

UrbanMetaMapping Semester Talks: Summer Term 2024 via zoom, 11.00 - 12.00 (CEST)

Registration via: talks.urbanmetamapping@uni-bamberg.de

May 8

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Preservation and management of urban heritage in the postrevolution period: the Medina of Sousse as case study.

When we talk about urban heritage in Tunisia, we directly point to the historic centers of the city, commonly called “Medina”. This category of heritage remains precious as it reflects local urban identity, beliefs of communities and the know-how of our ancestors in the field of architecture. Since the independence of the country, many Tunisian Medinas witnessed remarkable actions of architectural conservation and endogenous initiatives of valorisation that led to the recognition of three Medinas as World Heritage sites. Nevertheless, the Tunisian revolution of 2011 was a prominent event that wildly influenced and interrupted the process of preservation, management and valorisation of Medinas. In fact, anarchic disfigurement of urban landscape increased which affected authenticity and heritage density, technical degradation of historic buildings and assets became advanced because of the total absence of preservation projects and the incapacity of heritage institutions to control the disrespect of locals and apply coercive measures during that sombre era that Tunisia knew and persisted for several years. After a decade, multiple stigmata are still visible causing urban marginalization of the Medina and irreversible loss of heritage value and items. Our research deals with the on-going process of architectural conservation of the Medina of Sousse, from the independence of the country in 1956 until nowadays and especially we focus on the post – revolution period that lasted about ten years since 2011. We are ambitious to reconstruct the different steps of this dynamic process, revealing the involved actors as well as the multiple challenges. The Medina of Sousse has been a world heritage site since 1988; it approximately covers thirty-two hectares and is populated by seven thousand citizens. This traditional urban fabric, organic and compact, is surrounded with high earthen ramparts and encloses more than eighty historic monuments.

Given this context, the raised questions are : how much the urban and architectural heritage of Medina of Sousse was damaged after the revolution of 2011? Who are the responsible actors in both disfigurement and preservation ? And what are the strategies adopted by the municipality of the city and other stakeholders to mend these damages and struggle against the continuous threats? Through exploring the case study of the Medina of Sousse, our paper contains two complementary parts. First, we draw attention to the changes that occurred on urban heritage after the revolution by revealing phenomena, facets, involved actors and especially impacts on heritage assets and urban identity. Second, we focus on the preservation actions, the attempts of renewal and the solutions implemented to stop disfigurement and give impetus to the patrimonialization of this World heritage site.

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