



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher
RS Global Sp. z O.O.
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

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ARTICLE TITLE

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IN RESPONSE TO RECENT COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

ARTICLE INFO

Mohamed Amine Khenchouche, Nassima Khenchouche, Karima Benhalilou.
(2024) The Souk of El Khroub: An Economic and Social Pillar in Response to
Recent Commercial Transformations. *International Journal of Innovative
Technologies in Social Science*. 4(44). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3069

DOI

[https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4\(44\).2024.3069](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3069)

RECEIVED

22 October 2024

ACCEPTED

01 December 2024

PUBLISHED

06 December 2024

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THE SOUK OF EL KHROUB: AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PILLAR IN RESPONSE TO RECENT COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of El Khroub's urban dynamics, the traditional market (souk) continues to play a significant economic and social role, despite facing recent urban transformations and the challenges posed by contemporary development types. Over a six-month period, encompassing 52 working days of the souk (Thursdays and Fridays), we conducted an in-depth sociological survey using a detailed questionnaire with a representative sample of 400 individuals. The sample was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan method, combined with the quota sampling method (Moser & Kalton, 1971), to ensure that our sample reflected the diversity of stakeholders involved in the souk. The population was divided into four main strata: merchants, long-time visitors of the souk, local government members, and buyers. In addition to this survey, we conducted direct interviews with officials involved in the management of the souk, such as the municipal treasury officer and the current lessee of the souk, while also consulting the relevant specifications. This thorough assessment allowed us to fully understand the socio-economic characteristics and dynamics of this market.

Thus, although initially centered on livestock trade, the souk of El Khroub has lost much of its former vitality ; it remains a crucial economic hub for local businesses and an essential social gathering point, despite the lack of relevant initiatives from municipal services to invigorate it and restore its former prominence. This paper highlights the critical importance of the El Khroub souk as an economic and social space, which requires the implementation of a strategy that would ensure its prosperity and ability to face current economic challenges. Therefore, we present a scenario to address these issues.

KEYWORDS

Souk, Economic Dynamics, Livestock Trade, Local Economy, El Khroub

CITATION

Mohamed Amine Khenchouche, Nassima Khenchouche, Karima Benhalilou. (2024) The Souk of El Khroub: An Economic and Social Pillar in Response to Recent Commercial Transformations. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 4(44). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.4(44).2024.3069

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1. Introduction.

Nestled at the centre of El Khroub's urban dynamics, the traditional souk represents much more than just a marketplace; it is a living reflection of a rich cultural heritage, undeniable economic vitality, and a dense social fabric. Historically centered around livestock trade, this hub of exchange has become an economic and social pillar, bearing witness to the traditions and evolution of the local community. Yet, in the era of globalization and in the face of emerging commercial forms, the souk of El Khroub stands at a crossroads, striving to preserve its identity while adapting to contemporary demands.

The importance of the souk goes beyond mere commercial transactions : it is a place for meetings, cultural exchanges, and social cohesion (Doumane, 2023). Market days, held on Thursdays and Fridays, people from diverse social and economic backgrounds gather here, not only for shopping but also to engage in this long-standing social ritual. However, the rise of modern shopping malls and the growing digitization of commerce present significant challenges to the sustainability of this traditional model. These new commercial forms, with their promises of convenience and variety, attract a portion of the souk's usual clientele, highlighting the need for careful consideration on its future.

In response to these challenges, an in-depth sociological survey was conducted with 400 individuals representing the diverse stakeholders of the souk : merchants, long-time visitors, local government members, and buyers. This methodical approach, inspired by the works of Krejcie and Morgan, combined with quota sampling, aims to provide an accurate portrait of the perceptions, expectations, and interactions of different participants with the souk. It allows for identifying not only the challenges the souk faces but also the opportunities it holds for harmonious and sustainable development.

This paper aims to explore the results of this survey, shedding light on the current dynamics of the souk of El Khroub, the challenges posed by recent commercial trends, and the strategies that could reconcile tradition with modernity.

2. Methodology.

The objective of this sociological survey was to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics of the souk of El Khroub, in response to urban transformations and emerging commercial forms. To achieve this, a rigorous methodology was implemented, which included a detailed questionnaire, direct interviews, and the examination of the relevant specifications.

2.1 Sample and Distribution

In the context of our survey on the souk of El Khroub, it was essential to select a representative sample in order to obtain reliable and valid results. To achieve this, we chose to use the sample size calculation method proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), combined with quota sampling to determine the distribution of participants (Moser & Kalton, 1971).

Krejcie and Morgan (1970) offer a method to determine the appropriate sample size based on the total population and the desired confidence level. The formula for calculating the sample size is as follows:

$$n = (N * X) / (X + N - 1)$$

Where:

n is the sample size

N is the population size

$$X \text{ is } Z^2 * p * q / E^2$$

Where:

Z is the Z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for a 95% confidence level)

p is the estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic of interest (0.5 for maximum uncertainty)

$$q \text{ is } 1 - p$$

E is the desired margin of error (0.05 for a 5% margin of error)

For a population of 179,033 inhabitants (ONS, RGPH 2020) and using a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, the recommended sample size would be approximately 383 people. However, to maintain the desired distribution in our survey, we slightly adjusted the sample size to 400 individuals.

To ensure the representativeness of our sample, we applied quota sampling. This method involves dividing the population into subgroups or strata and selecting participants proportionally to the size of each stratum. The distribution of our 400-person sample was as follows :

Merchants: 120 people (30% of the sample)

Long-time souk visitors : 80 people (20% of the sample)

Local government members : 80 people (20% of the sample)

Buyers: 120 people (30% of the sample)

By using quota sampling, we ensured that our 400-participant sample was representative, accurately reflecting the diversity of the El Khroub population. This technique allowed us to segment the population into distinct subgroups, or strata, selecting participants proportionally to their presence in the overall population. This approach guarantees that our sample encompasses the richness and variety of experiences within the souk, making our results reliable and valid.

Our methodological approach combines statistical precision with qualitative immersion to capture the socio-economic dynamics of the souk of El Khroub. This enables us to offer analyses based on robust data, reflecting the complex realities of this traditional market and providing a solid foundation for our future recommendations.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques.

Questionnaire: A set of questions was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on participants' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors in relation to the souk. The questionnaire covered themes such as frequency of visits, purchasing preferences, and attitudes toward economic and social changes.

Direct Interviews : In-depth discussions with key figures, such as the municipal treasury officer and the souk's lessee, complemented the data collected through the questionnaire. These interviews explored the management challenges and future perspectives for the souk.

Examination of the Specifications : The analysis of this document provided insight into the regulatory frameworks and contractual obligations affecting the merchants and lessees of the souk, thus shedding light on the operational constraints.

2.3 Duration of the Survey.

The survey spanned a period of six months, covering 52 working days corresponding to market days (Thursdays and Fridays). This duration was selected to capture a comprehensive range of commercial and seasonal activities, thereby ensuring a thorough understanding of the economic and social cycles of the souk.

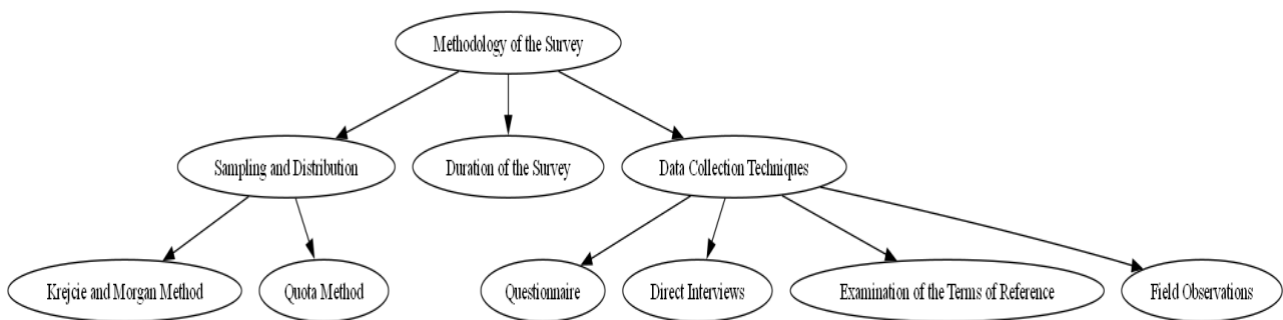


Fig. 1: Methodological Framework (authors)

3. Main Results and Analysis.

3.1 The Role of the Souk in Local Economic Development.

The souk of El Khroub is a vital market that supports the local economy through the sale of various products, primarily specializing in livestock sales. Analysis of the responses from our sample of merchants reveals a significant contribution from regional and local products, with a notable dominance of cattle, which constitutes 40%

of the businesses, reflecting the economic and cultural importance of these products. Sheep follow closely behind, highlighting their role in local traditions and religious celebrations (such as Eid al-Adha).

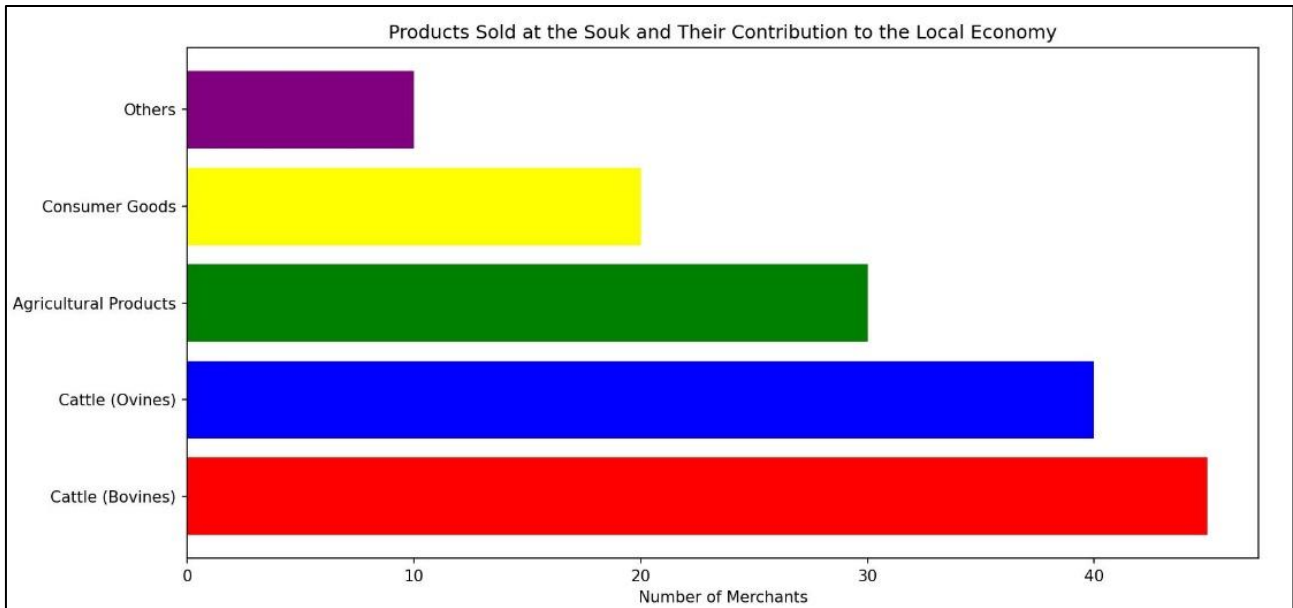


Fig. 2. Products Sold in the Souk and Their Contribution to the Local Economy (Authors)
Source: Sociological Survey

The graph above, which represents the distribution of products sold in the souk and their contribution to the local economy, clearly illustrates this trend. It highlights the variety of products offered, ranging from consumer goods to agricultural products, which cater to the demand of consumers seeking authenticity and freshness.

This diversity reinforces the souk's status as a key economic and cultural center, attracting buyers from far beyond the city of El Khroub and fueling the regional economy. As such, the souk of El Khroub not only plays a vital commercial role but also serves as a social and cultural link for the community.

3.2 Socio-Economic Impacts of the Souk on the City.

Multiplier Effect on Employment and Small Businesses.

The weekly souk of El Khroub acts as an economic catalyst, significantly influencing urban development and creating employment and business opportunities. It attracts a considerable number of customers and vendors every week, driving increased demand for infrastructure such as restaurants, cafés, and kiosks. This dynamic is particularly visible in the 20th of August district (communal housing area), where urban transformation and adaptation to current economic demands are evident.

Moreover, the souk represents an effective response to unemployment, offering various business opportunities that stimulate urban development well beyond its traditional perimeter. Our research, including surveys conducted with the local branch of the CNRC (National Center for Business Registers, 2022) and field observations, revealed a significant.

25% increase in business registration applications near the souk since 2013, confirming its appeal to merchants.

The positive impact of the souk on employment is also notable. While access to detailed statistical data on local unemployment rates is limited, our direct observations validate the successful integration of a substantial portion of the active population into the souk's economy and its surrounding areas.

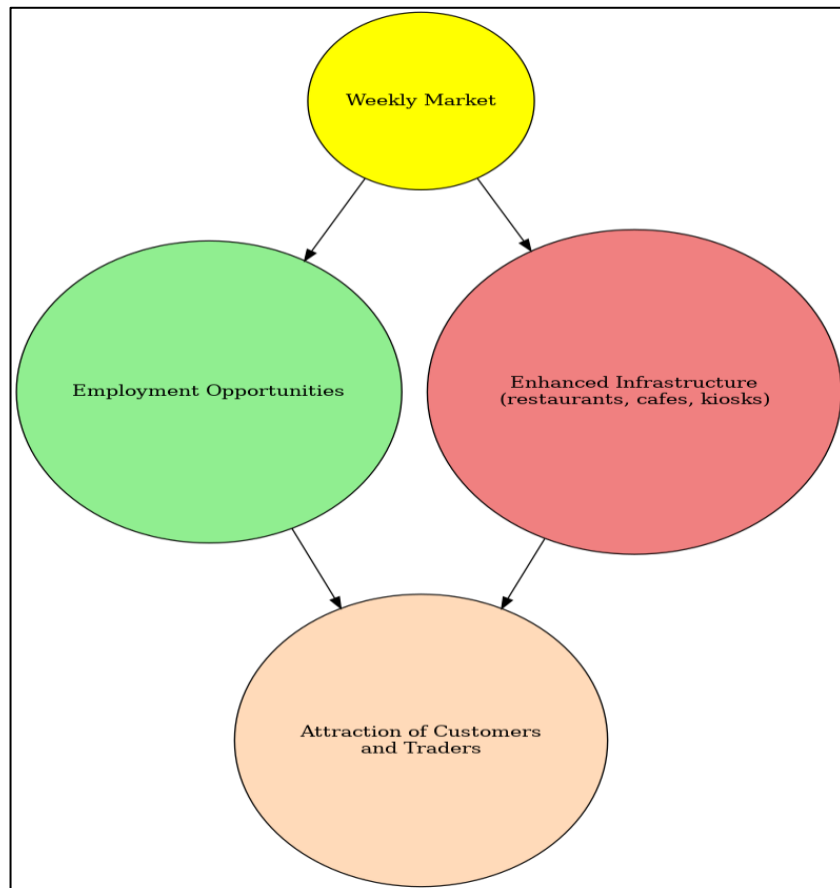


Fig. 3. Impacts of the Weekly Souk of El Khroub (Authors)

3.3 Competition with Modern Shopping Centers and Evolution of Foot Traffic.

The analysis of competition between the souk of El Khroub and modern shopping centers reveals an interesting dynamic, influenced by recent socio-economic changes. Historically, the souk has served as a vital shopping center for low- and middle-income residents, offering products at affordable prices for those seeking good deals. However, the post-COVID situation and the inflation experienced by our country have expanded the scope of visitors, now attracting customers from all social categories.

This transition is evident from the increasing variety of vehicles parked near the souk, indicating a more diverse clientele. This phenomenon not only indicates direct competition with shopping centers but also marks a shift in the perception and use of the souk by the population.

Summary of Perceptions of Competition.

Direct Competition : 150 responses indicate intense competition with shopping centers, highlighting the impact of these centers on the traditional commerce model.

Unique Advantage of the Souk : 120 participants emphasize the authenticity and proximity of the souk as a major differentiating factor.

Attraction of Shopping Centers : 90 people note a preference for shopping centers, attributed to their modernity and variety.

Authentic Experience : 30 responses value the cultural richness and unique experience offered by the souk.

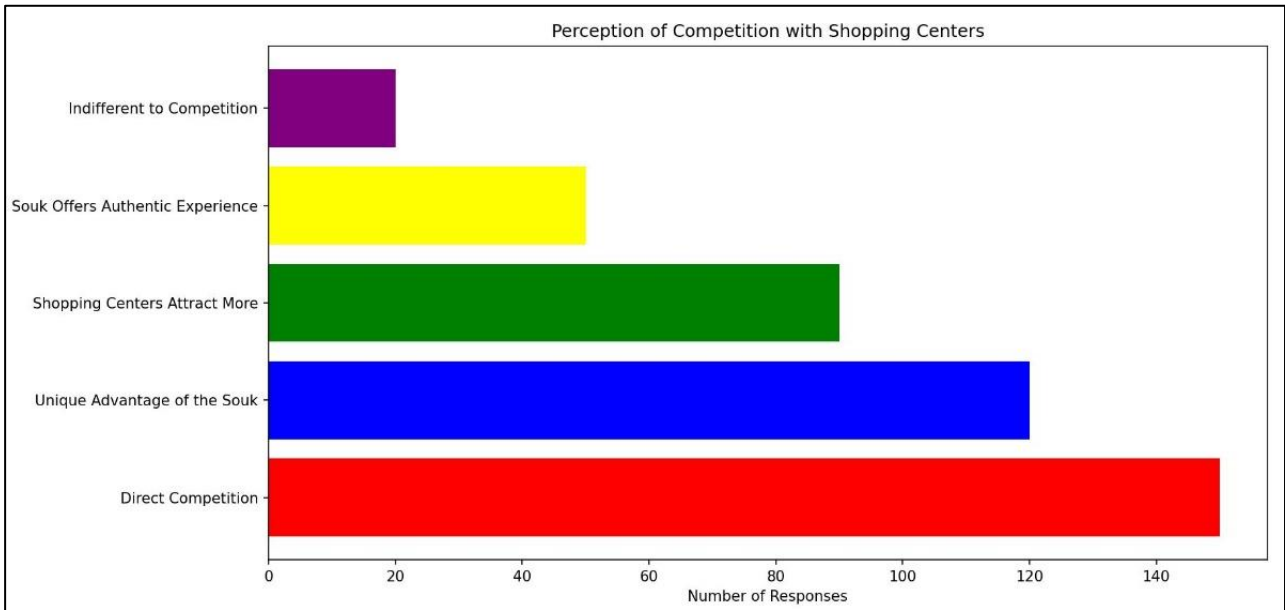


Fig. 4. Perception of Competition with Shopping Centers
Source: Sociological Survey

Indifference to the Competition : A small group of 10 visitors remain indifferent to this dynamic.

The evolution of foot traffic at the souk of El Khroub, marked by a diversification of its clientele, reflects its ability to meet the needs of a broader population, despite the competitive pressure from shopping centers. This trend underscores the crucial importance of the souk not only as a shopping destination but also as a social and cultural space, reaffirming its place in the economic and community fabric of El Khroub.

3.4 Problems Encountered at the Souk

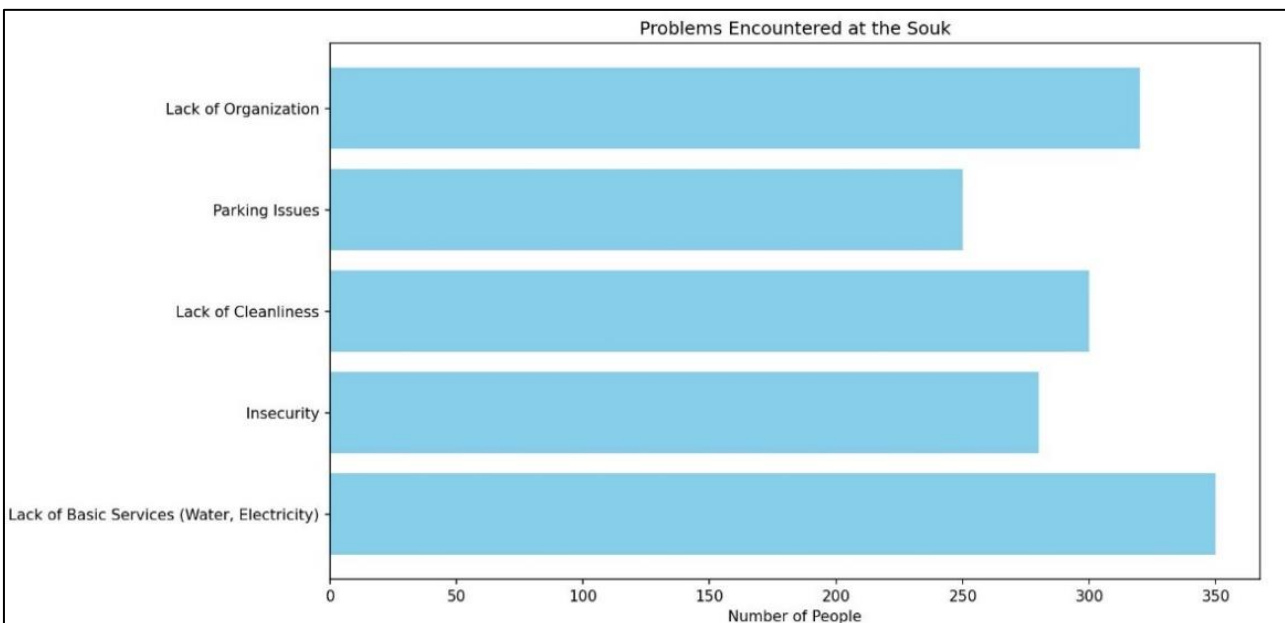


Fig. 5. Problems Encountered at the Souk
Source: Sociological Survey

It is clear that the "Lack of Cleanliness" is identifier as the most frequently reported issue, followed by "Lack of Organization" and "Absence of Basic Services." This visualization highlights the key areas requiring improvement to enhance the experience at the souk.

The survey results clearly show that "Lack of Cleanliness" is the most common problem encountered at the souk, with 350 respondents mentioning it. This suggests that the souk could greatly benefit from cleaning initiatives and waste management improvements.

"Lack of Organization" and "Absence of Basic Services" follow closely behind, indicating that the infrastructure and planning of the souk require improvements from local authorities. Implementing basic services such as water and electricity is crucial to ensure the proper functioning of the souk and enhance the experience for both vendors and buyers.

Issues such as parking and security are significant challenges. The lack of dedicated parking spaces may deter visitors from coming to the souk, while security concerns can negatively impact the number of people visiting, especially during early morning hours.

3.5 The Role of the Local Community in Supporting the Souk

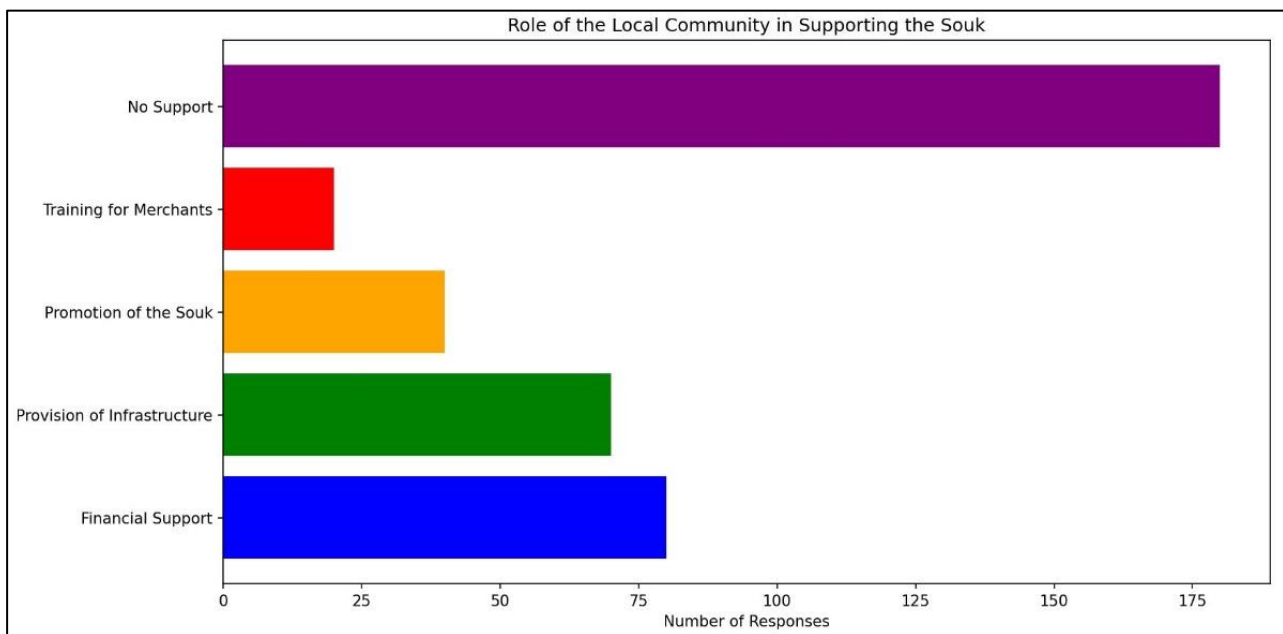


Fig. 6. Role of the Local Community in Supporting the Souk
Source: Sociological Survey

The graph above clearly illustrates the perceived role of the local community regarding the souk of El Khroub. One striking aspect is that the majority of respondents (180 out of 400) believe that the local community provides no support to the souk. This raises concerns about the commitment of local authorities to the souk, which is a vital element of the local economy and culture.

Financial support is perceived as the primary form of assistance from the local community, with 80 responses. This could include subsidies, tax relief, or other forms of financial assistance.

The provision of infrastructure, with 70 responses, indicates a need for improved facilities, such as access roads, sanitation, and other essential infrastructure for the proper functioning of the souk.

Promotion of the souk was mentioned by 40 respondents, suggesting that the local community could play a more active role in highlighting the souk as a shopping destination and cultural attraction.

Lastly, training for vendors, although less frequent with 20 responses, is still considered important. This indicates a willingness among some vendors to enhance their skills and adapt their offerings to the changing needs of consumers.

It is clear that, although some respondents acknowledge the local community's support role, there is a strong perception of a lack of commitment and support for the souk. To ensure the sustainability and prosperity

of the souk in the future, it is essential that the local community recognizes these concerns and proactively works to address them.

4. Economic Dynamics and Management Strategies of the El Khroub Souk.

4.1 Historical Auction Amounts of the El Khroub Market.

Period from 01/01/2002 to 31/12/2004 : 55,010,000 DZD per year

Period from 01/01/2005 to 31/12/2007 : 43,000,000 DZD per year

Period from 01/01/2008 to 31/12/2010 : Not available

Period from 01/01/2011 to 31/12/2013 : 50,000,000 DZD per year

Period from 01/01/2014 to 31/12/2016 : 90,750,000 DZD per year

Period from 01/01/2017 to 09/12/2019 : 105,350,000 DZD (Note: Contract terminated for the period 01/01/2017 to 09/12/2017)

Period from 31/12/2020 to 31/12/2023 : 109,600,000 DZD per year

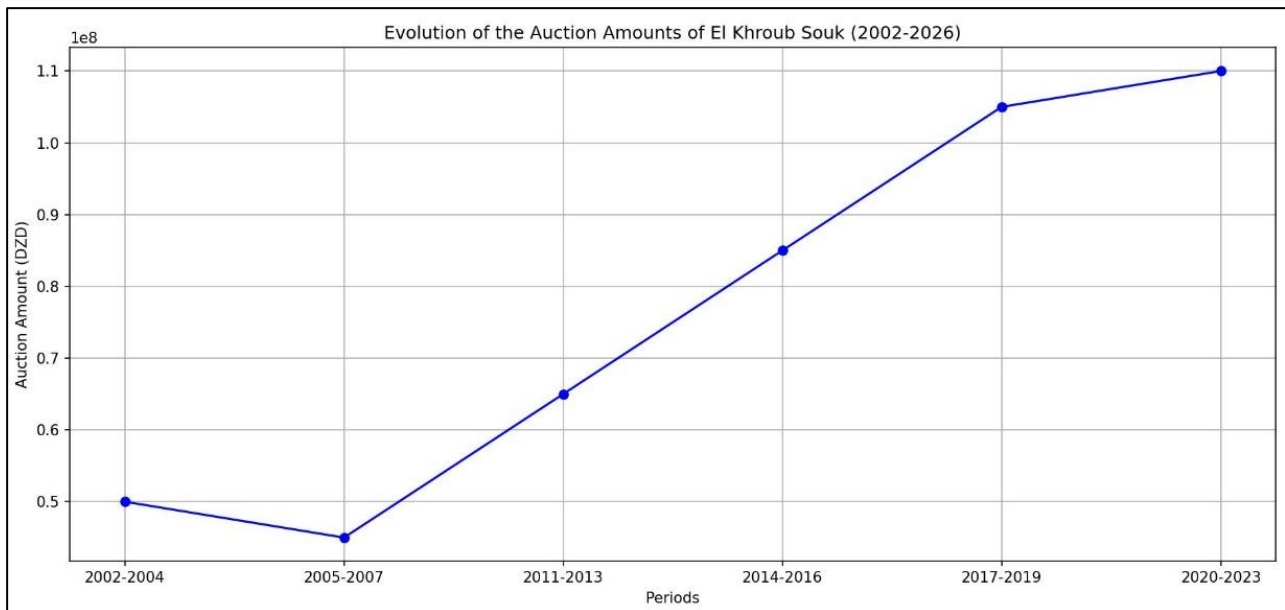


Fig. 7. Evolution of the Auction Amounts of the El Khroub Souk (authors)

Source: Specifications for the rental of the weekly livestock market of El Khroub through public auctions

This graph presents the evolution of the auction amounts for the El Khroub Souk from 2002 to 2023. A general upward trend is observed, indicating an increasing market valuation or adjustments for inflation and economic changes.

Period from 01/01/2024 to 31/12/2026 :

For the period from January 1, 2024, to December 31, 2026, the market for the El Khroub Souk has not yet been awarded. However, thanks to contacts within the Local People's Assembly (APC), we obtained the specifications for this period. Analysing these documents will allow us to anticipate the expected conditions and changes for the souk's operation and management during this time.

4.2 Analysis of the Specifications for the 2024-2026 Period of the El Khroub Souk.

The specifications for the El Khroub Souk cover a three-year period starting December 31, 2023. This document (Specifications for the Rental of the Weekly Livestock Market of El Khroub, 2023) complies with national and municipal regulations and defines the rental terms for the weekly livestock market and other products, playing a crucial role in the souk's future economic development and management.

Key Points of the Specifications:

Location and Area : The market spans 10 hectares, 42 ares, and 81 centiares in the Aissa Maatougui neighborhood, reflecting its significance as key commercial activity center.

Financial Issues : The starting bid set at 81,408,000 DZD per year, reflecting a significant increase that underscored the souk's growing value and its potential to generate substantial revenue for the municipality.

Participation Conditions: The auctions are open to adult Algerian citizens in good standing with fiscal and commercial legislation, ensuring legitimate and responsible operation.

Pricing Structure : The specifications outline the fees for variety items and services, ranging from 10 to 1,900 DZD, demonstrating the diversity and richness of the commercial exchanges at the souk.

Economic Impact on the Municipality of El Khroub.

The upcoming period highlights the crucial role of the souk as an economic pillar for the municipality of El Khroub. The gradual increase in auction amounts reflects the growing recognition of the souk's economic value, emphasizing its essential contribution to the local economy. However, this positive trend masks a persistent issue : the pricing structure imposed on traders has remained unchanged since the 1990s. This stagnation, within a context of rapid economic evolution, raises concerning questions regarding the fairness and relevance of the charges imposed on the souk's participants.

It is within this context that the interview with the current tenant of the souk, a key actor in its operation, becomes particularly relevant. His insights and experiences will provide valuable perspectives on the internal dynamics of the souk and the adjustments needed to address contemporary challenges.

Challenges and Pricing Dynamics at the Souk of El Khroub: Perspectives from the Current Tenant.

In our discussion with the current tenant of the souk, who operates the business in the form of a limited liability company (SARL), several critical points were highlighted regarding the souk's operation and its pricing model. The main elements mentioned are as follows.

Fixed Prices Despite Inflation: The current tenant indicated that the pricing set by the municipality for souk usage and the commercial activities has remained unchanged for a long time. This presents an issue as, over time, the cost of living and operational expenses have increased. This situation highlights a disconnect between the souk's pricing structure and the broader economic conditions.

Prices Favorable to Traders but Not to the Tenant Company: According to the tenant, the current rates favor traders over the souk management company. Traders can adjust their selling prices according to costs and demand, whereas the tenant company is constrained by a fixed pricing grid that does not necessarily reflect the current operational costs or inflation.

Inability to Adjust Prices Like Traders: The tenant compared their situation to that of individual traders who can adjust their prices to cover expenses and maintain profitability when faced with cost increase or economic crisis. In contrast, the tenant company is bound by the municipality-set prices and cannot adjust the rents or fees it imposes to respond to economic changes.

These points raise crucial questions about the sustainability and fairness of the souk's economic model for all stakeholders, especially the tenant managing the souk. To address these issues, it is prudent to revisit the pricing structure in collaboration with stakeholders, including the traders and the current tenant, to ensure that the souk remains an economically viable and equitable space for all. It would also be advisable to regularly review the rental agreements and the terms of the bidding process to ensure they reflect the evolution of costs and market conditions.

4.4 Profitability Simulation of the Souk of El Khroub.

a. Framework of the Analysis :

Analysis Period : 3 years (from 31/12/2020 to 31/12/2023).

Working Days : Thursdays and Fridays, as per the bidding terms.

b. Key Information :

Annual Auction Amount : 109,600,000 DZD.

Daily Revenue : 1,400,000 DZD per working day.

Daily Expenses : 250,000 DZD (personnel and cleaning).

c. Financial Analysis :

Total Working Days per Year : 104.

Annual Gross Revenue : 145,600,000 DZD.

Annual Net Revenue : 119,600,000 DZD after expenses.

Break-even Point : Reached in approximately 95 days, based on daily net revenue.

d. Economic Viability :

The souk proves economically viable over the three-year period, with an estimated gross profit margin of 9.30%. However, this modest margin underscores the challenge of maintaining profitability given the significant initial investment and operational constraints.

4.5 Reflections for the Future and Responses to the Tenant's Concerns.

Revision of Rates : Necessary to reflect current economic realities and ensure the financial sustainability of the souk.

Dialogue with Stakeholders : Essential to understand and address the needs and challenges of merchants, customers, and the tenant.

The recent period, marked by exceptional events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises, has revealed gaps in the current bidding terms, notably the absence of protective clauses for the tenants in the event of forced market closures. These challenges highlight the urgency of revising the bidding terms to include measures for compensation or adjustment, such revisions would minimize financial risks and ensure fairer and more sustainable management of the marketplace.

5. Recommendations.

5.1. Improvement of Infrastructure and Services.

Encourage the local municipality and authorities to invest in improving essential infrastructures at the souk, such as access roads, parking facilities, and public services (water, electricity, sanitation).

Propose creating rest areas and green spaces to enhance the experience for visitors and merchants.

5.2. Collaboration with Stakeholders.

Foster constructive dialogue among merchants, visitors, local authorities, and the tenants to identify needs, concerns, and opportunities for improvement.

Involve economic and social actors in the planning and management of the souk to ensure that decisions reflect the interests of all parties.

5.3. Support for Small Merchants and Artisans.

Implement policies to support small local merchants and artisans, encouraging a diverse range of products and services at the souk.

Promote access to funding and subsidies for new merchants wishing to establish themselves at the souk.

5.4. Urban Planning Around the Souk.

Collaborate with urban planning services to integrate the souk into the urban development of El Khroub. This collaboration aims to minimize negative impacts such as congestion while maximizing its potential as a center of economic and cultural activity.

5.5. Adaptation to Contemporary Challenges

Regularly assess socio-economic changes affecting the souk and adjust management strategies to ensure its sustainability and continued appeal.

Conclusions.

In conclusion, the souk of El Khroub stands as a vibrant microcosm of the economic, social, and cultural life of El Khroub, illustrating the richness and complexity of traditional markets in the face of contemporary challenges. Through our analysis, it is evident that the souk is not merely a commercial space; it is an institution deeply embedded in the community, playing a crucial role in preserving traditions while significantly contributing to the local economy.

In response to new commercial dynamics and economic challenges, the souk of El Khroub has shown remarkable resilience, adapting its offerings and attracting a diverse clientele. However, issues such as competition with modern shopping centers, infrastructure and management problems, and tariff constraints highlight the need for a renewed and proactive approach to ensure sustainable and inclusive development.

It is imperative for stakeholders, including local authorities, merchants, and the community, to collaborate closely in revitalizing the souk. This involves targeted investments in infrastructure, a fair revision of tariff structures, and the implementation of strategies that both value the souk's authenticity and meet the

expectations of modern consumers. Additionally, integrating the souk into urban development plans can maximize its potential as a center of economic and cultural activity, thus strengthening its role in enhancing urban quality of life.

With its rich history and economic potential, the souk of El Khroub finds itself at a critical crossroads. The decisions made today will determine not only its future but also that of the city of El Khroub as a whole. By adopting a strategic and collaborative vision, we can not only preserve this valuable cultural heritage but also transform it into a model for a prosperous and sustainable traditional market in the modern era.

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