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## The Impact of Commercial Mutations on Historical Buildings in Algeria: Case of Colonial Quarters in The City of Annaba

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### Abstract

The commercial dynamics that the city of Annaba has experienced in recent decades, due to social and economic development and market liberalization, have changed its urban and architectural heritage. This city, located in north-eastern Algeria and created before the tenth century, has seen many civilizations and dynasties pass by. Every civilization has left behind traces that time has sometimes taken care of protecting them, to bequeath us or erasing them completely. This heritage wealth testifying and telling the story of our ancestors' past, unfortunately, began to lose its value and originality after the transformations and modifications that took place in the old residential buildings inherited from two opposing cultures by integrating new forms of commercial activities. The objective of this communication is to analyse and measure the evolution of these mutations, with a focus on the ancient colonial areas of the city of Annaba where the phenomenon is most pronounced.

**Keywords:** Architectural and Urban Heritage, Historical Buildings, Commercial Mutations, Commercial Dynamics, Annaba.

### 1. Introduction

"The retail sector is constantly evolving: it tries to follow the changes in consumption or precedes the demand, by proposing new commercial concepts"[ *Le commerce de détail est sans cesse en évolution en tentant de suivre les changements de la consommation ou en précédant la demande en proposant de nouveaux concepts commerciaux*] (René-Paul Desse, 2016). The evolution of the urban space and the development of technology transform the space of sale. These changes have an influence on the built heritage and the image of the city. Trade is considered as a factor of revitalization and transformation of the city on a spatial and functional level. Public and private actors (traders, consumers, etc.) produce commercial spaces, whether by transforming an old space or by creating new buildings, it can be said that trade is a driving force for making the city about the city and that "there is no trade in good form when the city is sick and there is no city in good form when trade is sick" (Robert Rochefort, 2015).

The great socio-economic developments, the liberalization of the market to investors that Algeria has experienced in recent decades and the enormous opening up to China, due to the availability of all products and at lower prices than those of locally manufactured products, have led to large-scale distribution of shops, particularly in the downtown of Annaba. This commercial dynamic caused modifications, mutations and transformations on the old colonial districts located in the central space of the city. This built environment inherited from the French colonization, presents a mixture of architectural styles, neo-classical s, neo-Moorish and modern styles but the most important is the colonial part built towards the end of the 19th century, which contains beautiful Haussmannian buildings of neoclassical style (W. BOUMAZA, 2015).

The forms of mutations observed on the old urban fabric of the city of Annaba, is illustrated by a morphological transformation of the parcel of land caused by a strong densification at the level of the downtown, the spectacular establishment of new bazaars and shopping-centers and the transformation of the urban wastelands by large surfaces and show rooms with a new architecture, which gave a new image to the city of Annaba.

The objective of this work is to analyse and measure the evolution of these mutations, with a focus on the ancient colonial areas of the city of Annaba where the phenomenon is most pronounced. This study aims to answer the following questions:

- how the forms of shops are changing? and what are the causes of this evolution?
- what impact do the commercial dynamics have on the historical building?

### 2. Material and Methods

Annaba is a city situated in North-East of Algeria, it is the fourth city of Algeria in number of inhabitants after the capital Algiers, Oran and Constantine, the city of Annaba is a coastal city it occupies the West of the *Khli dj El Mordjane* golf, more known under the name of golf of *Bône* and located at 152 km in the North-East of Constantine,

at 246 km in the East of Jijel and at approximately 100 km in the West of the Tunisian border. This privileged position of the port agglomeration offers it the possibility of opening up to the international space and naturally confers on it a function of crossroads in international exchanges.

This city was founded before the 10th century BC, its situation in the north of Africa gives it a strategic place and it has seen several civilisations and dynasties pass through: Phoenician, Numidian, Roman, Vandal, Fatimid, Zirid, Hammadite, El Muahidine, Hafside, ottoman and French conquest. Each civilisation has left traces and vestiges that time has sometimes taken care to protect and bequeath to us, or to erase completely. Each civilisation had a method of planning its market space according to economic, social, cultural, political and technological requirements.

The initial core of the Medina dates back to the 11th century, between 1833 and 1840 the city underwent the first urban interventions carried out by the French military, which consisted of the widening of the streets and the transformation of the western part of the city, from 1870 onwards the extensions of the city began according to a planned system. Wide and straight streets, as well as the establishment of aligned buildings (Travers Lucette,1958) The old colonial districts of the city of Annaba occupy the downtown of the city and present a multiplicity of functions, commercial and residential activities, with a mixture of architectural styles, In the old town, which is characterised by the dominance of Arab-Muslim and traditional colonial style buildings, where the shops are located on the ground floor, in the colonial part built towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century hosts Haussmanian buildings in neoclassical style, traditional colonial building, modern, post-modern and the style produced by the current inhabitants.

Firstly, we will study the evolution of commercial locals in the light of the mutations that the Algerian political system in force has known. Then we will take the building of the downtown built on 19<sup>th</sup> century as a case of study where the phenomenon is more observed before studying the impact of the commercial mutations on the historical character of this district, we will be focalised on the architectural forms, architectural materials and urban design which will allow us to identify what impact the commercial dynamics have on the historical building?

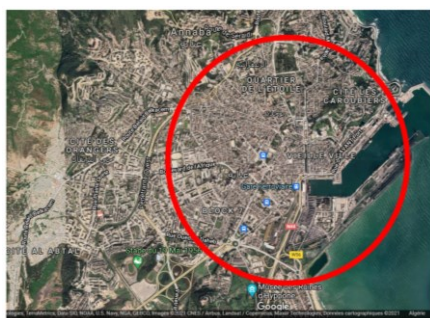


Figure 1. Quarters of the city of Annaba location (Google earth).



Figure 2. Quarters of the city of Annaba (data from the urban planning administration in Annaba, 2008, processed by M. MIHOUBI)

### 3. Evolution of Commercial Forms in Annaba

#### 3.1. Before 1962: Trade in Two Opposing Cultures

In Ottoman period, Annaba has functioned as a port, located 2 km north-east of the ruins of Hippone [*Dès l'époque turque, Annaba a fonctionné comme port, localisé à 2 km au nord-est des ruines d'Hippone*](M. Cote et G. Camps, 1988), it was a structured city like the majority of the Arab-Muslim cities at this period, Trade practiced in open air markets (souk) (SLAHA-SALAH, H, 2020) And In artisanal streets specialized according to the type of product, the repartition based on the principle of the culture and the religion of the society, In Bouna as it was called in this period there were 14 markets (Souk) (H.DERDOUR , 2013, Figure 3).

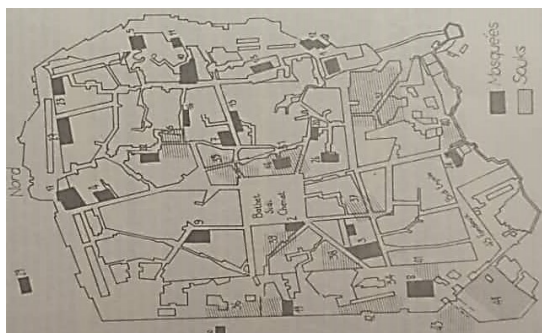


Figure 3. Markets of the city of Annaba Ottoman period (H'sen Derdour, 2013)

### French colonization period:

The city changed from a closed city with a wall to an open city, high buildings and wider, aligned streets. The weekly markets and specialized handicraft streets replaced by covered markets and shops with windows on the ground floor of buildings. During this period, trade was monopolized by the French colonists, whereas the Algerians were involved in small businesses. Between 1950 and 1962, the industrialists dominated, supply was lower than demand, the industrialists dominated the other economic actors, the sales points were small and very numerous, these sales points belonged to the traditional independent trade (Figure 4).

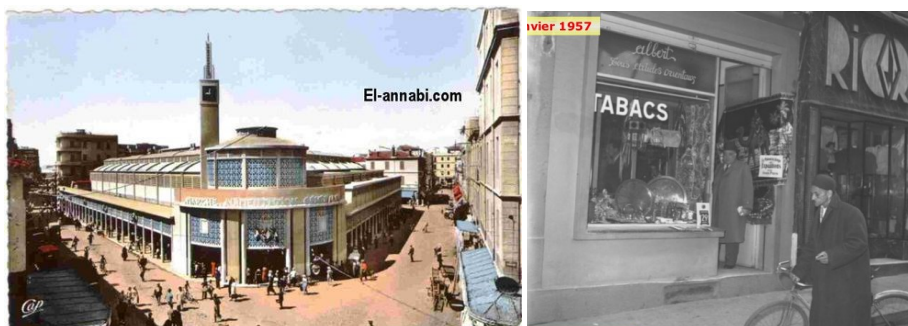


Figure 4. Markets and sales points before 1962 in Annaba

### 3.2. Trade Of the Socialist Period

After 1962, the city of Annaba has been subject to a major change, from an agricultural city to an industrial city, with the realization of large industrial complexes which caused a considerable rural exodus from the bordering regions in search of work and good living conditions, because during the first years of independence, there was a high level of unemployment and poverty in the country, particularly in the rural areas. As a result of this massive rural exodus, demand in the city began to exceed supply, leading to the emergence of so-called legitimate housing and at the same time the emergence of informal markets and trade inherited from the rural population. This type of trade appeared in several forms: the trade of “*trabendo*” shopping bags (import of small quantities of products) - night market “*souk elli*”. During the 1990s, this situation was amplified by a second wave of rural exodus (escaping insecurity).

### 3.3. Trade After the Liberalization of Market and Socio-economic Development

From 1995 onwards, the transition from a planned to a merchant economy has given rise to other economic forms, particularly in terms of commercial activities. The retreat of the role of the state in domestic trade, with the exception of public sales companies. A new political has appeared to fixing the conditions and the methods of establishment and organization of commercial spaces and exercise of certain commercial activities (executive decree n°12-111 of March 6, 2012). Progressively putting an end to the dysfunctions that characterize the disorderly establishment of commercial spaces. Article 03 of the executive decree defines “Commercial space” as any enclosure or establishment, built or unbuilt, arranged and delimited and within which commercial transactions take place at the wholesale or retail level. The installation of any Commercial Space and in particular of large surfaces and shopping centres, by private promoters or by any public or private legal person under public or private law shall respect the following conditions below (A.AIT ABDERRAHMANE Abdelaziz, 2015):

- Any project for the establishment of a commercial space must be approved by the wilaya commission in charge of the establishment and organization of commercial spaces, created at the level of each wilaya;
- Any implantation of a commercial space must be carried out in accordance with the Master Plan for Urban Development (PDAU) and the Land Use Plan (POS) (law n°90-29 of 1st December 1990 relating to urban planning and development, amended and completed by law n°04-05 of 14 August 2004);
- The activities of distribution of goods and services are likely to generate nuisances: to local residents, the health and safety of the neighbourhood to the environment or to historical monuments and sites; may only be located and carried out in areas spaces developed for this purpose, within the framework of and urban planning instruments (PDAU and POS).

### 4. Impact of The Commercial Dynamics on The Historical Building

- The disproportionate occupation of the ground floors of buildings by small shops.
- Illegal occupation of shopping streets in central areas by street vendors.
- surface area divided to smallest, because of the rent or various activities (the city become a big popular shopping center)
- Occupation of the empty spaces in the downtown of the city by houses of a completely different architecture from the existing ones on the upper floor and shops on the ground floor

- dysfunctions appear through: A disfigured urban landscape High urban density in the center inauguration of new commercial bazaars on several levels Treatment of facades with materials not compatible with the existing architectural styles (loss of authenticity) The exercise of certain commercial activities in urban areas in inadequate spaces causing troubles and disagreements with public order, the circulation of goods and people and good neighborhood Pollution and nuisance. The opening of supermarkets and mini-markets that do not have car parks or parking areas in large cities, which generates traffic congestion and difficulties in accessing the public road network.



Figure 5. Shops in Annaba city in past and present

## 5. Conclusion

In this work, we presented an overview of the impact of commercial mutations on historical buildings in the colonial districts of Annaba city. We have observed a population that is not aware of the need to preserve the authenticity of the buildings. Also, the traders are only interested in profit while not considering the importance of heritage for commercial attraction. In spite of all these laws, the preservation of colonial buildings is far from being achieved. The operations carried out by the state until now have concerned the rehabilitation of degraded buildings without taking into account the authenticity which is not yet considered as an integral part of the heritage.

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## Conflict of Interests

The Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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