

The revitalization of the historic center of Blida-Algeria, as an urban development strategy

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Abstract

Many cities are designed around old historic centers that are considered monuments of great value, and that have specific architecture but are deteriorating more and more. These constructions inherited from the past carry within them the passage of the different civilizations (Roman, Andalusian, Turkish and French) which give our cities a memory of the place and a specific character. Our research will therefore focus on the revitalization of the historic center of the city of Blida. A city center rich in history and a stratification of several civilizations, this core has undergone multiple alterations over time, and currently suffers from various pathologies. The issue of the revitalization of historic centers is at the heart of all discussions and presents a real concern because of its state of degradation, and its enhancement. How to define a development strategy? How to identify and enhance the land and real estate potential of historic centers?

Keywords: Historic center; revitalization; strategy; conservation; dynamism.

Introduction

Algerian cities during the different historical periods have constituted both a reference to modernity and civilization through an urban heritage important by its quantitative and qualitative consistency. The city of Blida, like all Algerian cities, is home to a heritage worthy of interest that can be appreciated through the various buildings, monuments and squares.

This research was motivated by a certain concern about the future of our historic cities, which currently suffer from a constant malaise. What better strategy for a requalification and/or revitalization of the urban ensemble? Currently the historic center of the city of Blida is running out of steam and losing its architectural, commercial and attractive value. We notice a number of problems that are related:

- Saturation of fabrics and degradation of buildings in the historic center.
- The poor quality of the built environment and the lack of harmony and aesthetics.
- The devaluation of historical monuments that constitute the memory of the city center.

The objective of this study is to take charge of the city center of Blida by focusing on revitalization. Revitalization is one of the strategies we have chosen in our research to revitalize the historic center. Thus, integrated urban revitalization (RUI) is one of the approaches that focuses on former city centers, it aims to establish a diagnosis of disadvantaged sectors in a territory, then to identify priority and structuring actions for their environment. The objective of integrated urban revitalization is to identify priority courses of action, improve the socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants, consolidate central districts and revitalize them.

1. Methodological approach

Revitalization is a process of urban operation that aims to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods in urban centers in decline or in difficulty. It is an initiative to revitalize neighborhoods that have suffered physical, economic and social deterioration. Through urban revitalization, the state seeks to find a balance between the laws of economic development, rights, the needs of the inhabitants and the development of the city as a public good.

This research was carried out following an observational work on the state of affairs of the city center of Blida (below we have presented an inventory of the city of Blida with its geographical location and historical overview). Based on the SWOT method, an analytical reading allowed us to identify the opportunities and weaknesses of the city center, which will certainly help us to identify the different intervention strategies.

2. Presentation of the city of Blida

In order to be able to act and respond to the problems of historic centers, it seems important to us to situate the city of Blida in its geographical and historical context. The city of Blida with an area of 1482.8 km² is located southwest of Algiers 50km from the capital and on the edge of the Mitidja 22 km from the sea. The city of Blida is bounded by:

- NORTH by the wilayas of Algiers and Tipaza;
- The East by the wilayas of Boumerdes and Bouira;
- The West by the wilaya of Ain Defla.
- South by the wilaya of Medea.

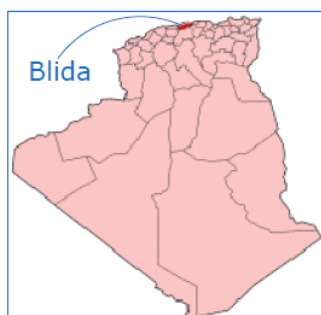




Fig 01: Location of the city of Blida. Source: www.googlemaps.blida.dz

Historical overview

In its urban growth the city of Blida founded by the hydraulic engineer known as Marabout Sidi Mohamed El Kebir, has seen several forms of urbanization. Currently the city presents itself as the result of its historical evolution. It is distinguished by three periods of important urbanization (Andalusian, Ottoman, French). Each period has a particular space with its specific morphological characteristics (Ouah Sofiane, 2014).

In the Andalusian era, the sultana Ouled and the Andalusians gather and form a proto-urban nucleus located in the plateau of Mitidja where their subsistence areas were based on livestock and agriculture. The first nucleus was in its lower part of piedmont for the following reasons:

- The morphology of the land favors an establishment.
- The proximity of a downstream stream.
- The presence of agricultural land.

In Turkish times, a citadel was built southwest of this urban core, its location was for defense reasons. The construction of a first rampart pierced by (04) four gates represented the sign of importance of Blida at that time. The urban core is growing and splitting along the perimeter route, the fabric has become denser and structured by centralizing routes.

In the French period the nucleus evolves and eventually becomes an elementary urban nucleus that the city intramuros. Then after crossing the ramparts, he extramuros city was adjacent to the intramural city. This period was marked by the realization of large peripheral ensembles. The urban sprawl was directed towards full for the European city. In the post-French period, the city experienced new extensions to the west and the construction of administrative and sanitary facilities.

In the current period, the extension of the city continues towards the Northeast, but the historic core is in major difficulty due to its deterioration and loss of architectural and attractive value.

Synthesis

The historical overview of the city of Blida shows that this city has undergone transformations that are the result of persistence of elements such as: the historical value of the city center, the geomorphology of the site and the intrinsic character of its inhabitants.

3. Analysis of downtown Blida

Currently the city center of Blida no longer meets the requirements of a dynamic city, it is characterized by a loss of identity and a state of degradation. Some questions are imposed on us, namely: how to solve the problem of the loss of identity of the city center? How to connect the historic center with the rest of the city? and what better strategy for the Blida center. This is why it is important to draw up a strategy in which the city can regain all its promptness. The SWOOT method (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) is a strategic analysis tool, which combines the study of strengths and weaknesses (of an organization, a territory, a sector, or other) with that of opportunities and threats, in order to help define a development strategy.

	Strength	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Urban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The boulevards have a strategic location in the city center, by their flow and direction (Mechanical and pedestrian flow important). - The tracks are wide -Presence of vegetation - Ground floor reserved for trade. -The presence of the mountain of Chrea. -Market presence and commercial function. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of parking spaces -Some secondary routes are very narrow -Noise impairment is caused by mechanical traffic. -Very dense road traffic at the level of the boulevards). -Lack of development of the Place d'Arme and the Place du 1er November -Lack of relaxation areas, park, garden ... etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The boulevards are large and well connected. -The presence of boulevard that connects Blida to the city of Algiers. -The presence of chrea near the city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The dimensioning of the secondary and tertiary roads is no longer up to standard. -The new public transport lines create traffic problems. -Lack of a comprehensive development strategy.

<p>Environmental and building</p>	<p>-The geographical location gives the city a strategic position (proximity to the capital, the Chrea mountain). -The variety of architectural styles. -La military zone provides security in the area. -A stratified urban fabric. -Elkawter Mosque as a landmark in the city center. Environnemental.</p>	<p>-The presence of buildings in very poor condition particularly individual housing -Lack of sports and cultural facilities -An imbalance in the distribution of equipment -Pollution.</p>	<p>-The presence of different style unique architecture that give historical value. -The presence of commerce as the economic potential of the city. -Presence of the mountain that allows to obtain a panoramic view of the city. -Demolition of houses for the construction of modern buildings that do not correspond to the character of the place.</p>	<p>-Blida is a seismic zone. -The development of tourism in chrea is not related to the development of tourism in the city center. -The climate of the city and dry. Lack of service equipment. -Lack of harmony in the typology of the building.</p>
<p>Socioeconomic</p>	<p>-Rich architectural and cultural heritage (museum, house, mosques). -Andalusian music which is an important artistic practice in the city.</p>	<p>-Unemployment -The lack of trade (cultural, touristic).</p>	<p>-The relationship of Blida with the capital Algiers gives an opportunity for the commercial aspect and tourist attractiveness.</p>	<p>-The loss of identity of the city center -The city center does not have all the infrastructure necessary for its development -Lack of job offres.</p>

The SWOT Strategy Matrix

Following the SWOT analysis, a matrix will emerge to allow us to compare the results of the diagnosis of our case study. This combination of strength/weakness/opportunities and strength/weakness/threats will allow us to quickly visualize the problems related to the city center, but also its architectural, urban and socio-economic potential.

	Strength	Weaknesses	Strength/Weaknesses
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The enhancement and promotion of attractive tourism. -Enhancement of existing historical sites by the creation of walks -The cultural and tourist vocation of the city center. -Channel flows to trade routes. -Création of parking spaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presence of the mountain that offers a panoramic view of the city center. -Demolition of ruined houses and reconstruction of new buildings that will respond to the architectural character of the place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Exploitation of historical monuments in cultural and tourist development. -Enhancement of the musical aspect and development of a cultural symbol of downtown Blida. -Widening of secondary roads and development of car parks. -Development of sports, cultural and public spaces.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The construction of public facilities. -The connection of the city center with its mountains. -Strengthen the development of tourism and trade with the development of the center. -Invest the harmonious architectural style of the city center. -Restauration of historical monuments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rehabilitation of the facades and reinforcement of the architectural character of the boulevards. -Absorb noise pollution by developing vegetation in Sidewalks of the tracks. -Reflect on a housing rehabilitation strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The use of the historical and cultural aspect to renew the image of the city. -Exploit the cold climate in winter to develop the tourist and commercial attractiveness of the city center with the mountain. -Take advantage of mountain tourism to create jobs.

4. Results and Intervention Actions

Integrated urban revitalization (RUI) is one of the approaches that focuses most on old urban centers, it aims to establish a diagnosis of the sectors and then to identify priority and structuring actions. Through the analytical strategy of the SWOT method, which made it possible to draw up a diagnosis. This diagnosis thus determines the triggers for the decline of downtown Blida, which is linked to:

- A deteriorated heritage.
- Economic diversity that is running out.
- The quality of life at the center which is dilapidated.
- The housing no longer meets the standards of modernity.
- Economic problem and unemployment.
- A negative image of the city center.

For the revitalization of this city center, four major axes are proposed, which consists of a roadmap for an efficient intervention:

- **Organization and consultation of the old city center:** the revitalization offers the opportunity to confirm the ability of the responsible members to reach a common agreement.
- **Socio-economic development of the downtown core:** the issue is the quality of life of all citizens. Diversify the commercial, socio-sanitary and residential offers of the city center in order to meet the needs of local populations.
- **Animation and promotion of the old city center:** set up a positive image of the city center to stimulate and improve investor consumption.
- **Downtown development:** involves design of layout and safety to welcome consumers, workers, visitors.

Also, our major axes will be translated into intervention strategies for the revitalization of downtown Blida. This revitalization operation can be summarized by the most urgent actions, namely:

- **Redynamisation commerciale et revitalisation urbaine :** Au travers de revivification d'anciennes boutiques marchandes, renforçant la sensation d'unité de lieu, va permettre d'optimiser l'animation des rues dans le centre-ville.
- **Urban tourism:** tourism is a factor in economic and social development.
- **The reconquest of public spaces:** They play an important role in the revitalization, through the emergence of the leisure economy. Public space is a revitalization engine generating community spaces.
- **City housing:** an urban population in the city center generates constant activity day and night. The attractiveness of the city center is linked to the quality of housing, which is why it is important to initiate residentialization policies in order to strengthen the vitality and viability of their urban centers.

5. Conclusion

Revitalization with heritage issues is at the heart of the downtown revitalization strategy. This strategy allows the revitalization of trade and crafts: methods, tools and sharing of experiences, also investment in good training to contribute to economic development, but most importantly the articulation of the old center with the overall policy of the city.

Following our study of the city based on the SWOT analysis, and in order to determine the different problems and actions. We have retained that the city of Blida is a very important economic source at different levels. It has a variety of tourism potential that is not valued and untapped. Despite all these attractions that have been listed before, the city of Blida is unable to develop the tourism sector.

Nevertheless, the actions and recommendations proposed upstream, can represent a driving force in the dynamics of development of the city and its territory.

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