



Cities to be tamed? Standards and alternatives
in the transformation of the urban South
Conference Proceedings
Milan, 15-17 November 2012

Planum. The Journal of Urbanism, n. 26, vol.1/2013
www.planum.net | ISSN 1723-0993
Proceedings published in January 2013

The Transnational Dimension of Contemporary Urban Landscape in Morocco¹

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The paper intends to provide a critical overview of contemporary urban landscape in Morocco from a transnational perspective, by addressing: (a) the role of the State and international investors in the current governmental development programs and mega-projects; (b) their effects on local communities (processes of urban renewal involving informal settlements); (c) bottom-up transnational practices and flows (of people, remittances, goods) affecting the micro-urban transformations (e.g. the appropriation of colonial leftovers).

The *transnational dimension* is the interpretative 'lens' through which these issues will be addressed.

A historical and trans-scalar approach is assumed: from a general overview of the Euro-Mediterranean borders and the Spanish-Moroccan region, to a brief touch on to some specific urban contexts. What emerges, as a possible conclusion, is a complex system of different levels of 'negotiation', involving various geographical contexts and a larger network of actors.

Keywords: Transnational processes, Euro-Mediterranean borders, Morocco, Post-colonial city, Urban landscape, Bottom-up practice.

¹ This paper presents the first outcomes of a side topic of the PhD research thesis by the author (PhD program in Territorial Government and Project – DiAP, Politecnico di Milano).

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Introduction

During the last decades, cities in the Maghreb area have assumed a decisive role, both at a local scale and in relation to the European Union (EU) neighbourhood policies (e.g. The European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument - ENPI), as 'gateways' to the region and as main nodes of a network of economic and cultural relations within the Mediterranean (Staley 2005). Moreover, in the light of the recent political events related to the 'Arab Spring', cities seem to have gained even more relevance in the MENA (Middle East and North African) area.

In this context, Morocco is playing an even more remarkable role: as an important actor involved in a *border region* (the Spanish-Moroccan one) and as a member of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED³), it has become the 'hinge' between different political and cultural systems, as well as different economical interests⁴.

As in other border areas, the condition of Morocco is exemplary of the intertwining of a series of different phenomena: transnational production processes, global migration movements, gender inequities, security concerns, new colonialisms.

Within this dissertation, the transnational dimension is assumed as a common condition to various territorial 'materials', experiences and processes observed at different scales; at the same time, as a key-element and the interpretative tool for the comprehension of the on-going *territorial and urban processes* in Morocco.

From this perspective, two main issues will be addressed:

- at an institutional level: state interventions, development mega-projects, related to the presence of international / transnational actors;
- at a bottom-up level: transnational practices and flows (of people, remittances, goods) affecting the micro-urban transformations, such as the forms of appropriation of public spaces and modern-colonial heritage, carried out by different populations.

The aim of the paper is to 'draft' a possible research trail on the effects of transnational processes over territorial and urban contexts. Moroccan urban areas are assumed as exemplary cases, to look at the outcomes (both physical, social and cultural) of the complex interaction among different institutions and subjects, acting at the local scale, at the regional level (Spanish-Moroccan region, Maghreb area, Mediterranean countries) and within a global framework. To this extent, the paper will assume a multi-scalar approach in order to look at the complex relationships that involve the Moroccan territorial and urban phenomena.

In order to exemplify the direct effects (from various viewpoints) of the transnational processes at stake, two specific urban contexts will be briefly and pervasively addressed as 'magnifying glasses' on the Moroccan urban landscape: the Tanger-Tetouan region and the Casablanca's metropolitan area.

³ Known as the 'Barcelona Process', the Euro-Med Partnership was constituted in 1995. The Euro-Mediterranean Association brought together the EU Member States and other 16 Mediterranean countries to a broad program of cooperation based on three distinct aspects: political and security dialogue; economic and financial partnership; social, cultural and human partnership. In 2008 the program was implemented with constitution of the Union of the Mediterranean (Source: http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

⁴ Such as the Gulf countries and the USA.



The main transnational framework

The Euro-Mediterranean macro-region⁵

In the context of a progressive 'hardening' of global political borders, Europe has assumed a contradictory image, even more complex than the 'Fortress Europe' metaphor (Biemann & Holmes 2006): we could describe it as an expanding 'nebula' without boundaries surrounded by buffer zones constantly changing. In this sense European borders could be seen as entities that are not only material (declined into a variety of images and spatial forms) but also immaterial. Variable filters, porous membranes, which react differently to diverse fluxes and exchanges.

This image is particularly pertinent if we look at the most 'sensitive' region of the Schengen Space⁶: the Southern border of Europe, the Euro-Mediterranean border (Leontidou 2004), where geographical elements, symbolical meanings, economic, social and cultural issues overlap over each other creating a complex fabric of relationships and dynamics.

In this context, the path taken by the European Union in the management and 'externalisation' of its own common borders was integrated with the implementation of partnerships with the bordering countries. The fulfilment of the ENPI policies and the EUROMED Partnership went in this direction.

Of particular significance is the regional perspective (Cugusi & Stocchiero 2012), directly related to crucial issues that characterize the relationships across the Euro-Mediterranean border. One of the most interesting regions, for historical, symbolical, political, economic and territorial reasons is the Spanish-Moroccan one.

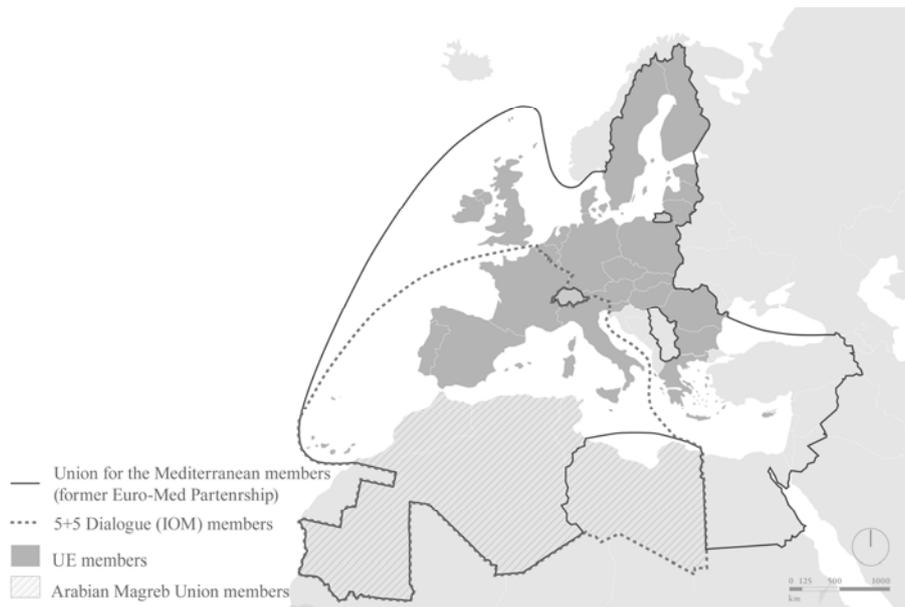


Figure 1. The Euro-Mediterranean overlapping geographies. (Source: Own drawing based on multiple images and data from the EU web site, 2008⁷)

⁵ For the definition of the Mediterranean as a macro-region see Cugusi & Stocchiero 2012.

⁶ The Schengen Treaty had led since the first agreement in 1985 to the progressive 'elimination' of European internal borders.

⁷ http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm, accessed 13 September 2012

The Moroccan-Spanish border region

Region of exchanges and conflicts, the Spanish-Moroccan border area is acquiring a more and more important role on the international scene. Despite the presence of disputes between the two sides of the Gibraltar Strait (related to illegal migration issues, the definition of maritime borders, the Western Sahara issue, the last Spanish colonial leftovers in Morocco), the maintenance of economic relations has always been a strategic priority for both the countries.

In the framework of economic and financial cooperation, Morocco and Spain have signed a series of agreements covering financial program: predominantly regarding Spanish investments in different sectors of Moroccan economy⁸. Like other cross-border areas (e.g. the USA-Mexican one), the region has experienced the implantation of free trade zones and infrastructure networks, the construction of new production plants (mainly owned by multinational firms of the chemical, food and textile sectors), which employ young Moroccan women, coming from the poorest areas of the country.



Figure 2. The Spanish-Moroccan border region. (Source: Own drawing based on multiple data from FAO⁹)

⁸ Among the most interesting aspects of these agreements it should be mentioned the mechanism of conversion of Moroccan foreign debt in private investments by Iberian firms already present in Morocco.

⁹ FAO - www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/Morocco/morocco.htm

It is worth noticing how the presence of the border generates here transnational mechanisms and places of production: global capitalism finds in the absence/suspension of national 'norms' (implied by the presence of the border itself), a perfect terrain where to flourish.

Moreover another main issue concerns this border area: the irregular migratory routes those, starting from the sub-Saharan countries, go through Morocco and reach the southern coasts of Spain and Europe (Ferrer-Gallardo 2011). The presence of the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, one of the last leftovers of European colonialism in North Africa, is one of the main reasons of dispute between the two countries. Here the border materializes itself as an element of control and defence: an 8,3 kilometres militarized fence surrounds the city, in order to discourage and prevent the illegal entrance of migrants, trying to reach Europe through one of its last territorial legacies in North Africa. The presence of the Spanish wall acts not only on a political level, but also symbolically as the sign of a function that the exclave had performed in the past: the defence from the 'others', the 'outsiders' (the Arabs during the last four centuries, the migrants today). For all these reasons the Spanish-Moroccan cross-border region seems to be a privileged point of observation of four main overlapping and interdependent systems:

- the international/transnational level of global market and financial dynamics;
- Euro-Mediterranean policies and cooperation programs;
- Spanish-Moroccan regional cross-border cooperation agreements;
- local spatial planning and administrative systems.

Moroccan urban landscape: trans-scalar and transnational processes

In this context and at a macro-regional scale, Morocco is becoming one of the most important partners not only for Spain, but also for Europe, the Mediterranean and Arab countries, both economically and politically.

Urban areas, in particular, are experiencing a rapid change due to the presence of growing financial investments (both from the Arab and Western countries), and the implementation of the touristic and business sectors (Kanai & Kutz 2010).

Along with informal settlements, at the boundaries of marginal consolidated urban areas and according to a bundle of transnational 'rationalities', we are witnessing the rise of entire new neighbourhoods, luxury residential districts, free trade zones, huge commercial areas, new ports and infrastructure nodes. These projects should be considered in the light of the development strategies and programs launched by the Moroccan Government, aimed at realising an advantageous and attractive 'environment' for international investors.

The Tanger-Tetouan province, for instance, is experiencing a moment of complex mutation and development due to the combined presence of different international and national interests that are deeply changing the urban landscape of the region (Kanai & Kutz 2010; Le Tellier 2008).

Together with the transnational processes connected to global capitalism and governmental initiatives financed by international actors, at the base of urban change there is also a series of bottom-up processes and practices that are deeply affecting the way in which cities are being built and transformed. These processes, which are rooted both in a complex system linking local and international economies, are dealing with:

- migrants' remittances and investments;
- the complex networks of relations among migrants and families / non-migrants (Chattou, Gonin & Hily 2010);



- new forms of mobility and circulation of people, goods and money (Breuer 2011).

One of the main interesting outcomes of the superimposition of these processes regards the way in which families incomes and savings are being invested in new houses or in the renewal of the existing built heritage, in order to fulfil their needs and improve their living conditions. This last process involves as well the modern colonial leftovers, generating an interesting mechanism of connection between transnational money flows and local urban context 'forming global patterns that concern not only mobility but new approaches and contributions to existing city structures as well (von Osten 2009). Many of these initiatives belong to a complex series of space occupation forms that are referred to cultural and social practices. These practices are crucial not only for the implementation and appropriation of the built environment but also for the usage and transformation of urban public spaces (Navez-Bouchanine 2010).

*The role of the State in urban development*¹⁰

Within this complex framework of international, regional and local processes, the recent Moroccan urban development factors seem to be multiple and fragmented. Nevertheless, three processes, that have been already mentioned, can be assumed as main vectors of change:

- the constant flux of population from rural areas into urban centres, both from other region of the country (internal movements) and from other areas (international migrations);
- the 'economies' derived from migrants remittances and savings;
- the presence of foreign investors, from both the Arab world and the Western countries, cooperating at the development of governmental initiatives.

The juncture between these phenomena has deeply influenced Moroccan urban development, producing: a pressing demand for housing solutions (often left to the individual informal initiative); the need to create infrastructures and services for a growing population; the increasing presence of private companies interested in investing in the financial sector and in the real estate field. As a result of these overlapping processes, urban planning has progressively shifted from the control of the public actor to public-private partnerships.

Despite the role of the private sector, it is worth describing the role played by the State (namely the Monarchy) in urban development (Barthel 2008; Kanai & Kutz 2010; Le Tellier 2008). In particular, King Mohammed VI should be seen as the first promoter of to the process of neo-liberalisation of Moroccan economy and growth.

“Under the tutelage of his monarchy, new development agencies and public-private partnerships have been created to steer the entrepreneurial globalisation process and expand the increasingly integrated city-region. Priorities have shifted from (a) earlier forms of state-led regional development through import-substitution industrialisation to (b) reliance on strategic nodes to territorialise transnational flows into the urban fabric” (Kanai & Kutz 2010: 347).

In fact, the role of the King had become more and more important since the early 2000's and it has been focused at giving a new image of the country, and in particular of urban areas. The theme of the 'presidential' or 'state' project is emerging as common category to many other countries in the Maghreb region (Barthel 2008: 5).

Looking at the case of Casablanca, for instance, in 2006 the King announced a development program based on some main points: the revival of the metropolitan strategy; the implementation of public

¹⁰ The term 'urban development' is used throughout the paper in a general sense, without connotative sense and without any specific reference to the 'urban development' literature.

transport; the implementation of tourism as a development strategy; the launch of some major urban projects (Barthel 2008: 5-6).

In fact, the role of the State in urban development appears to be pervasive at different scales, and in relation to different issues, both from the political side and from the cultural one.

The complex relationship between the State and the citizens, in Morocco (and in general in the Arab world), is particularly meaningful as regards to the maintenance of public and collective spaces in the cities (Navez-Bouchanine 2010: 218). In fact Public space is still perceived as a good that belongs to the State (the *Makbzen*) rather than to the community. These believe is particularly meaningful if we take into consideration the forms and practices of space occupation and use in urban context and the way in which people conceive common goods and spaces. The 'paternalistic' role of the State is both promoted by the State itself and reinforced by citizens' spatial practices and behaviour. At the same time, some examples of civil resistance and social conflicts are progressively emerging both in the political arena and in urban contexts, mainly in relation to the access to some primary 'resources'.

In fact, along with the mega-projects that are part of urban development programs¹¹, a series of interventions on public and collective spaces are witnessing the will to define these ones as international 'windows' in order to attract investors and tourist (Choplin & Gatin 2010).

Moreover, since the 80's the State has assumed particular measures to control and redefine its authority over places of worship, namely the mosques. From one side exercising a political control over the localisation of new mosques, from the other, applying for an injunction (never formalized) to their closure outside ritual prayer times (while traditionally mosques remained open all the time) (Cattedra 2002: 259).

The role played by the Head of the State, displayed as the indispensable actor of 'growth', is twofold: from one side it reveals a desire of control over urban development and urban environment; from the other, it is functional to attract foreign investors by referring to the authoritarian 'good-father' rhetoric, as guarantee for international enterprises.

This strategy seems to have been effective: in the Tanger-Tetouan the total amount of foreign investments in the industrial sector had passed, in the period 1994-2006, from 307,467 to 1,053,466 (1,000 dh) (Kutz 2010: 20).

The presence of international actors, agencies and investors (mainly coming from other Arab countries and from the Gulf) had deeply affected the territorial development policies of the Government. For instance, in Casablanca, the signatures of investment agreements with the Arab Emirates coincide with the maturation of a metropolitan strategy. The convergence of international economical actors and political subjects, lead to different actions and partnership on the territories: construction of roads, logistics platforms, specialized industrial parks, a new towns policy (Barthel 2008: 5).

It is worth noticing that the principal territorial and urban projects carried out by the Monarchy are perceived and conceived not only as 'vectors of development', but also as important 'windows' for the country on the international scene and as 'gateways' in relation to the Euro-Mediterranean context, the Arab world and the USA (Choplin & Gatin 2010).

It is in the overlapping of different international interests that lays the peculiarity of the urban condition in Morocco: the results of this 'unstable balance' are more than banal.

Mega-projects and transnational dynamics in the Tanger-Tetouan region

Considering the development plans launched by the Moroccan Government, it is possible to observe how the whole northern coast of the province of Tanger-Tetouan is subject to an intense construction activity

¹¹ National Program *Villes sans bidonvilles* (2004) and the *Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain* (2005)

of financials poles, residential dwellings, services and infrastructures. Among the different development projects carried out in the region, the largest ones that have emerged in recent years include: the Tanger-Med Port (Tan-Med I); economic free zones; and new towns developed beyond the edges of older built-up areas. These initiatives are particularly interesting for their features and for their territorial outcomes and altogether contribute to configure the Tanger-Tetouan region as a huge international system at the service of global economy. The Agency in charge of the construction of the main two sites (Tanger-Med and Tanger Free zone) is the Tanger Med Special Agency (TMSA), which is an interesting case of public-private venture. The first project is a new cargo harbour, 30 km away from Tanger city, near the Strait of Gibraltar. With this new hub Morocco is aiming at becoming the new 'bridge' between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. The area of intervention covers a broad portion of land (about 4 km of coastline), housing the functions of loading and unloading of goods carried in large containers. Since 2002, for want of the King, 'the project was implemented under the strategic choice to turn the region into an area conducive for investment, in an integrated regional development approach' (Source: TMSA)¹².

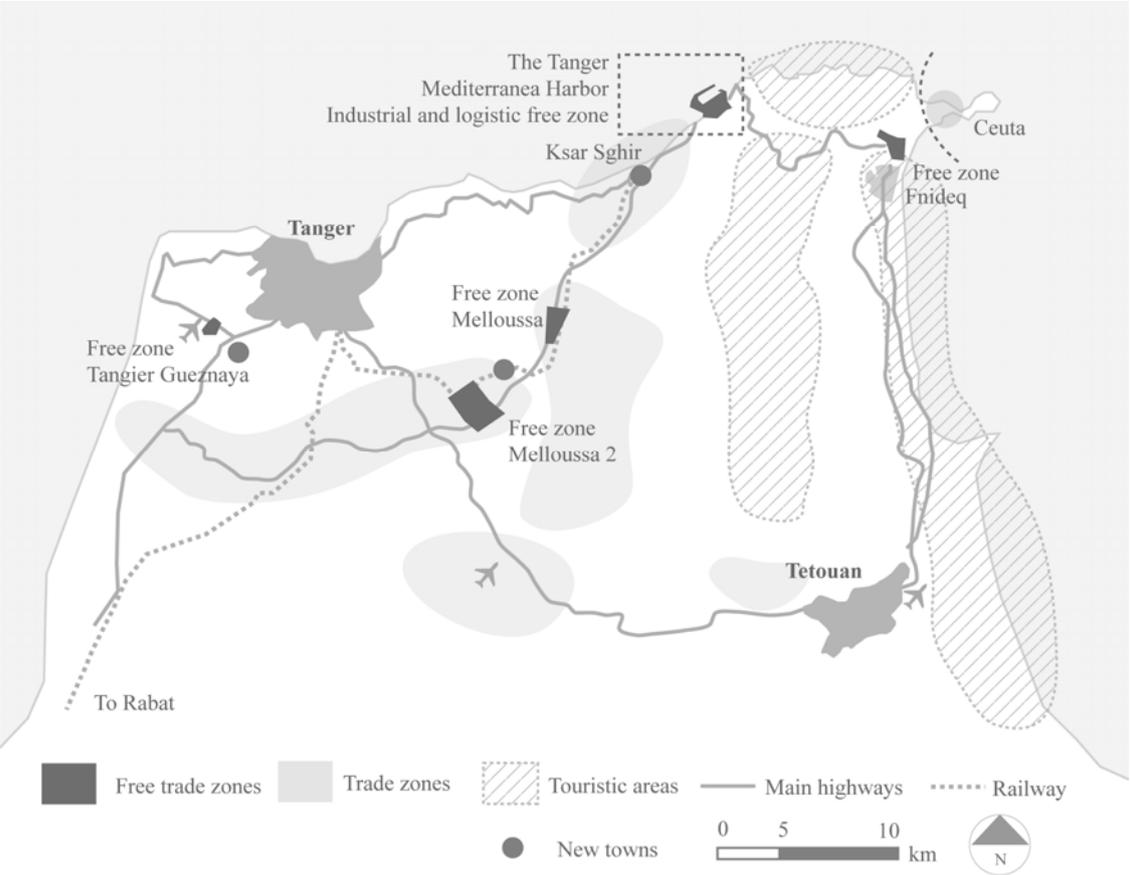


Figure 3. The Tanger-Tetouan region (Source: Own drawing based on multiple images and data from TMSA 2008 and Kanai & Kutz 2010)

Inside the harbour it is also present a huge *free trade zone*, where companies are able to store, pack and label

¹² TMSA website: <http://www.tmsa.ma/?lang=en&Id=5>, accessed 13 September 2012

their goods, using the internal industrial area and taking advantage of the transnational economy of the region.

The presence of the *free trade zone* is to be understood in the context of the signing of free trade agreements between member countries to Euro-Mediterranean partnership, which should lead to the creation of a *free trade zone* in the Mediterranean basin. Investments for the construction of the port come mostly from Abu Dhabi. To date, a second phase of expansion of the port, Tanger-Med 2, is under construction, which will double the size of the project and will bring the total capacity of the port to 8.5 million containers.

The presence of the new harbour is to consider not only at the international scale (as well as the Mediterranean level) but also in the light of the Spanish-Moroccan relations, at the regional scale, involving the presence of other important hubs (such as the Algeciras one). In the coming years, the 'competition' between the two countries in strategic sectors, such as tourism and commerce, will probably lead to a new economic and political balance in the region.

The second site is the Tanger Free Zone that was established in 1999, with the aim of attracting international holdings and companies: '475 companies of all sizes boosted by foreign investment from the European Union, United States of America, North Africa and the Middle East have generated more than thirty different activities' (Source: Tanger Free Zone)¹³. It is located next to the new town of Gzenaya, one of the growth poles indicated by the State in the '90s.

Three main new towns that are rapidly growing in the inlands, outside the consolidated city-centre are a widespread phenomenon, common to other urban areas and part of the governmental program, called *Villes Sans Bidonvilles* (PVSB), which is going to be discussed more in the following paragraph. In the Tanger-Tetouan area all of them are located in the outskirts of the main urban centre, at the confluence of important transportation and infrastructure axis.

The direct and indirect consequences of these new settlements, on the city-region and on the socio-economic context, are not easy to assess. From one side the creation of new workplaces and opportunities for local communities are to take into account and can generate forms of 'emancipation' for some sectors of the population (e.g. for women assuming a new economic role inside the traditional family). At the same time, the creation of new dwellings, despite the efforts to put forward the program of slum clearance, can be seen as a positive externality. On the other side, there are some negative effects that should be taken into account. Among all: social and gender inequalities and fragmentation (Kutz 2010: 18); the worsening of environmental and housing conditions. One example is the rising of informal settlements (mainly shacks) in the outskirts of these sites, built and inhabited by people working in the areas¹⁴. Moreover the implementation of some of these sites brought to the destruction of many informal and irregular settlements, as in the case of *Villa Harris*, a 'historic' slum located in the northern-east coast of Tanger, in order to permit the implementation of the touristic settlement of Ghandouri in 2004 (Le Tellier 2008: 165). The hasty reallocation of the inhabitants appeared to be dramatic: the new settlements turned to be new slums without any service and connection with the city and the related facilities.

The 'Ville sans Bidonville' program

In this context, the governmental initiatives carried out since the early 2000s to deal with informal settlements issues, appear to be contradictory. In 2004 Moroccan Government has launched, throughout the country, a development plan for slum clearance and the realization of 15 new cities (*villes nouvelle*)

¹³ TFZ website: <http://www.tangerfreezone.com/?lang=en&Id=3>, accessed 13 September 2012

¹⁴ A similar phenomenon is observable at the USA – Mexican border.

within 2020. The program should be considered in the light of the previous initiatives promoted by the State (mainly the *Programme national d'action pour la résorption de l'habitat insalubre* PARHI, 2001) in order to reduce and substitute the informal settlements. While PAHRI aimed at restructuring the existing slums *in situ*, PSVB's main goal is to reduce the pressure of housing demand on the major urban centres, progressively eliminating *bidonville* and irregular settlements (Le Tellier 2008: 160). Moreover PSVB should be considered as the Moroccan reply to the UN 2020 strategy *Cities without Slums*. The development of the new towns program is mainly assigned to local and foreign real estate companies and financial groups. A rich business, of which is mainly taking advantage not only Al Omrane Group, the real estate owned by the Moroccan State, but also foreign investors. For instance, the construction of the new town named Tamesna¹⁵, has involved firms from the following countries: Spain, France, Portugal, Malaysia, Qatar e Libya. Beyond the formal aspects of urban design, it should be noticed that the choice of placing new cities near the main urban centres of the country (on the outskirts of Marrakech, Casablanca, Tanger, Tetouan and Rabat), it deals with a well-defined program of transformation of the national territory, which does not seem to be focused on promoting the development of backward areas and marginal lands (the south-eastern regions at the border with Algeria and Mauritania), but rather on 'exploiting' the attractiveness of the main urban poles and supporting a more diffuse territorial control. On a less critical side, one should mention the innovations introduced by PSVB in comparison with PAHRI, which mainly consist of: the introduction of social engineering tools (social support to people moving from the slums to new houses); creation of 'guarantee fund'¹⁶ for the poorest people and finally a broader commitment and funding in social housing initiatives.

Colonial modern heritage and bottom-up spatial practices

Despite these interesting innovations concerning social housing promotion and slum clearance, it is worth suggesting that some of these initiatives, mainly regarding the new town implementation, seem to have some 'elements of continuity' (mainly the need of territorial control and slum clearance) with the projects promoted and financed during the first half of the 20th century by the French colonial Government in Morocco. Studies and plans aimed at giving an accommodation to a growing rural-to-urban population and, the same time, at controlling in a rational way the colonized territories and inhabitants.

Since World War II, the French colonial Government had financed a series of studies and projects to address, on the one hand the housing needs of a growing urban population and, on the other, the need to control in a rational and systematic way the colonized territory and population. The study, conducted since the early '50s by the research and planning group *ATBAT Afrique* (directed by Michel Ecochard), had as main aim the design and building of a series of new settlements for local inhabitants, living in the *bidonville*, according to the principles of local architectural culture and the new concept of 'habitat'.

It represents one of the first attempts of 'multidisciplinary' analysis in territories outside the borders of the Western world: introducing the study of pre-modern forms of dwelling (and in this sense the study would have a broad influence on Team X). At the same time the project is one of the first interesting examples of how transnational experts in the field of architecture and planning were recruited to give shape to the *colonial project* (Avermaete 2010).

The research revealed a strategy of intervention in the territory ranging from the reorganisation of the shanty towns, the temporary accommodation of the 'mobile' population, till the creation of new residential developments on the outskirts of the main urban centres (outside the perimeter of the *villes nouvelle*,

¹⁵ <http://www.tamesna.net/>

¹⁶ *Fonds de garantie en faveur des populations revenus irréguliers ou/et modestes* - Fogarim



addressed to Europeans) based on a modular grid inspired by the traditional patio-house of the Moroccan *medinas*. In this direction were developed two pilot projects carried out in Casablanca: the *Cité Verticale* (1952) a complex of two high-density building designed by Candilis and Woods inside the informal Muslim quarter *Carrières Centrale* and the district of *Sidi Othman* (1953 - 1955) designed by the Swiss architects Jean Studer and André Hentsch, further expressionist interpretation of the Moroccan *kasbah*. Elements and styles of local architecture were assumed as compositional elements employed to suggest continuity with the traditional forms of local architecture (An Architektur 2008).

The outcomes of these experiences appear to have had a strong 'political' content, but towards different 'directions': from one side they can be seen as the 'reification' on the territory of colonial 'culture' and 'space organization' (aimed at rationally organize and control the social fabric of the colonised territories); on the other, many of the protests, demonstrations and strikes that lead to the independence of Morocco (1956) started in these settlements.



Figure 4. The *Carrière centrale* development in Casablanca (Source: von Osten, 2008)¹⁷

After more than half a century, the experience of colonial Modernism seems to have 'failed' in its main objectives. As witnessed by a recent study (Avermaete, Karakayali & von Osten 2010), the current conditions of the buildings designed by the architects of ATBAT Afrique are far from their original ideas. Both the lodgings and facades of the *Cité Verticale* and *Sidi Othman* have been broadly changed by their inhabitants: closing the suspended patios, adding closure elements and gardens, opening windows and

¹⁷ Found at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/architecture-without-architects%E2%80%94another-anarchist-approach/>, accessed 13 September 2012.

doors. These are some of transformations that users have made over the years, adapting the houses to their needs. The same 'fate' occurred to the buildings made on the basis of the *grid Ecochard*¹⁸, where the original structures have substantially disappeared.

These transformations lead to identify a particular character of the experience of Colonial modern in developing countries¹⁹ (among which Morocco represents a particular case) and that concerns the way in which the architecture originally designed and built to be part of a process of change and 'modernisation' of local societies (from a colonial perspective) have been deeply transformed by the inhabitants, according to traditional forms of 'occupation of space', referred to the historic city, the *medina*. It is in the space 'in-between' on the border among inside and outside space, between private and public life that we can define a landscape of proximity in which complex and multi-layered spatial practices overlap (Navez-Bouchanine 2010; Trovato 2005).



Figure 5. Housing project in Casablanca, *Sidi Othman* settlement (Photo: Marion von Osten, 2008)

¹⁸ It was a structural grid of 8x8m each side, according to which entire low-rise neighbourhoods were built.

¹⁹ Features shared by experiences even radically different in different countries, like the case of the Pilot Plan Previ Lima (1972) in which, after more than thirty years from the physical implementation, housing designed by Aldo van Eyck, James Stirling, Candilis with Josic and have been radically changed by the inhabitants.

Conclusions and further research

The paper drafted the overall framework within which urban change is taking place in Morocco. To this extent different urban conditions have been explored, under the 'magnifying glass' of their *transnational dimension*. Plans and practices that are shaping Moroccan urban landscape seem to be referred to global and international processes, mainly related to issues such as: global capital production, international financial flows, global migrations, etc. To this aim, the paper tried to understand the effects of the 'landing' of these processes on urban landscapes and their outcomes on local spatial practices.

Some of these effects critically question the urban development models gaining more and more relevance in the overall Maghreb region and address some unresolved issues related to the fuzzy linkage between economical and territorial development, colonial leftovers and social/spatial justice.

From one side the implementation of productive plants, free trade zones, touristic settlements are strongly linked with the presence of transnational capitals and enterprises that had triggered some positive externalities on local economies.

On the other, the above mentioned public-private initiatives and mega-projects seem not to have given adequate answers to the emerging demands of local communities (mainly related to the quest for better housing conditions and more equal job opportunities) often contributing in exacerbating social inequalities and asymmetries.

At the same time, the economic fluxes generated by remittances from abroad have led to the possibility of improving housing conditions for migrant families in their own countries. The transformation of the modernist legacy in the countries of North Africa is, therefore, in some way related to the more general system of transnational mobility and migration, in a complex 'circuit' made of different levels of 'negotiation' (von Osten 2008), involving distant geographical contexts (former colonies and former colonial powers) in a game of formal references and cultural relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Nevertheless the considered bottom-up practices appear to be lacking in a common and collective vision, mainly due to the traditional relation between the citizens and the State in the Arab world. A possible clue of change is emerging thanks to the recent protests and strikes that have involved the youngest and most educated strata of society, claiming for reforms and more political freedom. These ones, in turn, should be read within a complex system of transnational networks and relations at different scales and across different geographies. This can be an interesting trail of research that needs to be implemented and explored.

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