the scope to housing and its direct environment. The only article which is an exception (Leuenberger and Plancherel) is there because of its methodological experience, the equivalent of which unfortunately does not exist at the current time for a housing construction project.

In other respects, the intensity with which the subject is tackled varies in the three countries. This diversity also determined the nature of the contributions. Thus, there are very few works today in Tunisia devoted directly to this question and it is difficult to have a well-balanced view of the contributions of recent research on the subject of living, which is not the case for Morocco or Algeria.

Finally, taking account of the skills of the inhabitants in one way or another raises the problem of aesthetics and the confrontation with the skills of the professionals. The aesthetics of the town and its constructions is unquestionably one of the issues at stake in the designer/user debate. But as this debate appears to be secondary to the more fundamental problems expressed by users which relate mainly to spatial organisation and access to a place to live in the urban space, we have declined to introduce it.

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