

FAÇADISM PUT TO THE TEST OF THE CONSERVATION OF RECENT HERITAGE IN MOROCCO EXAMPLE OF THE CITIES OF RABAT AND CASABLANCA

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ABSTRACT

Façadism, this architectural practice which established itself in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, entered Morocco in the early 2000s, as a method of retaining historic facades, the exterior walls of old buildings, or as the creation of replicas of these facades with new buildings having a contemporary character to their interiors.

The facade, one of the major components of a building, acts as an interface with the outside world by conveying several types of messages, whether implicit, explicit or symbolic, thus offering a linear continuum of the street. The popular attachment to this urban heritage makes the heritage difficult to demolish and somehow resists this desire to re-exploit its rare land.

The theoretical basis includes an attempt to preserve the historic image by systematically safeguarding the facades of old buildings of heritage value generally located in quality urban spaces. Considered then, as an element of discredit, façadism, is often evoked in an unconsidered way in the current conceptual framework. The advanced objective of this practice is to increase the density of the urban environment while respecting built heritage conservation.

Similarly, it is essential to point out that the use of façadism also results from a compromise of intruding factors in the safeguarding of heritage: real estate speculation, market force, urban densification, legislation, standards and skills of practitioners. It is then considered by some experts as a guarantee of a "facial" safeguard of the urban landscape. It even harms the efforts made over several years to the principle of an innovative and creative architecture which nevertheless generates the irreversible loss, in particular, of historical information.

KEYWORDS: *Casablanca, Existing, Facade, Heritage, Morocco, Rabat, Urban Regulations*

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INTRODUCTION

Façadism— this word is etymologically linked to architectural facades of heritage value. Initially called "Bruxéllisation" in reference to Brussels, and also called "Evidage" in Switzerland, is a complex architectural practice which generally serves as a compromise, between the curators who try to preserve the whole building for future generations, and the investors who try to maximize the rate of return on investment, on an architectural heritage in danger, it saves them above all the time to a long and costly reflection.

This article explores and verifies the hypothesis that facadism remains the only solution to safeguard a heritage in danger. Similarly, it is necessary to examine whether this heritage of facades, to future generations, does correspond to a real transmission of values.

The facade is manifested in the expression of the shape of a building, it is one of the first impressions of the building, facing the gaze of the user. Alberti defined it as "the noblest manifestation of architecture".

Indeed, the facade remains the most important architectural element capable of transmitting, through the perceived image, the function and meaning of a building, it is also the element that transmits the most, the heritage heritage and culture of a society.

The concern over protecting this architectural and cultural heritage has existed for a long time, the essence of these concerns remains knowing how to preserve this heritage with architectural and cultural aspects of a place while modernizing and adapting to growth.

The first reflections on heritage were led by Riegl, at the beginning of the 20th century, he even classified different "memory values", recommending a specific method of intervention to each.

Gustavo Giovannoni, took a big step towards a comprehensive understanding of the historic city, and its particular planning requirements. His theory is in line with the conservation approach of Moroccan cities, in this case Rabat and Casablanca.

He was also the first person to clearly recognize the incompatibility between historic cities and the development of modern cities.

His theory of the thinning of the architectural fabric seeks to reach a compromise between global preservation and limited forms of intervention.

He believes that the new city should coexist with the old city, instead of replacing it. It is an awareness of the historical heritage, and the built heritage, which pushed the architects to a freedom in the interpretation, and thus gave a freedom, to the concept and to the architectural creation, on the old fabric.



Figure 1: Image Illustrating a Façade Project for a Hotel Under Constuction in Casablanca, Morocco.

Source: Image K. BERDOUZ, Architwcte 2021.

Moroccan Cities Put to the Test of Heritage Conservation

Moroccan cities, mainly Rabat and Casablanca, are experiencing a plausible degradation of architectural heritage. This heritage is one of the components of urban identity, but also a landmark of collective memory.

This degradation is mainly due to a population explosion in these two cities, which implies a quest for urban land.

It is in this context that façadism was born in Morocco. The city has become a monocular and static image, as is the case with the historic centers of cities.

This article explores façadism as an approach to the redevelopment and conservation of architectural heritage in Morocco and questions the façadism projects in Rabat and Casablanca, which are mainly concentrated in historic centers dating from the beginning of the 20th century in the two cities: Rabat and Casablanca..

Casablanca, is full of buildings with high historical and heritage value, we will examine the building housing the Banque de la Société Générale.

There were early attempts to preserve the historic fabric of Moroccan cities in the face of large-scale development. Two experimental attempts were then made in the early 2000s, the Le Gourmet building in Place Al Joulane in Rabat, which was rebuilt by incorporating an existing building, and the Banque de Société Générale on Avenue Mohammed V in Casablanca, both projects offer both neighborhoods revitalization and enhancement.

It is certainly not preservation as it is described in international conservation charters, or in community conservation standards. Ibn khaldoun told us that any intervention on urban heritage cannot go unnoticed, and its reception cannot remain neutral.

Indeed, in most cases it is rather an empty gesture to preserve the history of a building, a street, or a neighborhood, while irreversibly removing the structure and the interior of a historic building– as rich as it is– and to relegate it to the decoration of the street.

The practice of facadism in Morocco, unfolds according to many ways of treatment: The stylistic replica (partial or total); The thick or semi-thick facade also called (the abstract reference); Façadism with hollowing combined with a stylistic extension (invention in the same style); The recessed facade.



Figure 2: Image Showing the Lincoln Hotel in Casablanca, Morocco, Behind a Facade of Posts to Support the Last Walls Still Standing, Photo Karima Berdouz 2018.



Figure 3: Computer-Generated Image Illustrating the Final Project of the Lincoln Hotel in Casablanca, Morocco, Proposed by Oualaalou and Choi

Source: Official Site of REALITES in charge of the 2020 project.

Façadism in Morocco, A Conservative Practice of Choice or Solution

The conservation of urban heritage has known various forms and different ideologies. Between Viollet-le-Duc and Ruskin, the conservation of the old town was divided between the theory of its reinvention, and that of not touching the remains of history, and "letting a monument die when its term has come".

It is mainly perceived, by the intellectual powers, as being a factor of collective cultural impoverishment.

We question here the opinion of ICOMOS, which in no way accepts the use of facades. Whereas in the majority of the examples studied, in this thesis, we observe a clear separation of principle, by considering the practice of façadism, as an ultimate practice, of intervention on a building, justifying an architectural heritage interest and/or planning, and not as a simple method of conservation.

The integration of contemporary architecture in historic buildings, whatever the method chosen, raises the main question of the relationship to time: (past and present) and the approach for the construction of this relationship. This approach spreads the relationship between the new and the old on several levels, ranging from extreme contrast to absolute mimicry in relation to the historic building.

Currently, in Morocco, façadism— as an operational tool, which has become increasingly used in urban blocks with heritage interest— is not framed by specific legal texts. It is often the subject of interpretations, and multiple, even contradictory legal systems.

Indeed, the contrast when it comes to a facade, thick or semi-thick, remains the intervention most perceived by the curators, as a possible threat to the historic building.

The contrast between the new and the old can cause a temporal and cultural update, which can be characterized by an adaptation of a contemporary architectural language anchored in its present.

Except that in this case, the stakeholders of the city remain limited, in imagination and open-mindedness, to accept a new design in an old one.

Prolonging the life of a building by giving new life to its facades and new functions, gives the district a new history that is created, and therefore becomes an intermediary that allows communication between the past, the present and the future.

In addition to modifying the legibility of the city, facadeism inevitably leads to poor heritage. Keeping only the facade of a building cannot preserve its authenticity or its architectural value.

Indeed, the protection of heritage is not limited to the simple protection of appearance. The interest of heritage buildings is due to their exterior aesthetic appeal, but also to their construction systems, their past uses and the lessons they have learned from a previous era.

Façadism is considered by some experts as a guarantee of a "facial" safeguard of the urban landscape. It even harms the efforts made over several years for innovative and creative architecture, but it also leads to the irreversible loss of historical information.

The façadism approach in urban decisions for the safeguarding of heritage appears here in total contradiction with the Giovannonian approach as a conservatory principle of heritage, since the reflection on façadism, is a practice which marks the break with urban reflection..

While it must be admitted that in some cases it is very difficult to repair poorly maintained buildings, without consulting heritage experts, several demolitions have been carried out in haste.

Thus, the facade problem hides a more significant gap in our planning practice, that is to say the lack of reflection on the recommended modes of intervention, in a heritage environment.



Figure 4: Image Illustrating the “Le Gourmet” Building, in its Initial State, 1930.

Source: The archives of the Hassan Commune. Rabat, Morocco



Figure 5: Image Illustrating the Le Gourmet In Rabat, Morocco Image in its Current Appearance, Photo Taken by Karima Berdouz 2019.

Façadism, the Discreet Entry of a Practice that is Looking for Itself or the Principle of the “Empty Shell”

Façadism, this practice newly introduced in Morocco, in a discreet way, can lead us to say that the preservation of the built architectural heritage is better served when one does not distinctly seek to preserve the facade, and the forms exteriors of a building, at the expense of the interior. And even less, to distort the temporal reading of this building after intervention.

To this end, conservation stakeholders emphasize the lack of feedback and in-depth analyzes of this practice, and its impact on the urban landscape.

This “experimental trial and error” thus provokes an urban landscape, designed by economic pressures, far from any prospective reflection.

Façadism is thus used as a compromise, for a better adaptation to contemporary constraints, while keeping the inherited urban coherence, even emotionally at times.

However, the facade approach has inevitably exposed the neglect of the maintenance and management of the architectural heritage.

In the absence of suitable legal texts and recognized practices, resorting to the appearance of heritage constitutes a gesture of good conscience, particularly under pressure from civil society.

Admittedly, research on façadism in Morocco is in its infancy. Nevertheless, it opens up a very vast field of architectural and urban planning practices used most of the time in an emergency without any feedback on their impacts on the urban landscape.

The future of research in this field is still wide and open, because always on field work, without scientific production in parallel and if the comparison can be made on the ground, this situation is repeated in a rather sneaky way in the Moroccan medinas.

The architectural heritage of Moroccan cities is no longer, on the monument or the building only, but on large urban facades, which then become only a decoration of shoddy compared to the hollowing out that the residences undergo inside., the case of Marrakech or Fez today is quite telling.



Figure 7 : Image Illustrating the Two Supported Facades Facing the Rue De La Banque De La Société Générale in Casablanca, Morocco.

Source: Ibtissam Kourdou 2013.

CONCLUSIONS

This relentlessness on the facades of buildings is becoming repetitive in Moroccan cities. We have recently observed other practices which consist in redesigning contemporary facades on other existing ones without thinking about the whole building. The most recent example is that of the building housing the urban municipality of Harhoura in the Prefecture of Skhirat Temara, built during the 2000s, but whose facades have seen a new "IMAGE" by building new facades.

This new skin added to the existing building, is considered as a "carnivalization of urban facades", it consists of a spectacular transformation of an urban landscape by a new architectural redevelopment which accompanies urban development in the said municipality during this year of 2021.

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