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THE PROBLEM OF CLASSIFICATION OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN ALGERIA: THE CASE OF THE AGHA PALACE IN FERDJIOUA

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ABSTRACT

Algeria has a rich cultural heritage, but the heritage classification process is still flawed. There are indeed historical monuments that have benefited from the classification process, but in reality have been neglected, such as the Agha Palace in Ferdjioua. The reflection focuses on this type of classified monuments, highlighting the importance of heritage enhancement in Algeria. We try to compare the current state of the monument with the effects normally induced by the procedure of its classification, in order to detect incompatibilities in the process of its patrimonialisation. In order to propose a revaluation of the palace through a new strategic vision of its conservation, this monument must be able to acquire an economic value and a social role with a significant impact, ensuring its sustainability by associating the user with the value of the most appropriate use.

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I. Introduction.

For thousands of years, Algeria has inherited a rich and diverse cultural and natural legacy. This heritage constitutes a varied heritage and an important basis for the construction of identities. It "expresses a particular relationship between a legally defined group and certain very concrete material goods: a space, a treasure, or even less" (Chastel A 1985, pp 67-82). Some of this legacy has been classified: around five hundred and fifty national sites and monuments (Oulabsir N 2004, p13). Despite efforts to preserve and enhance this heritage, some sites remain completely neglected, suffering from the ravages of time and human action.

Thus, a historical monument is considered to be "any architectural creation, isolated or grouped, which bears witness to a particular civilisation, a significant development or a historical event" (Bailly G.H., 1975, p. 12). These monuments are promoted through the classification process, which is the most appropriate approach for the protection and promotion of heritage under the aegis of the heritage authority.

The notion of heritage, with its component parts, in particular historic monuments, has been defined through various doctrines and international charters. The investigations carried out reveal that Algeria has long neglected its heritage because of urgent issues such as poverty and economic and industrial development, which it had to face after independence. It is only recently that it has taken an

interest in preserving its heritage. Decree no. 67-281 of 20 December 1967, concerning excavations and the protection of historical and natural sites and monuments, was mainly the result of the urgent need to provide Algeria, after its independence, with a national heritage. legislative framework to preserve and prevent any deterioration of its historical, artistic and archaeological heritage¹.

Since this decree was issued, a whole legal arsenal has been put in place to protect the country's heritage. However, Algerian legislation on heritage and its management lags behind international legislation. It has many shortcomings due to the fact that it is based on French laws from the colonial period. These laws are out of step with the political, social, economic and cultural realities of Algeria. In fact, what is prejudicial is the inconsistency of the texts in relation to the massive, rapid and anarchic urbanisation of the whole country and in relation to the evolution of regional planning and the new laws that organise it (Benseddik.Souki.H, 2012, pp 44-72).

Law 98-04 on the protection of cultural heritage provides a reference framework for the development of action plans and strategies by the Algerian Ministry of Culture, and is currently being revised. This revision will make it possible to evaluate the contributions and shortcomings of the existing legislative framework. Two lines of thought are proposed:

1. Knowledge of the heritage: consists of exploring the state of university research on the architectural heritage in Algeria. The inventory of architectural heritage was drawn up by the colonial heritage administration, the effects of which persisted until the 1990s. The Ministry of Culture considered it useful and essential to make the necessary adjustments to rebuild a standardised and exhaustive inventory and cataloguing tool.
2. Work on architectural heritage: the aim is to give paramount importance to the training, prerogatives and fields of action of heritage architects. This concerns both project management and managerial management in project management.

The 1998 law marked a significant turning point in heritage protection. It paved the way for the implementation of a genuine heritage policy. This law clarified concepts and established a detailed vision of heritage, leading to the creation of heritage management bodies at executive level. The subject of heritage is no longer reserved solely for exceptional and prestigious objects, but is identified through the notion of "property", which refers to any object that bears witness to the civilisation and culture of a society. This cultural property includes (law 98-04, article 3) immovable cultural property, movable cultural property and intangible cultural property. With the concept of immovable cultural property, Algerian legislation marks a clear departure from the strict and nominative definition of historical monuments and sites already provided by Ordinance 67-281. By recognising these different forms of heritage, Algeria is seeking to preserve and enhance its cultural heritage in all its diversity.

The procedure for classifying historic monuments in Algeria is governed by laws and decrees designed to protect these sites of cultural importance. Occupation and use of historic monuments must comply with conservation standards and require prior authorisation from the Ministry of Culture. The necessary authorisations, technical controls and consultations are in place to guarantee the preservation and conservation of this national heritage.

This definitive protection measure for historic monuments is of great importance for the preservation and enhancement of our cultural heritage. Classification confers legal protection on historic monuments, preventing their deterioration, destruction or misuse. Listed monuments bear witness to our history, culture and identity. Preserving them helps to pass on this heritage to future generations. These monuments attract national and international visitors, stimulating cultural and economic tourism. Owners of listed properties can benefit from tax advantages, such as tax reductions, in exchange for their commitment to restoring and maintaining these monuments.

On the other hand, this protection procedure has certain constraints. Owners of listed monuments must comply with strict rules on renovation, restoration and use. Restoring and maintaining historic monuments can be costly, especially for private owners. The classification process involves administrative procedures and in-depth studies, which can discourage some owners. The observation made in the field when exploring certain monuments is that, despite classification, some historic monuments remain threatened by neglect, vandalism or natural disasters. This is a process that requires a balance between protection and practical realities.

I.1. Exploring the procedure for classifying a historic monument, the case of the Agha Palace in Ferdjioua.

The region of Ferdjioua is an Algerian territory rich in historical remains: the Agha Palace, the Red Prison, the ancient Roman baths such as the Ouled Achour and Béni Guecha baths, the Labibet baths, the Ouled Sidi Cheikh Etl a zaouia baths of El Bellaria, near Tassaadane. These and many other historical monuments are the heritage and glory of the people of Ferdjioua. The palace of the Agha or "Djnane El Hakem" is a historical monument classified by the Algerian authorities. It was declared a national monument in 1998 by a ministerial decree published in the Official Journal No. 20. Despite this recognition as a heritage to be protected and enhanced, the Agha Palace has been neglected and is in a state of constant deterioration.

Despite its classification, this monument has not received effective attention and has been neglected, highlighting the importance of the heritage conservation process adopted by the Algerian authorities. The aim of this operation is to highlight the roots and history of the people of Ferdjioua. It is essential to preserve and maintain the site as a witness to its history and identity. The enhancement of the Palais de l'Agha aims to create a consensus between the political discourse, supported by a legal framework, and an effective, sustainable and integrated heritage process for this palace and other national heritage sites at risk.

I.1.1. Presentation of the monument.

The Agha Palace, also known as Djnane el Hakem or El Bordj, is a key building in the city's identity, with historical, symbolic and legitimising values. A descriptive architectural approach will highlight its artistic and symbolic value. An analysis of the monument's current state will allow us to assess the way in which its spaces have been appropriated and the various disturbances it has suffered. In fact, it is the object of study of this research that reveals the dysfunctions in the heritage process undertaken by the Algerian state. The aim of this work is to find the best strategy or even the necessary measures to be taken in order to take better care of it and enhance its value.

I.1.2. Historical context of the monument.

The history of the region has been written by the passage of several civilisations, but it was the Ottomans who left their deepest mark on the region. The Agha Palace, which stands in the centre of Ferdjioua, is a fine example of Muslim architecture. It was the seat of the head of the region, appointed by the Bey of Constantine. Declared a National Heritage Site a few years ago, in fact since 1998, this palace has witnessed most of the events that have marked this period. During the colonial period, the Agha Palace was the headquarters of the French authorities. It was built on the site of Bouakkaz's stables when he was Sheikh of Ferdjioua. This palace was first known as the headquarters of the Arabs after 1881. It was renamed after the creation of the mixed commune of Fedj Mzala. After 1929, it was renamed Dar el-Hakam (Governor's House) or Djenane el-Hakam (Governor's Garden) following changes made by the French authorities.

Plate 1. Presentation of the palace.



The Agha Palace and its environmental context.

Located right in the centre of Ferdjioua, the palace is the most emblematic monument of the past and present for the inhabitants of Ferdjioua.



*Picture 1. Photos of the palace during the colonial period.
The Agha Palace was called Bordj during the colonial period,
when it was the administrative headquarters of the French authorities.
This photo dates from 1884.*

Source: APC Ferdjioua 2012.

The colonial administration made use of this built up area, which is also of great beauty. It was finally restored and extended for the first time in 1929. With 800 m² of buildings and 2,000 m² of gardens, the palace has a ground floor, a first floor with a terrace and balconies overlooking the city, a courtyard and numerous cellars that were used as ammunition depots. According to historians, in the mid-1940s the Agha Palace served as a refuge for agents of the colonial administration. They barricaded themselves behind its heavy, hermetically sealed doors to protect themselves from the uprising in neighbouring villages in response to the massacres of 8 May 1945 in Sétif, Guelma, Kherrata and other parts of the country¹.

Since 1998, the building has been known as the Palais de l'Agha, a reference to Hadj Ahmed Bouakkaz Benachour, the former Agha and Sheikh of Ferdjioua from 1834 to 1864. However, this name has yet to be verified, as no one knows exactly where Bouakkaz resided. According to the facts and testimonies of the inhabitants of Ferdjioua, Bouakkaz lived in a palace built on Ottoman ruins near the Benachour baths. However, the testimonies of certain writings in the APC documents confirm that Bouakkaz Benachour, Agha of Ferdjioua, built the palace on Ottoman ruins in 1884. It was the French who modified it during the restoration of 1929.

¹According to documents provided by the Department of Culture in the wilaya of Mila, January 2012.

Plate 2. Acces Du Palais.



Access to the palace during the colonial period

The access was marked by extensive vegetation on both sides.



Current access to the palace

Lack of maintenance has meant that the garden has lost its importance, with a remarkable reduction in greenery.









Source: APC Ferdjioia 2012.

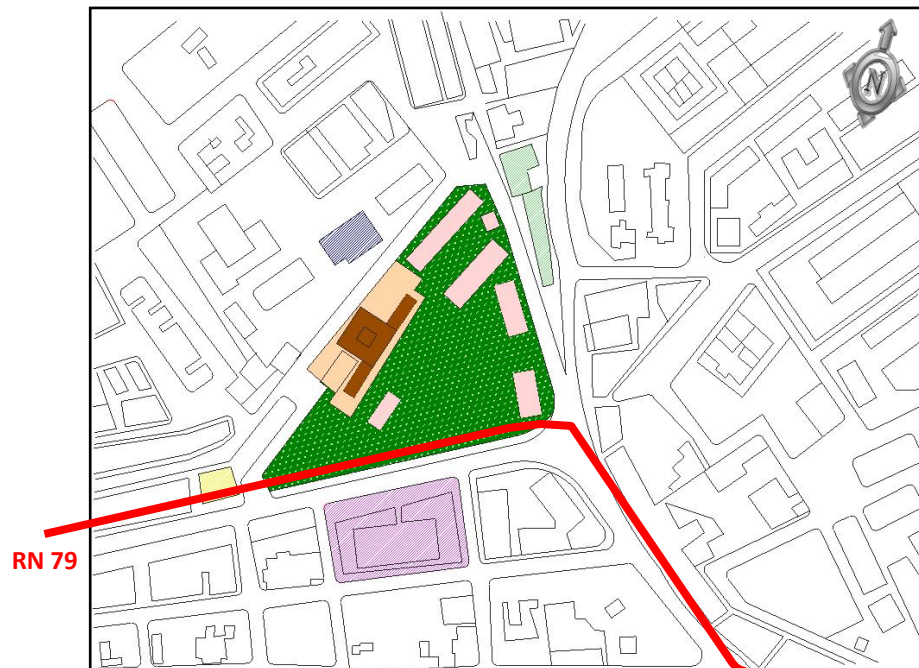
I.1.3. The Agha Palace in its territorial and urban context.

Located in the centre of the town of Ferdjioia, the palace occupies a triangular island surrounded by roads, in particular the RN 79, which links Ferdjioia to Constantine on the one hand and Sétif on the other. This location gives it a strategic position and easy access. With its remarkable location, its massing and its garden, the monument is surrounded by the town's main buildings: the town hall to the east, the courthouse to the south, the mosque and the CEM to the north and the Maison des Jeunes to the west. It is worth noting that the CEM, built in the 1990s, occupies a large part of the garden of the El Agha palace.

Plate 3. Immediate surroundings of the Palais.

LEGEND

-  The palace
-  1st extensions
-  2nd extensions
-  -The garden
-  Youth centre
-  Mosque
-  APC
-  Justice palace



The palace is surrounded by administrative facilities and forms the heart of the city.

Source: Google 2007. Treatment Authors.

Composed of a simple cubic volume in the central part, surrounded by two small parallelepipeds, the central monument has four levels. It consists of a basement and two floors that cover the entire surface: the ground floor, the first floor and finally the fourth floor, which occupies only part of the floor. The building has undergone several transformations, with some parts covered by terraces and others by scaffolding. First, the construction of the enclosure itself, which was the governor's residence, constituted the palace of Sheikh Ahmed Bouakaz in 1834. In 1929, the monument was restored and the first floor was added. The entrances were fortified with iron gates. Initially, the garden was sown and planted with plants and trees, but it suffered the same fate when it was neglected and abandoned.

In a second phase, two wings were added to the palace. This part of the palace is now used by the Scouts. A row of palm trees was also added to the ensemble, as well as a row of cobblestones leading to a fountain built opposite the door of the former governor's residence. However, the garden, with its large area, was coveted by several administrations. It wasn't until 1990 that the local authority allowed the Ministry of Education to build a CEM in the northern part, reducing the total area. The most recent change was the construction of a MATECO (sports field) for the CEM in the centre of the garden, next to the fountain and close to the palace.

I.2. The uses of the Palais.

From the time it was built to the present day, the palace has had a number of uses, each of which has given it a different status, starting with:

Administrative headquarters.

This monument, with its refined Muslim architecture, was the headquarters of the Sheikh of Ferdjioua, Ahmed Bouakaz, appointed head of the Ferdjioua region by Ahmed Bey of the Eastern Beylicate in 1834, and later became the headquarters of the local administrator under French colonial rule. The colonial administration, which took advantage of the beauty of the area, restored it for the first time in 1881 by Resolution No. 7. This restoration was the first conservation measure. In fact, it was its function as administrative headquarters that obliged the colonists to maintain and restore the palace. The usefulness of the palace meant that it had to be preserved. In fact, in 1929, the palace underwent major consolidation work in order to maintain it.

A centre for the children of the chauhadas¹.

In accordance with the decree of 20 March 1968, the Minister for Former Moudjahidines and Social Affairs, on the proposal of the Secretary General of the Prefecture, decided in article 01 to allocate the administrative building known as the "Bordj" to the creation of a centre for the children of Shouhadas, with a surface area of 10,500 m², of which 841 m² is covered. Furthermore, in article 2, it was decided that this building would be placed under the aegis of the estate services as of right from the day it ceased to be used, as indicated in the previous article.

Currently used as the municipal library.

Part of the ground floor is currently used as the town library. It consists of a reading room and an upstairs room used by the library's night watchman. The buildings adjacent to the palace, which were used as ammunition depots during the colonial period, are now occupied by a number of organisations, including the offices of the ADE, the Boy Scouts and others for various purposes. This part of the palace is in an advanced state of disrepair due to lack of maintenance. The users are not concerned about the state of the building.

¹documents from the national archives, letter N 68-010, office 5, division 4, Constantine prefecture.

Plate 4. The Uses Of The Palace.



The reading room on the ground floor of the building.



Access to the CEM and the Palais



Premises squatted by various administrative agencies.

The various areas shown in the photographs have been given new uses in relation to their original function, in addition to the fact that the EMC has been set up in the palace garden itself. A real breach of monument protection.

Source: Authors in June 2011.

II. Approach methodology and analysis tools.

In order to dispel the ambiguity raised by the classification procedure for the Agha Palace, the methodology adopted is based firstly on a theoretical framework for the process of heritage enhancement of a historic monument and its management. In fact, the operations for the enhancement of listed monuments are based on historical knowledge of the latter, highlighting their origin, construction method and style, etc. The historical approach to the Agha Palace helps to bring out the key elements. It highlights the various changes and occupations that have taken place within the heritage site and its immediate surroundings.

Architectural analysis is essential to understand the different spaces within the monument and how they are distributed. This analysis is a prerequisite for any improvement work. It highlights the sensitive architectural points of the building. The main tools used in this analysis are an exhaustive study based on a detailed architectural survey of the plan and its components, and a complete illustration using photographs to identify the criteria for classifying the monument.

It is therefore necessary to carry out a monographic study of the palace in order to identify the elements of permanence of the palace, while noting the various disturbances that exist in it. The surveys will make it possible to reproduce all the architectural and structural details, as well as the various cracks, alterations and anomalies. The work is complemented by photographs of the building as a whole and of details, forming a valuable first-hand documentation base that is essential for any restoration work carried out on this listed monument: the Agha Palace.

At the end of this study, the implications of the listing are highlighted. The classification of this monument is intended to provide a budget and actions to improve and preserve it. It is therefore important to highlight the shortcomings of legal protection, which is ineffective if it is not accompanied by real and effective action. The summary of this research concludes with the presentation of possible recommendations.

II.1. Approche architecturale du palais de l'Agha.

The architectural approach, through surveys of the different levels and cross-sections of the facades, together with the photographic montage, allowed us to gain a better understanding of the palace, from its functional organisation to its architectural details. The first visual contact with the palace aroused a passion for it. A first visit based on observation was followed by a photo session of all the rooms and details, so that the first sensations could be remembered.

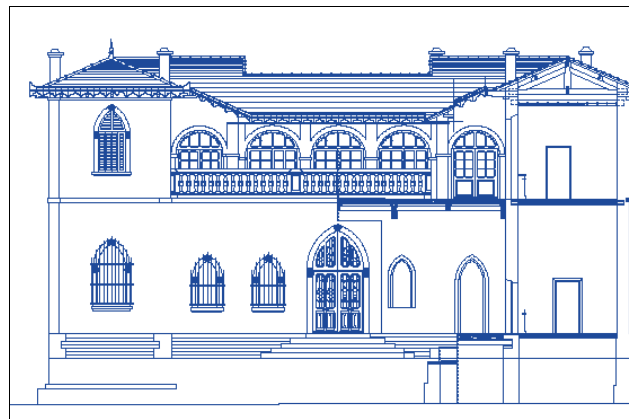
II.1.1. Architectural survey.

Plate 5. Architectural survey of the Palace facades.



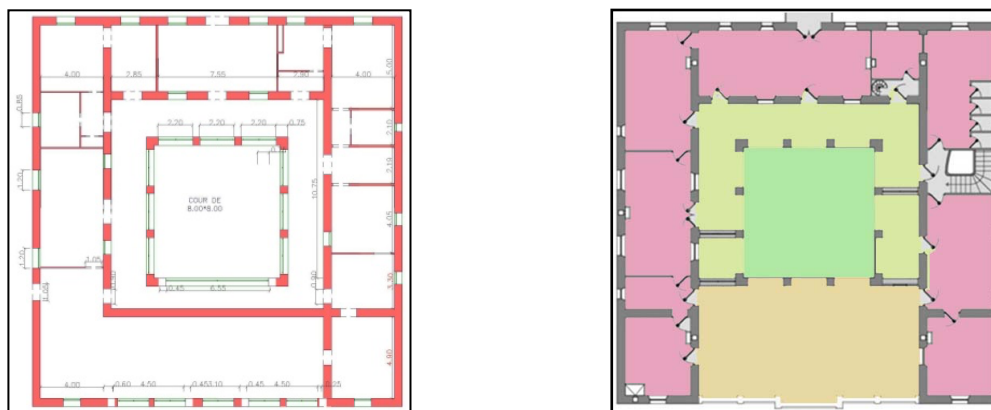
Source: author January 2012.

Plate 6. Patio level façade cut-off.



Source: author January 2012.

Plate 7. Ground and first floor plans.



Source: author January 2012.

II.2. Recording of disorders.

Humidity.

Like all ancient monuments, the palace has suffered the ravages of time. Moisture has been the cause of a number of problems. In fact, dampness caused by rainwater infiltration has caused cracks and delaminations in the concrete of the caisson slab, visible to the naked eye. This type of damage has affected the reading room and the archivist's office, as these areas are located below the terrace. At the same time, parts of the roof of the newly built toilet block have fallen off. As a result of the concrete detachment, rusty beams can be seen under the staircase leading to the upper floor.

Plate 8: desordes survey.



Cracks and detachment of the concrete under the stairwell leading to the upper floor.



Cracks and detachment of the concrete in the new sanitary block.



Deterioration of the roof in the the circulation area leading to the staircase.



Cracks in the caisson slab in the reading room.



Detachment of roof cladding and solid brick due to dampness.



Visible damp on the roof of the gallery.

Source: Authors June 2012.

The architectural study carried out beforehand revealed many disturbances and imperfections in the palace building on the one hand, and in the garden and natural surroundings on the other.

Due to the deplorable condition of the wooden framework caused by rainwater infiltration, the entire wooden framework had to be replaced and a waterproof film applied to ensure that it and the ceiling were watertight.

It is essential to restore the value of chimneys, which are a decorative element that conveys many historical values.

Re-sealing of the underside of the terrace and renovation of the ceilings on the ground floor throughout the building.

All the tiling on the ground and first floors will be replaced, as will the ironwork, handrails and balustrades on the various staircases and windows.

The solutions to enhance the garden are far-reaching, starting with the removal of the sports field in the centre, the resurfacing of the paving, the restoration of the fountain, the planting of trees and shrubs, and the removal of other additions considered to be intrusive and detrimental to its conservation.

Redeveloping the natural environment of the Palais to resolve the issue of approach and visibility.

As a listed monument, the Agha Palace should, firstly, benefit from definitive protection and, secondly, its conservation should lead to a rehabilitation operation to enhance its value. However, the state of the site has shown that the law has been broken by the construction of the CEM in the middle of the palace grounds. The entire area occupied by this facility needs to be reclaimed. Consequently, a site for a CEM should be selected using the urban development areas identified in the PDAU for the Ferdjioua commune.

III. Discussion and results.

The Agha Palace highlighted the importance of the 'use' of a heritage property after it has been listed. The function assigned to a heritage property after it has been listed plays a crucial role in its maintenance and long-term survival. The wrong choice of use can lead to deterioration. In fact, the palace served as the administrative headquarters and residence of the governor. Its maintenance was therefore the responsibility of those who used it during the colonial period. The restoration work carried out by the colonists is evidence of this. It should be noted that the role of the users of the built environment is paramount. As far as the maintenance of the building in good condition is concerned, the awareness of the users in favour of the conservation of the heritage is an essential factor.

However, the transfer of this heritage site from one company to another and the change in ownership meant that its users were no longer the same. The deterioration began when the use of the palace's spaces became arbitrary and indiscriminate. As the palace was listed, the municipality became the owner. The municipality should have more prerogatives to manage the palace and decide on its use. However, due to a lack of financial resources and experience in heritage conservation, the monument was left to its own devices and neglected.

The Agha Palace has undergone tremendous changes from its inception to the present day. The architectural approach was undertaken with the sole aim of identifying and proving the existence of a series of disturbances and excesses committed against this listed national monument. These alterations and disturbances undermine its classification, which was intended to ensure its maintenance and conservation. However, since it was listed, a number of things have gone wrong with it, including:

1. The isolation of the palace: a fence was built around the palace. Although this reinforces the unitary and monumental character of the palace, it only serves to cut it off from its surroundings and even from the rest of the city. Its relationship with the rest of the city's historic ensemble is non-existent. It highlights the difficulty of applying the law on the servitude of the surroundings, which is a necessity for any listed monument, in accordance with article 17 of law 04-98 on the criterion of visibility.
2. Encroachment on the palace grounds: the CEM building has taken over part of the garden, thus encroaching on the monumental ensemble formed by the monument and its garden. This building is currently causing real damage to the area around the palace. It calls into question the classification of the Djenne El Hakem garden, contrary to the recommendations of the Florence Charter for Historic Gardens.
3. The palace contains historical and cultural facts that are being lost due to lack of maintenance and careless use of space. The palace has a cellar that is no longer accessible. It connects the palace directly to the Red Prison. According to some locals, it was Sheikh Bouakkaz's secret passage to the prison.
4. In fact, many of the historical facts contained in this palace should be preserved for the memory of the Ferdjioui people. The current use of the palace, which is ill-considered and inappropriate, is gradually erasing the history of the place, the town and its inhabitants. These historical facts give the Ferdjioua region a special character of which its inhabitants are proud.

In reality, the lessons learnt from the case study of the Agha Palace show that the stages that make up any process of heritage designation of monuments in Algeria (selection, justification, conservation, presentation) were not respected. The decision to list the Agha Palace was purely political. It was taken after the introduction of law 04-98. The aim was to protect it. However, the process was not followed up.

In order to define the selection criteria, an expert assessment had to be carried out prior to the operation. Next, a diagnosis of the condition of the palace would be required to justify the project, and finally, a financial sacrifice in terms of time (a very large number of working hours) and, of course, the start of the conservation operation. After that, we will have to think about assigning a function to it, because the change of use is an important stage that should involve technicians, civil society and the local authorities.

The latter work together to take ownership of the monument in question and to promote it through the media so that it can finally be rehabilitated. Training qualified restoration staff and raising public awareness are the links in the heritage chain that need to be strengthened in Algeria.

In order to ensure that the process of heritage management leads to the enhancement of historic monuments, we need to think about the way in which these monuments are supervised. At the local level, specific political and technical management tools need to be put in place and the role of the municipalities (APC) in decision-making processes relating to heritage needs to be strengthened. In fact, each commune must set up a body with the following functions:

Developing a strategy to implement national policy at local level;

Coordination between the various government departments concerned (ministries of culture, town planning and housing, trade, crafts, tourism, social affairs, etc.) and local authorities.).

Involve stakeholders, civil society and local communities as far upstream as possible in operations and projects, and maintain this involvement throughout the process.

Giving the local authority greater prerogatives in the management of its assets.

IV. Conclusion.

The study of the Agha Palace led to an assessment of its classification. The main focus of the study was the state of neglect of this historic monument, despite the fact that it has been listed for twenty years. The main causes of the Agha Palace's classification were identified, highlighting the lack of rigour and inexperience in the implementation of laws and heritage procedures.

However, a policy based solely on legislative criteria is limited to the legal framework without having a real impact on society and, above all, on the effective management of the heritage on the ground, which in the meantime leads to the decay of the heritage, which is a fragile asset, especially historical monuments. Training and awareness-raising through the media are essential actions that must urgently be linked to heritage enhancement procedures in order to guarantee its long-term survival through the participation of the whole of society, particularly the inhabitants and citizens of the city in question.

Our research has confirmed that in order to preserve and transmit the meaning and value of a cultural asset, it is necessary to reflect on the attitude to be adopted towards that asset and to allocate the financial and human resources with the professional skills that will enable conservation activities to succeed, in particular the valorisation of heritage. In fact, heritage is not conserved to preserve it, but to give it a new lease of life through the "use value" that society places on it. In fact, the use of a conserved property could enhance and preserve the heritage value of the palace or reduce it by accelerating its deterioration.

Secondly, it is necessary to define an appropriate strategy for the heritage conservation process. The various stages of the heritage conservation process need to be identified and explained in terms of the social context in which heritage conservation activities take place if they are to be successful. Through the heritage conservation process, a historic monument can be classified. This act of protection is a legal process designed to protect the heritage, nationally or internationally, from the vagaries, arbitrariness, improvisation and ill-considered or abusive use of the asset.

It is therefore maintained and monitored by specialised teams under the supervision of the ministerial departments responsible for heritage. In addition to the reflections it has provoked, the study of the process of heritage enhancement reveals the existence of a close and constantly renewed link between the concept of heritage and that of local authorities. The State and civil society join forces and coordinate their actions in order to develop and safeguard the heritage.

A policy of decentralisation is urgently needed: it must be real and effective. Consideration must be given to the role of heritage bodies, the management and administration of this heritage and the funding of heritage enhancement projects. It is imperative to think carefully about the function of these monuments once they are listed, as their use values will have a major socio-economic impact. The use of a monument is its soul, giving it a life of its own and enabling it to play a leading role in the city and in present and future social life.

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