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# THE URBAN MODERNIZATION OF THE CITY OF ALGIERS, WHAT TOOLS?

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#### ABSTRACT

Being the result of a state voluntarism, traditional planning, which has for a long time forged urban development in Algeria, has proved to be an ineffective tool. Lacking the major urban strategies capable of creating considerable endogenous development, it has generated human settlements with landscapes of lesser urban quality, if not unpleasant. Its failure and obsolescence have led to the adoption of new urban planning practices, in this case: the project approach. With the advent of globalisation, major urban projects or major structural and emblematic projects have met with a favourable response in other parts of the world, making cities more attractive and more competitive. This problem made us, in the present work, target the city of Algiers as a case study in order to identify the urban planning instruments adopted and the measures taken, in particular, the modifications made to the P.D.A.U.<sup>1</sup> for the upgrading of the capital. The aim of this work is to improve the tools of urban production of this case.

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# 1. Introduction.

This article deals with a present-day, relevant subject. It tackles the management of urban space using essentially two tools: the plan and the project. The former is defined as the *« planning document that establishes the spatial and physical guidelines of a municipality while preserving an overall vision of development and its territory»* (Gouvernement du Quebec). As for the second, that concept has its etymological origins in an old French word, "pourject", which refers to the profession of the architect. Over time, this semantic term has evolved to include devices that are part of the productive activity of human beings, whose achievement, although uncertain, may be possible. (Cros, 1992) This ancient approach by architects resurfaced in the 1970s under the name of "urban project". These years were marked by a protest movement denouncing bulldozing renovation operations targeting historic centres and old fabrics. (Pinson, 2000).

It was in this specific socio-economic and urban context, characterised by the incompatibility and inefficiency of the urban plan, that the urban project was born. (Roncayolo, 1996). In addition to these constraints, there was the shortage of funds caused by the economic crisis of the 1970s that affected developed countries. The lack of funding from the welfare state for development and construction projects prompted the authorities to emphasise the economic importance of cities and to carry out a thorough review of urban planning theories (Carriére, 2002). This is why project-based urban planning has replaced standard-based urban planning, whose practices have proved to be obsolete and out of step with the dynamics and reality of the markets (Laouissi, 2023). This renewal of town planning is based on an approach that Tétard defines as follows: « [...] *is not an additional regulatory procedure, it is an*  *approach, a working method, a strategic tool. It applies to all or part of a territory* [...] » (Tetard, 2002). According to (Tomas, 1995), (Genestier, 2012) and (Waston, 2009), the new approach is based on typomorphological analysis, and it establishes a connection between architecture, urban planning and history, as well as spatial and social contexts (Berezowska-Azzag E. , 2012). Therefore, it's a return to the composition of urban forms and their history, to culture and identity, but also to social practices (Roncayolo, 1996), (Ingalina, 2010) (Visconte, 2023).

Furthermore, it is important to specify that with this approach, the practice of urban planning is no longer limited to the creation of plans and regulations, but extends to the implementation of operational policies, the management of the plan and the monitoring of its execution (Genestier, 2012). It requires the involvement of a wide range of players throughout the development process, such as politicians, technicians and local associations. These players are involved in the decision-making, consultation and negotiation processes, as it is confronted with the expectations and constraints of each participant. It therefore breaks with the centralisation of government and its universalist vision (Jaquet, 2014). Furthermore, it is important to specify that in the project process, the decisions taken are not irreversible. *«They are therefore partial decisions, rarely definitive, which will have to be revisited, which will have to be amended.»* (Pinson G. , 2005).

The project approach has resonated with globalisation, a beneficial process for authentic global development, including economic and social development. In this process, which has become irrefutably topical, Algeria has found itself obliged to become part of it. At the outset, the aim was to review the legal arsenal and urban planning practices in order to promote cities with considerable potential. So, following the example of Algeria's major conurbations, and in line with the guidelines set out in S.N.A.T<sup>2</sup> 2030, the city of Algiers was chosen to become a driving force for competitiveness and development. The aim is to develop growth areas to make them more attractive and more competitive, for the benefit of foreign investors among others (Mathieu, 2024).

This observation prompted us to have the following questions:

• What measures have been taken and what tools have been adopted to upgrade the capital Algiers? How far does the urban planning doctrine of the project conform to the reality on the ground?

The quest to answer these questions has led to two hypotheses:

• To face the challenges and issues of metropolisation, the status of the city of Algiers must be raised to a higher rank. This cannot be achieved without an institutional and methodological renewal of urban production, or in other words, the integration of a project approach.

The centralisation of decision-making power and the marginalisation of local authorities and citizens are some of the factors that mean that the plan (P.D.A.U.), through its tools and the measures it recommends, does not fully reflect the reality on the ground.

# 2. Material and Method.

To verify the hypothesis set out in the above-mentioned problem, the approach adopted is both historical and analytical. The historical method looks to the roots of the past for clues to current events. The analytical method is based on content analysis and draws on prior knowledge and experience. The initial aim of this research was to build up a body of documentation that was essential for understanding and dealing with the subject. The collection of information was supplemented by specific documents such as maps, administrative documents and legislative texts. This preliminary stage was followed by a presentation of the case study to provide a general overview. This was followed by an exploration of the documentation concerning the management of the city by the plan according to different temporalities. Emphasis was placed not only on the changes made to the Algiers 2030 P.D.A.U. during its preparation and implementation in order to integrate a project approach, but also on the discrepancy between the 2030 P.D.A.U. project (the theoretical plan) and the reality on the ground (the operational project). The work was brought to a conclusion with a view to opening up new avenues of research.

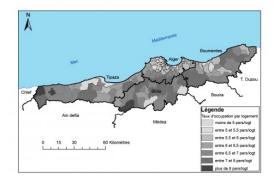
# 3. Results.

# The Persistence of the Plan in Urban Management in the City of Algiers.

Since the colonial presence, until the beginning of the 2000s, Algiers was managed on an urban level using urban planning tools. However, some attempts to change this way of making the city have emerged; unfortunately, they were unsuccessful; hence the persistence of the old instruments.

# 3.1. Presentation of the City.

Ikosium, El-Djazair and Algiers are all names given to a coastal city in northern Algeria, the largest country in Africa. The wilaya has a population of 5.7 million, spread over an area of 809 km<sup>2</sup>. The metropolitan area covers 5488 km<sup>2</sup>. Algiers, the country's administrative, political and economic capital, has a regional, North African and even Mediterranean influence (Berezowska-Azzag., 2015).



*Figure 1. Algiers' situation* Source: https://journals.openedition.org/mediterranee/7267?lang=fr.

# 3.2. The Layout of the City and the Seeds of the Urban Project.

Algiers is one of the rare cities in the world where the beauty of its natural site and its quite varied material cultural heritage attracts attention (Cohen & al, 2003). The origins of this Mediterranean city dates back to the third century BC, when the Phoenicians named it "Wyksm" - meaning "the island of seagulls". Ikosium was formed from the phonetic transcription of this Punic name. Algiers' many assets led to it being coveted and conquered by numerous travellers, including the Romans, the Vandals, the Byzantines, the Arabs and the French. Since the French presence till the present day, Algiers has been of particular interest for the power in place. It became the capital after independence and, from 1964, was destined to become a modern city (Cohen & al, 2003).

In order to achieve this, COMEDOR<sup>3</sup> drew up two plans: the planification and development plan for the Algiers conurbation, which was completed in 1970, and the general development and planning plan for Algiers (POG)<sup>4</sup> up to the year 2000, which was completed and approved in 1975. The former suggested the development of the eastern part of the bay; however, it was not completed. As for the P.O.G., its aim was to structure the existing urban fabric and extend the town eastwards in order to preserve agricultural land by creating new central areas (Bakour & al, 2015). Although this plan is part of traditional functionalist planning, it represents the foundations of the urban project because of the ideas and innovative approach it adopted. However, the implementation of the major projects proposed, which laid the foundations for the metropolisation of Algiers, led to significant urban expansion (Cohen & al, 2003).

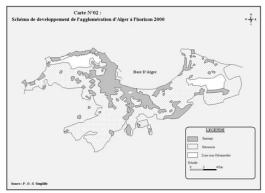


Figure N°2: The P.O.G. of Algiers. Source: http://journals.openedition.org/insaniyat/docannexe/image/481/img-2.jpg.

# 3.3. Return to the plan for effective control of urban growth.

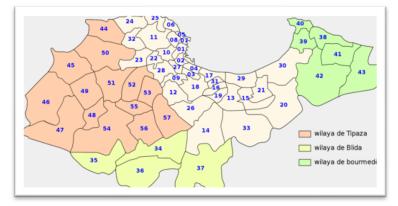
After the P. O.G. was called into question in 1979, the C.N.E.R.U.<sup>5</sup> drew up a new plan between 1981 and 1983: the P.U.D.<sup>6</sup> (Bakour & al, 2015). It sought primarily to control the capital's urban growth. Unlike the P.O.G., this plan encouraged urban growth to move towards the south-west, a hilly area that was difficult to integrate with the existing urban fabric. However, this guideline was not followed, as the eastern part was rapidly becoming urbanised (Baouni, 2009). This led to the degradation of agricultural land, the proliferation of illegal construction outside the urban perimeter and the emergence of a city outside the planned city. As a result, the strategy put in place by the Urban Development Plan had failed long before it was born.

# 3.4. The P.D.A.U.: a Reform Plan or a Reformulation of the P.U.D.?

In the 1980s, an acute economic crisis was triggered by the fall in oil prices, and it had a severe impact on a mainly rentier economy. This led, in particular, to a reduction and freeze in planning policy. These events provoked outrage in the streets, as demonstrated by the demonstrations in 1988 (Semmoud, 2015). As a matter of urgency, the government in power introduced political and economic changes. Algeria's urban history was marked by the year 1990, a period of transition from socialist to liberal rule (Cohen & al, 2003). A new urban policy was drawn up, creating a set of laws and regulations<sup>7</sup> as well as new urban planning tools: the P.D.A.U. and the P.O.S<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, the P.D.A.U. for Algiers, approved in 1995, aimed to relieve congestion in the capital's city centre and adopted the principle of centrality of its predecessor. In reality, it was simply a reworking of the Urban Development Plan.

# 3.5. A Major Urban Project: An Experiment that Aborted Long before it was Born.

Central government was encouraged by the emergence of globalisation and the desire to open up the capital to the international market, which led to a change in Algiers' administrative status (Ordonnace, 1997). The capital was elevated to the rank of GGA<sup>9</sup> governorate in 1997. This would enable it to benefit from major urban projects and significant investment to achieve the status of a Mediterranean metropolis. To realise this, it was first necessary to break with the logic of the past, which focused mainly on housing, and to give greater importance to metropolitan functions. In other words, it was a question of reconsidering the central spaces to make Algiers a multifunctional centre (Cattedra, 2010). To ensure more effective management of the city, an urban planning agency called U.R.B.A.N.I.S<sup>10</sup> was set up (Baouni, 2009). However, this initiative to develop the capital through urban projects only lasted a few years. In 2000, an ordinance was passed to put an end to the legal status of the Governorate, and the capital was renamed a wilaya (Ordonnance, 2000). It is important to emphasise that the Major Urban Project envisaged had no legal basis; it was the result of purely voluntary action on the part of the State.



*Figure 3. the communes of the G.G.A. Source: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gouvernorat\_du\_Grand-Alger.* 

# 4. Discussion.

# The Overhaul of the P.D.A.U. for the Upgrading of Algiers: A Speech or a Reality?

From the mid-2000s, and in accordance with the orientations of the S.N.A.T. (Ministère de l'intérieur), major urban projects have emerged in Algiers, appearing as a novelty in the landscape of the capital which they mark intensely. Described among other things as "mega projects" or "presidential projects", they are characterized, in particular, by their gigantism and are part of *« the register of* 

*exceptions* », in other words: urban planning of exemptions (Cattedra, 2010) and urban planning project. The latter advocates an approach which stands out from traditional planning by the in-depth changes it has introduced into the field of planning of major cities. Adopting this approach required anchoring or a foundation.

# 4.1. Regulatory, Institutional and Territorial Foundations: An Imperative Prerequisite for an Innovative Approach.

Admittedly, the economic growth of the 2000s revived the idea of transforming Algiers into a metropolis; however, the P.D.A.U. needed to be revised, as it does not correspond to liberal policy and does not encourage the creation of opportunities for national development (Berezowska-Azzag., 2015). Initially, the aim was to develop a regulatory, institutional and territorial basis. In order to achieve this, the specifications<sup>11</sup> for the creation of the P.D.A.U. of Algiers were modified. It proposed a project approach to replace the regulatory approach and emphasised the creation of a project contract within the framework of a metropolitan contract. The institutional and territorial changes focus on the transformation of 28 districts into communes and their integration into the new P.D.A.U. perimeter, which has the same boundaries as those of the G.G.A. These changes reflect, on the one hand, the desire to reorganise areas in difficulty while giving Algiers a central role, and on the other hand, the extension of the territory of the Algiers conurbation to reach a critical mass. Metropolisation is essential. (Boucherit-Kehal, 2019).

# 4.2. Strategic Objectives and a Master Plan.

The revision of the P.D.A.U. was entrusted to the Portuguese design office Parque Expo in 2006; year which coincides with the launch of the study of the development plan for Algiers Bay, for which the French agency ARTE Charpentier was in charge. The Wilaya as project owner, entrusted the coordination of these two studies to international consultant (Srir, 2022).

The aim of the initiators of the project to revise Algiers' urban development plan was to upgrade the capital after a decade of crisis and transform it into a metropolis based on a plural vision of the city. To achieve this, many players were involved. By working together and negotiating, they drew up a territorial project, i.e. the establishment of strategic objectives, reflecting local policies in a global approach (Boucherit-Kehal, 2019).

In 2009, the concepts developed by the two consultancies were given concrete form in a plan known as the Algiers Strategic Plan (P.S.D.A). Four major planning objectives or pillars were established for 2030, and they are the following: with an aim to ensure an efficient transport system, to open up the capital to the world, to develop or create green spaces for a city close to home, to preserve and enhance the natural heritage, and to preserve agricultural land. Based on these strategic objectives, six pillars of the Master Plan were defined, each grouping different themes. Fifty-nine emblematic, structuring projects, programmed on strategic sites, were the culmination of these pillars. It was necessary to facilitate the redevelopment of new urban areas in order to make the city more attractive (Berezowska-Azzag., 2015).

These were to be achieved by means of a series of planned initiatives which took place over time in four five-year development steps (revue, 2012). Each step, which, as mentioned above, includes a program to be developed and actions to be undertaken, is linked to both a particular brand image and an important event. The P.S.D.A. advocates the development of the city in its two dimensions: material and immaterial. This Way of doing things differs from the purely quantitative programming contained in traditional town planning documents (Boucherit-Kehal, 2019) (Wilaya, 2016).



Figure 4. The Master pan of Algiers. Source: https://www.scribd.com/document/691124280/Pdau-Alger-1.

# 4.3. Towards New Ways of drawing up and implementing the Urban Development Plan.

The process of drawing up and implementing the urban development plan, commonly known as the P.S.D.A.<sup>12</sup>, was highly complex and required rigorous organisation. To achieve this, the Wali (mayor) set up a steering committee. This committee based its decisions on information from its technical committees. These two committees were responsible for an organisational management approach. Thematic workshops were set up to ensure collaboration between the various skills involved. Each workshop was made up of representatives from various public bodies. This approach was at odds with the sectoral logic that was at the root of the problems and inconsistencies in the cities. In addition, another collaborative organisation was set up, called "Maison d'Alger" (House of Algiers), to encourage the involvement of residents and promote the Master Plan. However, the roles of the various players did not have the same degree of importance. The public and political players had the main role while the local authorities had only a secondary role, and citizens and professionals were simply informed at a late stage, which proves that they were sidelined (Boucherit-Kehal S., 2022). The marginalisation of local authorities shows that projects are driven by the upper echelons of the State, and their implementation inevitably requires derogations from development plans and town planning regulations (Cattedra, 2010). With its six pillars, this Master Plan explained the recommended governance model and the implementation and management of the plan to ensure the effectiveness of the projects. There were three levels of governance. The first belonged to the Algiers region. The next level was the consultative support structure, which played an essential role in consultation, decision-making and the presentation of proposals to improve the urban management process. The D.R.P.U.D.P.E.P.H.<sup>13</sup> was the third level of governance, with the "Alger métropole d'aménagement" (Algiers Metropolis Development) company. This is a public S.P.A.-type entity, created with the aim of implementing a privatisation approach to project management. Furthermore, the grouping of public players in the three levels of governance mentioned in the Master Plan bears witness to the predominance of the State in decisionmaking and project management. The absence of an arbitration structure confirms this observation (Boucherit-Kehal S., 2022).

# 4.4. Feedback on Major Structuring Projects and New Project Management Structures.

The so-called priority structuring projects are projects launched as part of concrete, priority actions intended to solve the city's urgent problems and have a knock-on effect for the whole area (Cattedra, 2010). These projects are divided into different themes (white plan, green plan, blue plan, social cohesion plan, mobility plan, and economic development plan) (Boucherit-Kehal S. &., 2019). Through this thematic distribution, the project owner seeks to strengthen the coherence of urban action (Berezowska-Azzag., 2015).

These projects are characterised by their function, size and location. They are seen as levers that can stimulate the renewal of urban areas. Their implementation has required colossal resources, particularly financial and human, as well as the use of derogations (Bouallag-Azoui, 2022). The major urban projects that have been completed or are planned include: recreational projects (redevelopment of the Bay of Algiers, etc.), new city centres, technology parks, symbolic and prestigious projects (the Great Mosque of Algiers, etc.), transport facilities and infrastructure, and new towns (Sid AbdAllah,

etc.) (Cattedra, 2010). These projects are an extension of "top-down" methods of action and urban planning. However, the steering and support mechanisms have changed. Understanding the decisionmaking system for Major Urban Projects is essential in a context marked by the injunction to internationalization despite the difficulties encountered in describing it. These difficulties are due, among other things, to the large number of players involved in different capacities in the running of the projects, and the sophistication, reinforced by the deregulation, of the functions, status and skills of the organisational structures involved. These projects are initiated by the state, which through its various institutions is both the project manager and the investor. This reflects a recentralization of the decision and the strengthening of the personalization of the decision, hence the consolidation of the decentralized powers of the state, in this case: the Wilaya. Additionally, the holding structures of major projects have seen a change with the emergence of new holdings, the structures responsible for the conduct of particular projects and the evolution of the roles of the S.E.M. These changes are signs of a desire to empower or privatise the control of the work (Cattedra, 2010). They find their justification in the fact that they want to compensate for the awfully bureaucratic mechanics of urban planning and the heaviness and rigidity of its organizational structures. The case of the Bay of Algiers is an eloquent example (Nouri-Boudiba, 2022). Moreover, the integration of Algeria into globalization has been in favour of managerial skills and the *«internationalization of project planning»*. The latter has been reflected in international capital attraction strategies and the interest of investors it has generated. This interest was fostered by the availability of land bases and derogations (Cattedra, 2010). Unlike conventional urban planning imposed, and formalized in the documents of urbanism, and which materializes the objectives of the technostructure on its territory, « planning exceptions »are shown as authorisations granted in case of need to overcome any constraints related to urban regulation. Although they circumvent the current urban rule, they allow for administrative flexibility (Bouallag-Azoui, 2022).

# 5. Conclusion.

The desire to place Algiers in the category of major metropolises has prompted the central government to rethink the design of the M.P.T.C.P. To do so, an innovative approach was advocated, which is a sine qua non condition for achieving the desired objective. This approach, which seeks to go beyond the traditional methods of urban planning, came as a response to the technocratic urbanism that advocated the plan in its technical, regulatory and rational dimensions. It is based essentially on operational strategies whose phases of action are characterized by their flexibility and evolution. It is also led by a plurality of actors who, thanks to decentralisation, do not work in a hierarchical way but rather in a transversal one. New ways of developing and implementing the project have been adopted, and new structures have been created, including the steering committee, the Algiers House and thematic workshops. With an intercommunal dimension and its master plan, the new M.P.T.C.P. of Algiers by 2030 aims to upgrade the capital in view of its modernization, metropolitan growth and internationalization. However, a review of the design and implementation process reveals that the procedures of the project approach adopted were not being implemented in a thorough manner. This approach presents some paradoxes; indeed, in some phases of the project life cycle, there is a return to traditional urban planning (the recentralization of the State) while at the same time, the reality of the land brings international investors in charge of the urban factory. Furthermore, the participation which constitutes one of the pillars of this new urbanistic doctrine was not effectively ensured. The marginalization of local authorities and citizens in certain phases of development and implementation of the P.S.D.A are witness to this. Despite these failures, a new way of thinking and making the city is developing and its complexity involves all actors of urban production, especially professionals and universities, to work collectively through scientific research in the field of urban planning with hope to making an effective contribution for the improvement of city management tools.

# Notes.

1. P.D.A.U.: Master Plan for Town and Country Planning.

2. S.N.A.T.: National Town and Country Planning Scheme.

3. C.O.M.E.D.O.R.: standing committee to study the development and organisation of the Algiers conurbation, a body reporting directly to the President.

4.The P.O.G. was adopted by ordinance no. 75-22 of 27/03/1975.

5. C.N.E.R.U.: national centre for applied urban planning studies and research.

6. P.U.D.: Master Town Planning Scheme).

7. Law no. 90-29 of 1 December 1990 on town planning and development, and law no. 90-25 of 18 November 1990 on land policy.

8. P.O.S.: Land Use Plan.

9. G.G.A: Governorate of Greater Algiers. It was created by order no. 97-15 of 31 May 1997 establishing the special status of the Greater Algiers Government.

10. U.R.B.A.N.I.S.: urban planning agency created by the G.G.A. authorities to ensure the sustainability of the development strategy adopted and its implementation.

11. The specifications were drawn up in 2006 by D.A.T.U.P.R.H .P.

12. P.S.D.A.: Algiers Strategic Development Plan

13. D.A.T.U.P.R.H.P.: Department of Regional Planning, Urban Development and Prevention and Elimination of Precarious Housing.

14. S.E.M.: Mixed Economy Company.

# Thanks, and Declaration of Interest Statement.

I would like to warmly thank all the members of the journal for agreeing to review and publish my article, and I declare that I have no conflict of interest.

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