SPACE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Dr. Bouzid BOUDIAF

Ajman University of Science and Technology
Email: Jrac.bouzid@ajman.ac.ae

Abstract:
This presentation deals with the relationship between identity and physical aspects of the urban and public places. The importance of the urban and public spaces in the communication of identity might be seen as one aspect of the broad area of research into the meaning of the urban space and its relationship to the physical form of housing in Algiers. It examines how people perceive and use their immediate environment and how different people modify their spaces differently. It is assumed that the physical form of the urban space mediates and structures gender relations. This will be illuminated by elements of the urban development and particularly of the urban activities, and an explanation of its relationship to changing ideologies and architectural norms. Typically, the urban and public spaces symbolize accepted notions of the appropriate function of the plaza and preferred public relations, such notions are in themselves profoundly important in structuring gender relations. The city of today differs from its past in several respects: size and scale, street layout, land use patterns, architectural style and type of housing. Traditional urban form and building which would have provided information about regional and national identity have been largely replaced by forms characterizing the international and universal buildings and spaces. These changes have altered the city’s form and have given rise to questions about the impact of these changes on the image of the city in terms of size and cultural values. So the concept of urban space becomes a determinant of the ability of planners, architects, engineers and administrators to provide an environment which is adequately structured to avoid chaos and to maintain an acceptable quality of life.

Introduction:
This presentation deals with the relationship between identity and physical aspects of the urban and public places. The importance of the urban and public spaces in the communication of identity might be seen as one aspect of the broad area of research into the meaning of the urban space and its relationship to the physical form of housing in Algiers. It examines how people perceive and use their immediate environment and how different people modify their spaces differently. It is assumed that the physical form of the urban space mediates and structures gender relations. This will be illuminated by elements of the urban development and particularly of the urban activities, and an explanation of its relationship to changing ideologies and architectural norms. Typically, the urban and public spaces symbolize accepted notions of the appropriate function of the plaza and preferred public relations, such notions are in themselves profoundly important in structuring gender relations.
The city of today differs from its past in several respects: size and scale, street layout, land use patterns, architectural style and type of housing. Traditional urban form and building which would have provided information about regional and national identity have been largely replaced by forms characterizing the international and universal buildings and spaces. These changes have altered the city’s form and have given rise to questions about the impact of these changes on the image of the city in terms of size and cultural values. So the concept of urban space becomes a determinant of the ability of planners, architects, engineers and administrators to provide an environment which is adequately structured to avoid chaos and to maintain an acceptable quality of life.

Theoretical Framework:
Civilization is the advanced social development that is believed to owe its origin to human interaction in cities. But cities do not always have a civilizing effect. In history, the size of a population has corresponded to the availability of resources, particularly food and water. Ever since the Age of Agriculture, the stability of food supplies and the relative security of group settlements have decreased mortality rate and increased fertility. The consequent increased demand leads to exploitation of resources, which invariably exceeds the accessible supply. As a result, a cyclical population decline occurs, through starvation, disease, social and economic declination, migration and war (Facing The Future: People and the Planet 1997). Historical examples abound: recurring famines, the Black Death, colonization, the two World Wars.

As cities have historically been a place of gathering, of diversity and culture, trends in city planning are redefining the structure of cities into segregated zones separating the haves and the have-nots. Classified by political theorist Michael Walzer as “single-minded” spaces, most metropolises today comprise distinct business districts, industrial zones, shopping arcades, uptown residences, and lower class or racial ghettos. In contrast to “open-minded” spaces that interweave multiple functions for the masses, single-minded spaces, along with automobile dependency, promote social isolationism, in which city residents tend to minimize interaction with and within the city and the diversity thereof. In addition, the decentralization of megacities to a greater urban sprawl spring a number of design issues, including the harmonization of new business districts, mix-income residences, and land allocation for green areas. At present, urban development continues to follow the piecemeal approach, where districts are designed as an isolated project. Furthermore, infrastructure such as roads and public transportation must be considered with the environment and population density. In most of the countries (since the industrial revolution for some European countries) and in the beginning of the 1960’s in South America and Africa, it had been noticed a huge and unexpected migration from the rural to the urban areas. For the Algerian case, in the XIX Century, the urban population was around 6%, and in 1997 it was around 45% and it is expected that by 2030, the urban population will more than the rural population. The attraction and migration to the urban areas can be explained by the search for a diversified environment (different ethnics, multitude of activities) offering many opportunities (in terms of jobs, leisure, health, communication, etc.) with the hope to change the social status, offer a better education to their progenitor. Certainly, this attraction has some positive aspects (amenities offered, well-being, increase of knowledge, etc.) but it has also some negative aspects from the environmental and psychological (anonymity, noise, aggression, vandalism, pollution, robbery, crimes, etc.). These negatives aspects, noticed in the case of Algiers, led to a social and physical segregation of the city, usually the areas with a high-rise buildings or occupied by a low-income lack of gardens or playground for children and most of the urban furniture are damaged physically or having some graffiti on them. It seems that there is a very strong correlation between crime and density. In fact this kind of behavior is not specific to Algiers or to our contemporary life (Historically and from the chronological point of the view, it was Leonardo De Vinci who was the first trying to construct a safety space, then we had the utopian who
developed some spatial organizations highlighting the hygienic issues and later there appeared ideas and studies of Henard, Howard and Perry, who tried to solve both functional and traffic problems, touching more or less aspects of public safety), this stratification led to the development of a new of thinking about the production of our build environment and called Environmental Design. Among those whom are behind the development of tools in Environmental Design, I mention Jane Jacobs (in her the death and life of the great American cities, she suggested that the city center can be livable and secured, she advocates open and permeable environments, in which strangers passing through spaces, as well as inhabitants, are part of the natural policing mechanism). Oscar Newman at late 1960’s has been an author of the idea of ‘Defensible Space’, based on strong integration of small neighborhoods around closed or semi-closed, impermeable spaces. Bill Hillier (with his book entitled Social logic of space) developed a technique that can be used for morphological analysis of buildings, architectural plans, urban areas and urban plans. The aim of this technique is to describe different aspects of the relationships between the morphological structure of man-made environments and social structures/events. It is a method that tries to relate some forms of human behavior with morphological features and analysis (the basic concept of Space Syntax is integration). Space Syntax is supposed to relate morphological features with the distribution of use of public space, with the quality of environmental cognition, with personal crime, with the inhabitant-visitor interface. The young scientific domain, an Environmental Psychology was established at 1970’s. It tries to recognize interactions between the quality, behavior and perception of space; and how to improve safety at public space. This domain is behind the creation of some international associations, I mention just some of them: IASPS (International Association for the Study of People and their Physical Surroundings) most of the members of this association are from Europe, MERA acting principally in Japan (Movement of Environmental Research), for U.S.A and South America: EDRA (Environmental Design Research Association), and PAPER (People and Physical Environment Research) which is acting in Australia and New Zealand.

Since 1980’s, cities are facing different types of risks: those related to anomie (such as physical decay, incivilities, crime...), but also accidents provoked by human activities (pollution due to chemicals, airplane accidents, gas explosion), natural hazards (earthquake), or terrorism menaces. The world seems increasingly concerned with the problems of a deteriorating environment: global climate change, vanishing plant and animal species, reliance on fossil fuels, and the inappropriate development of natural and productive landscapes, there is a marked tendency to bypass the urban environment. When seen in the context of the impact of humans on world ecosystems, it is clear that the links between cities, nature, and sustainability have profound impacts on the global environment. Urban open spaces are focal points in urban design and an important part of the fabric of any community. They serve as the public realm and environment for the surrounding buildings. They also provide a range of tangible benefits, such as mitigating air and water pollution, combating suburban sprawl, providing opportunities for recreation, reducing crime and fostering cohesive neighborhoods, attracting businesses, and stabilizing property values. As part of a broader urban agenda, investing in open space can serve as an anchor for revitalizing neighborhoods and building healthy communities. Sowell-designed urban open spaces are the heart of the matter. The degree the neighborhood is sustainable depends on its urban design. A good urban design is the key for any balanced and sustainable development.

In 1990’s, some countries such as Algeria succeeded to decrease to some extend the migration to the big cities, but another phenomena appeared. The menaces of terrorism led to the migration to the urban areas and principally to the big cities. This phenomenon can be illustrated through the establishment of illicit and quartered settlements which were behind the creation another type of psychoses and insecure environment: first, these settlements were very well and strongly organized in a way that to be part of the community
depends on the approval of the leader and most of the occupants came from the same area. Being without official jobs, they occupy some streets, each group was trying to define its territory and impose its own rules but ended by increasing the pick pockets, the drug dealer and their consequences remain for another decade to such an extent that the services of police would not recommend visitors (particularly the owners of cars) to go or across these areas. I am qualifying this situation as a phenomenon because since Algiers establishment its streets have been considered livable and not designed to ensure the facilitation of traffic as a prime purpose, but to be a part of the daily life as an incidental benefit by accommodating many social and recreational functions that passed through a natural historical development for any alike city till the main turning point of what is known for the Algerian the black decade when Algiers as a capital was and is seen as the symbol of the country became the top story of the country for almost fifteen years highlighting the dramatic changes and the repercussions that reshaped Algiers to a space of conflicts whether from the ideological issues or the conflicts between generations.

The research can be considered as a descriptive work for the situation on ground for a critical period of Algiers since 1992 up to now and it adopts some visual shots of urban public spaces through the city approaching with the objectives to understand the metamorphoses of our public spaces through the social factors and the production of a livable built environment, and highlights the solutions offered by the common people who are rich in their traditions, activities, ambitions, optimism to achieve a better life by adopting with the new facts on the ground quickly and practically showing a contrast model to that showed by the decision makers. The focus will be on how the people interactions and the built environment changed over time under different influences. Such understanding will help to draw on evidence linking people’s behavior to their physical environment. The idea which might be taken from such journey will realistically indicate the people perception and their social life more than any theoretical studies or general social statistics, so in order to answer the main question of such study of how secure this living built environment is, we have to follow the right diagnosis guide by examining the main veins of that environment “streets”, where the first symptom can be noticed. Such studies are essential for the professionals to plan a livable city, and to stimulate or guide the new generation for a common understanding based on such advisory studies to create a good standard of lifestyle to enjoy an ideal physical environment that exceeds the mere limited daily needs. Algiers city as a living built environment follows the life cycle principals and has the same characteristics of organization, response to stimuli, diversity, growth, development, and change through time.

Algiers as described by some artists and painters in the XVII Century.
Urban growth of Algiers in the XIX Century.

Algiers streets:
Streets in Algiers can be considered the veins which are pulsing in a way that reflect user’s traditions, habits feelings, demands, and needs. During its long age Algiers had the ability to grow and develop, also could be subject to get sick and aging. By having a walk in any street, a visitor who has an examiner eyes can guess, deduce and lay out the nature of its people identity expressed by the customers’ shopping, behaviors, street vendors attitudes and pedestrian interaction with each other and with their surrounded physical environment as a cultural mirror that reveals resident’s sophistication and satisfaction.

Casbah or the Medina of Algiers in the XX Century.

Just as many other cities do, Algiers comes from a small town on the coast, encircled in walls and surrounded by fields. Until late in the XIX Century, these walls were used as a separation between the urban center and the small villages and « summer residence » or Fahs.

During the Ottoman period, this area represented the fahs, nowadays it is part of the city used for the residential development.
Algiers in Arabic means a group of islands, during the Phoenician period; the land of Algiers was used as a trade post for the sake of commerce. In the Roman times, Algiers was called Icosium, was an unimportant city comparatively to Cherchel or Tipaza. In the tenth Century, Bologhine IbnouZiri founded a permanent settlement which developed into the Casbah and port of Algiers. After Algiers, during the Ottoman period and particularly with the Barbarous brothers (Aruj and Kheireddine) whom developed the maritime commerce by developing the port and the city was known as headquarter of the most successful arm of the Ottoman fleet. The Casbah of Algiers and the localization of the so called the « citadel » is an illustration of the basic condition of urbanism. The space in the medina is a particular and specific conception that can be perceived as a positive actuality of volumetric form and the prerequisite medium from which the whole fabric of urbanism should emerge. This concept of space is prototypical and its essence is discernible in different spaces and situations of the Kasbah.

Another criteria very important in the case of the Casbah of Algiersis the topography, this criteria not only shapes in some respect forms and spaces of the Medina but determined also the localization of buildings such as the mosques, the bakeries, the hammams, the fountains, the palaces and the « citadel ». The residential buildings were developed according the muslim tradition, e.g. the right for the sight and the air.

In the medina for instance, the « citadel » (or a mini - city within a city) retain the symbolic centrality as it was the ruler’s refuge and in the same time, it symbolized the administrative and military center. During the French occupation, the extension of the city has grown up around the medina, thus there was a spatial separation between the ottoman and the French urban spaces exception the center of power called « the marina district ». At the French occupation in 1830, the walls were pulled down after 1832, the fortress in the Kasbah dismantled, and the strip of fields would be urbanized following « the military project developed by: le genie militaire » and whose works started by 1860, known nowadays as Municipality of Algiers. This area would quickly be incorporated as part of the city with an important symbolic, social and artistic role, taking the part of a functional center the same as the old nucleus had always been. Later, with the introduction of a new mode of transport (Tramway and railway), those small centers in the surroundings (particularly the districts called: MustaphaSupérieur and El - Hamma) got integrated formally into the city by 1880. However, some of them remained as summer residences like the district of El - Biar, and others as subsidiary centers like BirMouradRais or Bouzaréah.

From 1930 until the recovery of the independence, Algiers served as a laboratory for development of ideas reflecting the vision the city as claimed by of the Modern Movement.

In the 1960’s, Algiers was estimated for almost 500.000 inhabitants, and due the departure of the colons and the arrival of lots of immigrants, the city grew extremely, with speculation and without a general project concerning construction among the centers. Suburbs grew without any more identity than that of being built in the same physical space. As a result, the city of today is entirely and completely different from what it was in the past. The physical development can be characterized by its insensitivity to cultural values, and its ignorance of typological and morphological features. This development exposed Algiers to another problem.
which is the conservation of the traditional city. As masses of people had migrated from rural areas and from the mountains to the city; so in addition to creating squatter settlements on the outskirts of the city, the migration had and still is one of the reasons for the deterioration and destruction of the traditional city.

As there are some public spaces such as plazas and boulevards being very famous for decades. The different plazas are shown on the table below with the figures. Most of these spaces are physically in a very condition and well conserved from the heritage point of view, but functionally most of them had a radical changes: some of them are considered an important commercial centers and are behind the development of the commercial street which are famous in some specific activities (the idea of the souk), others are well known for their cultural reputation as an intellectual places (mainly for the students or artists).

Martyrs Plaza before and after the French intervention, this plaza was created in 1833 for military purposes. In the map, it looks as the biggest void in the build environment. In the left photo we can also see the superposition of types of urban fabric (one as labyrinth and on it the regular and linear due to the change of speed and scale from the pedestrian to mechanic; this intervention illustrates the misunderstanding of the raison d etre of the urban composition where there was a very strong relation between the city and the sea.).
Table showing the chronological development of the main plazas built along the waterfront of Algiers. The distance two plazas is around 07 to 08 minutes of walk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology of the building</th>
<th>Form of the space</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Meaning of the place</th>
<th>Urban furniture</th>
<th>Date of construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martyrs’ Plaza</td>
<td>Neo-Classic</td>
<td>Rectangle</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Kisoques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regency Plaza</td>
<td>Neo-Classic</td>
<td>Rectangle</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>Shading areas for buses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Said Square</td>
<td>Neo-Classic</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Trees and shading areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emir Plaza</td>
<td>Neo-Classic</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>Commercial and Administrative</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Terraces and sitting areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Post Office Plaza</td>
<td>Arabisance</td>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Sitting areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audin Plaza</td>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td>Rectangle</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Trees and sitting areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st May Plaza</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Circular</td>
<td>Traffic regulation</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Mokrani Plaza</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>Circular</td>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall Plaza</td>
<td>Post Modern</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circular Plaza</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>Circular</td>
<td>Traffic regulation</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Greenery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square Plaza</td>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>Square</td>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>Parking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Martyrs’ plaza is shown with the different masses and urban furniture. Watch the scale, the proportion between the void and the masses; the ordinance of the facades. In the right photo, it is a proposition developed by RMJM with the objective to re-link the city with the sea.

Just nearby the Martyrs’ plaza, there is another void called Regency Place but used as a bus station and it will used as a station for the metro which is expected to be open to the public by the end of this year.

Port Said Plaza: Traditional urban form and building which would have provided information about regional and national identity have been largely replaced by forms characterizing the “Neo-Classical” style. These changes have altered the city’s form and have given rise to questions about the impact of these changes on the image of the city in terms of size and cultural values. The TNA is used as a background of a theatrical space.
This plan was developed by Haning whom was in charge of the urban development of Algiers; it is clear the strong influence of Le Corbusier project. (Master plan developed in 1958).
Emir’s Plaza: The form, the dimensions and the shape of this place are almost the same of the different places developed in 1880’s with the following public buildings: Post office; Town Hall; Church and Police station.

Main Post Office Plaza: Development of a new architectural style called: ARABISANCE (beginning of the XX Century).
May Plaza: The application of the CIAM principles by the architect Zehrefuss with the introduction of a new typology of buildings called Barres.

The so called square and circular plazas are just a result of geometrical composition and they end up by being using as traffic regulators.

Components of Place Identity:
Today places are not all surrounded by space. Places exist side by side (Place de le Regence and Place des Martyrs), in a system of places (sequence and frequency of the places). But still we ask ourselves: what makes a place?

A place is often seen as a blend of three components: The Form of the place, The Activities that take place (or in urban planning language we could say the function or use of the place), and at last The Meaning of the place.
To illustrate this, I shall use The Place des Martyrs in Algiers. First This Place was the first place created by the French occupant; it is situated at the intersection of two main axes used during the roman period which the Cardo and the Decamunus. This Place had many names and each period, its name was changed (Government’s plaza, Horse’s Place, Martyrs’Place). Martyrs’Place is perhaps the most significant place in Algiers. Let us take the form first. Martyrs’Place is a large rectangle open to the sea but closed at the sides.

Martyrs’Place is seen as an urban void by contrast to the masses and aggregates of the Medina.

The Martyrs’ Place is also articulating between two opposite worlds (the sea and the city) which were in harmony in way that the relation was so strong that we could define the former without referring to the latter and vice versa. To the form belongs also its location as nearby it but at the lower level, we have the central station for the train and nowadays, we are developing one station of the metro which is 35 meters under the level of the Place, and on the other sides we have many civic Buildings (such as the Mosques and Palaces). The Mosques (The Fishery Mosque “La pecherie”, New Mosque “Djamaa Al Djaddid” and Ketchawa Mosque “DjamaaKetchaoua”) are the dominating objects of the Place, bearing in mind that in the middle of the place there a sculpture of a horse and this is one the reason of its name as a horse’s Plaza. The Mosques and the Palaces (Dar Aziza and Bastion 23) express weight and solidness as well as a striving towards a higher sphere, and there are symbols of what the activity inside (mosques and palaces) should be like.

Martyrs’Place as urban void and where we can see the different typologies of the city (Medina, European city and their relations to the sea.)

But this is not the only activities taking place in the place. It is also an extension of the market and also an important traffic node. In the edge of the place runs one of the heaviest trafficked roads in Algiers due to the fact of having the central station of the buses leading to the different districts of Algiers. There is also something for the tourists where you can have a cup of coffee or tea in an enjoyable terrace with the view to sea, as you can be served you meal (fresh fish) in these terraces. Not far from the Place, the streets leading
to the headquarters of some banks and the first national newspaper. Last but not least, one can pay his taxes in the building of the opposite side of the headquarters of the banks.

Urban furniture in the Martys’ Place.

In my view, the significance of this place is made by the melting together the spirit life with the daily life, the form and the use which strengthen the relations between the meaning and the form.

The meaning of the Place can be detected by the fact, that it was dimensioned for the French army (for more than 25,000 soldiers regrouped in the same time), and that is why it was called Horse’s Place with the sculpture in the center of the place of the unknown soldier on his horse, the second aspect is much more symbolic in a way to highlight the power or the domination of the French army on the autochthon population.

1) Variety:

If places are to arise, variety is needed. Only a varied environment, which constantly changes as one moves through it, can be a system of places. If not, it will be space, where someone moves but does not seem to get anywhere.

Today, it is commonly agreed that urban environments should be varied. But not necessarily that variety should also cover urban uses. And why should it? A physically varied environment will make it possible to distinguish between places, so why bother about uses? I shall quote a sharp tongued lady’s comment to this question. She said: “Homogeneity of uses poses an unavoidable aesthetic dilemma: Shall the homogeneity look as homogeneous as it is and be frankly monotonous? Or shall it try not to look as homogeneous as it is and go in for eye catching, but meaningless and chaotic differences?”

Varied and beautiful surroundings are always better than dull and ugly ones. But still pure variety of forms makes places which seem to be rich in character and diversity, but where the physical diversity covers a functional homogeneity.

2) Place – Identity and Conflicts:

But if variety of uses is really that important, why is homogeneity of uses then the standard? What do we obtain by letting out variety of uses?

The answer is of course, that we get some of the qualities of places, and still avoid problems. For when different uses must exist side by side there is a great risk that they will come into conflict in one way or another: through traffic, pollution or simply cultural or aesthetic differences. On the other hand we can ask again if an environment free of conflicts will always be the best, or whether co-existence with both consideration and conflicts are part of life and therefore also of the urban environment.

The tendency to make urban environments full of experiences but without conflicts, has been named “Disneyfication”, not after the Disney cartoons or comics but after the amusement parks. In Disneyland or Disney world, you can get experiences for all your money is worth, but experiences without substance.
Most of us can enjoy this for a couple of hours, but you have to be a child or a very childish person to find Disney World a challenge for a longer span of time.

**The triangle of identity in urban image:**

But, we could ask, can these reflections be of any use in present day urban metamorphosis, and what do people really think about it? I see four major fields, where interplay between variety of form and function could be of value:

a) In the making of new suburban residential areas, where supplement of other uses than mere residential may give the place richer character, and making it a place to go, also for people from neighboring housing units.

b) In urban renewal projects, where the starting point of the process is often an environment characterized by variety of uses, which may not only be a problem but also a quality to preserve.

c) In redevelopment schemes in derelict urban areas, where the mix of uses may create a more public urban space, thus making the redevelopment scheme accessible to residence of the area.

d) In projects to improve existing homogeneous suburban housing resorts, where the supplement of non-residential uses may often be public services, thus also offering services to the residents.

**Approaches in urban-design:**

Approaches in urban design are based on presumptions. It is presumed that urban design is dependent on and influences other fields of knowledge and activity, but simultaneously, its own contribution cannot be reduced to any other domain and its unique production is not consequential to any aggregation of their productions.

The main goal of urban design activity is to establish a guiding value: an ad – hoc ideal image of a city or its parts. The image is ideal in what concerns spatial – structural – formal aspects. It presents what could be called the special formative law of the city, specific to time and place, and therefore of delimited validity within a dynamic chain of interpretations.

The main principles to be applied to urban design are: (a) contextual forms, (b) geometry as a generator of forms, (c) hierarchy, and (d) interaction among urban elements.

**(a) Contextual Forms:**

All the relevant information of location variables about a town could be summed up in one integrative document, taking the shape of a two or three dimensional composition of spots, lines and areas. This the contextual spot representation of the town, the object of the urban designer’s reading of forms.

The urban designer has to discover or to interpret within the given situation according to his interests or ideals. His major ideals are:

- Definition of the town structural essence or theme;
- Geometrical definition of the structure.

**(b) Geometry as a generator of forms:**

The theme or subject defined by the first principle has to be embodied in the structure of the urban space. It is necessary to yield a geometrical ordering system composed of nodes, landmarks, paths, edges and districts. Only the prominently evaluated components and their spatial relations form the primary ordering system of the town. It is proposed to regard the site as prominent components. On the background of the remaining urban tissue, this system is the town’s generator.
(c) **Hierarchy:**
Next stages in the urban design process draw nearer the urban components and concern gradual articulation and enrichment of the generating system. Concentration on previous landmarks and paths shows them to be areas defined by new sets of points and lines, and so further. Any design decision beyond the generating system may add meanings and interpretations but never negate the basic ordering of the urban space.
This entails that sites cannot become pathological enclosures within indifferent surroundings, because the very structure of the surrounding is nourished by and directed towards the existence of the site.

(d) **Interaction among Urban Elements:**
Any two urban elements are internally related if they are mutually conditioned, i.e. if the exclusion of one of them would be conceived as an indigence of the other. By ensuring internal relations between any two close elements; all along the urban design process, the influence of the generating system diffuses to further remote areas.

**Algiers’ streets:**
In the past, streets of Algiers and particularly those of the Medina were not connecting places only; they were connecting persons with each other and with their surrounded built environment, where one hears an interesting rumor, while another bumps into an old acquaintance and a third who acquires street smarts. Everyone was part of that built environment and was deeply involved in it (whether in terms of maintenance or assistance). Even though most of the streets have a labyrinth development but you would never find yourself on a long "street" to nowhere or under assault by a violent "road" gang, hence politicians seldom view with alarm the prevalence of "crime in the roads". The street, not the road is home to the homeless unless they are hoboes.
The politics and all its subsequences worked as a paintbrush that defines the image of Algiers all over the time.
In 1990’s (called the black decade by some politicians), a large portion of the city's infrastructure and industrial capacity were the target of the terrorists, and residents lost homes bargain their residences with the hope to leave the area if not the country. Algiers particularly was a terror battleground as the police and military forces were confronted to terrorists groups. So it’s a series of violence; violence of regional, domestic war, in addition violence of the different terrorist groups. Some of the violence effects on the ground:

- Despite the tyranny of the military aspects, the proliferation of armed groups which provocative and scare people, still violence and lack of security control are there.
- The economical deteriorating causes widespread poverty and unemployment.
- The collapse of many important buildings that are symbolic or architectural landmarks in Algiers, and the deterioration of structural and formal for the rest of the remaining buildings due to the lack of the maintenance and re-habitation.
- The collapse of the infrastructure.
- People suffered a lot emotionally and psychologically.
Ambiances in some streets, one activity plus one activity is more than two.

Trip within Algiers’ Streets:
Algiers is one of the cities that tells its story better than any historian or analyst. When visitor walks in its wide streets or its narrow walkways, can receive many messages, from all the surrounded features; sidewalks, streets paving, building’s elevations, street furniture, vehicles, colors, smells, sounds, landscaping, and even the people faces.

The proportions between the heights and the width of the streets and alleys: Micro-climate shadows.

The Black decade:
In 1990’s, a common scene in most of Algerian cities was the violence but the core of the most harmful armed violence was in Algiers as a symbol of the country by being the capital, so its streets turned into an open theater of extreme security instability and even military operations which has reached the peak point by 1994-1996 when there was hardly to find any safe zone in Algiers that leaded as a natural precautionary reaction from the people is to install alarms or any other cheaper substitute such as barbed wire, to block and isolate the entry & exit points of each district, official building, street or even a house. But starting from mid of 1998 violence levels became much lower than before although bombs kept explode randomly
here and there targeting in title the official forces but actually it was striking everything and everyone. These defending means were starting to reduce following any less indication of the chaos and armed violence in the public manifestation turning back some of these sights to an active areas but never like before. Police & military check points for security control requirements, the noise and pollution of traffic circulation reduced considerably the opportunities for the pedestrian in a way that the feeling that instead of living together, each one is watching and taking precaution from the other. The consequence from such behavior is the neglect of the public spaces as a space for gathering and socializing.

**Commercial activities:**

Algiers is similar to other famous cities has many street markets which are outdoor markets such as traditionally held in a market square or in a market town. The market square, souk or bazaar is an open area where market stalls are traditionally set out for trading with a vast variety of objects, and specialist commercial centers which normally located nearby the main streets, and consists of square or rectangular area or sometimes just a widening of the main streets. The most important ones are situated and surrounded by major buildings, Mosques and sometimes permanent covered market building, and the entire area is a traditional meeting place for local people as well as a center for trade such as Al- Aquiba market place which is one of the most known not only as a clothiers souk but for the gold and silver.
Along the Bab-Azzoun - Bab El Oued street (the first intervention of the French was by creating the continuity between the two gates: Bab Azzoun and Bab El Oued, this continuity was done for military purposes) is one of the famous commercial streets, the woman's paradise of clothes, shoes, handbags, and cosmetics. Clausel, Badjarah and Bab El Oued markets are for groceries, where most of families come for shopping the daily needs food. Some of the markets are often held only on particular days of the week so it's known as market day.

For souvenirs and gifts there are many souks and bazaars, most of them were located in or nearby Casbah (Copper, leather etc.). These streets look like a gallery or museum for the products displayed a variety of popular handicrafts.

People who used to do their trading & shopping activities at the exact specialized locations which they are central, and well served to apply the shopping activity, nowadays they are mostly depending in their shopping on small individual shops nearby or preferably attached to their houses as much as they can for common reasons and fears like:

- Security problems, high increment of number of the daily crimes, violence, and pic-pocket.
- Transportation difficulties due to the heavy traffic and to the numbers of check points.

Souks became obsolete, and instead many families have started to manage small business from their own houses to sell the most necessary goods for the daily needs, what they call it domestic trade. They are normally managed by old ladies, widows or even children of poor families. In the same time the commercial activities have appeared in Algiers streets and been formed by an unemployed young and mid age males by
using small carts shaded sometimes by an umbrella and selling different kinds of goods on the sidewalks during the day and then to leave as soon as the sun sets or even earlier.

Social activities:
One aspect which was characterizing the Medina of Algiers was its streets that often serve as the catalyst for the neighborhood's prosperity, culture and solidarity. Nowadays, most of the commercial streets in Algiers are occupied by some illicit activities which are behind the development of an unhealthy environment for the pedestrian. People’s frustration might be explained by this phenomenon and led some behavioral and functional changes in a way that the spirit of living in a community and the feeling of belonging were lost: another social change due to the physical metamorphoses (We shape our built environment, and then it shapes us).
Algiers main streets are famous by their terraces, cafés and restaurants but with the development of the fast food and take shops, these spaces are becoming obsolete. The café or coffee-shop has always been an important social gathering point in Algiers. From a cultural standpoint, the coffee-shop provides social members with a place to congregate, talk, write, read, entertain one another, or pass the time only as a street watchers, whether individually or in small groups.

Traffic system:
Algiers city can be categorized as the first capital city in North Africa that planed and constructed an ideal infrastructure of all kinds of transportation, starting from the whole city streets network and the highways to the metro. During the Roman period when Algiers was called Icosium, the transportation network was following the contour lines and aqueducts.
Generally speaking the urban fabric of Algiers can be illustrated as the main Avenues are developed along the coast and the Boulevards are perpendicular to the Avenues. No doubt the topography is one of the main constraints in the development of this urban fabric.
Due to the lack of coordination between the different actors that constitute the system (Electricity, water supply, sewage, telephone, gas, etc.); streets were and still are turned to a real messy status that led to the disappearance of all distinguished and standard elements that Algiers streets can be categorized by.
- Damaged roads pavements, shoulders, due to the heavy vehicles, tanks movement and the sudden bombs exposures.
- Rash traffic caused by the new streets diversions and huge number of the security check points.
- No clear border separates the hawkers stand points, pedestrian and the cars movement.
- Street furniture and landscaping because of no municipality services.

And because of the traffic system lacking; none of the above exists, in addition to the miserable condition of the street infrastructure that causes an extra pressure on the people, social problems, wasting more time, and require extra efforts from them to handle the daily life duties.
One seldom finds any street in Algiers away from the view of rubbish dunes and garbage due to many aspects: unconsciousness and or lack of disciplinary and technical services; and sometimes complaisance in terms of respect of rules.

**Street skyline:**
Algiers is one of cities where the topography shape its skyline and most of the main public spaces are is not without street or public square of the monument or sculpture done by a well-known artist or architect surrounded by an elegant landscape.

*Skyline of Algiers: in terms of urban composition, from the global and compact to the fragmented and isolated.*

**Conclusion:**
During the last few tough years the importance of achieving or even preserving a livable built environment that encourages and supports an active civic life has often been neglected by political elites, and policy makers, their responses to the new changes that have been in a sharp contrast to those of users/public, which is often reflected in different preferences for the built environment solutions. These differences are partly because their schemata vary. Users/public meaning of livable built environment quality is dissimilar to professionals, politicians, and policy makers’ meaning. This often resulted in a competitive representation and production of architecture and the built environment, which lead to a negative interaction between the people and their environment. So a common ground for dialogue and understanding should be established; contains the two groups involved in creating livable built environment and reset the priorities, what could be done and what not considering the new facts on ground, after the historical turning point they passed through.
Solving the security dilemma in Algiers is essential as it is part of the social factors that the population has mostly suffered from, as such development leaded to abolition of the night curfew that stopped people from exercising their normal life for years by staying out for longer time.

While the curfew was seen as a nightmare, the police and military check points have psychologically and practically messed up the daily life of the population, people have felt hard enough from the frequently waiting for hours in a jammed traffic to gain the single access to areas blocked off.

In parallel the manifestation of the destroyed buildings and monuments which were considered symbolic signs has cast a shadow on the people psychology so a serious planning for renovation and re-habitation for these sites will definitely help people to forget and over take the ordeal they passed through looking forward to create positive interaction with their physical environments.

References:
Boudiaf, B., 2006: Homes, Dwellings and the Quality of the Urban Spaces: case of Algiers in the 5th Symposium on Architecture and Development, Ajman University of Science and Technology, Faculty of engineering, Department of Architecture and interior design, Ajman, U.A.E., 22nd March 2006;
Lawrence, R, J 1997, Housing, Dwellings and Homes: Design theory, research and practice, Chichester, John Wiley and Sons Ltd.