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SUSTAINABLE TOURIST REQUALIFICATION OF THE BARDO DISTRICT CONSTANTINE – ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism, long neglected by urban managers, is now recognized as a key sector for the attractiveness of cities. Today, urban planning can no longer ignore this sector, as cities attract visitors through the tourism opportunities and events they offer. Urban spaces are being designed to highlight activities, exchanges, and meetings, making tourism an important pillar of the city's development strategy.

This research aims to reintegrate the city of Constantine, particularly its historic center, into the development dynamic, focusing on the old town and its surroundings marked by the declining colonial fabric and the endangered Bardo district, considered "sites in need" of development and attractiveness. The challenge is to reintegrate them into a virtuous circle of value creation and regeneration.

Located in northeastern Algeria, Constantine had a population of over 80,000 in 2016. One of the oldest cities in North Africa, it plays a major role in Mediterranean history. Its strategic geographical location, at the intersection of major North-South (Skikda-Biskra) and East-West (Sétif-Annaba) axes, enables it to perform significant cultural and industrial functions. Over the years, the city has transformed and expanded due to demographic and economic growth, the explosion of individual mobility, and competition for space. It is now necessary to restore meaning, coherence, and legibility to the territory, sometimes scattered, while addressing the consequences of a city disfigured by the dominance of cars and parking. The peripheral neighborhoods, just like the historic center, can become quality urban spaces and contribute to the city's attractiveness, as opposed to the undefined peripheral areas.

Thus, reclaiming struggling neighborhoods through their requalification can be a powerful lever for enhancing the city of Constantine. This offers residents access to modernity, improving quality of life and social cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging, and becoming a key element of the place's or community's identity.

Through this research, we seek to shed light on the issue of planning and promotion actions that accompany and reveal the ways of valorizing the city and its image, transforming it from an active city to a festive city, from a city of need to a city of desire. This transformation takes place through reflection on urbanity, culture, heritage, mobility, the reorganization of spaces and urban networks, and the places' capacity to accommodate. In this perspective, our efforts have focused on the originality of the approach, based on seeking innovation through the requalification of struggling peripheral neighborhoods and their integration into the surrounding urban fabric, through the creation of an urban park and cultural and tourist facilities, while respecting the criteria of sustainable development.

The image of the city of Constantine, reconciling its past with its future through sustainable tourism and heritage valorization, requires a more humanistic and coordinated urban policy. This policy favors soft, progressive requalifications, supported by public actions with strong symbolic significance, actively involving residents in the project and engaging a variety of private operators.

KEYWORDS

Requalification, Sustainable Tourism, Patrimonialization, Urban Renewal, Constantine City

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Introduction

Long associated with escapes to beaches, lush oases, or vast desert expanses, tourism was long perceived as a domain removed from urban management concerns. Today, this perception has fundamentally shifted. Urban planning and development now integrate tourism as a strategic lever, recognizing the potential of cities to attract visitors through their cultural and tourist offerings, whether permanent or event-based. Urban spaces are becoming stages where activities, exchanges, and interactions converge, creating a dynamic and immersive experience for visitors.

Tourism, as an economic and social driver, intrigues and fascinates researchers, professionals, and the public alike. It has garnered increasing attention for its transformative role in the territories it impacts. Over just a decade, the sector has experienced impressive growth. Revenues from international tourism have grown at a rate outpacing global trade, with an average annual increase of 3.8%. Projections anticipate nearly doubling tourist flows by 2020, according to the UNWTO Barometer (2012).

Recognizing the challenges and opportunities this growth brings, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) launched the ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty) program in Johannesburg in 2002. This ambitious initiative aims to promote sustainable tourism, addressing not only economic but also social and environmental dimensions, turning tourism into a tool for poverty reduction. Through targeted projects and long-term commitment, the UNWTO strives to demonstrate that, when well-planned and managed, tourism can become a pillar of sustainable development, combining attractiveness, profitability, and respect for environmental balance.

This research aims to revitalize the city of Constantine, with a particular focus on the Bardo district, identified as a declining area. The goal is to reintegrate these spaces into a dynamic of value creation and regeneration, highlighting the importance of planning and promotional strategies to transform the city into an attractive and sustainable destination.

The study explores issues related to urban staging, heritage enhancement, and spatial management, while examining the role of sustainable tourism as a development lever. The participation of local stakeholders and the implementation of tailored practices are identified as essential elements to foster the city's revival.

In essence, the central question revolves around the integration of sustainable tourism in the redevelopment of Constantine's Bardo area to serve as a driver of urban development and value creation. This leads to the fundamental question underlying our study: *How can the sustainable tourism-based redevelopment of the Bardo area generate value for the emergence and modernization of Constantine?*

Thus, tourism, far from being merely an economic sector, emerges as a key player in the reinvention of cities and territories. By adopting innovative and inclusive approaches, it can not only support the local economy but also contribute to greater social cohesion and the sustainable enhancement of urban spaces.

Methodology

The idea of using tourism as a lever for sustainable development is not new, but its early applications have varied depending on the regions and their specific needs. In the United States and the United Kingdom, tourism has often been employed to revitalize former industrial sites, contributing to the diversification and regeneration of the economic and social fabric in cities like Baltimore or Liverpool. In Mediterranean countries such as France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, tourism has been used to rejuvenate rural areas particularly affected by rural exodus and agricultural mechanization, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the countryside in response to urban growth.

In developing countries, examples are equally diverse. For instance, Cuba turned to international tourism to compensate for the economic support lost from the former Soviet Union, in a context defined by a political and economic system largely closed to non-socialist states' influence.

In this context, if tourism could be deemed "responsible," it could play a crucial role in offering emerging nations opportunities for socio-economic development. However, research on the connection between tourism and development, particularly in Algeria, remains limited or has addressed this issue belatedly.

Statistical data on tourism in Algeria (tourist arrivals, tourism revenues, trade balance, contribution to GDP) reveal a significant lag compared to its Maghreb neighbors, with modest economic performance hindering the attractiveness of national and foreign investments in the sector.

It was only in 2007 that tourism was elevated to a national priority, as the Algerian government decided to make it an alternative resource to hydrocarbons. To achieve this ambition, a **Master Plan for Tourism Development (SDAT)** was established. This strategic document aims to develop centers of tourism excellence while adhering to a sustainable development approach. It reflects the intention to leverage the country's natural, cultural, and historical wealth to position Algeria as a leading destination in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Our analytical approach is based on repositioning Algeria's tourism strategy along five main axes, showing how to:

1. Strengthen the attractiveness and reputation of Algeria as a destination through an adapted marketing policy.
2. Optimize investments and enhance the tourism offer by developing centers of excellence and promising sectors.
3. Develop a tourism quality plan to improve services and infrastructure.
4. Unite sector stakeholders around an effective public-private partnership.
5. Mobilize the necessary financing to realize priority projects.

The political will to promote sustainable and impactful tourism in Algeria has emerged in a context marked by a severe oil crisis, highlighting the urgency of diversifying the economy and capitalizing on the country's tourism potential.

Results

1-Constantine Seeks Its (Heritage) Path

As a central city and a metropolitan hub of eastern Algeria, Constantine urgently needs to reclaim its attractiveness, dynamism, and image as a modern, vibrant, prosperous, and pleasant city.

The city can rely on the exceptional charm of its spectacular gorges and the Oued Rhumel Valley, which runs through its historic center, serving as a valuable and structuring asset. However, the issues and dysfunctions that have arisen over the past decade have prompted the launch of several major projects aimed at revitalizing the city, particularly its center, and improving the quality of life for Constantine's residents by providing a more comfortable and functional living environment.



Fig. 1. Constantine viewed from above, 2022.

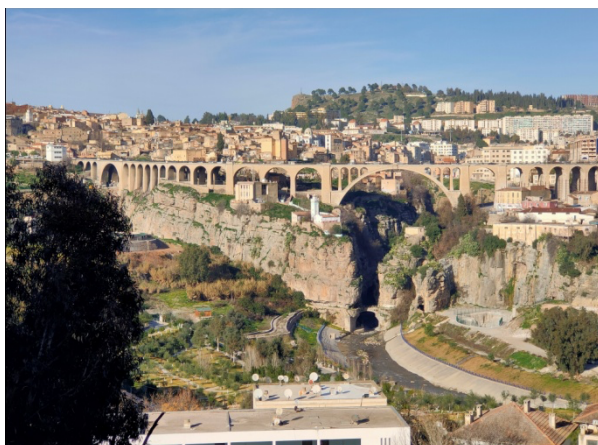


Fig. 2. Constantine relies on the charm of its magnificent gorges and the Oued Rhumel valley, 2021.

We focus on key structuring projects for urban renewal and requalification, considered a priority to restore a dynamic exchange among the city's various stakeholders. These initiatives, centered on economic, commercial, cultural, and tourism activities, aim to guide Constantine toward sustainable and harmonious modernization.

The modernization of Constantine is based on an ambitious urban renewal project focused on urban quality, landscape revitalization, and development that respects the territory. This transformation involves the reconstruction of the city center and its surroundings, asserting a centrality that embodies prestige, modernity, and national unity. The project emphasizes the requalification of the central area, including the Bardo district, to stimulate operational dynamism through tailored expertise.

Constantine's image, blending its historical heritage with a forward-looking vision of modernity and the future, can only materialize through a more human-centered and collaborative urban planning approach. This involves sustainable tourism development centered on heritage preservation and gentrification, promoting gradual and symbolic requalifications initiated by public actions. These initiatives must closely engage residents and mobilize various private stakeholders.

The city's evolution, characterized by spatial transformations and changing uses, raises challenges related to the requalification of spaces on symbolic, aesthetic, and functional levels. The introduction of the tramway, creating a striking contrast between public spaces and the balcony-like landscape, will not only reshape how residents and visitors perceive the city but also transform their mobility practices.

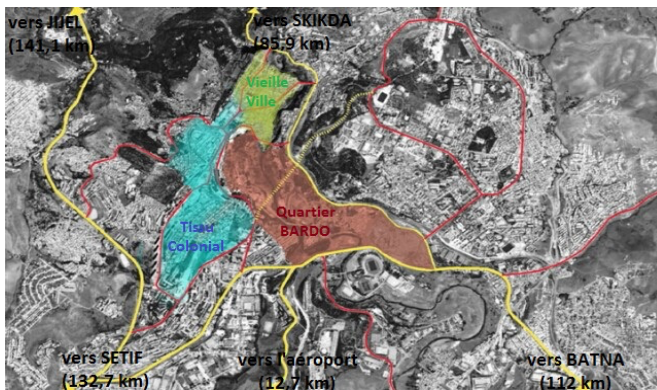
2. A historic center with considerable untapped potential: the Bardo district.

This research aims to reposition Constantine, particularly its historic center encompassing the old city and the Bardo district, within a dynamic of enhancement and regeneration. Considered a "stalled site" in terms of development and attractiveness, this area aspires to integrate into a virtuous cycle that promotes value creation and sustainable renewal.

After a period of neglect marked by demographic shifts and social stigmatization, the Bardo district is now benefiting from a national urban renewal program. This project seeks to revitalize the area while addressing sustainability challenges, focusing on economic, social, and environmental development. The ongoing transformations in Bardo are framed within a tripartite process: heritage conservation, urban renewal, and sustainable development.

The selection of Bardo is strategic, garnering consensus among local stakeholders. It presents a unique opportunity for authorities (municipalities and urban communities) to rethink Constantine's overall spatial organization by revitalizing this district.

As a central, working-class neighborhood, Bardo suffers from a negative reputation, often associated with poverty and violence. Long marginalized and excluded from tourist circuits, it embodies the challenges and paradoxes Constantine faces, particularly concerning tourism development and the improvement of its image.



The reflection on urbanity, culture, heritage, mobility, the reorganization of spaces and urban networks, as well as the capacity of the places to accommodate, highlights the strategies for enhancing the city and its image, thus transforming the active city into a festive city, and the city of need into a city of desire.

Fig. 3. The Bardo neighborhood in the city of Constantine, 2022

In this perspective, this research focuses on the originality of the approach, which is based on innovation in the requalification of struggling peripheral neighborhoods and their integration into the surrounding urban fabric, respecting the principles of sustainable development. The image of Constantine, which embraces its past while moving toward modernity and the future through sustainable tourism based on heritage preservation and gentrification, can only be realized with a more humanistic and collaborative urban planning approach. This approach favors gentle and progressive requalifications, initiated by public actions with high symbolic value, actively involving residents and mobilizing various private stakeholders. The central question is: how to reinvent the city while respecting its own roots and integrating it into a sustainable collective project?

Over the years, the city has transformed and expanded due to the combined effects of population and economic growth, the explosion of individual mobility, and competition for space. It is necessary to recreate meaning, restore coherence, give clarity to a sometimes scattered territory, and address the consequences of a city disfigured by car dominance and its corollary, parking spaces. The peri-central neighborhoods, just like the historic center, can become the embodiment of a quality urban living environment, thus contributing to the city's attractiveness against the undefined nature of suburban areas.



Fig. 4. Overview of the Bardo Neighborhood



Fig. 5. Bardo and the First Modernization Operations (2022)

Thus, the regeneration through the requalification of struggling neighborhoods can be a powerful lever to create value for the city of Constantine. It can also provide residents with access to modernity and contribute to the quality of life and social cohesion, fostering a sense of belonging and becoming part of the identity of a place or community.

The Bardo neighborhood in Constantine, after removing slums as part of the fight against substandard housing, will soon be transformed with the creation of a large park. This park, located at the heart of the city, will be a green space dedicated to relaxation and leisure, aimed at offering a breath of fresh air to a city facing rampant urbanization. The redevelopment of the Bardo neighborhood will thus create a "precious space of oxygen," set in a magnificent panoramic view.

This new piece of its urban matrix, both mixed and sustainable, provides new public spaces designed as meeting points between the city and the metropolis, alongside a large construction program of over 600,000 m² (2,700 new homes for a population of 16,000, a tertiary sector program, and major metropolitan functions that will generate nearly 7,000 new jobs in the heart of the city).



Fig. 6. The first revitalization operations of the Bardo neighborhood.

Discussion

1- The Heritage Preservation of Peri-Central Neighborhoods

The peri-central neighborhoods of Constantine are increasingly attracting the attention of public authorities, who recognize their architectural and aesthetic value. This awareness stems from the urban struggles of the 1990s, where local officials, heritage protection associations, and professionals in the field clashed. These conflicts led to the establishment of strict legal standards aimed at protecting heritage while promoting urban development. Today, actions in these neighborhoods are constrained by legal restrictions that prevent the demolition of buildings but aim to highlight the heritage through the redevelopment of public spaces. These interventions, which encourage urban tourism, can increase land value and transform the social composition of the neighborhoods, sometimes leading to conflicts between residents and tourists. The strategies in place seek to avoid the "museumification" of the neighborhoods while preserving their social dynamism.

2- A Sustainable Tourism Approach for the Economic and Social Redeployment of the Bardo Neighborhood?

The city of Constantine, lacking public gardens and leisure spaces, has launched the creation of a 65-hectare "urban park" on the site of Bardo, previously occupied by a slum. This park, intended to be a green haven, aims to improve the city's urban image and offer an ecological and cultural space. The project will consist of three areas: a botanical garden, a gorge path, and a landscaped area with waterfalls and a forest on the right bank of the Oued Rhumel. The redevelopment of this site, located in the heart of the city, aims to provide residents with a space for relaxation and recreation in a picturesque setting. Discussions during a symposium emphasized the importance of preserving the unique panorama of the Oued Rhumel riverbanks. This project is part of a sustainable tourism approach and urban development strategy, aiming to enhance local identity while addressing social and environmental issues.

3- Heritage Conservation: A Chance or an Obstacle for Urban Renewal?

The advanced degradation of urban heritage in Algerian cities, particularly in Constantine, raises the question of whether demolition is necessary to renew and restructure these spaces. Recent transformations in the city require the introduction of new tools to support changes, often initiated by private actors alongside public efforts. While there is a consensus on heritage conservation, conflicts may arise between different stakeholders, particularly between associations and institutions, regarding the management of heritage sites. These tensions reflect the symbolic, social, and economic issues tied to heritage conservation. Integrating the neighborhood into the city center increases the economic value of the heritage, seen as an important resource, but also raises political and identity-related questions. However, the strained relations between local associations and public authorities complicate dialogue, and the neighborhood's tourism development remains fragile due to economic issues, insufficient infrastructure, and the need to improve the quality of life. The population, facing daily hardships, remains largely indifferent to the tourism and heritage enhancement efforts.

Conclusions

The sustainable tourism requalification of the city of Constantine through the Bardo neighborhood can only be possible and achievable through a more humanistic and concerted urban planning policy. The emphasis is placed on softer, progressive requalifications, initiated by public actions with strong symbolic value, closely involving the residents in the project and mobilizing a variety of private operators.

The concept of sustainable tourism thus became a notion considered by many countries and organizations for all forms of tourism exploitation. Therefore, sustainable tourism should be based on the following principles (Babou I., Callot P., 2008):

- Optimize the use of environmental resources, which are a key element in tourism development, while preserving essential ecological processes and helping to safeguard natural resources and biodiversity;
- Respect the sociocultural authenticity of host communities, preserve their cultural, built, and living assets, their traditional values, and contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance;
- Ensure a viable long-term economic activity offering all stakeholders fairly distributed socio-economic benefits, which contribute to poverty reduction (stable jobs, opportunities for profit and social services for host communities, etc.).

Sustainable tourism becomes a primary objective to maintain a balance between the three values: economic progress, resource preservation, and the well-being of local populations (Miosset P., 2000), a program aiming to establish a new governance model. Finally, it promotes cultural diversity and adheres to

the principles of the Lanzarote Charter on Sustainable Tourism (1995), the Agenda 21 for Culture (Barcelona, 2004), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Paris, 1948) (Toselli U., 2008). It can be argued that the "concept" of "sustainable tourism" and the content generally attributed to it by policymakers is reflective of different priorities that vary depending on the nature and logic of the stakeholders involved in this sector.

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