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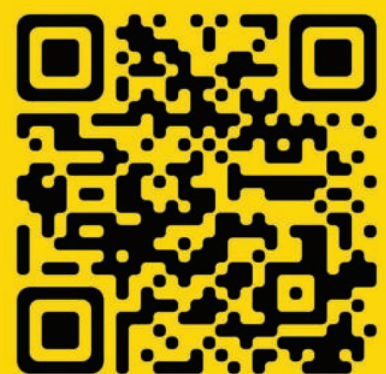
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Urban Changes in the Traditional Residential Neighborhood Case: The Bab El-Louz neighborhood in Bejaia

Sofiane Bounouni

Architecture department, University of Bejaia, 06000 Bejaia – Algeria.

sofiane.bounouni@univ-bejaia.dz

Abstract. Bejaia, as many Algerian cities, has undergone profound economic, social, political and urbanistic changes, but is today in a state of anarchy in total abstraction with the urban architectural heritage. In the heart of its center, the district of Bab El-Louz is considered as one of the oldest and most important districts of the city of Bejaia due to its strategic position, the residential character par excellence and its traditional architecture. In recent years, the neighborhood of Bab El-Louz is subject to remarkable changes in its residential space, changes that are made in an informal and unplanned manner, based on individual initiatives to meet the needs of the current situation. These transformations are becoming more and more significant from one day to the next, which has led to a real mutation of the Bab Elouz district, which is spatial, social and functional and which needs to be studied and analyzed. The purpose of this research is to show the consequences of mutation on the basis of architectural and urban transformations and mutations of the residential space of the Bab El-Louz district which threaten the survival of a historical heritage and the future of this district.

Keywords. Urban mutations, traditional residential neighborhood, Bab El-Louz, patrimony.

1. Introduction

The city of Bejaia, located in northern Algeria, is considered one of the oldest cities in the Mediterranean (Figure 1.). It knew the passage and the occupation of several civilizations, the district of Bab El-Louz object of our case of study is among oldest of the city of Bejaia.

The pivotal position of the Bab El-Louz district in the old city, in the heart of downtown, has made it one of the most visited places not only by its two mosques, but, also the place of Sidi Sufi which has driven a functional change making this district a site conducive to a second centrality.

The urban evolution of the Bab El-Louz district has generated, on the one hand, a densification of the fabrics marked by a vertical evolution and a substitution of individual housing, and on the other hand a process of functional mutation through the modifications and reconversion of the living spaces to the benefit of the commercial premises (the garage, the garden, the courtyard or the room which gives on the street).

This dynamic has provoked the acquisition of a new urban identity where a spontaneous commercial structure has been inserted into the pre-existing urban structures. It created a

commercial space, it introduced new urban practices and it provoked a mutation of the urban functions of the district.

Passed from one time to another and from one status to another, the Bab El-Louz district tries through its mutation to adapt to the new role that has been assigned to it as well as to the needs of urban life today. Because over the years and as the city evolved, the needs of the population have multiplied and diversified, the downtown area being a saturated place so this area was the favorite place to concentrate these types of activities, and this is why the Bab El-Louz district, not being an exception, has become a place sought by these activities that now occupy more and more space and have promoted its mutation on the functional level.

It should be noted that the new constructions do not have a building permit, which affirms the absence of urban planning services; this leads us to say that the owner acts on the space according to his own strategy of use by giving priority to the possibilities of commercial use.

The article aims to show the consequences of these mutations of the Bab El-Louz district which is measured by the number of transformations which spread on its urban fabric by touching its morphological aspect (built framework) as well as its functional aspect (activities), to this end we mobilize the results of the field survey which we realized in 2022.

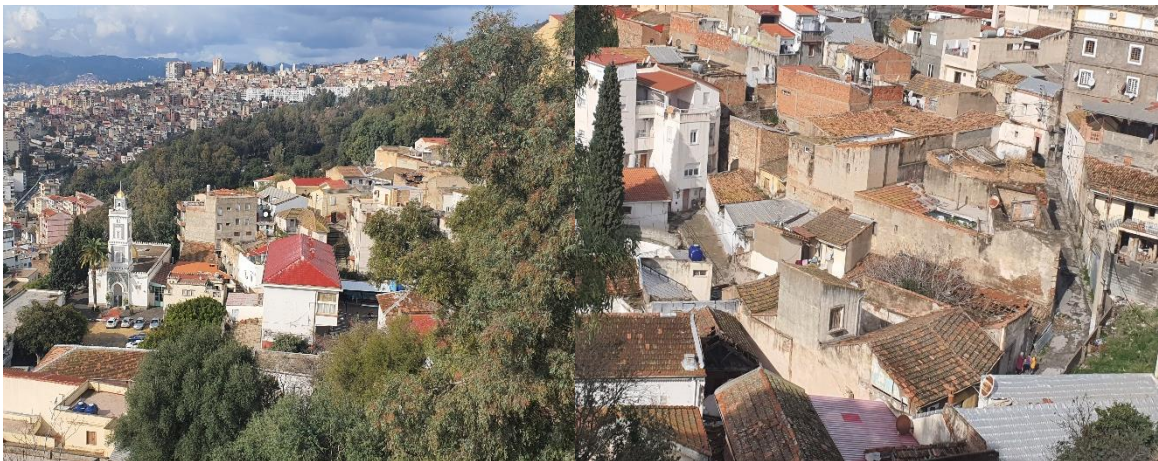


Figure 1. Photos of the city of Bab El-Louz.

2. Methodological approach

For data collection, we opted for a quantitative approach, which consists of collecting quantitative data through direct surveys and indirect surveys, marked by the use of data from previous surveys.

Our preliminary observations carried out in the study area made it possible to draw up a survey plan and questionnaire. The latter includes, on the one hand, a section of information relating to households for the various socio-professional categories and, on the other hand, a section relating to the built environment.

2.1. Questionnaire and choice of survey topics.

In short, the development of the questionnaire required a refinement of the themes to be tested. This phase fulfilled a double function: an intermediate function of preparation of the questionnaire and an autonomous function of research of explanatory diagrams of the plans in the selected study area.

2.2. *Methodology and sample selection.*

After learning about the socioeconomic characteristics of the resident population in the neighborhood. The sample was selected randomly and involved 5 households to be surveyed.

2.3. *The course of the investigation.*

The surveys were carried out on the district of Bab El-Louz during all the month of December 2022, the surveys were carried out every day of the week from 10 am to 3 pm except Friday.

2.4. *The analysis.*

This last phase will constitute, finally, the culmination of the research in which interpretations and analyses of the data collected and observed in the field have been carried out, on the one hand, and to have an in-depth idea of the forms and aspects of the mutation of the colonial training spaces, be they physical, functional or social, on the other.

3. Results and discussions

According to the results of the survey, the research of the consequences and repercussions of this phenomenon on the district as a spatial, functional and social entity have been carried out in the district of Bab El-Louz. However, it is necessary to know that the spatio-functional mutation of the Bab El-Louz district has entailed at the same time negative consequences, which have repercussions on the district transforming by this its main aspects, namely: the spatial, functional and social aspect. The consequences of the change on the neighborhood are as follows.

3.1 *Alteration of the urban landscape.*

The proliferation of transformations easily spotted on its urban landscape, does not go unnoticed, as they continually bring renewal to the image that everyone has constituted the neighborhood Bab El-Louz. From where results and consequently, alterations in the identification and recognition of places for the population, even, alterations in the psychological comfort that offered this district for its users, especially that the transformations that took place, lack coherence and harmony with the pre-existing framework.

In this sense, the spatio-functional mutation of the neighborhood, especially the ongoing construction work, juxtaposition of the built environment with contrasting age and physical condition, change of facade and architectural style, change of height relationships, extension of commercial facades by the multiplication and appearance of new businesses. All these changes have not added more urban quality to the neighborhood, the new image resulting from the transformations is far from satisfactory.

The transformations of individual initiative results are characterized by a lack of coordination and affect the morphological homogeneity of the district from which it results a lack of visibility of this space and of the image of this previously urbanistic integrated district.

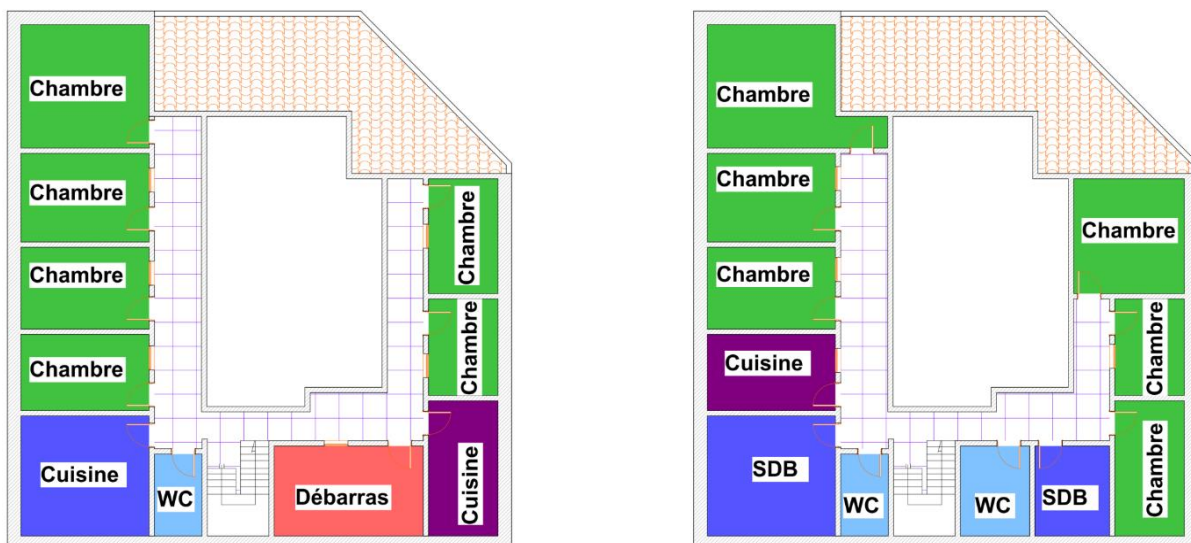


Figure 2. Alteration of the urban landscape

3.2 Introduction of a new form of spatial organization.

The mutation of the district has been marked by a new organization of functions at the level of its commercial buildings following the new trend of verticality imposed by the multiple reconstructions superimposed according to needs.

According to the observations on the ground, the functional mutation of the district has been asserted, which has provoked a new form of organization of the functions (ground floor for the shops and housing on the upper floors).



Plan before the modifications

Plan after the modifications



Figure 3. Introduction of a new form of spatial organization

3.3 *Tendency to increase in height.*

According to the observations made in the field, the elevations that have taken place in the BEL district do not go unnoticed on its urban landscape, they attack the harmony of the heights and the pavilions that used to exist in the district and they also generate an additional densification of the built space by the heterogeneous piling up of the constructions.

The incoherence of the volumes and the ruptures of scale are the negative aspects of the overhangs randomly distributed on the area of the district. They tend to darken and crush the profile of the streets by the absence of proportionality between the widths of the streets and the heights of the buildings.



Figure 4. Tendency to increase in height

At the end of this work, carried out in the urban area of the city of Bejaia, we conclude with a number of lessons on how to understand mobility practices in the said territory.

Thus, the survey we conducted in the field led to an understanding of mobility practices in the territory studied in the face of the extent of urban sprawl. The results obtained have, effectively, accredited and confirmed the idea that urban sprawl has been a provocateur in this trend observed in the excessive use of private cars, particularly in peripheral municipalities.

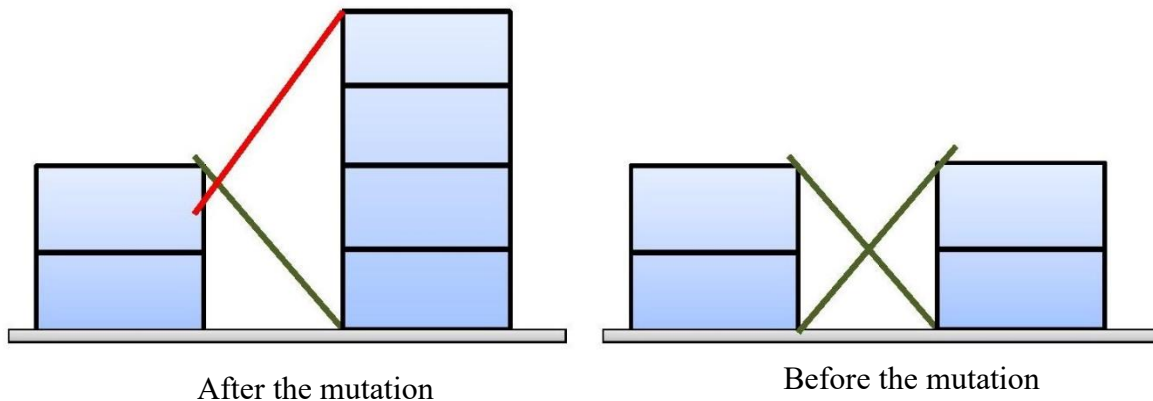


Figure 5. Schema of the influence of the tendency to increase in height

3.4 *The reduction of courtyards in favor of commercial spaces.*

This district has undergone conceptual transformations resulting in the reduction of courtyard spaces in favor of spaces dedicated to commerce.

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Figure 6. The reduction of courtyards in favor of commercial spaces

4. Conclusion

The neighborhood of Bab El-Louz has undergone considerable changes that have become more apparent in recent decades,

The district is left to a spontaneous evolutionary dynamic, the transformation operations of the built environment remain marked by diversity and lack of organization. They tend to progressively erase the imprints of its historical heritage that made its distinction from the other districts of the city.

In addition to the impact on the spatial and functional mutation, the vocation of this area tends to change from residential to commercial.

This state of affairs raises a problem of spatial and functional dysfunction resulting from the random creation of commercial space, which should be regulated by a legal framework and according to the needs of activities duly studied upstream.

Finally, it should be noted that rational planning and the rigorous application of urban and architectural regulations can be the key to positive and controlled change.

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