

REVITALIZING THE MEDINA OF TUNIS AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL

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Summary: Many Arab old towns in Maghreb and in South West Asia have been gripped by a fundamental and dynamic urban renewal during the 20th century. While the renewal process in most old towns can be attributed to global dynamics, the actors involved in the old town of Tunis are almost exclusively from a local and national level. This paper aims to highlight the processes and strategies for revitalizing the old town of Tunis, to analyse its motives and explain why the renewal process is spurred by local interest instead of global dynamics. For instance, the medina serves primarily as a national symbol. The symbolic significance of the old town of Tunis in terms of establishing identity coincides with the strategies of a state-funded revitalization process and increasing efforts to showcase the old town.

Zusammenfassung: Zahlreiche arabische Altstädte im Maghreb und in Vorderasien wurden im 20. Jahrhundert von einer grundlegenden Dynamik der Erneuerung erfasst. Während in den meisten Altstädten die Erneuerungsprozesse auf eine globale Dynamik zurückzuführen sind, finden sich im Fall der Altstadt von Tunis die Akteure fast ausschließlich auf lokaler und nationaler Ebene. Dieser Artikel zielt darauf ab, die Prozesse und Strategien der Revitalisierung der Altstadt von Tunis aufzuzeigen, ihre Hintergründe zu analysieren und herauszuarbeiten, warum der Erneuerungsprozess einem lokalen Interesse statt einer globalen Dynamik geschuldet ist. Dabei steht die Medina als nationales Symbol im Vordergrund. Die symbolische Bedeutung der Altstadt von Tunis in Bezug auf die Identitätsbildung geht einher mit den Strategien einer staatlich geförderten Revitalisierung und einer zunehmenden Inszenierung der Altstadt.

Keywords: Urban development, urban geography, Arab old town, Maghreb, identity, revitalization, mise-en-scène, Tunisia, medina.

Introduction

Planning and preserving the old town of Tunis has been a topic of national interest in Tunisia and has attracted the attention from the western world since the mid-20th century. For instance, in 1967, the Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis (ASM), a society for protecting the old town of Tunis, which focuses on furthering scientific research, preserving and ensuring a sustainable revitalization of the technical infrastructure and traditional residential quarter of the old town, was founded at the suggestion of the mayor of Tunis.¹⁾

¹⁾ The *Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina de Tunis* (ASM) carries out research, planning, development and restoration projects etc. together with the city council of Tunis (*Municipalité*), the *Agence de réhabilitation et de rénovation urbaine* (ARRU) and the Ministry of Tourism und Culture, in particular the subsection of the *Institute Nationale du Patrimoine* (INP).

In 1979, together with the old towns of Damascus and Cairo, the medina of Tunis was one of the first Arab old towns to be designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The medina of Tunis can be regarded as the best, scientifically researched Arab old town. There are a wide variety of studies performed by European, American and Arab architects, urban planners, geographers and sociologists, that not only deal with the structural situation but also with the society of the medina. In addition to that, studies are also available on the economic and social situation of the medina. Noteworthy examples include papers by ECKERT (1970), REVAULT (1980, 1983), ZANNAD BOUCHARA (1984, 1995), WAGNER (1996), LARGUÈCHE (1999) and ZEGHLACHE (2004). There are also extensive scientific studies, which focus on the historical and urban planning perspectives of the old town of Tunis, such as the works of DAOULATLI (1976), HAKIM (1986), WOODFORT (1988) and SEBAG (1959, 2000). MCGUINNESS (1997) provides an excel-

lent analysis of the interaction between politics, urban planning and ideology taking the old town of Tunis as an example.

Just 12 years ago, GANGLER and RIBBECK (1994) asked a question, which actually applied to almost all old towns of the Arab culture area: "Is it possible to save the medina still?" Nearly every old town in North Africa and Near East seemed to be falling inevitably into disrepair. Since then, the situation has changed considerably. Many Arab old towns are no longer abandoned to decay slowly but are now gripped by dynamic renewal. That is especially true for towns and cities in Morocco and Syria. In the old town of Marrakesh, for instance, residential buildings are being bought primarily by Europeans and renovated and frequently used as guesthouses (ESCHER et al. 2001). An improvement that is now defining the old town of Damascus is the opening of restaurants for international guests (ESCHER 2001). The renewal processes described are usually part of global contexts; the predominantly tourism-oriented use ensures the preservation of buildings and structures and contributes to transforming the given infrastructure and character of the old towns.

The situation in the medina of Tunis is different, however. Compared to Moroccan old towns, it is evident that, in spite of local efforts and the interests, it attracted internationally early on, there is little evidence of the global dynamics that is currently characterizing many old towns of the Arab world. For instance, there are almost no foreign-owned real estate properties in the old town of Tunis. Nevertheless, the old town and preservation efforts continue to gain more and more importance for the people of Tunisia. In this case, the actors are almost exclusively local and national. To understand which processes and strategies are driving the preservation of the old town of Tunis, it is necessary to discuss the symbolic meaning the old town of Tunis has before addressing the state-aided revitalization and the increasing *mise-en-scène* of Tunis' old town. After all, these strategies for revitalizing the medina of Tunis are singular and unique in the Arab world.

1 Tunis' medina as a symbol of national identity

Today, the medina of Tunis is an architectural symbol that has great significance for the national identity of Tunisia. In the context of the *Symbolische*

Formen (CASSIRER 1994), it plays an integral role in the shaping and understanding of life-world reality for the people of Tunisia; as a symbol the medina of Tunis lends identity (SCHWEMMER 2006). It speaks for itself and unites the people of Tunisia "against all rationality" (SOEFFNER 2004, 165). This symbolic meaning of Tunis' medina did not always exist, however. Instead it evolved over the course of various ideological attributions and processes. The medina of Tunis was established by Arab tribes, which settled at the location of the old Tunes after conquering the region during the 7th century AD. Historically speaking, the significance of the city of Tunis began to flourish in the mid-12th century, when Tunis was the capital of Ifriquia (SEBAG 2000, 631). The identity of the city and country is established after the mid-16th century, when the rulers of the city lay claim to domination over the country. The name of the city Tunis is extended to the entire country (SEBAG 2000, 633f.). During the French protectorship of Tunisia, a "second", new westernized city, inhabited by Europeans and referred to as *ville nouvelle* or *ville européenne*, started to evolve as of 1881 right next to the medina². This city, which is different in morphological, functional and social terms, forms the antithesis to the medina. The medina is marked off as another urban form by the *ville nouvelle*. Owing to this contrast, the medina is able to evolve into something special – a unique specimen. This is facilitated and reinforced by the fact that the architecture of the buildings and neighbourhoods that have developed in Tunis during the subsequent years was modelled primarily on Europe. Thus, the cornerstone was laid for the medina's current symbolic meaning, which has evolved through interaction of foreign and domestic influences, as is to be illustrated.

During the French protectorate, the medina was viewed by all actors at that time as the antithesis to the *ville nouvelle*. This difference is based on morphological opposites. The layout of the old town focuses inwardly, as can be seen in the closed-off *culs-de-sac* and the Arab residential houses, where the interior is arranged around the center. The *ville nouvelle*, however, is dominated by an open, angular and wide design and layout of streets, the buildings are multi-

² The Arabic word "medina" does not refer to any special quarter or neighbourhood of a city like old town. Instead it is just the word for "town". In French, however, the expression "médi-na" has come to mean old town. The people of Tunisia have in the meantime adopted in their French language use the French meaning of "médi-na" such that it has now also become the proper name for the Arab old town.

storeyed, with front windows facing outwards. The buildings here with their European spirit differ completely from the buildings in the old town. Based on these contrasts, both the French and Tunisian actors provided completely different ideological attributes. For the protectorate government, the medina symbolized the backwardness of the Tunisian people, and this was equated with the irrational, as described by BERQUE (1958, 33f): "Irrationnel, déraisonnable: ou du moins ce qui semble tel. Et telle apparaît la médina à ses nouveaux occupants. Telle elle apparaît encore là où elle se conserve, encore que, de notre côté, la méfiance du soldat et l'effroi, de l'ingénieur se soient mués, respectivement, en critiques de l'urbaniste et en émois de l'esthète. Le dangereux s'est ainsi mué en «insalubre» ou en «pittoresque»." The streets of the Arab city were characterized by the protectorate government as a "tangle", whereas the social life in the medina, which was incomprehensible for the Europeans, was construed as a "chaotic hustle and bustle". Consequently, the protectorate government identified the French way of life and European urban development policies as superior social organizational structures that legitimized a French hegemony over Tunisia. The medina, the "*ghetto musulman*", became an accessory of the "actual" town, the *ville nouvelle* (ABDELKAFI 1989, 251).

On the other hand, the Tunisian people and the political resistance movement in Tunisia view the medina positively; after all, it serves the locals not only as an identifying symbol but also the active resistance as an ideal basis for action. Since the mid-20th century, the medina has become the focus of political, national and cultural discussion. At the same time, the people of Tunisia have become more committed to traditional and religious values. The image of the medina, which arises from these attributes, is ideologically charged and politically instrumentalized. In short: the medina became a symbol for the resistance against the colonial yoke (ABDELKAFI 1989, 251).

After Tunisia gained its independence in 1957, the medina changed its role remarkably for the political designers of the new country. The ideological attributes of the Tunisians were changing their paradigm. The attributes which were positive until then became negative. An attempt is made to establish a national identity that does not relate to the *medina society* (ECKERT 1970), but instead differentiates itself from it while tying in with the democratic rationality of the Europeans. By making reference to BÉJI (1982), ABDELKAFI (1989, 232) states: „Le Nouvel État inscrit son action de modernisation dans le

champ de la rationalité, rejetant ainsi la société traditionnelle et ses productions culturelles dans celui de l'irrationalité". It is interesting to note that the arguments previously used by the protectorate government have been adopted. The medina is referred to as an "archaïsme, cause et symbole de la décadence historique" (ABDELKAFI 1989, 252). It becomes a symbol for opposing western rationality and thus progress and advancement. Moreover, it is associated with the decadent and wasteful life of Tunisia's bourgeoisie and the Bey government. It also bears, as a symbol of decadence, responsibility for the conditions resulting in the development of the colonial rule over Tunis (ABDELKAFI 1989, 232). This in turn diminishes the religious symbolism of the medina. The historical dimension, however, remains preserved. At the same time, the negative attributes result in a cultural deficit, after all the traditional values generated by the Tunisian culture are dismissed without allowing for a gradual adoption of western values (SCHULZE 1994). As a result, a new nation evolves which is bereft of any cultural identity and local entrenchment in figurative terms. Although, according to ABDELKAFI (1989, 232f.), the Ministry of Culture is charged with creating a new, national culture and thus the basis of a national identity, this authority indulges in empty discussions about history and authenticity. Between 1969 and 1974, Tunisia suffered an identity crisis; by the mid-1970's transformation started to take place gradually; the Arab traditions once again became more important for cultural life and national identity (ABDELKAFI 1989, 233). And with that, the significance of the medina is on the rise again. Starting in the historical area of the medina, a movement is developing once more. This movement views the medina as a symbol of national identity and cultural authenticity. Religious values and Muslim symbols gain popularity again. "Islam in its idealized original form evolves as a counterbalance to European identity" (SCHULZE 1994, 15) and the medina increasingly serves as a symbol and anchor for the sought-after illusion of an idealized Islamic society. Cultural identity and social principles become merged (BÉJI 1982, 113f.). HAKIM (1986) focuses on this topic by taking the old town of Tunis as a model to illustrate the normative principles of social organization for Muslim urban planning. Politically speaking, the medina acts as a social mirror during the period of the identity crisis and is now finally a symbol of national identity. The medina is becoming a *Kollektivsymbol* (SOEFFNER 2004), which constitutes the community. As a "sign for an unshakable community" and due to its symbolic character in this regard, the old town merges

“opposites into a uniformity, unsynchronized events into simultaneous events and coexistence into an entity” (SOEFFNER 2004, 163). It is not sufficient, however, to talk about the medina as a symbol of cultural identity. Instead, it is necessary to address the kasbah, or to be more precise, the spot where the kasbah used to stand, as a representative place of national authority. This is where the production of national identity is attributed to in terms of symbolism and ideology. With regard to the location of Tunis’ town hall (*Hôtel de ville de Tunis*), which was built after gaining its independence, a brochure published by the *Institut National du Patrimoine* (INP, 2005) states: “Le choix du site de la Kasbah pour abriter une œuvre architecturale aussi importante comme celui de l’hôtel de ville de Tunis, est strictement symbolique”. The symbolic and representative significance of the place of the former kasbah, and this is a peculiarity of Tunis, stems from the fact that this location served as the seat of Tunis’ rulers since the end of the 12th century almost without interruption. According to WOODFORD (1988), this tradition sealed the fate of Tunis as capital city. That is why it is not surprising that following Tunisia’s independence the first government maintained this seat of government and set up many ministries here besides the seat of the prime minister, even though it abandoned many Tunisian traditions in many other issues (WOODFORD 1988, 74). By selecting the site of the former kasbah, a clear signal is sent, emphasizing the significance of pre-colonial traditions in order to legitimize the claim to national authority historically and create a starting point for a national identity, as an ASM representative explains: „Voyez ici la kasbah, c’est la citadelle, c’est le quartier militaire, politique, administratif, comme avant ...“ (Interview 1, May 17, 2005).³⁾ The symbolization is tied closely with the goal to “increase domestic political or economic interests through cul-

tural embellishment and to redefine as an effort to preserve the existing order. Taking up cultural traditions is especially effective for such instrumentalization, since it represents reversion to a common ownership of beliefs and principles” (SCHWEMMER 2006, 14). In this case, the ‘symbolic medina’ is based on interaction and legitimizing the claims to authority, establishing identity, and the constitution of the cultural community.

It is clear that an identity is perceived between Tunis’ medina and that of the nation Tunisia, which is also established linguistically: one and the same word in Arabic describes both the city of Tunis and the nation Tunisia. Based on the foregoing statements it follows that the medina of Tunis is not only a symbol among other symbols of the Tunisian society, but also the national symbol per se, since it is an element of the society and symbolizes the entire society while representing it as a symbol.⁴⁾ Therefore, the Tunisian authorities are pursuing in accord with the Tunisian society a preferably national revitalization and Tunisian structuring of the medina.

2 Strategic goals and ideological contexts for shaping the medina

The strategic goals for shaping the medina are to be viewed in direct connection with the symbolic significance of the medina and the significance of the old town for the national identity of the nation Tunisia. First of all, the point is to brand the medina as a cultural asset and to vitalize it. The medina should be presented as the ideal place for the people of Tunisia. In this case, it should accommodate the entire stratification of all social classes of the nation and thus serve as a reflection or miniature version of Tunisia to a certain extent. According to staff members of ASM: “C’est un peu notre rôle de garder cet équilibre [...] Ce mixe sociale, il faut le réussir à le garder. Il ne faut pas la perdre même avec un prétexte de socialisme trop poussé, ni avec le prétexte ce qu’on appelle «gentrification» d’embourgeoisement” (Interview 10, March 22, 2007). That is why the image of the medina is to be limited to “typically” Tunisian representative elements. MOUHIL (2005, 11)

³⁾ The study is based on surveys conducted between 2005 and 2007. The paper makes reference hereinafter to the following interviews:

Interview 1 with department head of ASM; May 17, 2005 in Tunis.

Interview 2 with director of ASM; May 18, 2005 in Tunis.

Interview 3 with employee 1 of ASM; Sept. 2, 2005 in Tunis.

Interview 4 with employee 2 of ASM; Oct. 20, 2005 in Tunis.

Interview 5, 6, 7 with residents of Hafsia; Nov. 12/13/15, 2005 in Tunis.

Interview 8 with student of University of Manouba; Oct. 11, 2005 in Tunis

Interview 9 with building owner in the medina; Aug. 15, 2006 in Tunis.

Interview 10 with employee 2 of ASM; Mar. 22, 2007 in Tunis.

⁴⁾ The fact that the symbolic function primarily involves only the medina and not the entire city of Tunis can be explained by looking at the historical entrenchment of the medina in Arab history and the significance of its originally Arab architecture. Both are prerequisites that are not present in the other neighbourhoods of Tunis.

maps out the major steps that have been undertaken in the meantime while renovating the medina in order to stop the progressive decay of residential areas in the medina: "De grands pas ont été franchis dans le domaine de la sauvegarde et la protection du tissu traditionnel, dans l'installation et l'amélioration des infrastructures, l'assainissement des problèmes sociaux, de la surdensification et de l'habitat insalubre ainsi que dans la revalorisation de l'image de la médina et la sensibilisation des promoteurs privés à y investir." This clearly shows that the measures do not only involve buildings but also social and public life in the city. Buildings, structures and infrastructure are only viewed as a starting point for preserving and renovating the medina. In addition to that, particular attention is placed on shaping the image of the medina, as can be seen in the publication of ASM (1990) *Pour la promotion de la médina. Projets et réalisation 1980 ... 1990* (cf. Section 4). The visual image of the medina must be linked strategically with reference points so that the images can be assigned. "... c'est devenu à la mode, non, ici, c'est pour créer des références visuelles pour la restauration, pour les habitants [...] ils n'ont pas beaucoup de références visuelles, bien qu'ils soient dans la médina, donc, on veut leur sortir ces références de travailler plus sur un parcours etc." (Interview 3, Sept. 2, 2005).

Achieving the set goals is nowadays associated with the cultural potential of the locations and the many varieties of tourism. In this context, Tunisian planners and responsible designers of the medina make their ideological objectives clear: the medina should not become a dead museum or an exaggerated tourist attraction, and there should not be any sell-out of the medina to foreigners: "Honnêtement moi je n'ai pas envie [...] que la médina de Tunis vive ce que la médina de Marrakech est en train de vivre, qui est aujourd'hui pratiquement habitée un mois ou deux mois par an par des étrangers. C'est pas ça sauvegarder une médina et puis donc c'est pas qu'on veut pas qu'y vivent des étrangers, au contraire, mais il faut pas que ce soit un arrivage en masse." (Interview 10, March 22, 2006) Steps should even be taken to prevent the mummification and museumization of the medina. "Elle est centre de ville et centre de vie et nullement ghetto culturel" (MOUHILI 2005, 11). A representative of ASM explains this in greater detail: "On n'a pas voulu restaurer la médina comme un grand musée, ça nous intéressait pas" (Interview 1, May 17, 2005). The medina should highlight the actual Tunisian society and not become a lifeless or ethnic museum. The cultural heritage must be set in life and function and wherever the use has become

obsolete, it is necessary to find new purposes. "The fundamental approach to appreciating this heritage is to restore it, and to follow a new relocation programme if the original function no longer exists" (AKROUT-YAICHE 2004, 68). On a legal level the goals should be safeguarded through measures such as creating a development plan and establishing stringent specifications for implementing structural changes in the medina (ASM 1981 and ASM undated).

Tourism-oriented use and the aim to preserve the medina as a symbol of national identity can easily be inconsistent with each other. To ensure the establishment of an identity, it is necessary to guarantee that visiting the medina also appeals to local residents and that its image does not become characterized by mass tourism. The medina was not declared formally as *zone touristique*⁵. A medina that is kept alive by means of mass tourism is not the goal of revitalization. Instead, it is desirable to establish a culture-oriented tourism that should contribute to attracting individual travellers (Interview 4, Oct. 20, 2005). In fact, the *suqs*, especially around the *Djemaa Zitouna*, are characterized in particular by the tourist travel groups at certain times of the day. Nonetheless, tourism in the medina of Tunis is limited primarily to tour groups, which complete tours lasting several hours, and day tourists from the *zones touristiques* from the coastal regions. The medina does not have any hotels geared to tourists. The *Dar el Medina*, which opened in the spring of 2005 as a four-star *Maison d'hôtes*, represents the only exception, together with two hotels for backpackers in close proximity to *Bab el Bahr* and the youth hostel.

The medina should not be influenced by European residents alone; this is guaranteed by control and regulation of the real estate market. To purchase real estate in Tunisia, foreigners must obtain permission from the governor in accordance with a law passed on June 4, 1957. Although permits are issued on an individual case basis in the medina of Tunis, obtaining a permit is frequently a long complicated process that may extend over a period of years and which tends to discourage or frighten-off investors. "C'est lourdeur administrative qui prend que ceux qui sont pas patients, qui ne prennent pas leur temps, ils peuvent désespérer partout", reports a department manager at ASM (Interview 1, May 17, 2005). Getting permission

⁵ The concept *zone touristique* relates to the legal and functional status of an area; investments for tourist use are subject to special favourable conditions. Conditions such as areas are made public in the JORT (Journal Officielle de la République Tunisienne) in the form of legal texts and decrees.

is more than a formality, since there is no legal security without such a permit. Even though there are, according to the managing director of ASM, almost daily inquiries submitted by Europeans interested in purchasing and renovating a house in the medina (Interview 2, May 18, 2005), there are (practically) no foreign-owned properties.⁶⁾

A global opening of the real estate market to Tunis' medina has been prevented by the government. This was done to ensure that the medina from Tunis should remain Tunisian and to prevent a "second colonialization". A sell-out of the medina to foreign investors, such as in the Moroccan city of Marrakesh, has not been feasible thus far. Instead, official bodies and representatives expect that Tunisians invest in their houses and thus contribute to preserving the old town. To encourage this, awards are presented and corresponding representative announcements are made in daily newspapers and book publications (e.g. BINOUS and JABEUR 2002).

It is necessary to wait and see to what extent this strategy, which focuses primarily on a nationally defined medina, can be sustained and the state regulations can be implemented over the long term to address the increasing global interest in acquiring real estate in the medina and the investment requirements of foreign financiers. There are already indications pointing to an initial change in the real estate laws. According to a law passed on May 22, 2006, foreigners are permitted to own property, among other things, within a *zone touristique* and for tourism-oriented projects without foreigners having to obtain administrative authorization (JORT 2006). Admittedly, this pertains only to a designated *zone touristique* and not to the medina (at this point in time).

⁶⁾ Aside from some European tenants in the medina, there are currently only a couple of houses in the medina, which are owned by non-Tunisians. 2 German women, formerly married to Tunisian men, bought a building (Maison Bleu) and restored it; a Dutchman also purchased a house without the requisite permit from the governor. The house was then taken during the resident's absence from the medina. Moreover, there are also 2 French photographers living in the medina. An Italian woman, who has been renting a building in the medina for a couple of years, is since the beginning of the year 2006 in the process of applying for a permit to purchase the said house. A French couple recently bought and renovated a property on a side road to Rue Sidi Ben Arous. All in all, no more than 5 buildings are owned by foreigners. Albeit very isolated, there are other properties owned by Italian and French individuals, dating back to the first part of the 20th century.

3 Location-specific dynamics and public project work in the medina

The official and informal economic development in retail sales and in part in small trade, which has increased considerably over the past few decades, represents an important aspect, and yet greatly disputed aspect in term of its effect, for revitalization (WAGNER 1996). The locals, who live outside of the medina, and Tunisians from other parts of the country as well as international tourists play an important role for the extensive retail trade that characterizes the major thoroughfares of the medina. Another factor is the revitalization of traditional small trade, which is supported by the Tunisian government, e.g. by setting up schools in former madrasas (theological schools) (WAGNER 1996, 345). For the old towns in North African countries, the economic dynamics of retail sales and small trade are a generally known phenomenon and not a particular feature of Tunis' medina.

In the medina of Tunis, continuity represents the special feature of the revitalization measures, which is maintained in the seat of the government of the city Tunis and the nation Tunisia, with its placement at the former kasbah. Altogether nine ministries and other representative buildings have been located here or in close vicinity to the kasbah, such as the national archive (*Les Archives nationales*), the newly built National Library and part of the University of Tunis I (see Suppl. II and Tab. 1).

Even the significance of the many schools that make a major contribution to revitalization within and directly next to the medina should not be underestimated. The elite school – the *Collège Sadiki* situated right next to the former kasbah – is a prime example. Special effects include the secondary effects that occur as a result of the special location of the government district and the large-scale projects *Hafsia* and *Oukala* which are constantly advanced by the government (see Suppl. II). Both projects aim to improve the living situation and demographic situation in the medina through structural and social renewal.

A consequence of the location of the government district and its close spatial connection with the medina is that palaces and town houses in the medina are restored by the state and then utilized to accommodate state institutions as well as cultural and social facilities (see Tab. 2).

Moreover, there are many revitalization projects that concentrate on two "boulevards" which run right next to the government district: The *Rue Dar el Jeld* and *Rue Sidi Ben Arous* which becomes *Rue du Pascha* due to its extension. Both of these streets stand out

Table 1: Buildings in the government district

N°	Name	Function
1	Hôtel de ville de Tunis	Town hall
2	Ministère de la Culture et de la Sauvegarde du patrimoine	Ministry
3	Ministère de la Défense nationale	Ministry
4	Ministère de la Culture et de la Sauvegarde du patrimoine	Ministry
5	Premier ministère	Ministry
6	Premier ministère and El Rachidia music academy	Ministry / cultural institution
7	Ministère des Finances	Ministry
8	Ministère des Affaires religieuses	Ministry
9	Maison de la Partie	Party building
10	Poste de Police	Administration
11	PNUD: Programme des Nations Unies pour le développement	UN building
12	Partie du Palais de Justice	National court
13	UNTF: Union National des Femmes Tunisiennes	National organization
14	Ministère des Finances II	Ministry
15	Palais de Justice	National court
16	Ministère de l'Education et de la Formation	Ministry
17	Ministère de la Justice et des Droits de l'Homme	Ministry
18	Tunisie Telecom; PTT (Post)	State-owned enterprise
19	Ministère des Affaires sociales, de la Solidarité et des Tunisiens à l'étranger	Ministry
20	Bibliothèque Nationale – Library	Library
21	Archives nationales – National Archive	Archive
22	Université Tunis 1 – Faculté des Lettres	University
23	Collège Sadiki – School	School

in comparison to the rest of the medina, since there is a particularly high density of remodelled buildings, galleries, jewellery stores and first class restaurants that can be found here. Another secondary effect of the specific location of the government district is the functional socialization of the complimentary institutions of the services sector. A wide variety of clerk's posts, stationery and copy shops and a large number of food outlets have settled at the edge of the medina – to the north of the government district and across from the district court (*Palais de Justice*). There are more than 140 restaurants and food outlets of different categories and price classes in the medina and numerous cafés where employees of the government district, neighboring authorities and tourists can eat (Suppl. III). The government district generates secondary effects that can be interpreted as strategies for revitalizing the medina of Tunis.

The most extensive official measures include the *Hafsia* and *Oukala* projects in the medina (see Suppl. II), since both projects make substantial contributions to reshaping the buildings and changing the population structure within the medina.

The *Hafsia* project relates to the former Jewish district of the medina, the *Hara* with an area of approx. 13.5 hectares (ASM and HARVARD UNIVERSITY 1994). According to the studies of LARGUÈCHE (1999), poverty and deterioration have defined the district since 1860 at the latest, and it accommodated one of the four *quartiers réservés*, the quarter, where prostitution was practiced. At the end of the 19th century, impoverishment, deterioration and overpopulation in the area now known as *Hafsia* heightened with the departure of the prosperous Jews, who first moved to newer city districts outside of the medina, then to France and Israel and with the subsequent immigration of poorer classes of people from other parts of the medina; more and more buildings began to fall into disrepair (SEBAG 1959).

The aim of the *Hafsia* project was to rebuild the area which fell within the scope of the project, to fully revitalize it socially and economically, and to integrate it into the existing urban infrastructure of the medina. Buildings that were still standing and existing ruins were torn down and then rebuilt to

a design that reflected the traditional style of the medina. The network of streets was maintained for the most part. Some parts, however, were simplified and the typical structure of culs-de-sac opened up, as an analysis of the official city maps from 1930 and 2005 illustrates (see Suppl. II); the layout of buildings was schematized. The *Hafsia* project has been implemented in three phases so far. Both, the first and second phase, were distinguished with the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 1983 and 1995 (BAHRI-MEDDEB 1997). Nowadays, many apartments are used as storage areas for businesses and for wholesale trade. If one were to ask residents about their motivation for living in the *Hafsia* district, ideological reasons that make reference to the symbolic function of the medina are mentioned as motivation for living in the medina. Economic and pragmatic reasons, such as central location with regard to work, schools for children or favourable property prices and loans, are also cited as decisive factors for selection of their residential area (Interview 5, 6, 7, Nov. 12/13/15, 2005).

Unlike the *Hafsia* project, the *Onkala* project involved the entire medina with its outskirts. The word *oukala* – which had been reserved to designate a hotel or guesthouse, accommodation for merchants and travellers (CALLENS 1973) – experienced a change in functionality and meaning during the 20th century. In the context of the medina of Tunis with regard to urban planning, *oukala* now refers to an overcrowded house, which accommodates single individuals or multiple families without kinship. *Oukalas* develop when the buildings are abandoned by their rich owners and are occupied by a poorer class of people or when their owners plan and rent them as *oukalas*. The *oukalization* process frequently involves structural changes to the buildings: large rooms and central courtyards of the buildings are subdivided into smaller units and rooms with temporary walls erected as a means of privacy protection. The social and sanitary conditions are more than insufficient due to overcrowding: large families living together in one room, where sanitary facilities and kitchens are lacking or insufficient or poorly improvised.

Privacy, which is considered to be characteristic and important for homes in Tunisia, is not available under such living conditions. The structure of these *oukalas* increasingly fell into disrepair, since no improvements or only the bare minimum were being made. In the 1990's, the ASM documented and classified the *oukalas*. Their refurbishment was initiated together with the *Municipalité* and ARRU.

The project was carried out in four phases between 1991 and 2004. During each phase 12 to 98 buildings were classified as *immeubles menaçant ruine* (IMR) and expropriated from their original owners.⁷⁾ All in all, the project included more than 400 buildings, in which more than 1,500 families lived (BÉJAOUTI et al. 1996). It was possible to preserve some buildings by performing minor renovations, while other buildings were torn down and in part rebuilt. Some of the residents of the *oukalas* received new apartments within the medina. Most families relocated to the newly constructed districts *Douar Hicher*, *Hay el Walid* and *Agba* with favourable financial conditions. These districts are located far from the city centre in the periphery of the Greater Tunis Area with a completely different atmosphere. For instance, the *Agba* district is located more than one hour away from the medina, when travelling with public means of transportation. Relocation affected for the most part poorer people and individuals frequently suspected of having committed a misdemeanour. This led to a decrease in the percentage of the lower class in the medina and the fact that many buildings became the property of the state due to expropriation. There was a similar project implemented by the government with the goal to counteract the associated deterioration through expropriation and relocation of *oukalized* buildings in the *Hara* area during the 1930's. The project was interrupted, however, by World War II and never continued later on (SEBAG 1959).

Mapping out the medina according to public, social and cultural institutions, as well as recording areas which the government had access to via the *Hafsia* and *Onkala* projects, shows that the medina is characterized predominantly by state activities (Suppl. II). If one were to take the secondary effects initiated by the government district, such as restaurants, cafés, etc., and considered that the central core area and parts of the main axes are mainly distinguished by commercial use (Suppl. III), there are only two districts left where people live, in the northwestern and southwestern part of the medina. Many buildings in 'Tunis' medina are vacant and still in a state of disrepair, requiring renovation. The available residential floor space (and thus the number of inhabitants) has been reduced considerably due to the aforementioned factors. Large parts of

⁷⁾ The decrees which were passed with regard to expropriation were published in JORT. The following are relevant: Décret n° 91–1648 du 5 novembre 1991; Décret n° 95–1042 du 12 juin 1995; Décret n° 97–1856 du 22 septembre 1997 and Décret n° 2000–1444 du 27 juin 2000.

Table 2: Public institutions as well as cultural and social facilities in historically important buildings of Tunis' medina

N°	Name	Former use	Current function
1	Kasbah	1930: <i>Caserne de la Kasba</i> . previously: Location of kasbah	Town hall (<i>Hôtel de ville de Tunis</i>)
2	Kasbah	1930: <i>Caserne de la Kasba</i> . previously: Location of kasbah; party building	Ministère de la Culture et de la Sauvegarde du patrimoine
3	Kasbah	Arsenal / Prison Militaire / Service Militaire	Ministère de la Defense national
4	Kasbah	Arsenal / Prison Militaire / Service Militaire	Ministère de la Culture et de la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine
5	Dar el Bey	Seat of Mouradite rulers; palace of ruling bey; 1930: <i>D.^{ne} G.^{le} de l'Interieur</i> ; Service Administrative (<i>Direction des finances, des travaux public, de l'agriculture du commerce et de la coloniasation</i>)	Prime ministry (<i>Premier ministère</i>)
6	Dar Daouletli	1930: <i>D.^{ne} G.^{le} des Travaux Publics</i>	Prime ministry and El Rachidia music academy
23	Medersa Al Andalouisa	Quran school	Social institution for handicapped and elderly people
24	Medersa El Mountaciriya	Quran school	Kindergarten
25	Medersa El Nakhla	Quran school	Training centre
26	Medersa Echchamalya	Quran school	Training centre
27	Zaouia Del Abdel Kader	Zaouia	Part of the national library
28	Former synagogue	Synagogue	UNTF : Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisienne
29	Église St. Croix	Church	Municipalité seat
30	Église du Rosaire	Church	Festival room for official and private events
31	Caserne El Attarine	1814 Caserne of Bey Hammouda Pascha; 1930: <i>Direction des Antiquités, Bibliothèque Générale</i> ; ab 1958 : <i>Institut National d'Archéologie et d'Arts</i>	National library
32	Caserne Sidi El Mourjani	1874–1997: <i>Collège Sadiki</i> ; 1897–1956: <i>Administration des Habous</i> ; afterwards: <i>Faculté de théologie</i>	National library (Archive and print)
33	Dar Hussein	Former site of <i>Chateau de Ksar</i> ; Early 19 th century: Seat of ministry of Hamouda Pascha; As of 1882: Seat of French General Forgemol and seat of city administration (<i>Municipalité</i>); Seat of <i>Institut national d'Archéologie et d'Art</i> 1930: Quartier General	Institut National du Patrimoine (INP)
34	Palais Khireddine	1860–1870 built as Palace of Minister Kheireddine ; Tribunal	Museum: <i>Musée de la ville de Tunis</i>
35	Dar Othman	Town house	Department of INP: <i>Division et Sauvegarde des Monuments et des Sites</i>
36	Dar Cherif	Town house	INP: is being remodelled
37	Dar El Monastiri	Town house	INP: is being remodelled
38	Dar Lasram	Town house	Seat of ASM; cultural institute in lower level: <i>Club Tabar Haddad</i>
39	Dar Bou Zaiane	Town house	ASM: is being remodelled with the aim of building a cultural institute.
40	Dar Ben Abdallah	Town house; after 1940 seat of Office of Art of Tunisia, then seat of <i>Centre des Arts et Traditions populaires</i>	Museum: <i>Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires de la ville de Tunis</i> ; Cinema and theatre
41	Dar el Jaziri (Dziri)	Town house	Cultural institute: <i>Maison de la Poésie</i>
42	Dar Ibn Khaldoun	Residential house	Archive of INP
43	Dar Ben Achour	Residential house	Library Rue El Pascha
44	Bibliothèque Sidi Saber	1930: Religious institution: <i>Pensionat des Sœurs des St. Joseph</i>	Library
45	Medersa Achouria	Quran school	Seat of different cultural institutes
46	Medersa Bir Lahjar	Quran school	Cultural institutes: Centre Culturelle; Seat of Association du Festival de la Médina

the medina were primarily used externally through state institutions, publicly initiated activities as well as economic and tourist-related activities.

Streets, buildings and restoration-oriented companies are busy throughout the day for the most part in the medina. In the evenings, however, the medina is practically empty compared to the other residential areas and nightclub districts within the reater Tunis Area. An exception would be the month of Ramadan, when the symbolic significance of the medina is especially crucial. The *Festival de la Médina* takes place during this period. The use of the medina then extends to the late evening hours. Residents of the Greater Tunis Area also come to the medina to attend events, to go for a stroll, to meet and drink tea together.

4 The mise-en-scène of Tunis' medina

The construction policy measures, the described secondary effects and the achieved population exchange are just a few of the qualities that should assist the revitalization of the medina; nonetheless, another factor of great importance, which we would like to refer to as the mise-en-scène of the medina (*Inszenierung der Medina*)⁸⁾, has become more and more evident recently. The medina should not only be developed and enhanced (*mise en valeur*), it should also be actively showcased (*mise en scène*). The mise-en-scène of the medina forms an important interface between the material renewal and symbolic importance of the medina. By staging the medina, it is arranged socially and made tangible individually. Doing so (re)activates the *mémoire collective* inherent in the medina (HALBWACHS 1985). The mise-en-scène also allows for establishing a significant point of reference for the production of the national identity.

When analyzing the staging process of Tunis' medina, it is possible to distinguish on a theoretical level between three aspects that are in constant interaction: a material, mediality-focused and experience-oriented

aspect of the mise-en-scène of the medina.

The material aspect aims primarily at the shaping of the basic fabric of the medina. It is frequently used as a point of reference or origin for staging the medina. Its significance primarily becomes apparent in the development and shaping of the *circuit touristique* which evolved through the collaboration of the ASM, INP and the Ministry of Tourism, specifically with the beautification process of facades (*Embellissement des Façades*) which accompanied the route marked with tiles indicating directions through the medina. The idea is to provide visitors of the old town with insight regarding "Tunisian" aspects of the medina, based on selected locations and an established route. This does not only apply to foreign tourists but also to Tunisian visitors who come to the medina to see and experience their "own" cultural and national heritage (*patrimoine*). Moreover, the individual arrangement of shops, the painting of columns and many other featured elements in the medina point to the material aspect, which serves as a basis for the mise-en-scène of the medina.

The aspects of mediality in its complexity and significance are especially clear, when taking into account the range of the media by means of which it is possible to represent the process of mise-en-scène. Examples of this can be found, e.g. in newspapers, journals, books, CD-ROMs and TV series.⁹⁾ Some brilliantly arranged children's books which highlight the function of the traditional medina or are implemented in adventure stories deserve special mention here. (e.g. ANGÉLI 1990, FOURURE 1989, MARZOUKI 2002). There are also games, puzzles and posters that focus on the medina. Titles such as *Tunis – la mémoire* (MESSIKH 2000), new editions of large-size illustrated books and sketchbooks, e.g. *Tunis et ses environnements* (LALLEMAND 2000) or *Tunis naguère et aujourd'hui* (TURKI 2005) and the compilation of songs and chansons by ABASSI (1991) entitled *Tunis chante et danse* indicate the staging and promotion of the collective memory. Many publications study the historical transfiguration of the medina. The recurring articles in Tunisian daily newspapers like LA PRESSE and L'ACHRU play an important role in the discourse regarding the medina; titles like *Redonner vie à la médina* (L'ACHRU, Apr. 26, 1969), *Une valeur, un symbole. 20ème anniversaire du classement de la médina de Tunis sur la liste du patrimoine mondial* (ALI 1999) or *Une compo-*

⁸⁾ The concept of mise-en-scène and staging, which serves as a basis for the accomplishments, is an anthropological-aesthetic approach, modelled on the concepts of ISER (2001), PLESSNER (1979) and BÖHME (1995). The process of mise-en-scène creates atmosphere and constitutes a "common reality between the one who perceives and what is perceived" (BÖHME 1995, 35). By making a constant self-portrayal of people an inalienable prerequisite for personal existence (as *conditio humana*) (ISER 2001 and PLESSNER 1979), staging cannot be construed here as an antithesis to an authenticity concept, however it is understood.

⁹⁾ The mise-en-scène of the medina in the Internet for Tunisians is not very pronounced. This is affected by the monitoring of this medium in Tunisia and the associated slight use.

sante essentielle de l'identité et de l'authenticité (La Presse, Feb. 11, 2005) to name just a few essential points, direct the attention of Tunisians to the projects for reshaping the medina and define the image readers have of the medina. After all, the goal of the desired material restoration for the medina is documented in books, which outline and describe stately renovated and oriental-looking residential buildings (BINOUS and JABEUR 2002). In this manner, an ideal, "aesthetically oriental" life in the medina is presented and suggested such that the medina is enhanced successively through public, state-aided and private projects (BEJAOU et al. 1996; AKROUT-YAICHE et al. 1998).

TV series broadcasted by the national station TV 7, especially during Ramadan, represent a special form of the staging and showcasing (McGUINNESS 2001), such as *Khottab Ala El Bab* (1) and (2), *Gamrat Sidi Mahrous* and *Rikh El Misk*. Here the buildings in the medina serve as setting, backdrop and stage, creating an image of the medina that is propagated throughout almost the entire country regardless of level of education and income, and thus serving as a reference for "actually" experiencing the medina. For instance, the first visit to the streets and culs-de-sac of Tunis' medina for young Tunisians is an experience that they would definitely sum up with the following: "That is just like in TV!" (Interview 8, Oct. 11, 2005). Doing so successfully ties the medina experience in with the image of the medina propagated by the media. In case of visiting the medina "personally", the material aspect of staging gains special significance. At the same times, the experience-oriented aspect becomes apparent here. "Experiencing" the medina, characterized by the respective media-specific particularity, does occur, however, in all forms of putting in scene the medina. Staying in the medina and the associated medina experience is consciously influenced in light of the national identity. Particular importance is attached to the *Festival de la Médina*, which was initiated a couple of years ago in the evenings during the month of Ramadan with Tunisian and international concerts and with the aim to make the medina more attractive, especially for people interested in culture.

In addition to that, a wide variety of events, such as art and photography exhibits and international conferences, have been organized focusing on the "Medina of Tunis" as a topic and contribute to strengthening the attractive image of the medina. Streets and buildings of the medina do not only serve as inspiration and models for art and architecture students of the art college located in *Sidi Bou Said*, but

also as central themes for tourists taking photos; the buildings of the medina are placed in the limelight time and time again and are replicated in memory as well as on photos and postcards. A common experience is created by this putting in scene – a common reference object of a culturally influenced authenticity. The image of the medina is enhanced and thus the basis for a lively arrangement of the medina is established. It remains to be seen how powerful the identity-shaping symbolism is in the discussions and staging of the medina and whether the resulting basis is sufficient for creating a long-term positive image of the medina at all levels of society. If the effect remains limited to certain events and groups of people, this would lead to a fragmentation in terms of space and time. For instance, the medina is visited by a certain class of people and only during certain periods of time at specific locations, such as during the official opening of galleries, up-market restaurants or during a visit to a concert of the *Festival de la Médina* during the month of Ramadan. The *mise-en-scène* at least contributes to anchoring the "symbolic medina" in Tunisian society and thus creating a basis for a national identity. The fact that this is working to some degree can be vividly seen in the statement of one Tunisian building owner: "First of all, the image of the medina is the image of Tunisia. The image of Tunisia is the image of the medina and the image of the medina is the image of Tunisia" (Interview 9, August 15, 2006).

5 Conclusion: The 'symbolic medina' of Tunis, a national stage for Tunisians and tourists?

The normative designation of responsible politics and the dominant social discourse characterize the medina of Tunis nowadays as the 'symbolic medina', as a symbolic place – in which the national identity is anchored. In the light of the symbolic significance of the medina and the seats of the nation's and city's government at the location of the kasbah, it is easy to understand why the total power of control over the shaping of the medina has been reclaimed by Tunisia and has not been relaxed. The medina is preserved, shaped and promoted as a symbol of national identity. The old town of Tunis should look Tunisian and remain Tunisian. The medina should not become a lifeless museum or just a tourist attraction nor should it be sold to foreign investors or dominated by foreign inhabitants. The function of the medina stems from its symbolic character. As symbol it serves as a basis

for creating an “intellectual identity”, which shapes, holds together and solidifies the cultural community. This symbolic function results in state-calculated decisions and measures implemented for revitalizing the structure of the medina and for representing it in the media. State measures and complicated directives should prevent global access to the medina. Cultural economy, controlled tourism and especially state-initiated and -aided revitalization projects should ensure the preservation of the fabric and social life – as mirror image of “life in Tunisia” – in the medina. The old town of Tunis differs from other old towns in Arab countries in these points. The material revitalization is reflected in a concentrated, cluster-like and linear structure. An area-wide renewal of the city is not taking place, nor is a down-home social life evolving in the medina. The overall social entrenchment of the medina is supported through promotion by the media, in which the *Festival de la Médina* and TV series deserve special mention. These activities support and recall the Tunisian image of the medina in the collective memory of the nation. There is a risk, however, that a characteristic part of the Tunisian society is not integrated in the everyday life of the medina of Tunis, but rather the medina is reduced to a national stage for Tunisians and visiting tourists, whereas this stage is only “consumed” temporarily and primarily in the media.

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Public, social and cultural institutions and projects in the medina of Tunis



