

**PRESERVING PRIVACY AND SUSTAINABILITY AS
ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL VALUES THROUGH
REPURPOSING HISTORICAL RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS
WITHIN THE MEDINA OF TUNIS**

Thesis

**Submitted to Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies at the
Faculty of Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



By:

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

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The Medina of Tunis, a historical and architectural gem, exemplifies the intricate relationship between urban planning, socio-cultural dynamics, and Islamic values. This thesis delves into the Medina's evolution from its founding during the 7th century Muslim Arab conquest to its architectural and cultural zenith under the Hafsiids, and through subsequent periods of transformation. Despite efforts to preserve its rich heritage, contemporary adaptive reuse practices often prioritize aesthetics over the integral Islamic principles embedded within its architecture. This research focuses on the adaptive reuse of historic Islamic residential buildings, particularly examining Dar Ben Gacem as a case study to explore the impact of such transformations on the Medina's architectural and cultural heritage. The research investigates how the conversion of these buildings into non-residential uses affects core Islamic values such as privacy, sustainability, modesty, humility, and hospitality. By conducting qualitative research methods, including observations, site visits, and interviews with key stakeholders and entrepreneurs like Amel Meddeb and Leila Ben Gacem, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the implications of adaptive reuse on the Medina's architectural integrity and Islamic identity. The findings reveal a balance between preserving historical aesthetics and maintaining the functional and spiritual essence of Islamic architecture. The study emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in heritage management, advocating for a deeper consideration of Islamic principles in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. This approach ensures the Medina's cultural and religious heritage is upheld while accommodating modern economic and social needs. In conclusion, this thesis underscores the Medina of Tunis as a resilient urban space where adaptive reuse, when guided by Islamic values, can foster economic development, preserve cultural identity, and maintain architectural integrity. The Medina stands as a model for Islamic historic cities worldwide, demonstrating how to honor the past while embracing contemporary innovations.

Keywords: Adaptive reuse, Architectural heritage, Cultural preservation, Islamic values, Medina of Tunis

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ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY

ASM: Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina (Association for the Preservation of the Medina)

DBG: Dar Ben Gacem

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1 Background of the Study

Over the centuries, the Medina of Tunis has developed into a bustling urban center nestled in a fertile plain region near the sea. Founded during the Muslim Arab conquest in the 7th century, it served as the capital for influential dynasties. It experienced architectural, urban, and socio-cultural changes, particularly during the Hafsids era from the 12th to the 16th century. The subsequent period from the 16th to the 19th centuries saw the city thrive with numerous palaces, residences, mosques, and madrasas, solidifying its enduring historical significance (Daouletli, 1981). The Medina exemplifies an intricate relationship between architecture, urban planning, and the social-cultural and economic of past civilizations.¹

The Medina is a bustling area where local artisans engage in traditional crafts, contributing to a varied local economy. Its strategic location connects it to the Maghreb, Europe, and the Orient, influencing the city's character over time. The old city's special architectural and urban features come from a mix of these cultural influences. The blend of Maghreb, European, and Oriental elements creates a unique cityscape, showcasing the diverse cultures in the Medina, and attracting a global tourist market.²

Despite commendable efforts by organizations like ASM (Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina) to supervise restoration and raise awareness about the Medina's cultural significance, a critical issue has surfaced. Preservation attempts often focus on aesthetics, overshadowing the Islamic values integral to its architectural elements (Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina, 2013). This trend is evident in the growing use of Islamic

¹ Hedi Chouria, Saida Machat. (2023). *Dar Ben Gacem Ten-Year Report*. Tunis: Dar Ben Gacem. p. 12

² Boussa, D. D. (n.d.). Urban Conservation and Sustainability; Cases from Historic Cities in the Gulf and North Africa. Conference On Technology and Sustainability in the Built Environment (p. 309). Riyadh: King Saud University - College Architecture and Planning.

architectural elements like arches and domes in contemporary buildings, reinterpreting historic styles for a modern audience. Other architects and planners focus on these environments' social and economic aspects, adapting them to meet contemporary needs. This approach is exemplified by designing residential spaces that foster social cohesion, consider climatic conditions, and minimize costs through traditional building materials like mud. As a result, the term "Islamic architecture" has become multifaceted, its meaning evolving based on individual perspectives and interests.³

The transformation of historic buildings into commercial and entrepreneurial spaces, coupled with demographic shifts and economic changes, presents a dilemma—preserving the Medina's architectural heritage versus conserving its intrinsic Islamic principles. Once serving different functions, historic buildings have now been repurposed for commercial and entrepreneurial use, becoming cafes, restaurants, hotels, and spas (Faleh, 2021). While Islamic architecture traditionally combines form and function, sometimes, function is more important than fancy decorations. For example, houses might be built to be simple and practical without completely ignoring aesthetics. However, when these buildings are adapted for new uses, there's a concern that they might lose their original Islamic design and functionality.⁴

Small businesses in historic neighborhoods (Medinas) across North Africa, including Tunis, are popping up. This trend started in Marrakech in the 1960s and 1970s, when Europeans became interested in buying old houses there. This led to the creation of guesthouses (maison d'hôtes) and fancy restaurants, and by the late 20th century, real estate in these old towns was booming. In Tunis, this trend of small businesses seems to be linked to recent cultural and political changes in the country. It's important to understand how these businesses are affecting the Medina, not just physically but also socially, culturally, and economically. This includes looking at how heritage management is being handled. Recent discussions about politics, society, and cultural identity in Tunisia, especially after

³ Akbar, J. (2020). *'Imāratul Arḍi Fi al-Islām*. p. 24-25

⁴ Sana Malik, Beenish Mujahid. (2016). Perception of House Design in Islam: Experiences from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 6(2), p. 55-56

the Arab Spring, show that these changes are being driven by the local people themselves at a community level.⁵

The city of Tunis is a great example of adaptive reuse. There is a building called Dar Ben Gacem that used to be a house but is now a guesthouse. Guest houses like DBG are not just places to stay; they are part of the city's architectural and cultural heritage. Restoring them helps preserve this historic architecture and reminds people of an important period in Tunisian history.⁶

This study will take a closer look at the Dar Ben Gacem as an example to explore how adaptive reuse impacts Islamic residential buildings in Tunis in the sense that reused houses keep their original look, important features, and materials, historical and artistic values, and also preserve the effort, skill, and dedication of the original builders. This way, the building itself is saved, and the hard work of the people who built it is remembered.⁷

The following sections will explain how we will conduct our research, which includes visiting the buildings, observing them, and interviewing key people like Amel Meddeb (an architect and president of ASM) and Leila Ben Gacem (founder of Dar Ben Gacem and a social entrepreneur). By learning from them and analyzing how Dar Ben Gacem was transformed, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of how adaptive reuse affects Tunis's cultural and architectural heritage, especially its Islamic identity.

The central research question in this study investigates how the conversion of historic Islamic residential buildings into non-residential uses, even when preserving aesthetic features, impacts the core architectural values that define the authentic Islamic identity of the Medina. The study aims to bridge the gap in understanding the implications of these

⁵ Faleh, M. (2019). Restoration of Tangible and Intangible Artifacts in the Tunisian Landscape: 'Boutique Hotels' and the Entrepreneurial Project of Dar Ben Gacem. *Journal of Heritage Management*, p. 5

⁶ Hedi Chouria, *Op.Cit.*, p.43

⁷ Mohannad Tarrad, Salam Mtawea Husban. (2021). The Creation of Guidelines for Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Buildings in Jordan, Case Study Palace of the Ali Alkaid Basha (Jordan). *Architecture and Modern Information Technologies*, p. 3

transformations on the cultural and architectural heritage. The significance lies in redirecting the focus from mere aesthetic preservation to the deeper values within the Medina's architectural elements, particularly in its historic residential edifices. The continued presence of the two DBG buildings in the Medina of Tunis is itself a product of Tunisian heritage. The preservation of these buildings through restoration ensures the representation of this historical architecture, characteristic of an emblematic period in the history of Tunisia.⁸

The study aims to redirect scholarly attention to the overlooked risk of diluting Islamic identity during the adaptive reuse of residential buildings. It proposes a shift from a purely materialistic or aesthetic orientation to a profound consideration of Islamic principles, such as privacy, modesty, humility, hospitality, and sustainability. This appeal targets architects and professionals engaged in monument architecture and rehabilitation within the Medina.

In the subsequent sections, the research will employ qualitative research methods, including site visits, observations, and interviews, to analyze firsthand the impact of adaptive reuse on the Medina's architectural features, functionality, and its reflection of Islamic identity. The ultimate goal is to contribute valuable insights that encourage a paradigm shift in heritage management, ensuring the preservation of Islamic principles in historic buildings within the Medina of Tunis.

2 Research Objectives

This research aims to bridge the gap in understanding the cultural implications of transforming historic Islamic residential buildings into non-residential uses, with a specific focus on the core architectural values of privacy and sustainability in the Medina of Tunis. The objectives are to shift scholarly focus from mere aesthetic preservation to the deeper values inherent in the Medina's architecture, such as privacy, humility, hospitality, modesty, and sustainability. The study intends to reveal how these conversions impact the architectural values of privacy and sustainability, examining how changes in building usage affect traditional privacy practices and sustainable design. By evaluating successful

⁸ Zulkefle Ismail, Fahmi Ibrahim. (2021). Architectural Transformation in the Context of Adaptable Housing and its Current Potential in Islamic Perspective. *8th Brunei International Conference on Engineering and Technology*, AIP Publishing, p. 2

adaptations through case studies, the study seeks to propose strategies for balancing modern functional requirements with traditional values, ensuring that new uses for old buildings do not compromise core Islamic principles. Additionally, the study aims to identify the specific challenges and opportunities associated with repurposing historic buildings while maintaining privacy and sustainability. By investigating examples like Dar Ben Gacem, the research aims to demonstrate effective practices in integrating modern functionality with traditional Islamic values. Through detailed case studies, the research will highlight how restoration efforts can represent historical architecture while preserving the Medina's Islamic identity. Ultimately, the objective is to encourage a paradigm shift in heritage management, prioritizing the preservation of Islamic principles of privacy and sustainability in the architectural transformation of the Medina of Tunis.

3 Research Question

The main research question of this research is: How does the conversion of historic Islamic residential buildings into non-residential spaces, while maintaining aesthetic features, impact the essential architectural values of privacy and sustainability that define the authentic Islamic identity of the Medina of Tunis?

4 Literature Review

The discussion surrounding Islamic architecture, as examined by scholars like Jamel Akbar (2021), goes beyond traditional perspective, emphasizing the foundational aspects set by Islamic law. Akbar's work prompts consideration of how these foundational aspects influence the adaptive reuse of historic structures within Islamic contexts, especially when converting residential buildings into non-residential spaces⁹.

Yahya Waziri's perspective (2013) supports Akbar's argument, emphasizing the depth of Islamic construction beyond external appearances. A deeper exploration is needed to understand how Islamic teachings guiding human construction can inform the preservation

⁹ Akbar, J. (2021). *Crisis in the Built Environment: The Case of the Muslim City (Vol. 2)*. Istanbul, Turkey: insan publications, p. 296

and adaptation of historic structures, especially in light of contemporary global influences¹⁰.

Majid Faleh (2013, 2017) explores the theme of the erosion of architectural identity due to globalization¹¹. A thorough examination is required to unravel the nuances of this erosion and its implications, particularly at the intersection of global and local priorities, impacting the authenticity of Islamic architectural identity in historic urban areas.¹²

Sarah ben Salem (2018) stresses the need for balance between urban heritage preservation and evolving social and environmental needs. A critical perspective encourages assessment of the feasibility and implications of achieving this balance, exploring how Islamic values guide the delicate equilibrium without neglecting contemporary demands.¹³

Besim Selim Hakim (1986) explores the foundational factors shaping Arabic-Islamic cities, focusing on guidelines created by Islamic jurists and implemented by judges. The book delves into the physical organizational system that forms the distinct beehive urban layout and interprets the interaction between building processes and urban forms, using the Medina of Tunis as a case study. Hakim also highlights the importance of understanding the factors that shape Muslim perspectives on housing and special use, and underscore the contemporary relevance of traditional practices and calls for future research to bridge past and present urban development knowledge.¹⁴

¹⁰ Wazīri, Y. (2008). *al-'Imrān wa al-Bunyān Fi Manzūri al-Islām*. Kuwait: Kuwaiti Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, p. 212-213

¹¹ Faleh, M. (2021). *Reconstructing Tunisian Architectural Identity in the Context of 'Ottomanization', Colonization, and Post-Colonization*. (Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Retrieved May 2024, from AKPIA@MIT: <https://akpia.mit.edu/sites/default/files/images/PostDocFaleh.pdf>, p.20

¹² Majdi Faleh *Urban metamorphosis and Islamic Architecture in the time of globalization: Utopian realities and challenges*, 2013, p. 134-136

¹³ Salem, S. B. (2018). *The Medina of Tunis Facing the Modern City Tangible, Intangible and Social Values in an Arabic Old City*. *Architecture_MPS*, p. 13-15.

¹⁴ Hakim, B. S. (1986). *Arabic-Islamic Cities Building and Planning Principles*. Emergent City Press, p. 14

In "Al Tawhīd: Its Implications for Thought and Life," Ismail R. Al-Faruqi explores Islamic art and architecture as a manifestation of the principle of Tawhīd, the oneness of God. He argues that Islamic architecture is deeply intertwined with Islamic beliefs, reflecting the unity, harmony, and order perceived in the universe through the lens of monotheism.¹⁵ Al-Faruqi highlights that Islamic architecture is not solely concerned with aesthetics but is a reflection of Islamic values, beliefs, and societal norms. This architectural approach shapes the built environment to align with religious teachings, creating spaces that foster a sense of spiritual tranquility and a connection to the divine. His ideas underscore the notion that Islamic architecture transcends physical structures, aiming to shape environments that reflect and reinforce Islamic principles and values.¹⁶

Spahic Omer (2011), discusses the significance of Islamic architecture in the contemporary context, emphasizing the need to revive and preserve its principles to address modern challenges. He argues that Islamic architecture offers a holistic approach that integrates spiritual, social, and environmental considerations, presenting a sustainable and culturally rich alternative to modern architectural practices and stresses the importance of understanding and applying the principles of Islamic architecture, such as harmony, balance, and functionality, to create built environments that promote well-being and harmony with nature.¹⁷

Anton Escher and Marianne Schepers (2007) highlight the importance of preservation efforts for the Medina's fabric and social life. A detailed examination is necessary to understand the implications of preservation efforts on the intellectual identity of historic urban spaces, exploring how these efforts affect the cultural and social fabric of the Medina.¹⁸

¹⁵ Faruqi, I. R. (2000). *Altawhīd* (Vol. 4). Virginia, U.S.A: The International Institute of Islamic Thought. p. 202

¹⁶ Faruqi, I. R. (n.d.). *Islam and Architecture*. Retrieved May 2024, p 4-5

¹⁷ Omer, S. (2011). *Islamic Architecture and The Prospect of its Revival Today*. *Jurnal Intelek*, 6(1), p 484-488

¹⁸ Marianne, Escher and Marianne Schepers. (2007). *Revitalizing the Medina of Tunis as A National Symbol*. 62(2), p. 139-140.

Majdi Hariri's (1989) perception of Islamic architecture as preserving religious values and the environment introduces the theme of sustainability. A deeper analysis is required to explore how sustainability is conceptualized within Islamic architectural values and how it shapes the adaptive reuse of historic structures.¹⁹

Despite this expansive literature, a significant gap remains. While scholars focus on how Islamic architectural design and homes' materials reflect Islamic teachings, they overlook the potential risk of losing Islamic identity when these buildings are converted into non-residential spaces. This specific issue has not been explored in previous research, forming the core of the research problem for this study.

5 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study centers on examining critical Islamic values embedded within residential buildings, with a specific focus on privacy, hospitality, sustainability, humility and other foundational principles that define the Islamic identity of structures within the Medina of Tunis. Islamic values are not mere architectural features but deeply influence the design, functionality, and cultural significance of residential buildings and spaces. Privacy, for instance, is an essential aspect, ensuring a sense of seclusion and intimacy for families. Likewise, sustainability, humility and hospitality are reflected in the modest design and welcoming nature of these homes.

However, modern challenges, particularly the adaptive reuse of residential buildings for commercial or entrepreneurial uses, pose a threat to these intrinsic Islamic values. The introduction of modern technologies, such as energy-intensive ventilation systems, stands in stark contrast to the sustainable and natural techniques traditionally employed in these spaces. This shift jeopardizes sustainability, a cornerstone of Islamic values, as it deviates from environmentally conscious practices.

To illustrate this threat to Islamic values, the study will delve into specific examples. For instance, the use of energy-intensive solutions for aeration can compromise sustainability, contradicting the traditional and sustainable techniques integral to Islamic

¹⁹ Al-Hariri, M. M. (1989). *Usus Taşmim Al-Maskan Fi Al-'Imārah al-Islāmiyah*. Makkah, Saudi Arabia: Shari'ah al-Sa'ūdiyyah Li At-Tauzi', p. 78

architecture. The conceptual framework aims to highlight the imminent risk of these values disappearing within the evolving architectural landscape of the Medina.

By focusing on practical examples, such as the clash between traditional techniques and modern interventions, the study seeks to unravel the complex relationship between these core Islamic values and the challenges posed by contemporary practices. This exploration will shed light on the potential disappearance of privacy, hospitality, sustainability, humility, and other vital values within the evolving architectural landscape of the Medina of Tunis.

6 Research Significance

The significance of this research is basically embodied in its critical examination of the adaptive reuse of historic Islamic residential buildings within the Medina of Tunis, focusing on how such transformations impact core architectural values and the Islamic identity of the Medina. This study addresses a crucial gap in heritage management by shifting the focus from mere aesthetic preservation to the deeper Islamic values embedded within the Medina's architecture.

- **Cultural and Historical Preservation:** The study highlights the importance of preserving the architectural and cultural heritage of the Medina of Tunis. By examining the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, it underscores the need to maintain the original design, important features, and materials that embody the historical and artistic values of these structures. This preservation is not only about saving the physical buildings but also about remembering the efforts, skills, and dedication of the original builders, thereby honoring their legacy.
- **Balancing Modern Needs with Islamic Values:** The research highlights the delicate balance between modern economic and social needs and the preservation of intrinsic Islamic principles such as privacy, humility, modesty, hospitality, and sustainability. By focusing on adaptive reuse, the study reveals how historic buildings can be repurposed for contemporary uses without compromising their original Islamic design and functionality.
- **Impact on Community and Social Fabric:** The study investigates how the transformation of historic residential buildings into commercial and entrepreneurial spaces affects the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Medina. It explores how

small businesses and guesthouses contribute to the local economy and social cohesion, while also posing challenges to the preservation of Islamic domesticity and identity.

- **Guidance for Architects and Heritage Professionals:** By redirecting scholarly attention to the risk of diluting Islamic identity during adaptive reuse, the study provides valuable insights for architects and professionals engaged in monument architecture and rehabilitation within the Medina. It advocates for a shift from a purely materialistic or aesthetic orientation to a profound consideration of Islamic principles in heritage management.
- **Contributing to Heritage Management Practices:** The research offers a comprehensive analysis of the impact of adaptive reuse on the Medina's architectural features, functionality, and its reflection of Islamic identity. The findings aim to contribute to heritage management practices by encouraging a paradigm shift that ensures the preservation of Islamic principles in historic buildings. This approach not only protects the architectural integrity of the Medina but also sustains its cultural and religious heritage for future generations.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding and preservation of Islamic architectural values amidst modern transformations in the Medina of Tunis, offering practical guidance for heritage management that respects and preserves the cultural and religious identity of historic urban spaces.

7 Methods

In order to examine the impact of repurposing historic Islamic residential buildings in the Medina of Tunis on their essential architectural principles and genuine Islamic identity, I have employed the following methods:

7.1 Interviews

Two interviews were conducted to gather expert insights on heritage conservation and the repurposing of historic buildings:

Amel Meddeb: Interviewed on June 11, 2024. Amel Meddeb, originally from the Medina of Tunis, is an architect with the Urban Planning Office of ASM. She was

appointed President of ASM and Chief of the Municipal District of the Medina of Tunis in 2018. Since 2023, she has been a member of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People of Tunisia. Her expertise in urban planning and her leadership roles offered valuable perspectives on the heritage conservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings in the Medina.

Leila Ben Gacem: Interviewed on June 21, 2024. Leila Ben Gacem is a social entrepreneur and founder of Blue Fish, a consultancy that enhances the economic sustainability of heritage sites. She established Dar el Harka, a hub for the creative industry, and Dar Ben Gacem, a boutique hotel and cultural catalyst located in the Medina of Tunis. Additionally, she is the founder and president of Mdinti, the first economic interest group in the Medina. Her extensive experience in heritage conservation and sustainable development offered invaluable insights into the rehabilitation and repurposing of old buildings.

7.2 Case Studies

Detailed case studies were conducted focusing on historic Islamic residential buildings as the primary variable of interest. The architectural changes made during adaptive reuse were examined, assessing their subsequent impact on the original Islamic identity. The case studies provided a comprehensive understanding of how adaptive reuse affects the preservation of Islamic architectural values.

7.3 Site Visits

Site visits were undertaken to repurposed historic buildings such as Dar Ben Gacem, Dar Hayder, and Fondouk El Attarine. During these visits, variables such as observed architectural changes and the adherence of these buildings to Islamic values were recorded. These site visits allowed for a firsthand assessment of the impact of repurposing on the architectural integrity and Islamic identity of the buildings.

7.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted based on insights gathered from literature, observations, interviews, and case studies. The analysis focused on identifying and examining variables that contribute to a nuanced understanding of the impact of adaptive

reuse on the Islamic identity of historic residential buildings. This approach facilitated a thorough exploration of the cultural implications and the balance between modern functionality and traditional Islamic values in the Medina's architectural changes.

7.5 Photographic and Architectural Documentation

Additional data were gathered by collecting photos and architectural plans of historical houses from the *Atelier d'Urbanisme* of the ASM. This method provided visual and structural documentation that was essential for analyzing and interpreting the changes made during the repurposing process and their impact on maintaining Islamic architectural values.

8 Thesis Structure and Outline

This research is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of adaptive reuse on the architectural and cultural heritage of the Medina of Tunis, with a particular focus on the core Islamic principles of privacy and sustainability. The outline is detailed in three main chapters, each addressing specific aspects of the research topic:

The second chapter, *Medina of Tunis as an Islamic City: Historical and Cultural Context*, explores the historical and cultural background of the Medina of Tunis. It starts with an introduction to the Medina's history and significance, highlighting the concept of Islamic cities throughout history. This section also addresses the importance of mosques in urbanization and the attention given by jurists and scholars to Islamic urbanization and architecture principles. The chapter proceeds by examining the historical context of the Medina under the Hafsid and Ottoman dynasties, with a focus on the establishment of urban and architectural identity during these periods. Furthermore, it explores the architectural features and Islamic values embedded within the Medina's structures, emphasizing sustainability and privacy. Specific elements such as the *sqifa* (twisted entrance), courtyards, *mashrabiyyah*, and thick walls are analyzed to illustrate how these features reflect Islamic values in the Medina's architecture.

The third chapter, *Challenges in Preserving Islamic Identity in the Medina of Tunis*, discusses the contemporary challenges faced in maintaining the Islamic identity of the Medina amidst modern changes. It starts with an introduction to the shifts in conservation efforts within the Medina's historical buildings, with a focus on the legacy of the Tunisian

Waqf Association and the challenges it faced under colonial rule. The chapter also highlights the conservation initiatives by private and governmental entities, highlighting the roles of the Safeguarding Association for the Medina and government efforts. The impact of commercialization and demographic changes on the Medina's urban evolution is analyzed, including the rise of commerce and the resulting social restructuring. Furthermore, this chapter addresses the erosion of Islamic identity due to the reuse of old residential buildings, addressing the challenges of maintaining Islamic domesticity and the impact of modern usage.

The fourth chapter, *Balancing Islamic Values with Modern Needs in Building Transformations*, explores how the Medina can balance preserving Islamic values with modern needs during the transformation of buildings. The chapter starts with an introduction before identifying privacy contexts and sustainability practices in transformed houses within the Medina. It distinguishes between environmental sustainability and economic and social sustainability, highlighting specific examples of how these practices are implemented. The chapter also looks at the broader impact of repurposing houses on fostering community and social cohesion, focusing on urban and social aspects, and community protection. Additionally, it examines the economic benefits of repurposing, including fostering collaboration, shared prosperity, revitalizing traditional crafts, and empowering local residents.

CHAPTER II

MEDINA OF TUNIS AS AN ISLAMIC CITY: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

1 Introduction

The Medina of Tunis is not merely a maze of old streets and busy markets. It's a living example of how Islamic ideas about city planning and building design have shaped a place for hundreds of years. This chapter will delve into the rich history of the Medina and how Islamic values are woven into its very fabric.

We will first examine the core ideas behind Islamic cities. Mosques are a big part of the story, because they're the center of community life. The discussion will highlight the Quran's emphasis on prayer and how religious and social activities go hand-in-hand in Islamic cities. We'll also explore the contribution of Islamic scholars and judges who, inspired by the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) founding of Medina, created ways to build cities that focused on people's well-being and brought people together. This section will illustrate how these early Islamic planners cared about making sure everyone benefited and that no one was harmed.

The next focus will be on the Medina of Tunis as a real-life example, starting by looking at the golden age of the Hafsid dynasty. During this time, the Medina thrived, and we'll see how the Hafsids built famous landmarks, bustling markets with different areas for different goods, and strong city walls. This will show how important trade and safety were during this period. Then, we'll explore the Ottoman period and see how the Medina kept its Islamic character even though some new building styles from Europe began to merge. Finally, we'll look at the time when France ruled Tunisia (from 1882 to 1956 AD) and the years after that. This section will discuss the challenges the Medina faced as an Islamic city during French rule and how it remained a strong center for resistance movements.

After zooming out from the whole city, we'll take a closer look at the houses in the Medina. This section will show how Islamic values, especially ideas about using resources wisely and keeping things private, are built right into the homes. We'll explore features like *sqifas* (twisted entryways), courtyards, *mashrabiyyah* screens (decorative window coverings), and thick walls. By looking at these details, we'll see how these features not

only give privacy but also show respect for the environment and using resources responsibly, which are important Islamic principles.

2 Overview of The Medina's History and Significance

2.1 The Concept of Islamic City Throughout History

2.1.1 The Significance of The Mosque(s) in The Urbanization

Islamic cities exhibit distinctive characteristics, with the mosque serving as the focal point around which the city's layout revolves, encompassing traditional markets and residential areas. This arrangement mirrors the structure of ancient cities, where a religious center is surrounded by bustling marketplaces and then residential quarters.²⁰

Drawing from Quranic narratives, we find exemplars guiding righteous architectural practices. Key to this is the establishment of mosques, which are seen not only as places of worship but also as central to the formation and organization of Muslim communities. The first key verse, from Surah Al-Hajj (22:26), underscores the importance of purity and devotion in the construction of sacred spaces, specifically the Ka'bah in Mecca. This directive reflects the broader Islamic principle that sacred buildings should facilitate worship and spiritual reflection, establishing a strong connection between religious values and architectural practices. The second significant verse, from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:127), recounts the moment when Prophet Ibrahim and his son Isma'il raised the foundations of the Ka'bah, highlighting the integration of prayer and intention in the building process. This emphasizes that Islamic architecture is not merely about constructing physical structures but also about the spiritual devotion and intention behind them. In Surah Ibrahim (Q.S. 14:37), Prophet Ibrahim's prayer for his descendants to dwell near the Sacred House and engage in prayer reflects the role of urban planning in supporting religious practices. This

²⁰ Sabeeh Lafta Farhan, Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem, Zuhair A. Nasar. (2018, November). The Urban Transformation of Traditional City Centres: Holy Karbala as a Case Study. *Archnet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research*, 12(3), p. 54

plea illustrates that the design and layout of cities should be oriented towards facilitating worship and embedding religious principles into the urban environment.²¹

This notion is reinforced by Quranic verses referencing the Haram Mosque in Mecca and the Al-Aqsā Mosque in Jerusalem as foundational mosques (Q.S. 17:1). In Međīna, the construction of the Qubā Mosque followed immediately after the Prophet's migration, highlighting the centrality of mosques in community formation.²²

Quranic narratives establish mosques as the cornerstone of Muslim cities, underscoring the intrinsic connection between urbanization and worship. They offer enduring principles for urban planning and construction, emphasizing the spiritual significance of city-building.²³

Surah al-Jumu'a (Q.S. 62:9-10) further emphasizes the seamless integration of prayer and business in Islamic cities. It directs believers to prioritize Friday prayers over business activities, highlighting the balance between spiritual and economic aspects of life in Islamic urban planning. This integration of religious duties with daily activities reflects the Islamic approach to harmonizing spiritual practices with practical needs.²⁴

These verses, among many others, collectively demonstrate that Islamic urban and architectural practices are deeply intertwined with religious values, aiming to create environments that foster worship and spiritual growth while harmonizing these principles with everyday life and community planning.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38-39.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Nu'Man, S. B. (2016, November). A Unified Architectural Theory for Islamic Architecture. *International Journal of Architectural Research Archnet-IJAR*, 10(3), 104.

2.1.2 The Attention of Jurists and Scholars to The Principles of Islamic Urbanization and Architecture

As previously mentioned, the first Islamic city was established by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Medina. This marked the beginning of a series of steps to organize the city's layout, divide it into plans, and define its roads and streets. These actions were deeply rooted in the values of the Islamic faith, in harmony with the customs of previous nations, yet guided by textual evidence. Unlike previous architectural endeavors, which often served ideological or political agendas, the Prophet's architectural vision prioritized human welfare and community benefit, laying the groundwork for a system of urban planning that would later be refined by Islamic scholars, jurists, engineers, and builders.²⁵

The meticulous attention paid by Muslims to urban planning and architecture resulted in cities that seamlessly integrated with Islamic life, considering factors such as climate and location. These cities were not haphazardly constructed but carefully planned, with scholars and judges contributing to their development based on principles aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing harm. Islamic jurisprudence concerning urban planning was comprehensive, transcending fiqh differences. Scholars across various Islamic schools of thought addressed urban issues, offering general principles rooted in Islamic teachings. These principles emphasized the unity of the Islamic city as a cohesive cultural and civilizational center, adapting to societal changes while upholding the principles of preventing harm and bringing benefit.²⁶

Cities across the Islamic world exemplified this unified approach to urban planning, despite variations in time, place, and local influences. The Islamic urban and architectural

²⁵ as-Sabī'ī, ' (2008). *al-Fikru al-Mi'māru wa al-'Imrānu al-'Arabī wa al-Islām*. Tunis: Publications of the Tunisian Jurists Unit, Readings in Arab and Islamic Architectural and Urban Thought. Tunis: Zitouna University. p. 68

²⁶ at-Talīlī, M. B. (2008). *Taqdīm Kitāb Nafyu ad- ḍharar Li Ibnī al-Imām at-Taṭlīl*. Tunis: Publications of the Tunisian Jurists Unit, Readings in Arab and Islamic Architectural and Urban Thought. Tunis: Zitouna University. p. 447

landscape was on the brink of becoming a framework of rights and duties, emphasizing the importance of construction specifications and technical standards.²⁷

The Prophet's guidance regarding street width and organization provided a practical foundation for urban planning. His instructions and advice from early Islamic leaders like Umar ibn al-Khattāb laid the groundwork for the layout of Muslim cities, fostering a balance between public and private spaces that remains evident in cities like Fes and Damascus.²⁸

Based on this guidance, numerous jurisprudential treatises have been authored in the field of urban planning across almost all Islamic schools of thought, and many fatwas and judicial rulings have been issued in this regard. These treatises and rulings transcend sectarian differences, as it is rare to find a city without dual jurisdiction—Maliki and Hanafi, or Shafi'i and Hanbali. Judges and jurists have not produced contradictory urban planning concepts or issued rulings indicating division or discord in their approach to urbanization and construction issues.²⁹

Islamic scholars and jurists played significant roles in shaping urban planning principles, providing intellectual and organizational frameworks for the Islamic city. Their contributions were guided by the overarching goals of Islamic legislation, which prioritize the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth.³⁰ Islamic scholars and

²⁷ Abed Sabe'i, *Op.Cit.*, p. 75

²⁸ Nu'Man, S. B. *Op.Cit.*, p.103

²⁹ as-Sabīī, *Op.Cit.*, p. 144

³⁰ al-Harīrī, M. M. (1989). *Usus Taṣmīm al-Maskan Fi al-'Imārah al-Islāmiyah*. Makkah, Saudi Arabia: Sharikah al-Sa'udiyah Li at-Tauzī'. p. 78

jurists, including figures like Ibn Khaldūn³¹, al-Farābī³², Sahnūn³³, Ashhab³⁴, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusī³⁵, Ibn Aẓum³⁶, and judges such as Ibn Abdulrafī³⁷, and Ibn al-Hukm³⁸, played pivotal roles in shaping urban planning principles. They offered intellectual and organizational frameworks for the Islamic city, drawing upon Islamic teachings to guide

³¹ Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406) was a prominent Arab historian, philosopher, and scholar born in Tunis during the Hafsid Empire. His most important work, the "al-Muqaddimah" (Prolegomena), changed how people studied history, society, and economics. Ibn Khaldūn's insights into cities' emergence and evolution were ahead of his time, emphasizing the intricate interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors in shaping urban development.

³² Al-Farabi, also known as Abu Nasr al-Farabi (870-950 AD), was a renowned Muslim philosopher and polymath of the medieval Islamic world. Born in Central Asia, he made significant contributions to philosophy, political theory, music theory, and science. Al-Farabi's contributions spanned diverse fields, including logic, metaphysics, ethics, and psychology, blending Greek philosophical traditions with Islamic thought. His influence extended across the Islamic Golden Age and beyond, shaping intellectual discourse and contributing to the preservation and transmission of ancient Greek philosophical texts.

³³ Originally from Homs, Syria, he was born in Kairouan in 776-777 and died in 854. He acquired knowledge from the students and companions of Imam Malik in the East. Upon his return to Kairouan in 803-804 AD, he dedicated himself to teaching and scholarship and was appointed as a judge by the Aghlabid state.

³⁴ Abu Umar Ashhab ibn Abd al-Aziz ibn Dawūd al-Masri was a distinguished scholar who led the Maliki school of thought in Egypt. Imam Sahnun was one of his students. He was born in 757 AD and died in 819 AD.

³⁵ Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi (994-1064) was a prominent Muslim scholar from Córdoba, Spain. He was a polymath known for his contributions to Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and literature. His notable work, "The Ring of the Dove," explores love and human emotions. A leading figure of the Zahiri school of thought, Ibn Hazm's rigorous logic and prolific writing greatly influenced Islamic scholarship.

³⁶ Known as Ibn Azzum Al-Qayrawani, he was a Maliki jurist and a member of the Shura Council of his time. He was born in Kairouan and died there in 1484-1485. He is currently buried there, and his grave is a shrine for its people.

their approach. Their insights were instrumental in establishing a unified vision for urban development, reflecting Islam's cultural and civilizational identity.³⁹

2.2 The Case of the Medina of Tunis

2.2.1 The Hafsīd Era in Tunis: The Establishment of Urban and Architectural Identity

From the 12th to the 16th century, during the Almohad and Hafsīd periods, the Medina of Tunis stood as a major hub in the Arab world, leaving behind numerous historical artifacts. The arrival of the Almohads⁴⁰ in *Ifriqiya* (Tunisia) in 1159 ushered in a new era for Tunis (Figure II.1). Initially under Almohad rule, the city blossomed into the capital of a new Hafsīd dynasty established by Abu Zakariyā' in 1229.

This shift in power, with Tunis taking precedence over established capitals like Kairouan (previously dominant in the 9th century), reflected the growing influence of Berbers within the Almohad sphere. One of the first significant constructions in the new Hafsīd capital was the Great Mosque of Az-Zaytūna, a pivotal religious and educational institution. The Hafsīd era (1159-1574) subsequently witnessed a surge in urban development within the Tunis Medina. The rulers actively shaped the city's religious landscape, constructing the iconic Al-Qasbah Mosque (1233) with its distinctive square

³⁷ Ibn Abdurafi' (1210–1286 AD), whose full name was Abu al-Abbas Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al-Ra'uf al-Marrakushi, was a renowned Andalusian-Moroccan scholar, jurist, and historian.

³⁸ Also known as Abu al-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Mahalli (1035–1113 AD), was a prominent scholar and jurist from Al-Andalus. He specialized in Islamic law (fiqh) and was renowned for his expertise in Maliki jurisprudence.

³⁹ as-Sabī'i, *Op.Cit.*, p. 196

⁴⁰ Muslim dynasty that ruled over North Africa and Al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) during the 12th and 13th centuries. Founded by Ibn Tumart in the early 12th century, the Almohad movement aimed to purify and reform Islamic society based on their interpretation of Sunni Islam. They emerged as a formidable force, overthrowing the Almoravid dynasty and establishing their own caliphate centered in Morocco.

minaret, which reflected the Maliki style of minarets in North Africa, and the prestigious Shamma'iyyah, the first madrasa (religious school) established in North Africa. The widow of the first Hafsidsultan further enriched the religious tapestry by building madrasas around the Great Mosque, Az-Zaytūna.



Figure II.1 Location of the Medina of Tunis ⁴¹.

Economic prosperity also flourished under Hafsids' rule. The city's commercial heart expanded with the creation of new sūks (traditional markets) like Sūk el-'Attarine, catering to perfume and incense merchants, and Sūk Al-Qumāsh, specializing in fabrics. The focus on trade wasn't limited to construction; the Hafsids also strengthened the Medina's defenses by consolidating the existing ramparts and constructing new gates.

In conclusion, the Hafsids era (1159-1574) stands out as a golden age for the development of the Tunis Medina. From iconic religious structures and prestigious

⁴¹<https://www.africanworldheritagesites.org/cultural-places/fortified-cities-of-the-maghreb/tunis.html>

educational institutions to bustling new sūks and reinforced defenses, the Hafsid left an enduring mark on the city's urban landscape.⁴²

Observing the map of the Medina reveals two major transversal axes: one street connecting the north-south suburbs and another linking the east-west suburbs. These two axes intersect at the courtyard of the Great Mosque (Figure II.2). Around this religious nucleus, the sūks networks are organized according to their nobility: the most prestigious sūks, such as those for textiles, perfumes, books, and jewelry, are located near the mosque while noisy or polluting markets, such as those for dyers, tanners, blacksmiths, and carpenters, are situated outside the city walls in the Medina peripheries. The historic city adheres to an extraordinarily rational urban order. This order stems from several factors born from social, geographical, and climatic organization. It serves as the receptacle for an urban population living off commerce and craftsmanship, making it a hub of exchange between city dwellers, peasants, and nomads who sell agricultural products.⁴³

⁴² Revault, J. (1967). *Palais et Demeures de Tunis, XVIe et XVIIe Siècles*, éd CNRS, Paris: Centre National De La Recherche Scientifique. p.8-9

⁴³ ad-Doulātli, A. (1981). *Medinah Tunis Fi al-'Ahd al-Hafsi*. Tunis: Dār Sirās Li an-Nashr. p.69-70



Figure II.2 Central Medina of Tunis: A Map Highlighting the Great Mosque at its Center. (credits: ASM)

During the Hafsids era, Tunisia experienced a unique period of greatness and peace in its intellectual, religious, and economic spheres. Its strategic position, open to the Near East, the Maghreb, Africa, and Europe, endowed it with numerous monuments inspired by Andalusian and Eastern influences. Abū Zakariyāʾ established the first North African madrasa in 1230. Under his reign, Tunis became the capital of the kingdom in 1235, where he built the Almohad mosque near the Al-Qasbah palace, with its minaret architecture

inspired by Moroccan designs. His first and primary achievement in religious architecture was the Al-Qasbah Mosque. His son, Al-Muntasir Billāh, strengthened the dynasty during his reign (1249-1264), creating new souks, reorganizing existing ones, and constructing a new mosque on the city's heights, Jama' al-Hawā' (1255), along with other urban and architectural creations, such as a new access point on the southwest side of the Medina in 1276.⁴⁴

Two renowned figures illustrate this era: Ibn Khaldūn, born to an Arab family from Spain, the most eminent writer of all North Africa, historian, and sociologist, author of the *Prolegomena* and the *History of the Berbers*; and Ibn 'Arafa⁴⁵, a famous imam and head of Malekism from Tunisia.

The Hafsid sultans endeavored to maintain a kingdom that extended from Tlemcen to Tripoli for nearly three centuries. However, the dynasty could no longer sustain its prosperity, facing a prolonged political decline accompanied by the rise of the Turks and the Spaniards. This led to the end of Hafsid's rule following the capture of La Goulette and Tunis by Ottoman forces in 1574.

2.2.2 The Ottoman Era

Ottoman history in Tunis an in 1574 with the city's capture by Sinan Pasha, leading Turkish troops from Istanbul. The day after the Turkish conquest, Sinan Pasha and his successors undertook extensive renovation in the Kasbah, which was dilapidated. They established the diwan (council), the residence of the Pasha, and the Dey there. After the Ottomans settled in, Tunis was a city half in ruins. As soon as conflicts ceased, the people of Tunis resettled in their city, erased the damage caused by the Spaniards, and rebuilt their homes. Sinan Pasha and his successors started by repairing the city's walls, renovating the

⁴⁴ Hatem Bourial, *Au temps des hafsidés, Tunis devient notre Capitale en 1235*, 2015

⁴⁵ Full name Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Arafa al-Warghami, was a prominent Tunisian scholar and jurist who lived during the 15th century. He is celebrated for his contributions to Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and Sufism. Born in Tunis, Ibn Arafa became a leading figure in the Maliki school of jurisprudence, which predominates in North Africa.

Qasbah, and refurbishing the Hafsid mosque in 1584-85 after converting it to the Hanafi rite.⁴⁶

In 1594, the first regime of the Pashas in Tunisia ended after three years of turmoil. This ushered in the era of the Deys. The effective transfer of power from the *Pasha* to the *Dey* occurred with Othman Dey in 1594, who governed the regency until 1610. In the 17th century, Tunis benefited from the arrival of the Moriscos. Othman Dey welcomed several thousand Andalusian refugees expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by Philip II in 1609. Many of these refugees settled in Tunis, enhancing several artisanal industries, including the manufacture of chechias (traditional caps), silk weaving, and ceramics.⁴⁷

The early period of Ottoman domination in North Africa highlights the strategic and military interests in Tunis and the destruction that ensued. Tunis was the center of continuous battles to control and fight the Turks. These battles led to the construction of fortresses, once by Emperor Charles V of Spain (1535) and again by Don Juan of Austria (1569). In 1573, Don Juan of Austria and his army's siege resulted in significant destruction and demolition of the city. It became a partially destroyed city controlled by Sinan Pasha.⁴⁸

The Ottoman rule over Tunis (16th-19th centuries) was a period of both preservation and challenge for the Islamic character of the Medina. Early on, the city faced destruction due to conflicts with European powers. However, the Ottomans largely maintained the urban form established by the previous Hafsid dynasty. Their focus on restoration and reconstruction helped the Medina retain its historic Islamic identity. The later Ottoman period coincided with modernization movements in Europe, and the Ottomans incorporated some European architectural elements while respecting Islamic traditions. In Tunis, however, modernization efforts under Ahmed Bey led to a concerning trend. He prioritized

⁴⁶ Saadaoui, A. (2001). *Tunis Ville Ottomane : Trois Siècles D'urbanisme et D'architecture*. Centre De Publication Universitaire. p. 18.

⁴⁷ J. Revault, *Op.Cit.*, p. 13

⁴⁸ Faleh, M. (2021). *Reconstructing Tunisian Architectural Identity in the Context of 'Ottomanization', Colonization, and Post-Colonization*. (Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Retrieved May 2024, from AKPIA@MIT: <https://akpia.mit.edu/sites/default/files/images/PostDocFaleh.pdf>. p.3.

building a European-style palace over mosques or religious schools within the Medina. This reflected a shift in focus from preserving Islamic heritage to projecting power through grand new structures.

Despite these challenges, the Medina's core Islamic character remained relatively intact. Its urban structure persisted, and traditional architectural styles continued to be replicated (Figure II.3). However, European influences were gaining ground during this late Ottoman period. These trends would become a much larger force during the French colonization that followed.⁴⁹



Figure II.3 Map of the historic center of Tunis showing open spaces. Parks, cemeteries, public and private courtyards, and public and private gardens are indicated.⁵⁰

2.2.3 The Colonial and Post-Colonial Era

The Medina of Tunis, a traditional Islamic city center, faced a complex transformation during French colonization (1882-1956). Historically, Islamic principles guided the Medina's design, creating a space that reflected cultural values. The French, however,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.9-10.

⁵⁰ <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/project/atlas-for-the-medina-of-tunis-landscape-architecture-as-a-catalyst-for-urban-regeneration/>

aimed to remake Tunis in their image. They portrayed the Medina as a symbol of backwardness to justify their intervention and establish a European city alongside it. This "dual city" concept created a stark division between the European and Islamic areas.

Despite French efforts to marginalize the Medina, it became a crucial center for resistance movements. Intellectuals, youth groups, and political parties like the Neo Destour Party used the Medina as a base to fight French rule. The Medina's historical significance and maze-like layout offered these movements a strategic advantage. The image of the Medina as a symbol of resistance is still present today. It continues to be depicted in Tunisian media as a place of struggle against colonialism. The French presence also had a lasting physical impact. The destruction of Medina's fortifications to make way for French administrative buildings restricted its growth and created a permanent physical barrier between the two cities.

The Islamic character of the Medina of Tunis faced significant challenges after Tunisia gained independence in 1956. Habib Bourguiba (1903 - 2000), the first president, aimed to establish a new national identity that wasn't defined by religion but by Tunisia itself. This national identity approach overshadowed the Medina's traditional Islamic architecture.

Furthermore, French colonization had already caused physical damage to the Medina. The destruction of the Medina's walls and ramparts restricted its growth potential. They severed its physical connection to the larger Islamic city. This physical separation contributed to marginalization. Adding to these woes there was a significant population shift within the Medina. Wealthier Muslim families who could afford to move away from the crowded and neglected Medina to the suburbs. This outward migration reduced the population practicing Islam within the core of the Medina. The Medina itself suffered from overcrowding and a lack of maintenance during this period. This neglect led to the degradation and misuse of its historic Islamic buildings.⁵¹

Finally, post-independence planning prioritized the development of tourism over reviving the Medina's Islamic community. International funding for restoration projects may not have prioritized Islamic architectural ethics, potentially leading to further marginalization of the Medina's Islamic character.

⁵¹ Faleh, M, *Op.Cit.*, p.19-20.

3 Sustainability and Privacy as Islamic Values of Residential Buildings

3.1 Incorporation of Sustainability and Privacy Within The Architecture of Residential Building in Islamic Cities

3.1.1 Privacy

Privacy is a fundamental aspect of Islamic architecture, encompassing various dimensions such as personal clothing, the private domain of the home, and the privacy of communication. The Qur'an prescribes behavior patterns to respect the privacy of others, including proper ways to announce one's presence when entering a house. The invasion of others' privacy, such as through direct visual corridors into their private domains, is strictly prohibited.⁵²

Islamic teachings, both direct and indirect, provide guidance on construction with an emphasis on privacy protection. Allah says in the Qur'an, "O you who believe, enter not into houses other than your own until you have asked permission and have properly greeted those in them" (Q.S. 24:27). Furthermore, believers are instructed to lower their gaze and guard their modesty (Q.S. 24:30). Islamic architectural guidelines, inspired by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, focus on several tasks related to the home: protection of privacy against the outside world and among family members, respect for guests and neighbors, and the relationship between men and women. The Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) emphasized, "Do you know the rights of the neighbor? You must not build to exclude the breeze from him unless you have permission." This principle informs policies that shape the built environment within the Muslim community, ensuring that neighbors' rights are respected. These teachings inspire design strategies in Muslim homes, such as interior courtyards and bent entrances, which allow sunlight and air circulation without exposing the private life of the house to outsiders. When windows face the street, *mashrabiyyahs* (latticed screens) or raising the windows above eye level can help maintain privacy.⁵³

⁵²Hakim, B. S. (2008). Arabic-Islamic Cities Building and Planning Principles. Emergent City Press. p.20

⁵³ Nu'Man, S. B. *Op.Cit.*, p.102.

Privacy in Islamic architecture, whether in rural or urban areas, is essential and inspired by the rule of "no harm, no damage." This privacy extends to all sensory dimensions—vision, hearing, smell, touch, and taste—each of which has mechanisms to be considered in the architectural design. For instance, cultural factors like *sharaf* (honor), *karāmah* (dignity), *hayā'* (bashfulness), and *'ird* (protection of the family's women) significantly influence the need for visual privacy in Muslim communities.⁵⁴

Historically, the structure of Islamic houses has been designed to prioritize privacy, especially for women, who should feel free not to be covered at home. This consideration leads to architectural features such as high surrounding walls, high-level outdoor windows, and twisting entrances to prevent outsiders from seeing inside the house. Separate entrances for men and women further ensure privacy.⁵⁵

In Islamic society, privacy levels vary based on gender and space. At home, visual privacy from outsiders is the same throughout, especially for women, reflecting Islamic instructions that women should conceal their hair and body from strangers. Thus, the design of houses for Muslims centers on women's requirements and comfort, which may differ in other cultures and religions regarding physical and psychological comfort in residential spaces.

The Islamic religion identifies the rights and needs of every individual, including privacy, well-being, and religious beliefs. Islamic Shariah places great emphasis on private lives, making the right to privacy one of the most important rights mentioned in the Qur'an. Consequently, the structure of homes under Islamic Shariah must consider the privacy of both the home and its members, especially women.

The design of Islamic homes aims to balance family privacy with social cohesion by organizing the interfaces between private and public spaces. Measures like interior courtyards and twisted entrances help achieve this balance. Interior courtyards allow

⁵⁴ Hana Aljawder & Hala A. El-Wakeel. (n.d). Architecture and Privacy in Islam: An Analytical Review., *Islamic Heritage Architecture* , 211, p. 129-130.

⁵⁵ Ali Saeed Bokhari, Mahmoud Tarek Mohamed Hammad & Djamel Beggas. (2020). Impact of Islamic Values and Concepts in Architecture: A Case Study of Islamic Communities. *Sustainable Development and Planning XI*. WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment. p.390

sunlight and air circulation while maintaining privacy, and twisted entrances prevent direct views into the home from the street. These design strategies comply with the teachings of Allah and his Prophet. They reinforce the principle that “there should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm.” In the context of home design, harm is when someone outside can observe private behavior inside the home.⁵⁶

Islam did not instruct Muslims on how to build houses but provided guidance on tasks associated with the house and housing phenomena. These include privacy protection, respect for guests and neighbors, and maintaining the relationship between men and women.⁵⁷ For example, Umar Ibn Khattāb ruled on a case where an upper-floor addition had a window overlooking a neighbor’s property. The window had to be sealed if someone could see into the neighbor's house. This principle also applied to doors, highlighting the importance of window and door placement in Islamic architectural design.⁵⁸

3.1.2 Sustainability

Islamic architecture goes beyond aesthetics and functionality. It incorporates a deep respect for the environment and promotes responsible resource management, aligning with the core values of Islam; *Mashrabiyyah* window screens, with their intricate patterns, serve multiple purposes: controlling sunlight and airflow to regulate temperature naturally. This passive cooling approach reduces reliance on energy-intensive air conditioning. Additionally, Islamic teachings emphasize a simple and non-wasteful lifestyle, reflected in buildings' absence of excessive ornamentation.⁵⁹

The Qur’ān emphasizes humanity's role as a caretaker of the Earth (Q.S. 2:30). This translates into responsible building practices. Windows and doors should be positioned to maximize natural light and ventilation, minimizing the need for artificial lighting and

⁵⁶ Nu'Man, S. B. *Op.Cit.*, p.102.

⁵⁷ Omer, S. (2011). Islamic Architecture and The Prospect of its Revival Today. *Jurnal Intelek*, 6(1), p. 11.

⁵⁸ Nu'Man, S. B. *Op.Cit.*, p.103.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 102

cooling systems. Similarly, using local and sustainable materials like mudbrick, which absorbs and releases heat naturally, reduces dependence on energy for climate control. Sand lime bricks, made from readily available materials, offer another eco-friendly option in hot, dry climates. Effective waste management is crucial for sustainable cities. Islamic principles encourage practices like urban composting and recycling, echoing the Quranic verse reminding us that Allah created us from the earth and settled us here (Q.S. 11:61).⁶⁰

While the concept of "green building" may be recent, Islamic architecture has always embodied its core principles. The Quran and Hadith advocate for responsible resource management and avoiding waste. These values seamlessly align with modern sustainability practices. Islamic architecture demonstrates that environmental responsibility has been a core value for centuries. Although not from Islam, green buildings can be classified as Islamic architecture because they are in accordance with the Islamic concept, which encourages humans to take care of the earth. Likewise, sustainable/organic architecture. The concept of sustainability has recently been widely discussed, even though the concept has existed in the Islamic concept since its inception. Al-Qur'an and Hadith mention many commandments so that humans do not waste energy and do not destroy nature. Of course, the two things the Qur'an and Hadith commanded align with the current sustainable architecture concept.⁶¹

3.2 Manifestation of Sustainability and Privacy within the Residential Architecture of the Medina

The residential buildings of the Medina of Tunis are not merely structures; they are testaments to the ingenuity with which Islamic values, particularly those of sustainability and privacy, were woven into the very fabric of everyday life. Here, we will explore some of the prominent architectural components and materials that exemplify this philosophy.

⁶⁰ Loc.Cit.

⁶¹ Jefry Tarantang, Ahmadi Hasan, Ibnu Elmi A. S. Pelu, Ahmad Dakhoir. (2023, June). The Idea of Building A House of Maqashid Sharia Perspective. *Journal of Islamic Architecture*, 7(3), p.544

These elements transcend mere practicality, transforming basic needs into expressions of both beauty and cultural values.⁶²

3.2.1 The *Sqifa*: Twisted Entrances

The concept of privacy holds paramount importance in Islamic architecture. Nearly every residence incorporates one or more *sqifas*, or twisted entrances. The number of *sqifas* might vary depending on the family's social status, ranging from single to double or even triple configurations. These strategically designed entryways ensure that even with the door open, a passerby cannot glimpse the interior of the home (Figure II.4).⁶³

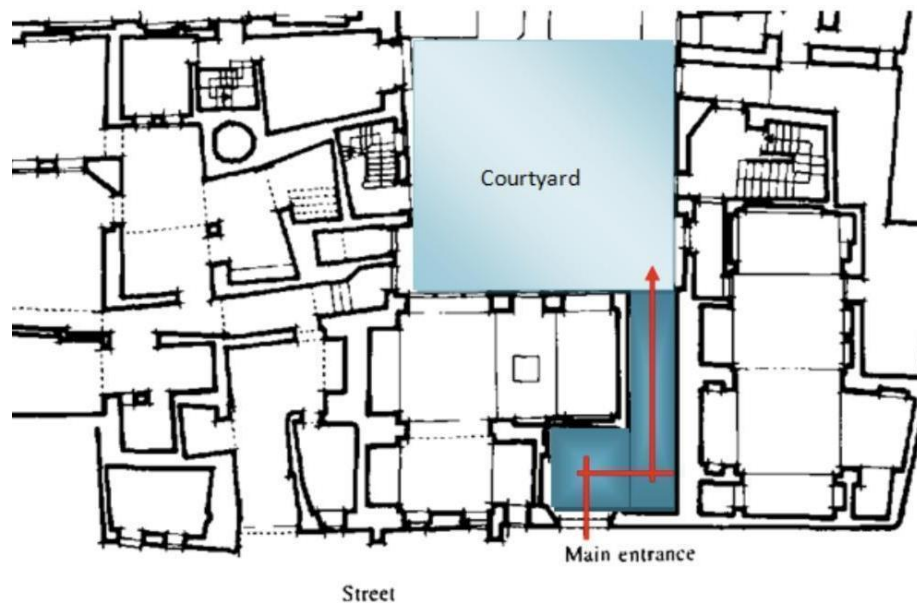


Figure II.4 The entrance opens into the courtyard, Al-Suhaymi house, Cairo, 1648⁶⁴.

⁶² Faruqi, I. R. (n.d.). *Islam and Architecture*. Retrieved May 2024, p.2

⁶³ Ali Saeed Bolhari, *Op.Cit.*, p.390

⁶⁴ Mohammed Al Surf, Connie Susilawati, Bambang Trigunaryah. (2012, January). *ResearchGate*. Retrieved from researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/How-to-design-the-main-entrance-in-vernacular-houses-Obtained-from-El-Shorbagy-2010_fig3_265702212

3.2.2 The Courtyard: A Haven of Tranquility

The domestic architecture of the Medina of Tunis exhibits a distinctive and consistent style that is both aesthetically pleasing and functionally sound. This typology, characterized by an interior courtyard, is a unifying feature found across a wide range of residences. From the grand abodes of the bourgeoisie and opulent palaces adorned with intricate designs and luxurious finishes to the more modest homes of working-class families, this architectural style pervades the urban landscape of the Medina.

The central element of these homes is the interior courtyard, which serves as the heart of the domestic space. This design fosters a sense of community and family cohesion and enhances the residences' functionality and sustainability. The orientation of private rooms towards the inner courtyards and patios plays a crucial role in achieving privacy, which is a core principle of Islamic architecture. By orienting the rooms inward, the need for external windows is significantly reduced. This architectural choice limits exposure to noise from the bustling streets, creating a serene and quiet interior environment that offers respite from the urban hustle and bustle.

Furthermore, the inward-facing design provides a sense of seclusion from neighbors, maintaining the household's privacy. This is specifically important in densely populated areas like the Medina, where homes are constructed in close proximity to one another. The interior courtyards also facilitate natural ventilation and light, contributing to the sustainability of the buildings. The open courtyards enable the circulation of cool air, reducing the reliance on artificial cooling systems and thereby promoting energy efficiency. Additionally, the courtyards often include greenery, which further enhances the microclimate by providing shade and improving air quality.⁶⁵ Additionally, courtyards often feature central fountains or reflecting pools, contributing to a serene and cooling environment, particularly during the hot Tunisian summers. (Figure II.5)

⁶⁵ Ali Saeed Bolhari, *Op.Cit.*, p.391

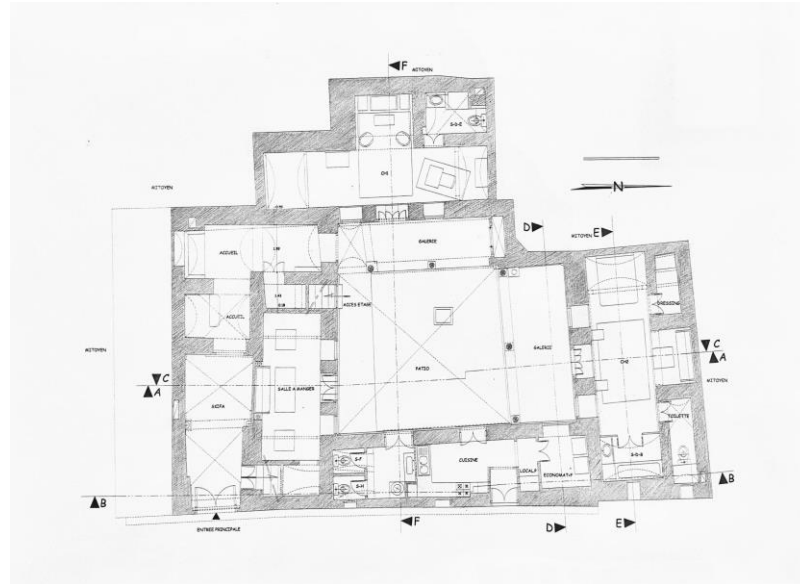


Figure II.5 Ground Floor Plan of Dar Ben Gacem Showing the Courtyard. (Credits ASM)

3.2.3 The *Mashrabiyyah* and Other Fenestration Systems

Lighting plays a vital role in regulating visibility, and Islamic houses ingeniously integrate fenestration systems that ensure visual privacy while enhancing aesthetic appeal. One such example is the *Mashrabiyyah*, a distinctive latticework screen typically crafted from wood renowned for its intricate and ornate designs. These screens serve multiple purposes: they allow occupants to observe the outside world discreetly, maintaining a connection with the external environment while ensuring that they remain unseen from the street. This fosters a sense of privacy and security, which is a fundamental aspect of Islamic domestic architecture.

The *Mashrabiyyah* screens serve both functional purposes and add to the home's artistic and cultural depth. The detailed craftsmanship involved in making these screens is a testament to the skill and artistry of traditional artisans. The patterns of the *Mashrabiyyah* can vary greatly, from simple geometric shapes to complex floral motifs, each representing the region's cultural heritage and artistic traditions.

Other fenestration systems used in Islamic houses include strategically placed windows designed with privacy in mind. These windows often have limited openings or are positioned at angles that restrict direct views into the home from the outside. This strategic

design enable for natural light to enter the space while preventing unwanted visual intrusion. These windows' size, shape, and placement are meticulously considered to ensure balancing the need for light, ventilation, and privacy.

Alongside, *Mashrabiyyahs* and carefully placed windows, some Islamic houses incorporate thick walls and high parapets around courtyards to further enhance privacy. These architectural features ensure that outdoor spaces such as courtyards remain secluded from neighboring properties and passersby, creating a private oasis within the bustling urban environment. (Figure II.6) ⁶⁶.

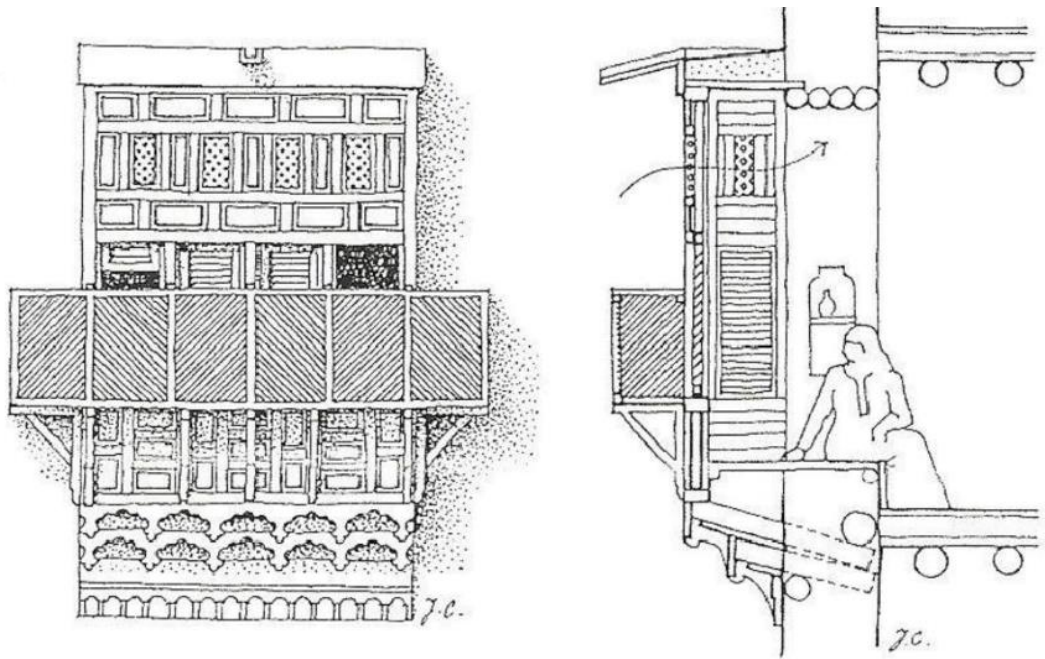


Figure II.6 Details of Mashrabiyyah in Elevation and Section View ⁶⁷.

3.2.4 Thick Walls: Insulation and Privacy

The walls of Medina residences are impressive not just for their material strength but also for their remarkable width, often exceeding one meter (Figure II.7). Constructed with

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.389

⁶⁷ Semary, Y. M. (2017, October). Modern Mashrabiyyas with High-tech Daylight Responsive Systems. *The Academic Research Community Publication*, 1(1), 3.

layers of durable materials like stone or compacted earth, these thick walls offer a multitude of benefits that extend farbeyond their primary function of providing structural stability. Firstly, they ensure exceptional robustness and durability, allowing homes to stand the test of time and withstand various environmental challenges. This durability is particularly important in the Medina, where historical buildings have endured for centuries.

In addition to providing structural support, these thick walls function as highly effective thermal insulators, significantly contributing to sustainable living. During the hot summer months, the substantial wall thickness helps keep the interior cool by absorbing and gradually releasing heat, preventing the rapid temperature fluctuations typical in thinner-walled constructions. On the other hand, the walls retain and radiate heat during chilly winters, maintaining a warm and comfortable indoor environment. This natural regulation of indoor temperatures reduces the need for artificial heating and cooling, thereby lowering energy consumption and supports environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, the thick walls act as effective natural sound barriers, offering a layer of auditory privacy that is often overlooked but highly valued in densely populated urban areas like the Medina. These walls create a serene and quiet indoor environment by minimizing noise from the bustling streets outside. This sound insulation is particularly beneficial for maintaining the privacy of conversations and daily activities within the home, fostering a sense of psychological comfort and security. Inhabitants can freely express themselves and engage in various activities without the constant worry of being overheard or disturbed by external noises.

It is important to note that auditory privacy provided by these thick walls does not imply complete isolation from the outside world. Instead, it acts as a shield from undesirable noise, enabling residents to maintain a balanced connection with their surroundings. This allows them to enjoy the positive aspects of living in the vibrant Medina, such as the lively atmosphere and cultural richness, while still having a peaceful haven within their homes to retreat to when needed. The thoughtful design of these thick walls ensures that residents experience the best of both worlds: the dynamic energy of the Medina and the tranquility of a private, secure living space.

Moreover, these thick walls' aesthetic and cultural significance cannot be overlooked. Often adorned with traditional decorative elements and craftsmanship, they reflect the region's rich architectural heritage and identity. The use of locally sourced materials and

traditional building techniques enhances the sustainability of these structures while preserving the cultural legacy and knowledge passed down through generations.⁶⁸

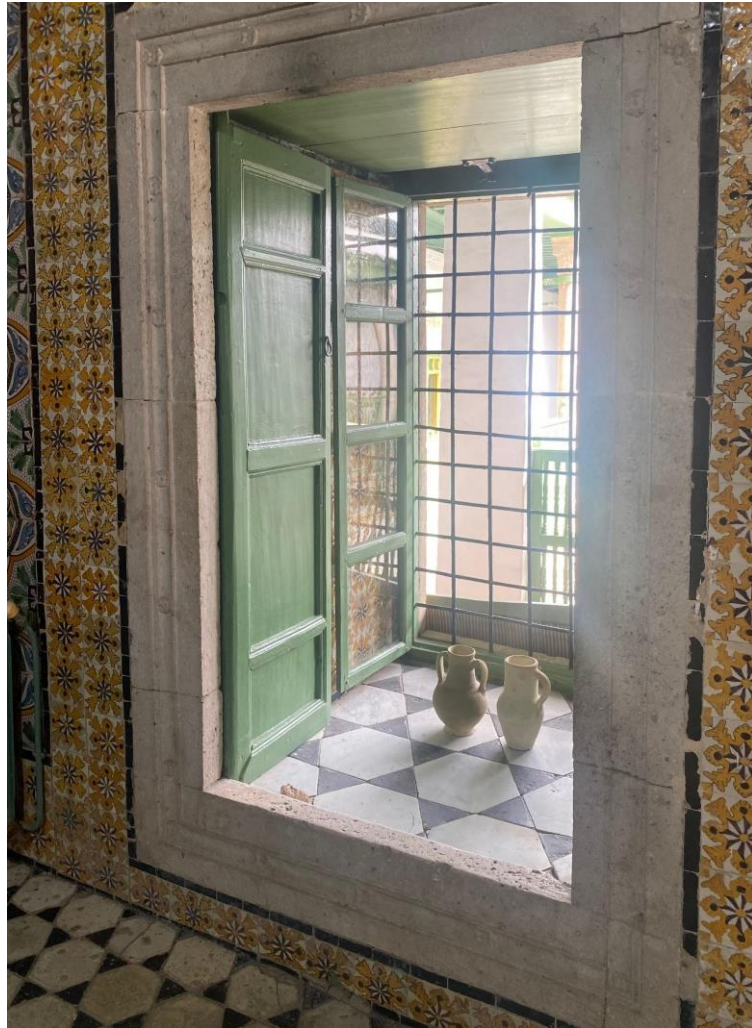


Figure II.7 Dar Hayder's Wall: Over one meter thickness. (Photo by Author)

4 Conclusion

Our exploration delved into the rich history and vibrant present of the Medina of Tunis, solidifying its place as a quintessential Islamic city. We examined the core principles of Islamic urban planning – the centrality of mosques, the harmonious blending of religious

⁶⁸ Ali Saeed Bokhari, *Op.Cit.*, p.390

and social life, and thoughtful consideration of climate and location. These values, evident throughout Islamic history, establish a framework for building cohesive communities that reinforce a strong Islamic identity.

The Medina's development unfolded across significant historical periods. The Hafsid era witnessed a golden age, marked by the construction of iconic landmarks like the Great Mosque of Az-Zaytūnah, solidifying the city's religious significance. Bustling souks strategically placed by good type further emphasized the vibrancy of commerce and cultural exchange. The Ottoman period presented both preservation and adaptation. Restoration efforts addressed existing structures, while some European architectural influences were introduced. However, the Medina's core Islamic character remained largely intact, with the Hafsid urban layout and traditional architectural styles persisting.

This analysis explored the complexities of French colonization and the post-colonial period. Despite facing marginalization and neglect, the Medina also served as a crucial center for resistance movements, a testament to its enduring spirit and symbolic importance. French attempts to create a "dual city" ultimately failed to erase the Medina's Islamic identity.

Finally, we examined the enduring Islamic values embedded in residential architecture. Features like *sqifas* (twisted entrances), interior courtyards with central fountains, mashrabiyya screens, and thick walls all exemplify the application of Islamic principles. These elements demonstrate respect for privacy, a core Islamic value, while also promoting sustainable living practices.

In summary, the Medina of Tunis stands as a living testament to the legacy of Islamic city planning and architecture. From the central role of the mosque to the focus on social cohesion, privacy, and respect for the environment, the very fabric of the Medina represents the core values of Islam. This analysis reveals that the architectural and urban principles defining Islamic cities – the centrality of mosques, the integration of religious and social life, the focus on community needs, and the use of sustainable building practices – are demonstrably present in the Medina of Tunis. Thus, the Medina of Tunis goes beyond being an old city; it is a thriving example of an Islamic city, where history, religion, and cultural values continually intersect and shape its unique and distinctive character.

CHAPTER III

CHALLENGES IN PRESERVING ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN THE MEDINA OF TUNIS

1 Introduction

The Medina of Tunis, a fascinating maze of alleyways and historic edifices, reflects the city's rich and deep Islamic heritage. However, this UNESCO World Heritage Site stands at a crossroads.⁶⁹ While the bustling commerce and thriving tourism industry fuel economic growth, they also present a significant challenge: the preservation of the Medina's Islamic architectural identity.

This chapter delves into the complex struggle to maintain the core Islamic principles embedded within the Medina's residences. These historic spaces were meticulously designed to foster privacy and separation of space, concepts fundamentally at odds with the open and public nature of modern commercial establishments like hotels and restaurants. The transformation of these residences into commercial hubs creates a fundamental clash between the historic and the modern.

This chapter will explore the multifaceted challenges threatening the Islamic identity of the Medina. We will begin by examining the historical efforts undertaken to conserve the architectural heritage, including the crucial role played by the *Waqf*⁷⁰ Association, ASM (Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis), and the Tunisian government. However, we will also analyze the limitations and disruptions these programs faced.

Furthermore, the chapter will investigate the significant impact of commercialization and demographic shifts. The migration of residents and the transformation of the Medina's houses from a residential haven to a commercial and tourist center have altered the social

⁶⁹ Jmour, M. M. (2021, May 21). *Challenges and opportunities of historic urban centres: case study of the Medina of Tunis (Tunisia)*. May 2024, UNESCO World Heritage Convention: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/canopy/tunis-medina/>

⁷⁰ Or *habus*, is a private and public endowment governing properties, amenities and utilities.

fabric of the community. Repurposing these residences for commercial purposes has resulted in the erosion of the Medina's traditional character, raising concerns about the dilution of its Islamic identity.

Despite these challenges, this chapter will not solely paint a bleak picture. By fostering a discourse on creative adaptations, the chapter aims to contribute to finding a sustainable balance between economic progress and cultural preservation in the Medina of Tunis. The hope is that the lessons learned here can offer valuable insights for other historic cities facing similar struggles.

2 Conservation Efforts Shift within the Medina's Historical Buildings

2.1 Conservation Efforts within Waqf

2.1.1 The Legacy of the Tunisian Waqf Association

Many landmarks in Tunisia, particularly those in the city of Tunis, have benefited from extensive maintenance, restoration, and sometimes the complete reconstruction of significant portions of their dilapidated elements, thereby saving them from oblivion. The waqf (endowment) system, which has characterized the social and religious life in Islamic societies since the advent of Islam, played a substantial role in preserving many heritage buildings. Unlimited funding ensured the long-term maintenance of all monuments and public services. This system did not prevent urban transformations, including significant changes like constructing new commercial complexes during Ottoman times. However, it required civic oversight of urban changes, reflecting the organization of society as a whole. Families of notables who owned prestigious houses in the Medina had civic responsibilities within their neighborhoods, and the diverse population, both socially and religiously, was involved in the daily governance of the city.⁷¹

Among the notable waqf institutions is the Tunisian Waqf Association, established in 1874 by the Grand Vizier Khayr al-Din Pasha. Recognizing the importance of waqf in maintaining the cultural and religious heritage, Khayr al-Din Pasha appointed Sheikh

⁷¹ Nora Lafi, Max-Weber. (2020). *Protecting the Medina of Tunis: Reflections on Current Challenges and Initiatives*. University of Erfurt. Berlin: World Heritage Watch. p. 148

Muhammad Bayram V (1840-1889), a distinguished scholar from Az-Zaytūnah Mosque, as its head. Bayram V initiated a meticulous policy for the maintenance and revival of religious, civil, and military landmarks by overseeing their waqf properties, organizing their administration, and enhancing their revenues. This initiative aimed to rectify the deteriorating conditions that the waqf properties were experiencing and revitalize these landmarks' architectural and functional vitality.⁷²

The Waqf Association was dedicated to maintaining landmarks, particularly the religious ones that had fallen into disrepair to the point of ruin. They faced the challenges posed by the complex and accumulated issues related to the neglect of waqf properties and the random alterations that marred the architectural features of these landmarks, regardless of their functions. The philosophy of waqf generally revolved around the dialectical relationship between preserving a landmark through continuous restoration and maintenance and benefiting from it so that it could fulfill its spiritual, social, or economic role according to its intended purpose. This dual focus ensured that landmarks were not only preserved as historical artifacts but remained active contributors to the community's religious and social life.

2.1.2 Challenges and Resilience under Colonial Rule

In a subsequent period, the application of waqf regulations faced significant disruptions due to the general situation in the country under French colonial rule. The French authorities gradually weakened the influence of the Waqf Association and seized waqf assets through various means, including hindering the benefit from waqf revenues. The establishment of the Municipality of Tunis provided a legal entry point that gradually allowed foreigners to acquire properties and lands before the full onset of French colonization. This legal maneuvering paved the way for their intervention in certain landmarks, especially religious ones, including mosques and mausoleums. These properties were often altered through subdivision, expansion, or even a complete change in their

⁷² as-Souli, A. (2008). *Faḍl al-Waqf Fi ṣīyanati al-Ma'ālim al-Islāmiyah*. Tunis: Publications of the Tunisian Jurists Unit, Readings in Arab and Islamic Architectural and Urban Thought. Tunis: Zitouna University. p. 455-457

architectural functions, reflecting the colonial agenda of diminishing the Islamic cultural footprint.⁷³

The financial crisis of the Tunisian *Waqf* Association worsened, hindering its ability to perform its spiritual, social, and educational functions amidst ongoing assaults on *waqf* properties. This resulted in the dissolution of the association a few months after the country's independence in 1956. Despite these difficulties, the *Waqf* Association continued its efforts in maintaining and restoring historical landmarks. It persisted even if it had to employ the French military engineering administration, to which the association covered the necessary expenses. This collaboration, although born out of necessity, highlighted the unwavering commitment of the *Waqf* Association to preserve the Islamic heritage of Tunisia despite the political and financial challenges it encountered.⁷⁴

Through these efforts, the *Waqf* Association preserved significant cultural and religious sites and maintained a connection to the country's Islamic heritage. This legacy of resilience and dedication ensured that many of Tunisia's historic landmarks survived the turbulent colonial period and continue to stand as symbols of the nation's rich cultural and religious history.

During the colonial period, significant changes were introduced to heritage protection organizations. During the colonial period, significant changes were introduced to heritage protection organizations. For instance, in 1885, the Service des Antiquités et Arts de la Régence was established, which later became the Institut national d'Archéologie et d'Art with Independence in 1956 and the Institut national du Patrimoine in 1993, located in Dâr Hussein, the former palace of the reformed Ottoman municipality from the late 1850s. This period saw heritage being theorized and applied mainly to the Medina's most significant monuments, such as religious and palatial structures. This shift raises several problems regarding heritage protection in the medina:

- Imposition of Bureaucratic Supervision: Introducing a bureaucratic system for heritage protection during the colonial period replaced the earlier civic-based governance. This

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 484

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 488-489

shift moved the control and management of heritage sites away from local, community-driven efforts to a more centralized and bureaucratic framework.

- **Disconnection from Civic Roots:** The new bureaucratic supervision imposed by the colonial authorities disconnected heritage protection from its traditional civic roots. This change reduced local community involvement and oversight, which is integral to heritage management.
- **Focus on Significant Monuments:** The colonial approach to heritage protection emphasized the preservation of the most prominent monuments, such as religious and palatial structures. This selective focus potentially neglected other important aspects of the Medina's heritage that were significant to the local community.
- **Colonial Apparatus of Control:** The new heritage protection system was part of the broader colonial apparatus of social and spatial control, which often reinforced colonial dominance and suppressed local traditions and practices.⁷⁵

2.2 Conservation Initiatives by Private and Governmental Entities

2.2.1 Safeguarding Association for the Medina

The *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (ASM) stands out as the most prominent organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing the historical fabric of Tunis. Established in 1967 as a result of a strategic political decision led by the Ministry of Tourism, the Municipality of Tunis and the Governor-mayor Habib B. Ammar, ASM has played a crucial role in shaping the architectural ethics within the Medina. The establishment of ASM reflected a local initiative aimed at reviving the Medina's value, driven by a post-independence era focused on new dynamics and local interests.⁷⁶

The mission of ASM encompasses protecting the old town to advance the sustainable revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and infrastructure, as well as conducting scientific research in heritage management and historical preservation. Supported by its Atelier d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme, ASM's diverse missions include consulting, project

⁷⁵ Nora Lafi, Max-Weber, *Op.Cit.*, p.149

⁷⁶ F. Privitera and M. Métalsi. (2016). *Le Signe de la Médina: La Morphologie Urbaine Selon Roberto Bernardino*. Florence: ed DIDA.

management, restoration, training, and engineering consultancy, ensuring the ongoing protection and revitalization of the Medina.⁷⁷

2.2.2 Governmental Efforts and Challenges

According to UNESCO, the Municipality of Tunis and ASM have aimed to protect historic buildings and reclaim slums since 2000. Between 2008 and 2016, these institutions focused on revitalizing traditional neighborhoods and showcasing the facades of areas like the Andalous neighborhood. These participatory projects, conducted closely with artisans and residents, spurred further efforts to restore old buildings, promote crafts, and spread knowledge about traditional crafts and architecture. Beyond ASM, preserving cultural heritage in Tunisia began with the government's efforts in the early 1990s. It is important to examine past legislation to protect and manage Tunisian heritage to understand their effects and shortcomings and suggest alternative strategies.⁷⁸

From 1985 to 2000, Tunis faced numerous modern challenges within its Medina. The Project Tunis-Carthage (PTC) was a significant initiative during this period. Although UNESCO channeled its progress through the Ministry of Planning, with ASM and PTC collaborating on the project, the focus was more on the Carthage part, leading to a romanticized misunderstanding of the Medina. The general urban planning goal was to create a Carthage-Medina package for cultural tourism, intended to contribute to the economic development of Tunis by making it a first-class tourist attraction.⁷⁹

During the post-independence period from 1961 to 1969, under President Bourguiba and Minister of Planning Ahmed Ben Saleh, Tunisia experienced accelerated economic progress. The political strategy encouraged mass tourism, although the Medina remained marginalized due to colonial legacies, the exodus of the bourgeois to the suburbs, and the

⁷⁷ Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina, *Tunis Patrimoine Vivant: Conservation et Créativité*, 2013, Tunis,

⁷⁸ Faleh, M. (2019). Restoration of Tangible and Intangible Artefacts in the Tunisian Landscape: 'Boutique Hotels' and the Entrepreneurial Project of Dar Ben-Gacem . *Journal of Heritage Management*, p.3

⁷⁹ Faleh, M, *Op.Cit.*, p.20

high density of houses occupied by migrants. This phenomenon of rural-origin families occupying formerly noble or bourgeois houses led to degradation and misuse, posing an ethical dilemma for the Medina's preservation.⁸⁰

Planners in the post-independence period often overlooked the economic, political, and social realities of Tunis, favoring a global approach that aimed to turn the Medina into a museum-like entity, imitating Western models. This trend, coupled with the influence of mass tourism and architectural globalization, has continued to obstruct the ordinary evolution of the Medina. However, despite these challenges, ASM remains a key player in preserving the Medina's architectural and cultural heritage, striving to balance modernization with historical preservation.⁸¹

3 Modern Urban Evolution of The Medina of Tunis

3.1 Impact of Commercialization and Demographic Shifts

3.1.1 The Rise of Commerce and a Shifting Landscape (18th Century Onwards)

Since the Ottoman era, significant urban changes have occurred in the city of Tunis, especially with the advent of European capitalism. This period of transformation was accompanied by economic development, which influenced the policies governing the ownership and exploitation of real estate—specifically houses, inns, and warehouses—by the residents of Tunis. During the Husainid period, the pace of changes in property ownership accelerated both economically and politically, reflecting the strong entry of European capitalism and its social and cultural repercussions. Consequently, many real estate properties transitioned from being residential buildings to economic commodities such as shops, hotels, baths, bakeries, etc.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.18

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.20

⁸² As-Souli, *Op.Cit.*, p. 460

In modern times, two complementary factors actively contributed to the stimulation of the economy and the vibrancy of Tunis. On one hand, Tunis became a massive urban market for agricultural products and traditional crafts from the Tunisian province. On the other hand, it became an important center for financial transactions related to the sale and rental of real estate, significantly contributing to the city's growth. This economic activity facilitated the exchange of goods within the global trade framework, which in turn accelerated dependence on European countries, leading to an accumulation of loans for the Tunisian province. These major changes, starting from the second half of the 18th century, were reflected in the urban space of Tunis.

3.1.2 Social Restructuring and its Consequences

At a social level, the Muslim population was redistributed within the urban area. Families who could afford it abandoned the 'Arab city' and settled in the 'European city'. Native Tunisians began to move towards the European suburbs like Carthage and La Marsa. While many of the old residents left the city of Tunis, it simultaneously welcomed large numbers of new arrivals, both foreigners and people from within the country.⁸³

Amid this movement, which oscillated between emigration from and immigration to Tunis, a significant number of buildings were neglected and often fell into ruin due to this migration. This was particularly because the newcomers from various interior regions of Tunisia were often of low social status. A survey conducted in 1840 revealed that 1,279 properties were in urgent need of maintenance and repair.⁸⁴

These developments during the Ottoman era and beyond highlight the dynamic transformation of Tunis. The city's economic and social landscape was shaped by the interplay of local traditions and European influences, leading to significant changes in property ownership, urban planning, and population distribution. Despite the challenges, these changes contributed to the growth and modernization of Tunis, reflecting a complex history of adaptation and resilience.

⁸³ Faleh, M, *Op.Cit.*, p.15

⁸⁴ As-Souli, *Op.Cit.*, p. 461

3.2 Dilution of The Islamic Identity Through The Reuse of Old Residential Buildings: Erosion of Islamic Domesticity

3.2.1 The Challenge of Preserving Islamic Domesticity in a Changing Medina

The transformation of Tunis' Medina houses from a residential haven to a bustling commercial and tourist center creates a fascinating tension. While economically beneficial, it comes at the cost of diluting the core values embedded within the Islamic architectural identity of these buildings. Hotels, restaurants, and guesthouses simply don't require the same level of privacy as traditional family homes, and in fact, their function directly contradicts these principles.

According to the entrepreneur Leila Ben Gacem, among the objectives of these renovation projects is to safeguard the national cultural heritage. However, there is no intention to specifically conserve the Islamic culture within the Medina's architecture, Islamic culture is systematically integrated into the cultures that shape the identity of the Medina. Samely, Amel Meddeb has also stated regarding the conservation of the Islamic identity within architectural interventions that in the philosophy of restoration within the Medina of Tunis, except for the mosques and mausoleums, all the monuments are considered as Mediterranean heritage and not specifically Islamic. She added « Tunis is Mediterranean before being Islamic: the typology of traditional houses in the Medina is the same as in Greece, Italy, and other non-Muslim Mediterranean countries. What is Islamic is the use of this typology, the way of living, and not necessarily the architectural typology of the house; the grandfather's house brings the extended family together in the courtyard, and each family has its own private space. The twisted entryway, however, exists only in houses where Muslims live, in Tunis as well as in Fez... »

3.2.2 The Impact of Modern Use

The modern use of historic Medina residences results in the loss of several key privacy features. Traditionally, these homes were designed to ensure privacy and tranquility for families, with a clear separation between public and private life. Twisted entryways with sharp turns obscured direct views into the interior, protecting the household from outside scrutiny. Today, however, wide-open entrances and large windows expose the interiors to the outside world, fundamentally altering how residents interact with their surroundings.

Furthermore, the transformation of courtyards, once private havens for family gatherings, has eliminated their sense of seclusion. These spaces, often featuring central fountains or reflecting pools that added to their serene atmosphere, are now bustling common areas overlooked by large windows. This shift dismantles not only the physical separation of spaces but also the social order embedded within Islamic domesticity.

Hotels, by their nature, mix genders and social circles freely, contrasting sharply with the traditional separation observed in these homes, where only family and close relatives gathered. Privacy now exists only within individual hotel rooms, not between residents and strangers or between women and guests. This blurring of the once clear distinction between private and public spaces erodes a cornerstone of Islamic architecture.

Additionally, the shift to modern, unsustainable means of ventilation and aeration further compromises the integrity of these historic buildings. Covering courtyards and relying on electric energy instead of natural ventilation (Figure III.1) disrupts the ecological balance and the traditional, environmentally harmonious living conditions these homes once provided. This reliance on artificial methods underscores the broader challenge of maintaining the cultural and environmental sustainability of the Medina amidst modernization efforts.

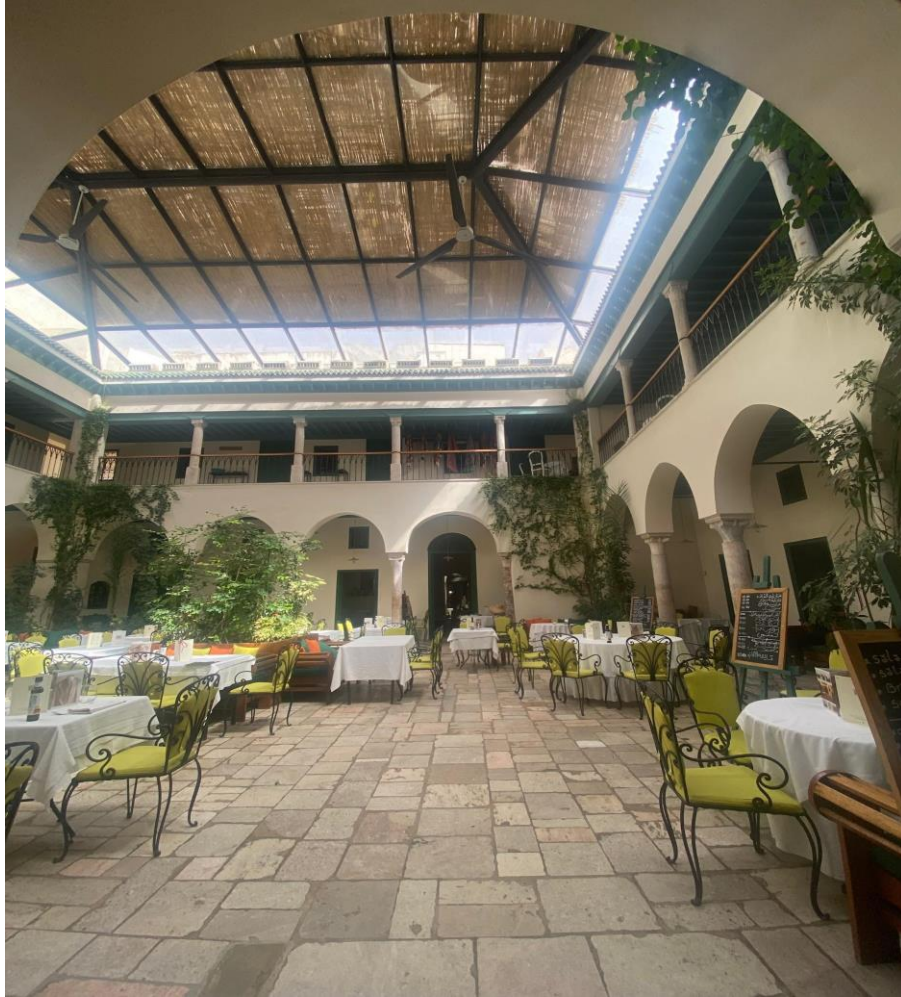


Figure III.1 The Restaurant and Craftsmanship House Fondouk El Attarine: Enclosed Courtyard. (Photo by Author)



Figure III.2 Informational Plaque at the Restaurant and Craftsmanship house
Fondouk El Attarine. (Photo by Author)

“Dates back to the Hafside era

Equivalent to the ancient Caravanserai of the East

Restored and converted into a Restaurant in 2003”

4 Conclusion

The Medina of Tunis stands at a crossroads, grappling with the complex challenge of balancing economic progress with the preservation of its rich Islamic architectural heritage. The city's bustling commerce and burgeoning tourism industry are undeniable signs of economic vitality. However, this very development comes at a price, creating tension with the core Islamic architectural values embedded within the Medina's historic residential buildings. These residential buildings were carefully designed to foster privacy and separation of space, concepts fundamentally at odds with the open and public nature of modern commercial establishments like hotels, and restaurants.

This tension is further intensified by the impact of commercialization and demographic shifts. The transformation of the Medina from a residential haven to a commercial and tourist hub has led to the migration of residents, altering the social fabric of the community. Furthermore, the adaptive reuse of old residences for commercial purposes has resulted in the erosion of the Medina's traditional character.

However, this complex situation also provides an opportunity for innovative solutions. Architects and urban planners need to skillfully navigate this environment, finding creative approaches to bridge the gap between the past and the present. Instead of simply mimicking the past, they can reinterpret historical elements in ways that respect the Medina's rich history while meeting modern needs. These reinterpretations should not only focus on replicating original functionality but rather subtly acknowledge the building's past and the cultural values it embodies.

For instance, traditional courtyards, once havens of quiet family life, could be transformed into semi-public spaces that still offer pockets of respite within the bustling city. Thoughtful landscaping or the use of movable screens could create these pockets of privacy, giving visitors a sense of refuge while maintaining a connection to the traditional function of the courtyard. Similarly, the traditional L-shaped entryways, while no longer serving their original purpose of obscuring views from the street, could be reimaged in hotel lobbies to create a sense of anticipation and exploration for guests entering the space.

The challenge lies in finding a sustainable balance. Economic development is vital for the Medina's future, but it should not come at the expense of its cultural and religious identity. By employing creative solutions that respect the past while accommodating to

modern needs, the Medina can secure a prosperous future. It can evolve into a vibrant space that not only serves as a tourist destination but also continues to tell the story of Tunisia's rich heritage. Ultimately, the Medina of Tunis can serve as a model for other historic cities facing similar challenges, showing the possibility of progress existing in harmony with cultural preservation.

CHAPTER IV

BALANCING ISLAMIC VALUES WITH MODERN NEEDS IN BUILDING TRANSFORMATION

1 Introduction

The transformation of traditional Medina houses into restaurants, guesthouses, and other forms of accommodation creates a unique intersection of privacy, sustainability, and cultural heritage. As these historical structures adapt to modern requirements, they present both challenges and opportunities in maintaining the delicate balance between preserving their intrinsic character and fostering economic growth. This chapter explores the implementation of privacy and sustainability in the context of transformed Medina houses, focusing on how these repurposed structures can contribute to urban conservation, economic resilience, and social unity.

Building on the discussion of privacy and sustainability in Chapter II, this chapter investigates the extent to which Islamic values are still applied to preserve the Islamic identity within the Medina. Insights from experts such as Amel Meddeb and Leila Ben Gacem highlight how traditional notions of privacy are upheld despite the public nature of guesthouses, reflecting the enduring values embedded in Islamic teachings. Additionally, this chapter examines the sustainability measures adopted in Medina houses, emphasizing environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Through the adaptive reuse of traditional houses and support for local artisans, projects such as Dar Ben Gacem demonstrate the integration of sustainable development with community engagement, revitalizing traditional crafts, fostering economic growth, and enhancing social well-being. Additionally, the chapter analyzes how repurposing these houses has introduced other Islamic values alongside privacy and sustainability.

As we navigate the waves of globalization, sustaining the city's identity and life remains a vital cultural question. Historic centers offer an inheritance of the past and are shaped by contemporary society, leaving marks for future generations. It is essential to rationalize the past with present and future community needs, planning a balance of permissible change

and ensuring the rehabilitation and revitalization of historic cities and centers in a sustainable manner.⁸⁵

This chapter focuses on the model of Dar Ben Gacem, a pilot project for the rehabilitation of old houses. As a boutique hotel committed to providing the most authentic cultural experience, Dar Ben Gacem exemplifies how historical buildings can be restored while supporting local communities. Since the first Dar was inaugurated in 2013, Dar Ben Gacem has operated as a social enterprise, reinvesting all profits into restoring historical buildings, improving the Medina's territorial marketing, and employing community members.⁸⁶

2 The Implementation of Privacy and Sustainability in Transformed Buildings

2.1 Identification of Privacy Concepts in Transformed Medina Houses

The transformation of traditional medina houses into guesthouses and other forms of accommodation has led to the emergence of new concepts of privacy and tranquility. Amel Meddeb explained, "In a way, we have lost the notion of intimacy: although the space has become public, each unit (guesthouse room) remains a private sanctuary. There is a fundamental standard to maintain personal privacy." Similarly, in an interview with entrepreneur Leila Ben Gacem, she shared, "More hosts from over 68 countries have reported experiencing a profound sense of tranquility, not only between the internal and external spaces of the building but also among the various rooms surrounding the courtyard." This exceptional calmness is attributed to the preservation of the building's original structure and materials; there have been no changes to the materials and thickness of the walls, effectively preventing sonar wave penetration both between the rooms and from the outside in. This ensures exceptional acoustic privacy and serenity for the hosts in each room, creating a genuine sense of "home" within every space—a true haven of rest. She also noted that this level of tranquility is often missing in their own modern houses. This profound sense of tranquility and privacy aligns with the Quranic verse from Surah An-Nahl (Q. 16:80), which underscores the divine intention for homes to be places of peace

⁸⁵ Boussa, D. D, *Op.Cit.*, p. 324

⁸⁶ <https://darbengacem.com>

and rest, where privacy is preserved, creating a sanctuary that fosters both serenity and seclusion.

2.2 Identification of Sustainability Practices in Transformed Medina Houses

1.1.1. Environmental Sustainability

Sustainable development has become a powerful driver for urban conservation planning, emphasizing the constant reuse of existing built resources (Figure IV.1). This approach integrates minimal energy input to adapt to new societal needs and relies on local culture, equitable urban service distribution, democratic management principles, and the regeneration of traditional social values.⁸⁷

Maintaining existing structures offers numerous environmental benefits, such as reduced demolition waste and resource consumption, and preserving the original building's embodied energy.⁸⁸ According to Amel Meddeb, sustainability is enhanced through the reuse of existing materials in restoration projects. This method involves salvaging authentic materials, storing them for future use, and reintegrating them into buildings. By recycling and reclaiming materials, restoration supports economic, environmental, and cultural heritage sustainability.

⁸⁷ Boussa, D. D, *Op.Cit.*, p.310

⁸⁸ Afify, A. (2018). Sustainable Conservation for Historical Buildings in Mediterranean Cities. *International Journal of Herit. Archit*, 2(2), p. 312.



Figure IV.1 The Restaurant and Craftsmanship House Fondouk El Attarine: Using Recycled Tiles and Preserving Authentic Materials ⁸⁹.

Dar Ben Gacem exemplifies a commitment to sustainability and community engagement, positioning itself not just as a boutique hotel but as a cultural hub. It supports local artisans, collaborates with communities, and promotes the Medina's economic and social well-being.⁹⁰ Despite lacking an elaborate environmental strategy, Dar Ben Gacem's inherent values of environmental commitment are evident. The hotel's practices, such as minimizing carbon emissions by having all team members reside within the Medina and encouraging walking or cycling, significantly reduce its environmental footprint.

⁸⁹ *Foundouk el Attarine*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 2024, from Foundouk el Attarine: <https://www.fondoukelattarine.com/site/en/index>

⁹⁰ Hedi Chouria, Saida Machat, *Op.Cit.*, p.15

Additionally, Dar Ben Gacem's network of local individuals and businesses within the Medina fosters a shared economy, supporting local products and entrepreneurs while minimizing carbon emissions through the use of traditional transportation like the *Barwita*⁹¹ for moving supplies.⁹²

2.2.1 Economic and Social Sustainability

Adaptive reuse is often preferred over demolition and replacement due to lower costs and the advantage of utilizing the existing building's location (Figure IV.2)⁹³ This approach not only saves construction costs but also promotes the right to work, a key aspect of sustainable development. Reviving traditional crafts in historic centers like the Medina of Tunis breathes new life into these areas and contributes to their economic and social sustainability by creating jobs for many unemployed people. Conserving main heritage resources and enhancing cultural and economic activities make it possible to present these heritage assets to visitors and tourists, further boosting economic and social sustainability. This holistic approach ensures that the Medina's rich cultural heritage is preserved while fostering economic growth and community well-being.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Tunisian term referring to a traditional two-wheeled cart pulled by animals or humans.

⁹² Hedi Chouria, Saida Machat, *Op.Cit.*, p.52

⁹³ Mohannad Tarrad, Salam Mtawea Husban, *Op.Cit.*, p.4

⁹⁴ Boussa, D. D, *Op.Cit.*, p.322



Figure IV.2 Restoration Project of an old house in the Medina of Tunis. (Credits (ASM

3 Implementation of Additional Islamic Values in Repurposing Houses

3.1 The Role of Repurposing Houses of Fostering Community and Social Cohesion

3.1.1 Urban and Social Aspects

The reuse of heritage buildings is one of the most effective methods for preserving urban heritage, as it helps integrate these structures into the city's urban fabric rather than leaving them as closed monuments. This repurposing stimulates various planning and organizational measures in the surrounding areas, contributing significantly to urban development. The reuse of heritage buildings is crucial for urban conservation. By rehabilitating and integrating them into the city's fabric, these buildings remain active components of the urban landscape rather than becoming isolated monuments. This integration encourages various planning and organizational measures that benefit the surrounding areas. Once rehabilitated, heritage buildings play a positive role in the community by encouraging the opening of shops and services, thereby providing job opportunities for local residents. The restoration of these buildings can transform them into vibrant community hubs that support economic and social activities.⁹⁵

3.1.2 Community Protection

In the interview conducted with architect Amel Meddeb, she highlighted the unique community cohesion within the medina: "The medina remains an urban space that unites Tunisians, unlike Fes or Marrakech, which have been abandoned; houses there have been taken over by Europeans either for habitation or conversion into hotels or other entrepreneurial projects. In fact, within the medina of Tunis, there are only two hotels and about fifteen guesthouses, and we do not expect a significant increase in this kind of rehabilitation of old houses in the coming years; very few projects are currently underway."

She added, "Even out of nostalgia, many Tunisois (natives of Tunis) have returned to live in their old houses and create startups in them to revive economically. The medina is a very sociable space, open to everyone, for entrepreneurs as well as new residents, and the

⁹⁵ Mohannad Tarrad, Salam Mtawea Husban, *Op.Cit.*, p.4

most important thing is the relationships between neighbors; whether they are owners, visitors, or inhabitants. For example, to create a guesthouse in a residential neighborhood, you must first obtain the neighbors' agreement, otherwise, the entrepreneur will not get the permit from the municipality to start their project. This is part of the neighbors' rights inherited from Islamic culture, still preserved within the medina of Tunis, not only by the residents as Muslims but also by the regulations from the municipality of the Medina of Tunis."

Additionally, she emphasizes that "the guesthouse always has the functionality of both hosting and living, unlike mass tourism which can create constraints for the neighborhood. Guesthouses and even hotels are well integrated into the urban structure of the medina in a way that you cannot distinguish them except for a plaque or sign indicating that it is a guesthouse (Figure IV.3), otherwise, from the outside, the facades look like neighboring houses that have retained their functionality as private residential buildings (Figure IV.4)".



Figure IV.3 Exterior wall of Dar Ben Gacem. (Photo by Author)

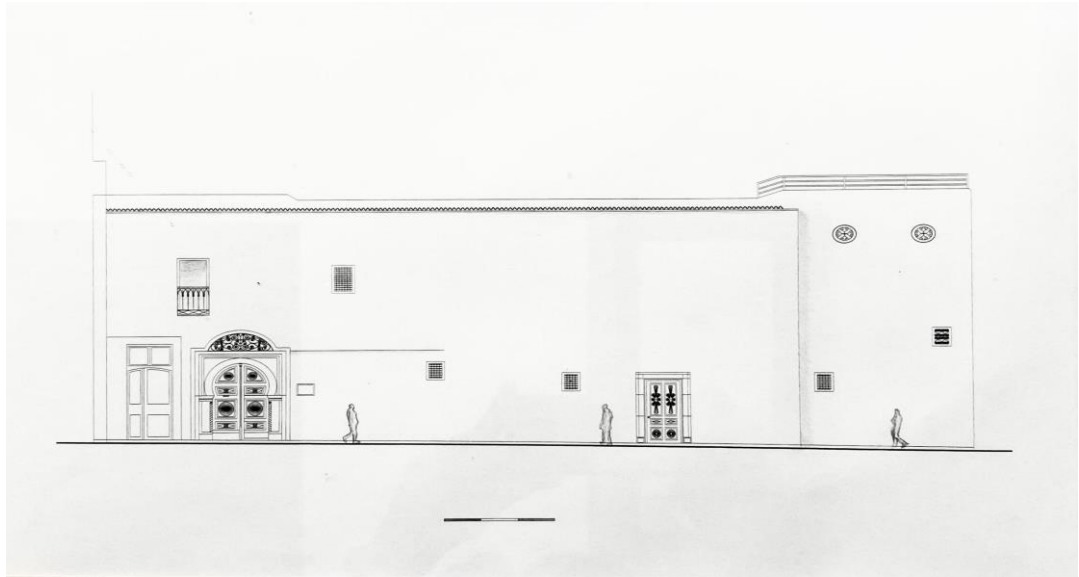


Figure IV.4 Facade Plan of Dar Ben Gacem. (Credits: ASM)

In some cases, local residents may even intervene to protect projects like Dar Ben Gacem from potential issues.⁹⁶ For instance, Leila Ben Gacem collaborated closely with master artisans to empower and promote their craftsmanship, indirectly supporting the customs and culture of the Souks of the Medina (Figure IV.5). This collaboration has stimulated the economic and cultural precincts of the Medina, strengthening connections between entrepreneurs, craftsmen, residents, and tourists. The use of local materials and techniques in furniture making, along with local symbols and icons, reminds visitors of the dynamic, living culture of the area (Figure IV.6)⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ Hedi Chouria, Saida Machat, *Op.Cit.*, p.33

⁹⁷ Faleh, M, *Op.Cit.*, p. 9



*Figure IV.5 Dar Ben Gacem: local materials and techniques in furniture making*⁹⁸.

⁹⁸ <https://darbengacem.com>



*Figure IV.6 Fondouk El Attarine: A Craftsmanship House for Creating and Selling Local Handicrafts.*⁹⁹

⁹⁹ <https://www.fondoukelattarine.com/site/en/visit>

3.2 The Role Repurposing Houses' Impact on the Financial Prosperity and Economic Development of the Medina

3.2.1 Fostering Collaboration and Shared Prosperity

The Medina of Tunis boasts a rich history as a center of economic activity. Its vibrant souks, bustling with artisans and merchants selling traditional goods like textiles, ceramics, spices, and jewelry, have long been a draw for both locals and tourists. These traditional crafts, including pottery, carpet weaving, and leatherwork, play a significant role in the Medina's economy. According to the Safeguarding Association of the Medina, with its 3,000 stores, the Medina accounted for a quarter of the Tunisian agglomeration's commercial activity in 1973, surpassing even production activities.¹⁰⁰

The repurposing of houses within the Medina has had a profound and multifaceted impact on its financial and economic landscape. Pioneering initiatives like those undertaken by Dar Ben Gacem have yielded positive results, particularly in diversifying the economy, creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and promoting a collaborative economic model.¹⁰¹

Reused houses have fostered new relationships between various economic actors within the Medina, including entrepreneurs, artisans, boutique hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. Many entrepreneurial projects have adopted a strategy of recommending craftspeople to clients, creating a direct and positive impact. This collaborative spirit has empowered businesses to develop strategic plans together to enhance the Medina's overall economic activity. Furthermore, it has strengthened collaboration among members through the establishment of a system of mutual commercial support, encompassing project sponsorships, opportunity sharing, and customer referrals. While these collaborative practices resonate with traditional Tunisian values, they have historically been more community-based and sporadic, often occurring within families or among individuals from the same region. Dar Ben Gacem has played a pivotal role in fostering new and broader forms of collaboration among these stakeholders. As a prime example, Dar Ben Gacem

¹⁰⁰ Hedi Chouria, Saida Machat, *Op.Cit.*, p.13

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.45

was the first to initiate collaborations with craftspeople by organizing workshops, experiences, and client referrals, creating a mutually beneficial relationship.¹⁰²

3.2.2 Revitalizing Traditional Crafts and Empowering Local Residents

The interview with social entrepreneur Leila Ben Gacem underscores the core principles of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs are deeply invested in their environment and create solutions to address its challenges. Their focus is not on charity, but rather on establishing for-profit business models that prioritize social and environmental well-being alongside financial gain. Social entrepreneurship occupies a space between traditional non-profit organizations and purely profit-driven businesses. It prioritizes creating added value, generating a profit, understanding the needs of the community and environment, and offering a valuable service to society – principles that align closely with the concept of *Waqf* (Islamic charitable endowment).

As highlighted by the positive impact on local employment, Dar Ben Gacem has consistently prioritized the well-being of the Medina's residents. Many jobs have been restored or even established as a result of the guest house's interventions. Significantly, these job opportunities have been occupied by local residents, showcasing a commitment to empowering the surrounding community. The careful restorations undertaken at Dar Ben Gacem, using traditional techniques, have empowered and enabled craftspeople to revive their trades. This has allowed them to regain mastery of their skills and pass on their knowledge to both experienced artisans and apprentices. This not only enhances their recognition but also serves as a testament to the success of the Dar Ben Gacem model.¹⁰³

Dar Ben Gacem's presence has significantly broadened the spectrum of economic activities within the Medina. The increased demand for renovations of traditional houses (Dars) by architects and specialized craftspeople signifies a resurgence in the construction and restoration sector. This diversification is a clear sign of economic resilience and adaptability within the region. The proliferation of boutique hotels modeled after Dar Ben Gacem, both within the Medina and across Tunisia, further highlights this trend even more.

¹⁰² Loc.Cit.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 47

While not exclusively attributable to Dar Ben Gacem, the pioneering success and early establishment of this unique hospitality concept within the Medina has undoubtedly served as an inspiration, impacting both tourism and social development in the region.¹⁰⁴

4 Conclusion

The transformation of Tunis' Medina presents both challenges and opportunities, specifically when considering the impact on local residents. While the traditional character of the buildings has undeniably changed, innovative solutions can ensure a future that prioritizes the well-being of residents alongside economic development and heritage preservation.

Repurposed houses can offer economic benefits without sacrificing the tranquility residents seek. By creatively reinterpreting original architectural features to create privacy and a sense of refuge for guests, these projects can ensure a peaceful environment for all. Additionally, a focus on sustainability through the reuse of existing materials minimizes environmental impact, creating a healthier living environment for residents. These initiatives not only but also benefit residents and resonate with Islamic values of responsible stewardship and peaceful living.

Repurposing houses can nurture a vibrant and supportive community within the Medina. Regulations that ensure respect for neighbors and the careful integration of guesthouses into the urban fabric minimize disruption to residents' daily lives. Entrepreneurial projects like Dar Ben Gacem demonstrate how economic development can empower local residents. Collaborative models that support local businesses and artisans create new job opportunities and revitalize traditional crafts, directly benefiting residents. This collaborative approach reflects traditional Islamic values of social responsibility and shared prosperity.

The future of the Medina depends on embracing innovative approaches that prioritize the welfare of residents. The new concept of sustainability extends beyond the walls of individual houses to encompass the entire urban area. This means preserving a clean and

¹⁰⁴ Loc.Cit.

safe environment throughout the Medina, ensuring a healthy and enjoyable living space for residents and visitors alike.

There is a renewed interest in architecture and urban planning, not as mere historical monuments or museums, but as tools to meet the needs of society and improve the general living standards. This means that the entrepreneurial projects that have sprung up in the old city over the past decade reflect the entrepreneurs' awareness and deep understanding of the concept of architecture and urban planning. They have moved beyond the narrow view of the Medina as simply historical relics, recognizing its potential as an investment in present and future generations. These projects strive to serve residents while preserving the architectural and artistic heritage that bears witness to the history and glory of their ancestors. They ensure that residents do not forget the urban and architectural values laid down to preserve their religion and principles, while employing these spaces in a way that serves the Muslim community in the present and future, each according to the community's priorities and life requirements.

By finding a balance between economic development, privacy, sustainability, and community involvement, the Medina can ensure a future that respects its past while creating a thriving future for its residents. This strategy will create a Medina that is not only a vibrant center of commerce and culture but also a sustainable and supportive community for generations to come.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Our study of the Medina of Tunis has illuminated its deep significance as a quintessential Islamic city, embodying centuries of rich history, architectural ingenuity, and cultural vitality. The fundamental principles of Islamic urban planning, such as the centrality of mosques, the integration of religious and social life, and climate-conscious design, have been carefully woven into the fabric of the Medina. These aspects create a cohesive community with a strong Islamic identity and serve as a testament to Islamic architecture's and city planning's enduring legacy.

The Medina's historical development, from the golden age of the Hafsid era to the adaptive strategies of the Ottoman period, demonstrates a dynamic interaction between preservation and innovation. Despite the challenges introduced by French colonization and the post-colonial era, the Medina has retained its Islamic essence, symbolizing resilience and cultural continuity. The analysis of residential architecture, including features like *sqifas*, interior courtyards, and *mashrabiyyah* screens, highlights the Medina's dedication to privacy, sustainability, and the application of Islamic values in everyday life. These architectural features are not merely aesthetic but are deeply ingrained in the cultural and social fabric of the city, reflecting the principles of Islamic life and community.

Today, the Medina faces a crossroads, balancing economic growth with preserving its rich heritage. The adaptive reuse of old houses has emerged as a key strategy, addressing the economic needs of various categories of people within the Medina. Repurposing these historic buildings as commercial or entrepreneurial projects has significantly improved the financial levels of both the owners and the individuals employed within these repurposed spaces. This economic revitalization aligns with one of the fundamental objectives of Islamic law—preserving properties. Thus, in this context, adaptive reuse can be seen an 'Islamic act' that fosters economic development within the community.

The transformed houses bring financial benefits compared to their initial residential function, benefiting both owners and workers. This financial gain was absent when these houses were used solely for private residence. For instance, guesthouses strike a balance between serving as living spaces for owners and hosting visitors, generating financial profit while preserving their residential essence. This model ensures that the reuse of old houses supports the Islamic community's economic growth both within and beyond the Medina.

Moreover, guesthouses like Dar Ben Gacem demonstrate how adaptive reuse can maintain architectural integrity while benefiting to the local economy. This approach not only preserves these buildings' historical and cultural significance but also revitalizes the community by creating jobs and promoting local crafts and services.

Furthermore, the Medina represents a crucial part of Islamic history, with its evolution since the Islamic conquest in Tunis bearing representing a pivotal chapter of Islamic civilization. Adapting urban principles from the Quran, the Prophet, and Muslim scholars emphasizes the importance of preserving the Medina's architecture and its responsible exploitation. This act of preservation safeguards the tangible and intangible Islamic cultural heritage embedded within the architectural framework. The Medina's streets, buildings, and public spaces are living records of Islamic history and culture, and their preservation is essential for maintaining the identity and continuity of the community.

Unlike other historic cities such as Fes or Marrakech, which have been largely abandoned by locals and taken by Europeans for habitation or conversion into hotels, the Medina of Tunis remains a unified urban space that unites Tunisians. With only two hotels and about fifteen guesthouses, the Medina maintains its communal life, even amid changing demographics. The limited number of repurposed houses, alongside the majority kept as private residences create a vibrant and authentic Muslim community. This contrasts sharply with other old cities that have transformed into tourist-centric areas lacking genuine community life. The preservation of residential functions in the Medina ensures that it remains a living city, where residents continue to engage in daily social, cultural, and economic activities. This balance between tourism and residential life is important for sustaining the Medina's unique character and identity.

The adaptability of architecture in the Medina of Tunis has demonstrated its ability to meet everyday needs without diluting the intangible Islamic heritage. The architectural design ensures privacy, sustainability, and other values, demonstrating that residents and entrepreneurs can prioritize these aspects while preserving the Islamic identity. This balance between modern needs and traditional values is essential for maintaining the Medina's cultural integrity. The adaptive reuse of buildings respects the original design and purpose while incorporating modern amenities and functionalities, ensuring that the Medina can adapt to contemporary life without losing its historical essence.

Ultimately, preserving Islamic values within houses and other architectural edifices is crucial. Today's Islamic principles that address Muslims' needs will become the intangible Islamic heritage for future generations. By fostering a supportive community and maintaining a clean, safe environment, the Medina can continue to thrive as a center of commerce and culture. This approach ensures that the legacy of Islamic urban planning and architecture continues to inspire and guide future generations, respecting the past while creating a prosperous future for its residents.

In conclusion, the Medina of Tunis serves as a model for historic cities facing similar challenges. It showcases the possibility of achieving progress preserving cultural preservation, ensuring that the legacy of Islamic urban planning and architecture continues to inspire and guide future generations. By striking a balance between economic development, privacy, sustainability, and community engagement, the Medina can honor its past while creating a thriving future for its residents, becoming a beacon of Islamic heritage and modern innovation. Through thoughtful and respectful adaptive reuse, the Medina can continue represents Islamic civilization's values and principles, providing a living example of how historic urban spaces can adapt to modern needs while preserving their cultural and historical integrity.

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