

Marginalization and Urban Transformation under Public Action: The Case of Sidi Salem in the Periphery of Annaba City (Algeria).

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Abstract

The urban growth of Annaba has been marked by poorly managed expansion, driven by accelerated urbanization as well as demographic and political pressures.

This process has placed significant strain on land housing.

In response, several public housing programs were implemented to address the needs of different social groups.

This study focuses on Sidi Salem, a peripheral neighborhood, and highlights the shortcomings of public housing policies in suburban areas, along with their social and spatial consequences.

The research applies the territorial diagnosis method to analyze local dynamics and challenges, emphasizing the gap between national policy objectives and their local implementation.

Keywords: Housing Policy, Territorial Diagnosis, Marginalization, Annaba.

Résumé

La croissance urbaine d'Annaba a été marquée par une expansion mal maîtrisée, entraînée par une urbanisation accélérée ainsi que par des pressions démographiques et politiques. Ce processus a exercé une pression importante sur le foncier et le logement. En réponse, plusieurs programmes de logement public ont été mis en œuvre pour répondre aux besoins des différents groupes sociaux. Cette étude se concentre sur Sidi Salem, un quartier périphérique, et met en lumière les insuffisances des politiques de logement public dans les zones suburbaines, ainsi que leurs conséquences sociales et spatiales. La recherche applique la méthode du diagnostic territorial pour analyser les dynamiques et les enjeux locaux, en soulignant le décalage entre les objectifs des politiques nationales et leur mise en œuvre locale.

Mots-clés : politique du logement, diagnostic territorial, marginalisation, Annaba.

ملخص

شهد النمو الحضري في عنابة توسعاً غير مُدار بشكل جيد، ناتج عن تسارع التحضر بالإضافة إلى الضغوط الديموغرافية والسياسية. وقد وضع هذا التوسع ضغطاً كبيراً على الأراضي والسكن. استجابةً لذلك، تم تنفيذ عدة برامج إسكان عام لتلبية احتياجات مختلف الفئات الاجتماعية. تركزت هذه الدراسة على حي سيدي سالم، وهو حي طرفي، وتسلط الضوء على أوجه القصور في سياسات الإسكان العام في المناطق الضواحي، بالإضافة إلى عواقبها الاجتماعية والمكانية. تطبق هذه الدراسة طريقة التشخيص الإقليمي لتحليل الديناميات والتحديات المحلية، مع التأكيد على الفجوة بين أهداف السياسات الوطنية وتنفيذها على المستوى المحلي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سياسة الإسكان، التشخيص الإقليمي، التهميش، عنابة

Introduction

Like many cities in the Global South affected by urban sprawl (Dureau, 2004), major Algerian cities have experienced sustained spatial expansion since the mid-1970s. This expansion can be attributed to the economic growth driven by oil and gas production, which created a strong demand for labor, as well as rural exodus and high fertility rates.

Cities such as Algiers, Oran, Constantine, and Annaba illustrate these demographic and migratory dynamics, highlighting the mounting pressure on land and housing. In Annaba, this process manifested in two forms: planned urbanization through public housing programs (ZHUN), and informal urbanization outside regulatory frameworks, leading to the emergence of precarious and marginalized urban spaces. Although national urban planning policies aimed to reduce inequalities and eliminate substandard housing, the programs implemented often failed to address the actual needs of local populations.

They encouraged peripheral expansion characterized by poor-quality construction, a lack of infrastructure and public facilities, limited economic opportunities, and persistent social vulnerability.

This situation underlines the need for a more contextualized and inclusive approach to urban planning. Against this backdrop, the analysis of Sidi Salem—a peripheral neighborhood located 4 km from Annaba’s city center, covering 114 hectares and home to around 30,000 residents—sheds light on how a project initially designed to integrate populations and meet housing needs evolved into a space of social and spatial exclusion.

This research examines the extent to which public policies and planning mechanisms have considered local specificities, and explores prospects for urban renewal by identifying both inherited constraints and opportunities for neighborhood enhancement.

Methodology

Our research is based on recent literature addressing urban growth dynamics, with a particular focus on the Global South. Concepts such as urban renewal, regeneration, requalification, and urban sprawl, although sometimes ambiguous in their origins and applications, remain central to public urban planning policies. In the Algerian context, the specific processes of neighborhood formation provide the conceptual framework for our study.

Harvey’s (2003) reflections on *The Right to the City*, which examine claims and appropriation processes of urban space, and Hall’s (2014) historical perspective on the evolution of urban planning debates, have particularly informed our approach. Likewise, Rivière d’Arc’s (2010) book, *Les villes du Maghreb: Transformations, recompositions et requalifications*, provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding contemporary urban transformations in Maghreb cities, especially in Algeria.

Methodologically, our analysis is grounded in the territorial diagnostic approach, a tool that combines qualitative and quantitative data to build a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the

territory (Goeury & Sierra, 2016). While widely used in strategic urban planning, this method also proves relevant for academic research, as it identifies spatial, social, and environmental dynamics while integrating the perceptions of residents and local stakeholders.

Applying this approach to the Sidi Salem district is justified by its capacity to establish a detailed overview of the territory, identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and anticipate future developments. It thus provides an analytical framework that is useful both for research and for public policy decision-making.

Practically, our work combines a quantitative analysis, based on data collection across urban, social, economic, environmental, and landscape dimensions, with a qualitative analysis that draws on local actors' perceptions. This qualitative dimension was enriched by debates, interviews, and a survey conducted with a random sample of 100 residents of Sidi Salem.

Cross-referencing these two approaches has made it possible to highlight the district's specific issues, identify its key current challenges, and outline prospective directions for its transformation.

Results and Discussion

The Sidi Salem district, located on the south-eastern periphery of the Annaba agglomeration (El Bouni municipality), covers an area of approximately 2.5 km² and is home to an estimated 33,000 inhabitants.

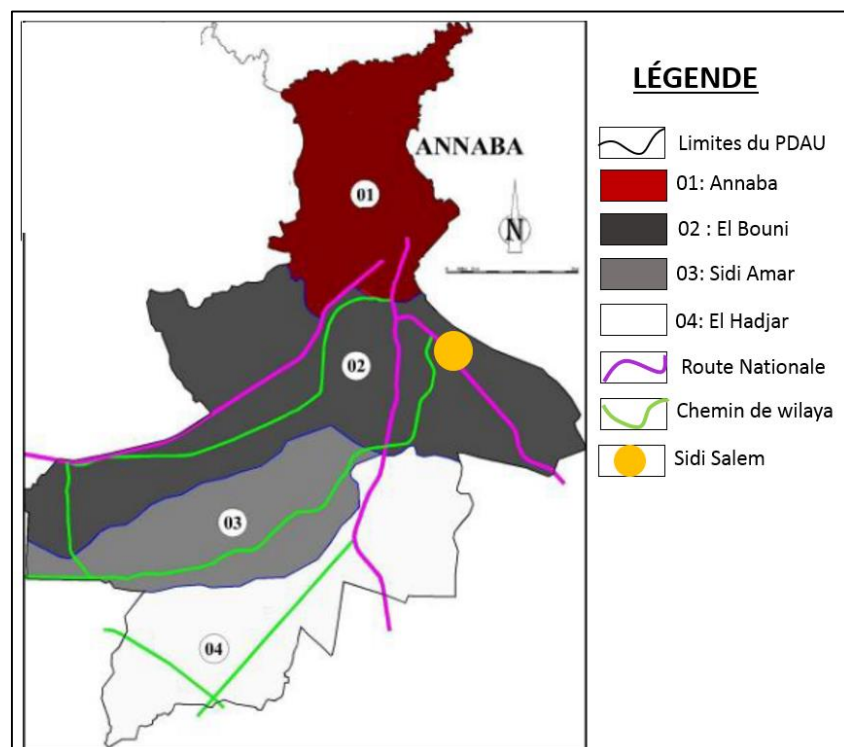


Figure. 1: Location of Sidi Salem in The Annaba Agglomeration
(Source: PDAU, 2008)

Its geographical setting is strongly constrained by two natural barriers: the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the Seybouse River to the south, which creates a clear physical separation from the rest of the urban

fabric of Annaba. This particular location has shaped Sidi Salem into an urban enclave, deeply influencing its patterns of growth and development.

The district's evolution has been marked by the successive superimposition of public housing programmes carried out over several decades. However, these interventions, often fragmented and lacking a comprehensive urban vision, have produced a heterogeneous urban landscape. Newly developed areas, resulting from national housing policies, coexist with older sectors characterised by precarity and physical deterioration.

Sidi Salem thus reflects the contradictions of peripheral urban planning policies: while partially addressing the increasing demand for housing, these projects have failed to fully integrate the district into the wider urban dynamics of the Annaba metropolitan area.

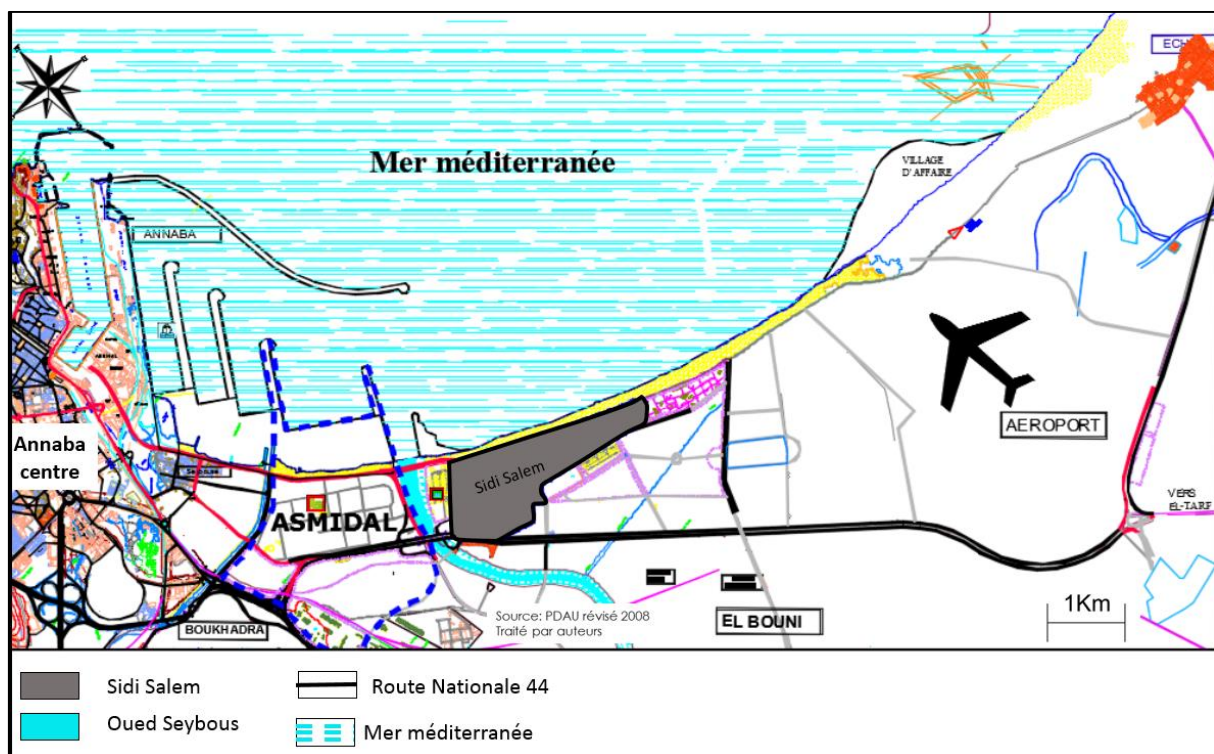


Figure. 2: Geographical Situation of Sidi Salem
(Source: PDAU, 2008)

1- Origins of Marginalization in Sidi Salem : Evolution of the Neighborhood during the Colonial Era

During the colonial period (1830–1962), the Annaba region was renowned for its mineral resources, particularly its iron and phosphate mines (Kouadria & Acidi, 2012), which stimulated significant economic development. This prosperity attracted substantial European immigration, mainly from France, Italy, and Spain. Sidi Salem experienced a major influx of immigrants with the construction of housing for European workers.

This immigration deeply influenced the urban structure of the neighborhood, creating well-equipped areas reserved for Europeans, while local populations were relegated to less developed zones. This segregation laid the foundation for infrastructural and socio-economic inequalities that remain visible today.

The urban planning of Sidi Salem was also shaped by the creation of the Sections Administratives Spécialisées (SAS) under the Constantine Plan in 1956. These SAS, arranged in a dense regular grid around a central square, initially served to house Algerians on the outskirts of Annaba in order to better monitor their movements. Later, these resettlement estates were used to accommodate European workers.

The choice of SAS locations was strategic, ensuring proximity to regroupment camps to facilitate administrative, social, and health missions. The term “SAS” still persists today, although it would be more accurate to normalize it as “Sasse,” given that these spaces no longer serve the same role nor have the same scope as during the colonial era.

The rest of the neighborhood consisted of low-rise tower or slab housing blocks gradually built during the last two decades of colonization (1940–1960). Urbanization then slowed due to the war of liberation. After independence, the situation in Sidi Salem, as in many other Algerian regions, reflected the difficult transition from colonial rule to the post-independence era. However, this transition did not always resolve the precarious conditions inherited from colonization. On the contrary, many peripheral neighborhoods, including Sidi Salem, continued to face challenges related to poverty and the lack of adequate infrastructure, partly due to the disruptions caused by the war of liberation and the developmental difficulties that followed independence.

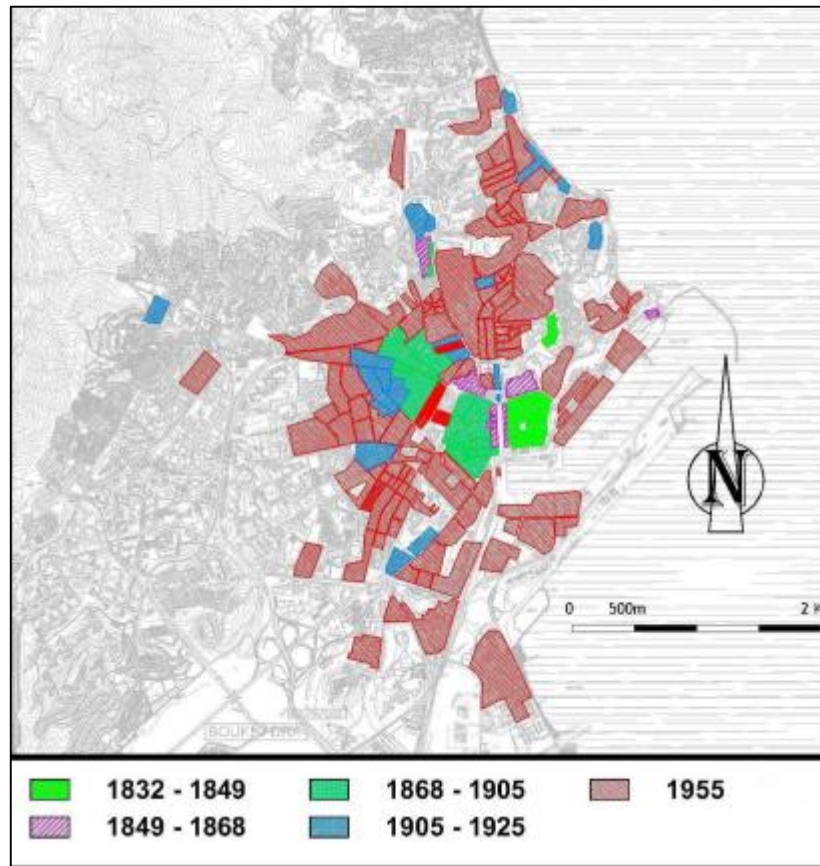
2- Post-Independence Urban Development and the Deterioration of the Neighborhood

The urban trajectory of Annaba reflects the dominant pattern of Algerian cities, characterized by excessive territorial expansion (Hafiane, 1989), which has produced significant territorial, social, and economic impacts.

On the one hand, this expansion generated hybrid peripheries, composed of rapidly growing urban areas where informal development became the dominant vector. The planning and regulatory framework remained inadequate to provide an operational structure to guide urbanization, resulting in an increasingly fragmented and socially segregated urban space (Hafiane, 1989) as the city continued to sprawl.

On the other hand, urban sprawl led to substantial economic consequences. The costs associated with infrastructure, particularly transportation and energy networks, rose considerably, further straining the city’s structural balance.

Figure 03 : Urban Expansion of The City of Annaba



This increase, compounded by the State's limited financial resources, made the implementation of large-scale projects increasingly difficult, thereby affecting the quality of urban services. Consequently, neighborhoods such as Sidi Salem became attractive places for the most vulnerable populations. The impoverishment of a significant part of the urban population living on the periphery intensified in 2020, due to the sharp rise in unemployment, which reached 12.2%. The predominance of informal activities and the insufficient provision of services and infrastructure were also coupled with a rise in violence and criminality generated by growing delinquency (Bakour and Baouni 2015).

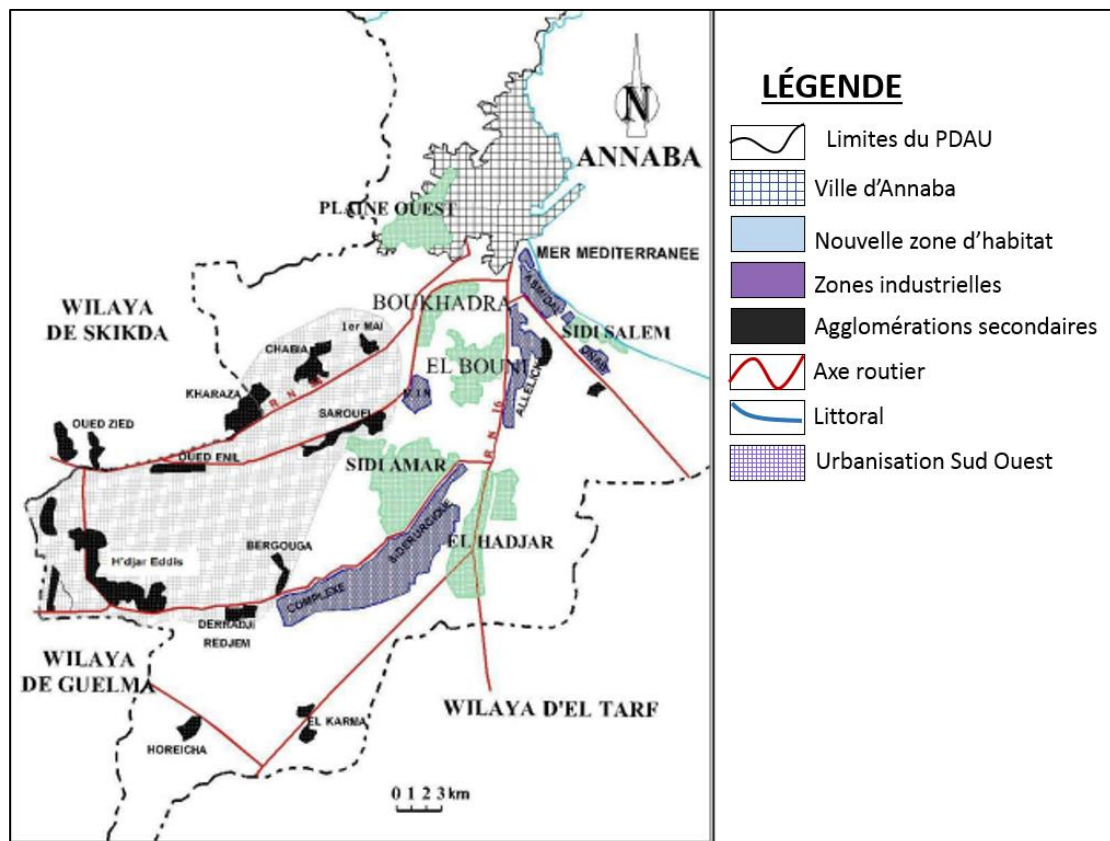


Figure. 4 : Urban Components of Annaba and its Region
(Source : Mebirouk et al. 2023)

In the case of Annaba, the Algerian State initiated the construction of the El-Hadjar steel complex in the 1970s, with the aim of promoting heavy industry and reducing the country's dependence on steel imports. This site was chosen due to its proximity to the iron ore deposits of eastern Algeria (Yousfi, 2011).

During this period, the population of the Sidi Salem district grew rapidly as a result of rural migration and high fertility rates, themselves linked to the decline in infant mortality and the improvement of health and hygiene conditions. In fact, infant mortality in Algeria dropped from 250 per 1,000 live births in 1966 to 95 per 1,000 in 1976, while fertility remained high, averaging six children per woman in 1970.

This demographic growth created strong pressure on housing demand and led to the spread of informal settlements, particularly in the south-east of the city, close to the beach and the Seybouse River. Even the SAS housing estate was affected, with the addition of extra rooms to existing dwellings and constructions encroaching on open spaces (squares, streets, and pathways). These informal extensions gradually transformed the urban fabric into a dense and compact mass, where streets often resembled labyrinths (see Fig. 5).

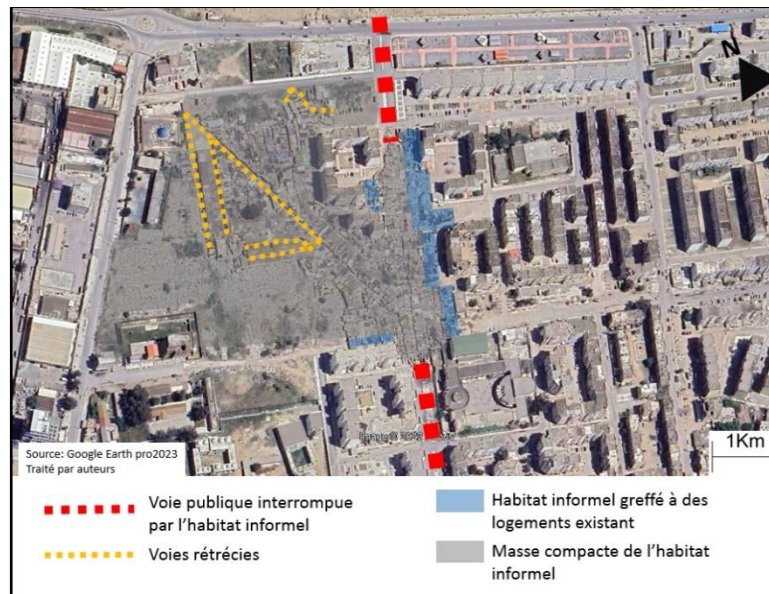


Figure 5 : Urban Development of the Sidi Salem District

Source : Prepared by The Authors Based on Google Earth Images

By the late 1970s, in an attempt to curb the expansion of informal neighborhoods—developed mainly on the city’s periphery through non-regulatory construction processes and lacking adequate infrastructure and services—the State planned a new urban housing area as an extension of the S.A.S. district.

This collective housing zone was organized according to a fragmented grid layout along the servicing roads.

By the late 1980s, within the same framework of reducing informal housing and addressing the growing demand for dwellings, two programs of progressive social housing (Safar Zitoun, 2009) were implemented (Boukhmira I and II), as an extension of the ZHUN.

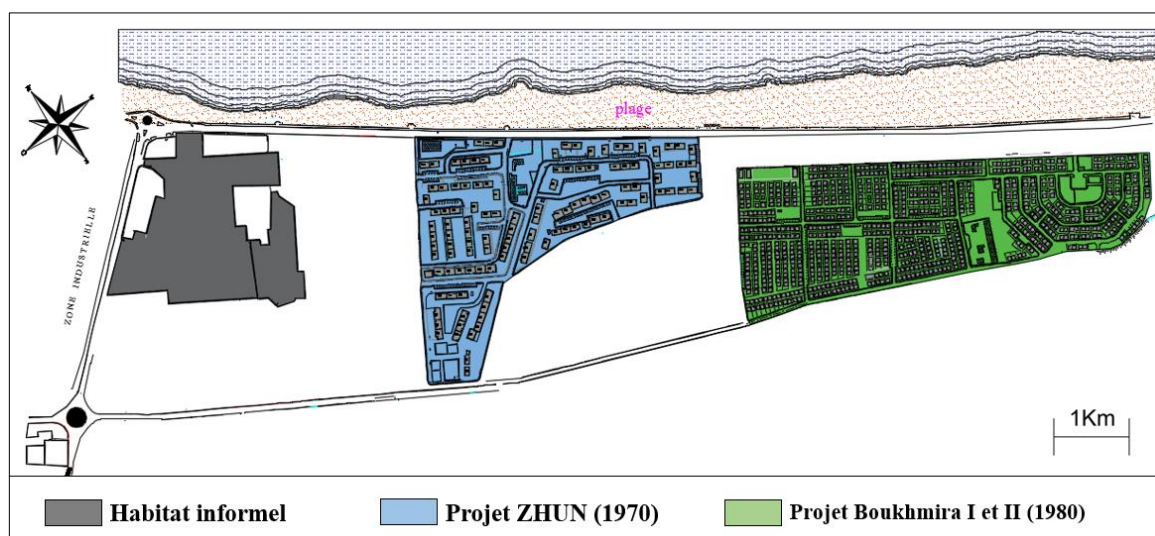


Figure. 6 : Urban Evolution of the Sidi Salem District

Source : Prepared by the Authors Based on PDAU, 2008

This operation aimed to transfer families rapidly to the new housing estates. The resulting urban fabric was composed of individual units organized in a dense, regular grid, laid out in a discontinuous pattern along the access roads. However, the implementation of this program remained incomplete due to financial, logistical, and administrative constraints. Consequently, some of the families who were supposed to be rehoused did not benefit from new dwellings and continued to live in precarious conditions.

From 1989 onwards, the State sought to improve the living environment and develop the Sidi Salem area through the establishment of a commercial activity zone (ZAC Sidi Salem). The elected officials of the El Bouni municipality encouraged the participation of nearly 80 external investors to stimulate local economic activity by allowing them to implement their projects within this zone.

In 1999, the State launched a program of 400 housing units, followed by another 700 units, in order to fill the remaining urban gap between the ZHUN and Boukhmira I and II (see figure 7). This initiative introduced a third type of social housing: collective dwellings organized in a relatively loose and regular layout, arranged in small clusters around shared collective spaces.

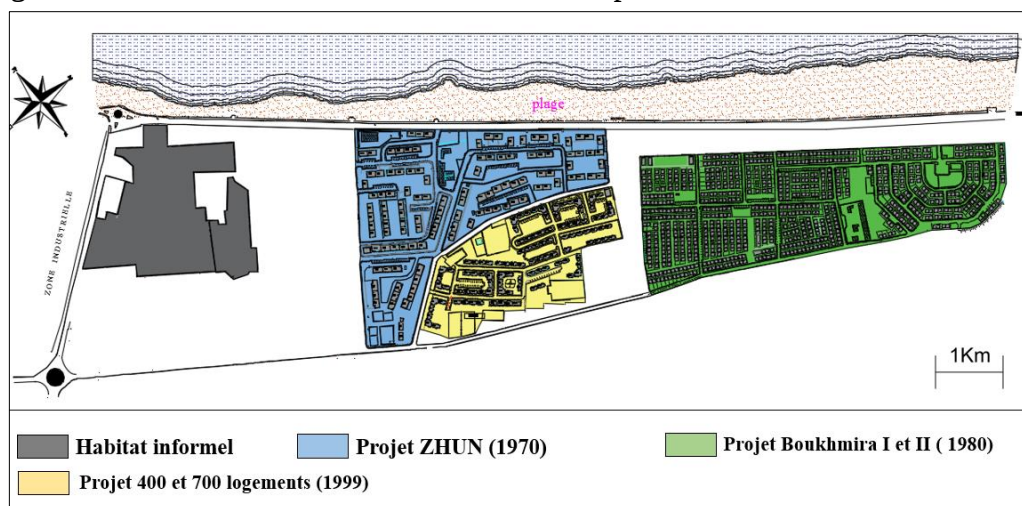


Figure. 7 : Location of the 400 and 700 Housing Projects
Source : Prepared by the Authors Based on the PDAU 2008

Another housing program was completed in the early 2000s, with the construction of 300 social housing units by the Office de Promotion et de Gestion Immobilière (OPGI) in Sidi Salem (see Fig. 8). Intended for low-income households, these housing units were allocated according to social and economic criteria defined by the local authorities. Beneficiaries could rent the units from the OPGI. Tenants had to meet resource and family composition conditions set by current regulations. Rents were determined according to official scales, often lower than those on the private housing market. The OPGI could also offer for sale unused units or those requiring major rehabilitation works. Sales were reserved for eligible persons under the same criteria as for rental, and sale prices were regulated by the authorities.

In the early 1990s, the OPGI was reorganized in response to the country's new political and economic orientation, abandoning the socialist model and opening up to the market economy. Initially of an administrative nature, the OPGI has since this reorganization become a public industrial and commercial

institution, considered as a merchant in its relations with third parties and subject to commercial law. This led to a significant change in relations with beneficiaries and in housing policy.

Faced with major shifts in the country's economic policy in the early 1990s, Algeria's precarious housing resorption policy was integrated into the State's 2010–2014 five-year plan, which programmed 300,000 housing units to reduce precarious settlements (Taleb and Aknine 2017). The social housing construction program aimed at several objectives defined by the authorities : improving living conditions for residents of precarious neighborhoods, fostering their integration into urban life, strengthening social cohesion by reducing socio-economic disparities, and promoting the inclusion of marginalized populations.

However, in the case of Sidi Salem, this policy was not sufficient to achieve these objectives due to several factors. Rapid population growth led to the creation of new informal housing areas at a pace faster than that of resorption projects. Internal migration, driven by the search for jobs and other opportunities, also contributed to the growth of informal settlements. Rural-to-urban migrants often ended up without adequate housing, fueling the expansion of informal neighborhoods. Furthermore, some residents of informal settlements who received social housing chose to rent it out rather than occupy it—taking advantage of this new supply while retaining their informally built dwelling. These practices exploited the lack of coordination between the services responsible for managing the transition to new housing.

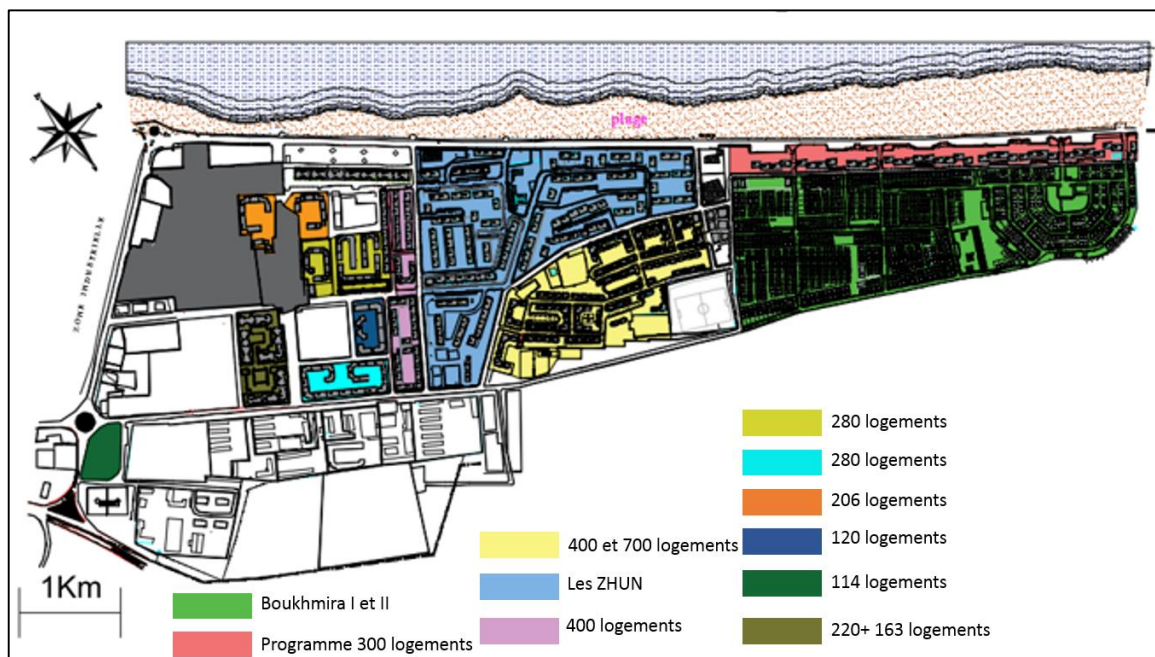


Figure. 8 : The Different Housing Programs in Sidi Salem

Source : Prepared by the Authors Based on PDAU, 2008

3- Sidi Salem : An Underutilized Urban Development Potential

From an urban perspective, the Sidi Salem neighborhood enjoys a strategic geographic location, close to the Seybouse housing estate and the administrative center (chef-lieu) of El Bouni daïra, and bordering

Echatt to the northeast along the coast of the El Tarf wilaya. Its three main access points facilitate movement and integration with surrounding areas.

The neighborhood is clearly defined by physical landmarks such as the port, the airport, National Road 44, and Wilaya Road 56. Despite undeniable economic, cultural, and touristic assets, the socio-economic conditions of its residents remain concerning, with a high unemployment rate. This contrast highlights that the neighborhood's potential is not fully utilized.

Although social housing programs have been implemented, several factors explain the persistence of marginalization. Firstly, some housing units have deteriorated over time due to insufficient maintenance and environmental factors, while informal constructions coexist alongside formal housing. Public intervention has focused primarily on creating new urban areas, without sustainable mechanisms to ensure the upkeep and development of existing neighborhoods, which remain vulnerable to degradation from the moment they are completed.

Secondly, the quality of life is affected by air, sea, and soil pollution caused by a chemical fertilizer production plant. This situation exacerbates social distress and constitutes an environmental threat to the daily lives of residents (Zegaoula & Khellaf, 2014).

Finally, public spaces are often degraded, with some serving as informal dumping sites due to ineffective municipal waste management and lack of oversight. While the relationship between private and public spaces raises issues of the deterritorialization of social ties and the disjunction between primary social networks and residential areas (Navez Bouchanine, 2005), other factors also play a role, such as insufficient local waste collection services, which lead residents to dispose of their waste in "non-private" spaces (Figures 9, 10, and 11).



Figure. 9 – Household Waste Accumulation Near the SAS in Sidi Salem

Source : Prepared by the Authors



Figure. 10 – Household Waste Near Agricultural Plots
in Sidi Salem

Source : Prepared by the Authors



Figure. 11 : Waste and Degradation in the Sidi Salem
Neighborhood

Source : Prepared by the Authors

The survey results among residents highlight their key concerns and expectations regarding the condition and use of public spaces in the studied neighborhood (Figures 12 and 13).

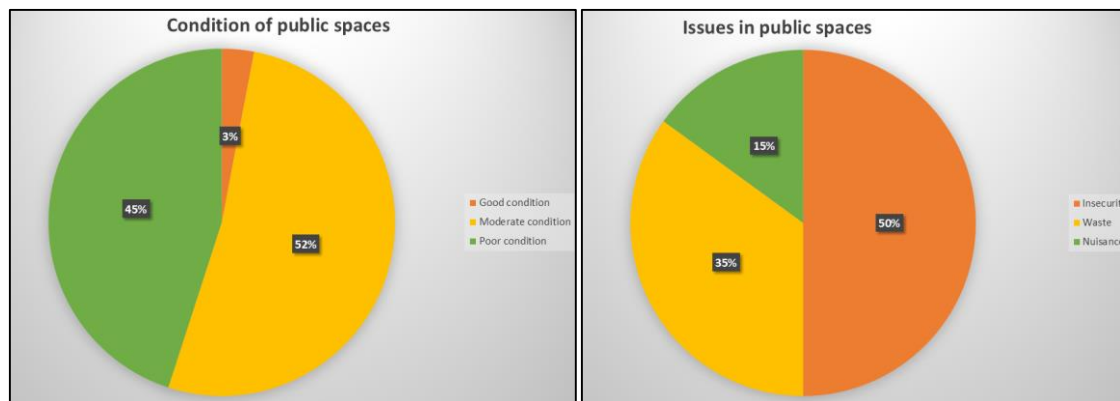


Figure. 12 : Residents' Perception of the Condition of Public Spaces in Sidi Salem
Source : Survey Conducted by the Authors

Figure. 13 : Main Problems Identified by Residents in Public Spaces in Sidi Salem
Source : Survey Conducted by the Authors

With only 3% of respondents considering public spaces to be in good condition (compared to 52% rating them as moderate and 45% as poor), this variation clearly indicates that the majority of the population perceives public space quality negatively in the study area.

Regarding the most frequent issues, safety emerges as the primary concern, cited by 50% of participants, directly impacting residents' perception of quality of life in these spaces. Additionally, 35% of respondents highlighted waste management as a major problem, while 13% mentioned nuisance, indicating that other disruptive factors affect the use and quality of public spaces.

Despite these challenges, the Sidi Salem neighborhood presents significant development potential, particularly due to its natural and landscape assets. Its attractiveness could be enhanced by new accessibility infrastructure, such as the planned maritime line connecting Sidi Salem Beach to Ras El Hamra in the northern part of the city. Furthermore, the presence of underutilized plots and ongoing urban improvement efforts led by local authorities, through programs for upgrading and resorbing precarious housing, as well as the Urban Coherence Scheme (SCU), offer opportunities for positive change.

However, several factors hinder the neighborhood's development: the absence of post-project maintenance frameworks, weak governance mechanisms, and limited community participation in local management represent major constraints to the success of local development initiatives.

4- An Urban Fabric Misaligned with Residents' Needs

The Sidi Salem neighborhood exhibits a significant gap between the current lifestyles of its residents and the physical characteristics of its urban fabric. The neighborhood's development results from a series of housing projects that no longer meet the contemporary needs of the population regarding housing, infrastructure, and services (Figures 14, 15, and 16).

The deficiencies identified affect not only infrastructure, with 51% of respondents reporting difficulties in moving around the neighborhood, but also services, deemed insufficient by 68% of residents, as well as housing conditions, considered poor by 40% of participants. Although most of the projects that shaped the neighborhood were public, the lack of follow-up or post-project maintenance has contributed to this situation of deterioration and misalignment with residents' needs.

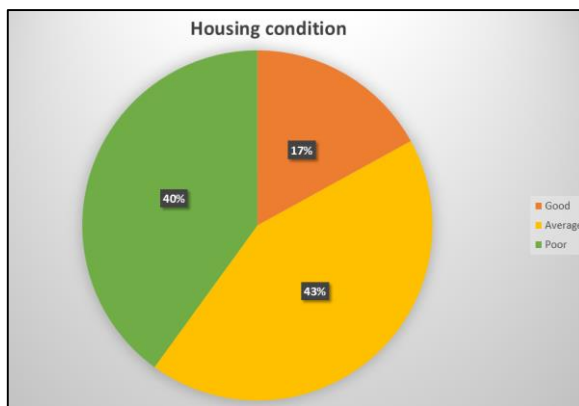


Figure. 14 : Residents' Perception of Housing Conditions
Source : Authors' Survey

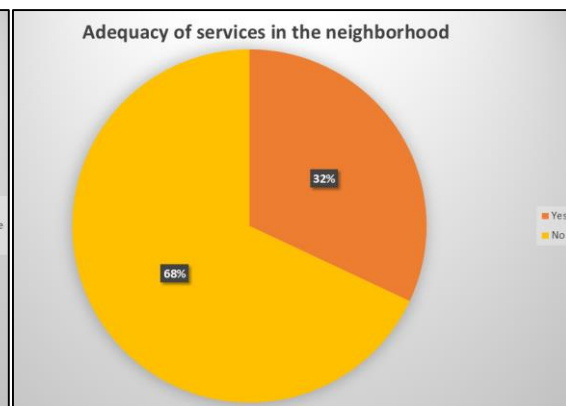


Figure. 15 : Residents' Perception of Neighborhood Services
Source : Authors' Survey

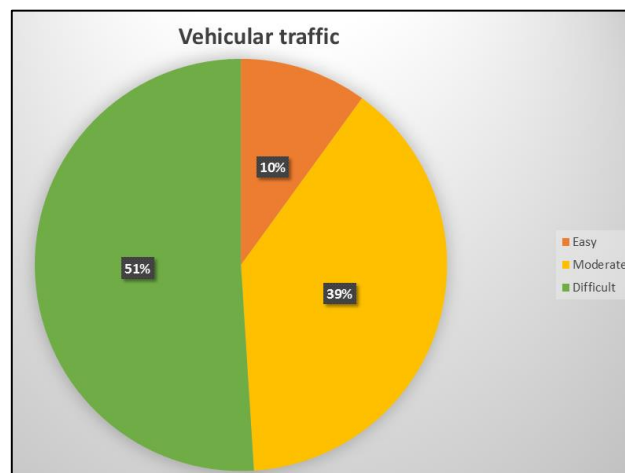


Figure. 15 : Residents' Perception of Vehicular Traffic
Source : Authors' Survey

5 – The Complex Challenges of Urban Renewal: Social Obstacles and Governance Deficits

The analysis of the Sidi Salem neighborhood indicates that it has suffered from a lack of post-construction interventions by public actors. Implementing such actions what could be considered urban renewal is unlikely under current conditions, where public policies and instruments focus primarily on new projects and do not integrate the renewal of older, deteriorated developments.

Such potential interventions would face social, economic, and political difficulties. Socially, they would first confront resistance to change, as residents have developed increasing skepticism toward political decisions and public actions. Interviews reveal that residents fear that the project might lead to their displacement or the loss of their current housing. Relocation to distant areas such as Draa Erich, El Kalitoussa, or El Kantra would significantly impact the local population, reducing proximity to workplaces and services, and increasing transportation costs, which would strain household budgets.

Additionally, this redistribution of housing would disrupt family and neighborhood networks. Relocated residents, often stigmatized, would face integration challenges in the new environment, where essential solidarity networks would need to be rebuilt. Another constraint is that the plots of land, often informal or disputed, generate legal conflicts and obstacles to renewal implementation.

To these site-specific constraints are added limitations in urban governance models. Insufficient financial resources of municipalities, combined with the cumbersome decision-making processes of local authorities and other public actors, make urban renewal projects already complex to manage unlikely to succeed. Finally, the political and social context means that community-led actions are difficult to carry out and are rarely among the options encouraged by authorities, who often seek to instrumentalize them.

6- Social Dynamics and Residents' Perceptions

Beyond physical and infrastructural aspects, Sidi Salem exhibits a complex social dynamic that strongly influences the use and appreciation of its urban space. Surveys and interviews conducted with residents reveal that they develop daily strategies to cope with service deficiencies, the degradation of public spaces, and insecurity. For instance, informal use of vacant land for community or economic activities, organization of local waste collection within certain blocks, and the establishment of inter-family solidarity networks demonstrate that the population appropriates the neighborhood despite its constraints. These practices highlight that marginalization is not only an issue of urban planning but also a social and cultural challenge. Studying these perceptions emphasizes the importance of the human dimension in urban renewal processes and allows for the proposal of solutions that are more closely aligned with residents' actual needs, in contrast to previous approaches that focused primarily on technical or historical diagnoses.

7- Redevelopment Potential and Innovative Strategies

Despite degradation and socio-economic constraints, Sidi Salem possesses significant potential for urban redevelopment. Its geographical location, close to the sea, major roads, and still underutilized or vacant spaces, represents a major asset for targeted interventions. This potential could be leveraged through several avenues : rehabilitating degraded public spaces, creating pedestrian areas and urban parks, improving internal mobility, and optimizing public service provision. Active involvement of residents in the design, implementation, and monitoring of projects could strengthen their ownership of the neighborhood and ensure the sustainability of interventions. Moreover, integrated projects combining local economic development, tourism, and cultural initiatives could transform the district while respecting the population's needs. This forward-looking and multidimensional approach, focused on opportunities

and solutions, clearly distinguishes this study from the first article, which primarily concentrated on the historical analysis and challenges of Sidi Salem without exploring potential development levers.

Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive contribution to understanding the origins, dynamics, and challenges of a peripheral neighborhood initiated by public authorities. The study offers three main contributions, addressing methodological, territorial, and operational dimensions.

Firstly, the research explores the application of the territorial diagnostic method within a scientific context. By relying on real data and interactions with the residents of Sidi Salem, this study demonstrates the relevance of this methodological approach for analyzing the dynamics and challenges of a disadvantaged neighborhood. This contribution strengthens the toolkit available to urban researchers and planners by highlighting the added value of this methodology.

Secondly, the study provides an in-depth understanding of the functioning of Sidi Salem and its underlying issues. By examining neighborhood degradation, residents' needs, and development opportunities, the research offers a nuanced analysis of local dynamics. It also sheds light on the relationship between national housing policies closely linked to social and economic policies—and their local implementation in the case of a specific neighborhood, helping to explain the gaps that sometimes emerge between objectives and actual outcomes.

Finally, the study confronts the concepts and approaches of urban renewal with the realities on the ground. In Sidi Salem, public policies often stop at the initiation stage of projects without adequately addressing their ongoing management. By highlighting this disconnect, the research underlines the necessity for policies that integrate both project implementation and post-construction management, ensuring the sustainability of interventions and the improvement of residents' quality of life.

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