

Urban Revitalization as a Lever for Urban Progress. Case of the Belouizdad-Algiers Distric

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization and housing challenges are inescapable realities of our contemporary era. Around the world, many urban regions face complex issues such as the shortage of quality housing, degraded neighborhoods, and continued population growth. These issues raise crucial questions about how we manage our urban spaces and how we respond to the needs of citizens. This work explores urban revitalization, both as a general concept in the specific context of Algeria, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities that arise. Our study asks how the urban revitalization of a neighborhood can be implemented in a relevant way while effectively promoting community participation? This research, whose objective is to understand the challenges of urban revitalization, offers a strategic framework for revitalization. Establishing recommendations to improve residents' quality of life, thus serving as a starting point for future actions. It aspires to transform the neighbourhood into a vibrant and inclusive place, while mobilizing the community engagement and resources needed for successful urban revitalization.

Keywords: Urban revitalization; neighbourhood; Algiers; strategy; local development.

1. Introduction

This research focuses on the concept of urban revitalization as a catalyst for progress and transformation. Revitalization is a process of urban operation that aims to improve the quality of life. It is an initiative to renovate, rehabilitate, reinvent or revitalize neighbourhoods that have suffered physical, economic and social deterioration by investing in economic, social and cultural development projects in urban centres. According to the Lisbon Charter Oct.1995, revitalisation is a process that combines architectural and urban rehabilitation with the upgrading of urban activities.

At the heart of these concerns and the challenges of urbanization, the context of the municipality of Belouizdad, which is characterized by a rich history and a unique cultural identity; is also facing pressing issues in terms of housing, aging infrastructure and sustained population growth. In this specific context, our reflection questions how the urban revitalization of a neighborhood can be implemented in a relevant way in order to effectively promote community participation?

The objective was to assess the effectiveness of urban revitalization as a response to the challenges related to environmental degradation, the deterioration of urban infrastructure and the quality of life of the residents of Belouizdad.

The methodology of this research is inspired by several approaches to deepen our understanding of urban revitalization at the level of the Belouizdad district. Thus, urban revitalization is a vast subject because it encompasses different aspects of intervention, namely: physical, social, economic, political, cultural, health and environmental. To solve urban problems, including substandard, poor or obsolete housing, inadequate transportation, sanitation, other traffic problems and other problems. ¹

2. Case study: Belouizded district

2.1. situation

Belouizdad is a town and commune in Algiers Province, Algeria. It is located about 3 km southeast of the city center and has a 1.6 km long coastline in the bay of Algiers. It is composed of four main districts: Belcourt, El-Aguiba, El Hamma and Ruisseau, separated by the Jardin d'Essai.

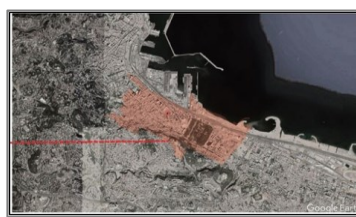


Figure 1. Location of the commune in relation to the Bay of Algiers. Source: www.Google earth

¹ Britannica, E., Ed. (1994). The new Encyclopaedia Britannica. Micropaedia Ready, p201

2.2. Historical Overview

The site of the commune of Belouizdad was occupied by rectilinear agricultural land with irregular shapes that all fed the Algiers. The place had three fountains and two batteries (occupied by the army) which ensured the defence of the area.²

French colonization appropriated the city of Algiers in 1830, and the district kept its agricultural character. In 1837, a garden was planted on an 18-hectare plot of land located to the west, it became "the Government's central nursery and the initial 5-hectare plot kept the name of Petit Jardin d'essai". After 1846, the district experienced a stagnation in its urbanization which lasted until 1860 (date of resumption of construction).

We are witnessing the beginning of the extension of the city of Algiers towards the Hamma district, framed by the development plan drawn up by Eugène Redan. The operation was characterized by the change of vocation from a military district to an industrial district and the beginning of the development of the port of Algiers.

Between 1880 and 1930, the port was extended into the district and the district was completely urbanised, following the orthogonal route within the boundaries. This period saw the definitive extension of the port of Algiers to El Hamma and the construction of large collective housing complexes (HLM) to address the housing crisis that hit the city.

Between 1962 and today, the district has undergone a period of renovation resulting in the demolition of some blocks and the establishment of an urban plan by the CNERU with the aim of transforming the district into a political-administrative center of the capital.

3. Methodology and analysis tools

The study carried out in this research required interdisciplinary methods including a reading of the city. This study on the current state of the municipality of Belouizdad seems important to us to understand the state of the municipality, through the presentation of its geographical location and a historical overview. The application of a typo-morphology analysis tool allowed us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the neighborhood. The two studies combined helped us to define a development strategy.

3.1. Urban dynamics

The plot

The parcel of land in Belouizdad is divided into 19th century fabrics, the formation of the dominant urban fabric in the neighbourhoods is organised into 63 blocks, resulting from the French division. In addition to this regular grid, there are blocks created after 1962:

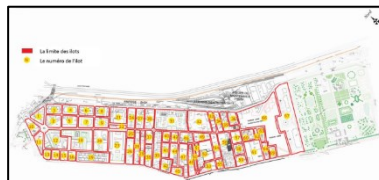


Figure 2. Parcel system map. Source: CNERU edit by author

The road

The road network of Belouizdad is intimately linked to the structure of the plot, playing a crucial role in the dynamics of the city and in the relationship between the district and its history. The Belouizdad district is organized around several major axes: the Eastern Highway, railway, the longitudinal streets Hassiba Ben Bouali, Rochai Boualem (Aissat Idir) and Mohamed Belouizdad and transversal streets Bougerpha Street, Alfred Musset Street.

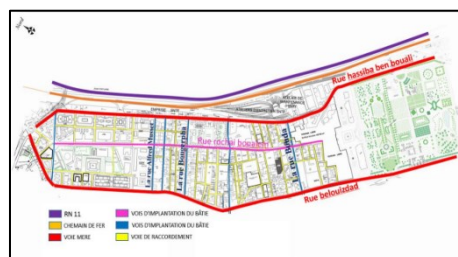


Figure 3. Roadsystem map. Source: CNERU edit by author

² Revue de l'histoire des colonies françaises, tome 19, n°80, Mars-avril 1931

The building

Due to its position in the center of the capital, the Belouizded district has a land occupation whose size is limited between the ground floor and R+3 except for a few residential buildings of the bar and tower type.

The district is home to nationwide facilities such as the National Library, Sofitel Hotel, UGTA Headquarters and the Ministry of Youth, as well as accompanying facilities. The district is largely occupied by secondary and warehousing activities unrelated to its central location.

We recorded three different situations for the state of the building. They are as follows:

- A good building condition for recent constructions.
- An average state of building for the existing facilities which date from the post-colonial era.
- A very advanced state of deterioration for the colonial-era buildings of some individual dwellings.
- Collective housing and former industrial sheds



Figure 4. Condition map. Source: CNERU edit by author

4.Results

The historical overview and analysis of the framework for the study of urban dynamics allowed us to detect the potentialities and weaknesses of the Belouizdad district, which we can summarize as follows:

Potential of the district

Central Location: Easy access to major government institutions and business districts, making it an area of geographical importance.

- Functional Diversity: The district displays functional diversity, with residential, commercial and industrial areas.
- Architectural Diversity: Architectural variety, from colonial buildings to modern constructions, adds richness to the urban fabric.
- Renovation potential: a potential for revitalization with underused buildings and land that could be transformed into modern and functional spaces.

Neighborhood Weak Points

- Industrial Heritage: The presence of old warehouses and declining industrial facilities in some parts of the neighborhood creates challenges for reuse, as they often require costly decontamination.
- Traffic Issues: Despite its central location, the neighborhood suffers from traffic problems, especially during rush hour, which hurts its attractiveness to residents and investors.
- Deteriorating buildings: Part of the historic buildings of the district are in an advanced state of deterioration, requiring significant rehabilitation intervention.
- Fragmented Occupation: Fragmented occupation of parts of the neighborhood creates underutilized areas, which hinders the efficiency of space use.
- Buildings in a state of wasteland: Abandoned sheds and warehouses constitute an industrial wasteland that requires reflection on their reuse.
- Lack of Certain Facilities: The municipality of Belouizdad suffers from the lack of certain essential facilities, which can affect the quality of life of residents and the attractiveness of the neighborhood, such as leisure facilities and green spaces.

4.Discussion

Urban revitalization is one of the approaches that is most interested in urban neighborhoods that are in distress, it aims to establish a diagnosis of the sectors and then to identify priority and structuring actions. Through the analytical strategy, which made it possible to draw up a diagnosis of the neighbourhood's potential and weaknesses. This diagnosis thus determines dysfunctions at the level of the municipality, we distinguish:

- 1-A pressing need for leisure facilities, public spaces and green spaces to improve the attractiveness and urban vitality of the district,
- 2-The state of deterioration of the housing is a concern of the residents, who stress the need for a revitalization of existing housing (urban renewal and/or rehabilitation),

3-Urban revitalization is also recommended in the face of road congestion, the deterioration of buildings and the need for equipment,

4-Urban revitalization emerges as a response from our research findings and the concerns of the inhabitants. This convergence leads us to reflect on collaboration between residents and authorities to implement effective revitalization projects.

5-It is important to establish partnerships between local authorities, urban planners and community actors to ensure the success of revitalization.

5. Conclusion

The Belouizdad district offers interesting potential for urban revitalization due to its central location, functional diversity and varied architectural heritage. However, it faces challenges related to industrial heritage, traffic, deterioration of buildings and fragmentation of occupation.

A strategic approach to revitalization should capitalize on strengths while effectively addressing weak points to create a vibrant and attractive neighborhood.

Urban revitalization is an opportunity that can transform this district into a dynamic place to live, meeting the needs of its population while preserving its historical capital. The desire expressed by the local community in favour of urban revitalisation reinforces the conviction that this approach can be a lever for positive development to create a dynamic and inclusive neighbourhood.

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