



BOOK REVIEWS

L'architecture et l'urbanisme au Maghreb aux XIX-XX siècles: Cas d'Alger (1800–2000) by *Mustapha Ben-Hamouche*, Medina Foundation, Blida, Algeria, 2018, 238 pp. ISBN 978-9931-9475-0-9.

This collection of essays in French by Mustapha Ben-Hamouche constitutes a compendium of historical knowledge on architecture and urban planning in Algiers. Though centred on the last 2 centuries, the work considers the Algerian capital's tumultuous urban history within its broader historical and cultural contexts, and through three periods: before, during and after colonialism.

The first part, dedicated to the pre-colonial period, explores, in three chapters, the cultural sources of Muslim architecture, the succession of architectural traditions that have marked city development, and the urban tissue forms. In chapter one, Ben-Hamouche specifies what should be understood by the all-encompassing expression *Islamic Architecture*. He contends that this term refers to the methods by which the built environment, the material expression, and the lived space (*espace vécu*) respond to the general principles, requirements, recommendations and teachings of Islam (p. 19). Since no explicit prescriptions pertain to the built environment, as such, Muslim architecture is expressed in a wide variety of traditions that have their roots in pre-Islamic material cultures. The second chapter considers the sedimentation that has resulted from the ruling of successive dynasties in North Africa from the seventh to the nineteenth century, notably the *Futuhates*, whose arrival marked the inception of early Muslim's religious imprint on the built environment. The following chapter details a complex morphogenetic process, of reworking and maturation of building and development practices informed by religious

beliefs as well as emerging cultural norms, legal customs, and technical know how.

The following part is divided into six chapters that explore chronologically the impacts of colonization on architecture and urbanism. The decade 1830–1840, including the military capture of Algiers, marks a historical turning point in the material culture, arising especially from new security constraints and the expression of a new colonial order. This new 'disciplinary' architecture is manifested in particular in the formal ordering of the façades, the frank geometry of the streets, and the monumental scale of the buildings. The period includes the origin of a hybrid architecture that mixes colonial architecture and the local heritage. During the 1840–1880 period, architecture becomes a tool of colonization, marking the domination of both places and inhabitants, punctuated by attempts at pacification with the creation of new cities. The following decade marks a shift and includes the transition from military to civil rule. The neoclassical style of colonial architecture gives way to different currents, including the neo-mystical and the revival of Islamic arts. The art of architecture is considered to be declining during this period. Architects are adopting an eclectic neo-Moorish language, which translates into assorted collections of façades separated from each other in the city. In the 1900–1930 period there is a surge in winter tourism, and the rise of the notion of historical preservation, in the wake of the centenary 'celebration' of the colonization. The natives are not consulted though, as their local vernacular architectural tradition is being reconsidered as a component of an imperial culture. Between 1930 and 1945, the municipal administration expands and initiates reflections on the outcomes of the implementation of the initial plans of urbanism between 1900 and 1930. The development of neighbourhoods had occurred in the absence of

communal plans, which was deemed problematic. The adoption of the zoning, perceived as a magical tool of modern planning, led to segregation of major urban functions, such as industry, recreation and trade. Le Corbusier's famous iterations of the OBUS plan (1932–1942), conceived as an alternative to the Algiers master plan, have become a source of inspiration for modern Algerian architects. This marks the beginning of a new stage in colonial architectural history in Algeria, with the introduction of a new material: reinforced concrete. In the period after the Second World War, from 1945 to 1962, the housing question came to the fore in the context of rapid demographic growth. As an answer to the surge of slums around the city, large low-rent housing estates were systematically built. However, these types of housing were judged unsuitable for the native population, which triggered some experimentations, from architects such as Pouillon and Simmonet, aimed at combining Western and indigenous architectural traditions for the creation of new housing forms.

The last part of the book consists of a chapter concerned with the 1962–2000 post-colonial period. In spite of the departure of the settlers, the built environment inherited from the colonial period continued to shape the society, as a field of confrontation arose between the natives and a colonial space not designed for them. The first triennial development plan of 1967–1970 reflects such tensions, while attempting to establish a new urban system, including the industrialization of the construction sector, based on socialist ideals. However, the progressive ideology of the period has not been kind to architectural heritage, leading to further degradation of the traditional built environment.

Recently, the revival of a market economy has instigated a new phase of urban development. Algiers has been transformed into an architectural laboratory, where large firms are solicited to conceive 'prestigious projects'. The status of the rich architectural heritage of Algiers remains in flux. The preservation of vernacular architecture requires massive investments, while the colonial heritage is often seen as a cultural burden, rather than as an asset. It places the unresolved issues of cultural identity at the forefront of urban planning discussions.

Though essentially based on secondary sources, this book brings clarity to the intricate and rich architectural history of Algiers and the Maghreb. The abundance of ancient and contemporary examples set in their contexts sheds new light,

while opening new avenues for the understanding of this unique city. This work will benefit those teaching and studying in the fields of architecture and planning.

Benoumeldjadj Maya, Faculty of Earth Sciences and Architecture, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, University Oum El Bouaghi, Route de Constantine, PO Box 358, 04000 Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria. Email: mayalabed@gmail.com

Teaching Urban Morphology, edited by *Vitor Oliveira*, Springer International Publishing, Cham, Switzerland, 2018, 338pp. ISBN 978-3-319-76125-1.

Editor and contributing author Vitor Oliveira captures a rich spectrum of disciplinary perspectives in the multi-authored book *Teaching Urban Morphology*. The book's diverse portfolio of theory and pedagogy, as professed by a distinguished field of faculty, fulfils an important need for a core resource to support teaching the multidimensional subject to an equally diverse audience of students.

The book's eighteen chapters are organized as three sections in response to the overarching questions: why teach, what to teach, and how to teach urban morphology. Both the collective work and, to varying degrees, individual chapters examine these three questions through the lens of each contributor's area of academic expertise.

Part 1 directly addresses the question of 'why teach urban morphology?' from the viewpoints of geographers Michael Barke and M. R. G. Conzen (edited by J. W. R. Whitehand), urban planners Tolga Ünlü and Meta Berghauer Pont, and architects Giancarlo Cataldi and Nicola Marzot. Barke's opening chapter offers an expansive view of underlying motivations for teaching the subject. Epistemologically, urban morphology seeks to explain formative and transformative processes and the spatial structure of towns and cities. An enriched understanding of urban development contributes to a student's ability to 'interpret layers of meaning that are invested in townscapes' and to develop more integrative 'ways of seeing' (p. 12). By cultivating heightened awareness, urban morphology enhances student capacity to become better stewards of inherited built environments. Practical relevance resides in urban morphology's role to better inform design and planning processes