

## **INTERVENING IN A HERITAGE SITE – RECONFIGURING PUBLIC SPACES, UNRAVELING COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT OF THE BOUREGREG VALLEY IN RABAT, MOROCCO**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The making of the city in Morocco obeys a complex process which began with the promulgation of the first regulatory text of modern urban planning. A process that has not stopped evolving and renewing itself. In an international movement for the promotion of cities under the effect of globalization, the passage from planned urbanism to project-based urbanism is the major manifestation of this.*

*The development of the Bouregreg valley in Rabat is an instructive example of this way of making the city. It unfolds on a site rich in history. This research paper proposes to study the relation of the production of space to heritage, starting from the observation that this angle of view remains insufficiently explored.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Bouregreg Valley, Urban Project, Heritage, Public Spaces*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The construction of the modern city in Morocco follows a complex process that began with the promulgation of the first regulatory text on modern urban planning<sup>1</sup>. Since then, territorial dynamics have evolved in unprecedented ways (the development of new cities, proliferation of substandard housing, coastal development, etc.). After gaining independence, urban development was primarily carried out through operational urbanism (housing subdivisions, PAM programs, Hay Essalam in Salé, Hay Ryad in Rabat, etc.). It was in the 2000s that the regulation of urban spaces underwent a significant change with the adoption of a new approach to city planning, transitioning from planned urbanism to project-based urbanism. This choice aligns with the global trend of promoting cities under the influence of globalization.

In Morocco, Rabat-Salé was the first urban area to adopt urban projects as a new way of city planning or rather, redeveloping the city through the Bouregreg River Valley development project. Centuries after the founding of the two cities, this project intervenes in a site that has remained partially inhabited and practically left to its own devices for a long time. The development of waterfronts in general and the banks of the Bouregreg River have been the subject of numerous

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<sup>1</sup>The Dahir of April 16, 1914: relating to alignments, development plans, and extension of towns, easements and road taxes.

research works and papers<sup>2</sup>, but without exhausting all the perspectives for interpreting this significant act in the contemporary history of Moroccan city making. Urban projects do not typically take place on empty virgin sites; often, these sites have their own history and identity. The Bouregreg Valley development project unfolds on a site of significant heritage value, concentrating material and immaterial evidence of the layering of historical events, monuments, and major landscapes in the city. In this article, we seek to understand how this heritage and identity from the past were incorporated into the creation of a contemporary space. How was this translated into public spaces? To what extent did it impact the memory of the places and the old practices?

Fieldwork was necessary to observe the material changes in space and to grasp the manifestations of social practices and the feedback from users. This approach would not have been able to reveal the hidden dimensions of this major development project without targeted interviews with official project stakeholders.

### **THE BOUREGREG VALLEY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: A NEW PARADIGM FOR SPACE PRODUCTION**

The development of the Bouregreg Valley was initiated as an Urban Project, marking the beginning of a novel approach to urban space creation in Morocco. According to its proponents, this approach serves as an effective alternative to address urban and territorial dysfunctions that conventional urban planning has been unable to resolve. It is also seen as a tool for promoting the local and national economy.

In recent years, this method has become widespread in major cities in the form of development and planning programs such as ;« *Tanger grandemétropole* », « *Marrakech la renouvelée* », « *Rabat ville lumière, capitale de la culture* », and others. These new programs embrace a "proximity" approach to land development, spanning various scales from the improvement of public spaces to the realization of significant architectural projects, following a process that goes beyond the traditional framework of urban planning.

As a deviation from traditional planning, the Project-based Urbanism in Morocco finds its origins in urban planning documents. It was initially introduced through the Urban Development Master Plan of Rabat in 1995 (SDAU). This master plan introduced a new practice, namely the programming of urban projects in parallel with zoning allocations. Four major projects were identified: the development of the Bouregreg riverbanks, the coastal promenade, "Avenue de la Victoire", and the Akreuch Plateau. Their programming was not driven by a need defined in the Master Plan (SDAU), but rather, they were introduced during the latest consultations based on proposals from high authorities. This is why the final Master Plan document of SDAU does not provide guidance on the modalities of their implementation; this information was suggested in subsequent internal notes<sup>3</sup> (la société d'économemixte).

<sup>2</sup>BARTHEL Pierre. Arnaud, MOULOUDI Hicham, Waterfronts de Casablanca et de Rabat : un urbanisme de projet, *Urbanisme*, n°369, nov. déc, 2009, pp, 52-56.

<sup>3</sup> Archives of the Department of Urban Planning, Morocco



**Figure 1: The Four Major Urban Projects Planned by the SDAU of Rabat 1995.**

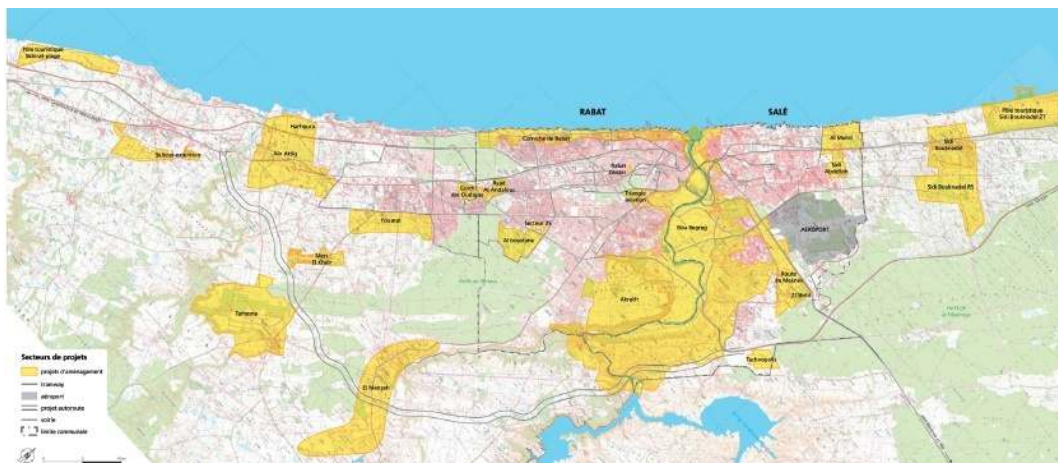
It was not until the 2010s that the development project of the Bouregreg riverbanks was launched, along with the piecemeal development of the promenade within the «Rabat ville lumière, capitale de la culture» program.

The Urban Development Master Plan of 1995 (SDAU) designated the urban projects it proposed as supportive and “accompagnement” actions. In this sense, these are interventions intended to support the guidelines of the urban planning document, but on the ground, they sometimes took positions contrary to the urban planning system<sup>4</sup>.

In line, a "major urban projects" division was established within the Urban Planning Directorate in 2001. Its objectives were to engage in reflections and make proposals on the project approach. It was within this context that various urban and architectural projects were proposed for the city of Rabat and the entire urban agglomeration.

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<sup>4</sup>One of the representative aspects of this whole was the way in which the question of public utility was approached. Limited to collective facilities by law 12-90 relating to town planning, the declaration of public utility was extended to zoning in the Bouregreg development plan, the entire site is thus eligible for expropriation, which calls into question the very meaning of the public utility. Also, the Bouregreg project was exempted from the provisions of the general construction regulations adopted for the application of article 59 of law 12-90 relating to cityplanning.



**Figure 2: Urban Projects Planned in the Rabat-Salé Agglomeration.**

Source: Direction of Urban Planning, Morocco (Direction de l'Urbanisme)

Public action gradually shifted from the department responsible for Urban Planning to local authorities. As a result, the scale of intervention changed, moving from large urban projects to targeted and specific actions within so-called development programs. Entitled "*Rabat, City of Light, Capital of Culture*" this program introduced a new approach to space planning through the enhancement of public spaces. The program is complemented by large-scale architectural projects aimed at leaving a mark on both the physical space and people's minds. Notable examples include the new Mohammed VI Theater designed by architect Zaha Hadid, the Mohammed VI Tower, the luxury hotel complex "Kasr Al Bahr," and the carousel.

These projects, whether initiated by the state or economic powers, place the city within a neoliberal trend where image and consumption (shopping, commercial activity) are at the core of the strategies of the new way of city planning. They also reflect the dominance of hyper-capitalism, although not to the detriment of the public interest<sup>5</sup>. The introduction of entrepreneurial logic gives the territory a new dimension that was certainly present but never as explicitly expressed; the territory becomes an investment capital.

This trend is part of an international race where contemporary cities appear to be under constant pressure to stay up to date. Three strategies are adopted to remain competitive and "sell themselves": the hosting of mega cultural events, the restoration and promotion of heritage, and the construction of iconic buildings (Hankinson, 2006; Kavaratzis, 2005). These three approaches are employed in the Bouregreg Valley development project. However, from a scientific perspective, the question of heritage preservation has been inadequately addressed in this case and even in similar projects<sup>6</sup>. Mohammed Naciri<sup>7</sup> has astutely highlighted the striking disconnect between the intensification of discourse regarding heritage preservation on one hand and the reality of abandonment and deterioration of heritage sites on the other.

<sup>5</sup>BARTHEL Pierre. Arnaud, MOULOUDI Hicham, Waterfronts de Casablanca et de Rabat : un urbanisme de projet, Urbanisme, n°369, nov. déc, 2009, pp, 52-56.

<sup>6</sup>Weonlyfound one issue of a journal dedicated to this subject (Faculté des sciences et des lettres de Rabat, 2010, *Hesperis – Tamuda*, fascicule unique, Vol. XLV).

<sup>7</sup>NACIRI Mohamed, « Le patrimoine et ses expressions dans l'espace public » (en arabe), dans : Faculté des sciences et des lettres de Rabat, 2010, *Hesperis – Tamuda*, fascicule unique, Vol. XLV. 11-23pp

## **MOBILIZATION OF HERITAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BOUREGREG VALLEY: A DISCREPANCY BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND REALITY**

The distinctiveness of the Bouregreg Valley<sup>8</sup> development project lies in its scale and the uniqueness of its hosting site<sup>9</sup>, particularly in terms of heritage. Known as the "Golden triangle" due to the presence of two historic medinas, Rabat and Salé, at the river's mouth and the Oudayas fortress, the project area encompasses eighteen historical sites of various categories.<sup>10</sup> This project was underpinned by a discourse focused on heritage throughout its implementation. Initial discussions encouraged the promotion of existing heritage and its enrichment with new facilities.<sup>11</sup>

From the outset, heritage preservation was oriented toward making the area tourist friendly. It echoes a global trend in search of cultural experiences. In its various promotions, the project highlights both tangible heritage, such as abandoned archaeological remains or currently used cities, and intangible heritage, represented by social practices, rituals, and skills. This organic connection between heritage preservation and tourism was reinforced by the local and universal recognition of this legacy through its classification and inscription<sup>12</sup> on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Despite the heritage-focused discourse surrounding the Bouregreg project, questions arise about the legitimacy of its execution. This is because the hosting site had been subject to a preservation plan since 1954 through a viziriel<sup>13</sup> decree with the objective of safeguarding the valley from any actions that could alter or harm its environment. Paradoxically, this decree served as a pretext to leave this area to deteriorate and be marginalized. For nearly fifty years, this site turned into an illegal dumping ground, the river water was polluted, and unauthorized extraction quarries for construction materials marred the landscape, leading to ecosystem degradation. Nevertheless, the site was preserved in its natural state, except for a few buildings that were constructed despite the existence of nonaedificandi<sup>14</sup> servitude since 1914.

The project took shape without the hosting site being declassified beforehand<sup>15</sup>. This contradiction raises questions about the credibility of the heritage discourse surrounding the project, as well as the legal legitimacy of this intervention.

If we accept that heritage is a collective asset meant to be shared, the approach taken by the project suggests otherwise. The project sponsors emphasized collective memory as one of the four main axes of the project. However, apart

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<sup>8</sup>Valley of the Bouregreg river separating the two cities of Rabat and Salé, in Morocco

<sup>9</sup> The project covers an area of 6,000 ha with an ambitious program encompassing 6 complementary sequences, the first two of which, called Bab Al Bahr and Al Saha Al Kabira, are currently being implemented; the other sequences are at the study stage.

<sup>10</sup> Two medinas, a necropolis dating from the Roman period, archaeological remains and a specific ecosystem.

<sup>11</sup> Internal summary note from the Department of Urban Planning and Architecture, relating to the development study of the banks and the Bouregreg valley presented by the Michel Pinseau firm.

<sup>12</sup> Often in Morocco, the classification or inscription of archaeological heritage does not systematically promote heritage status. The medina of Fez experienced a different fate than that of the medina of Marrakech despite being the first to be classified as a world heritage site. Marrakech remains the best known and visited by tourists, to the point of sometimes confusing it with Morocco. This is explained by strong tourism marketing.

<sup>13</sup> The Site of the Bou-Regreg in Rabat with classification, BO n° 2154 of February 15, 1954 – P. 179). This plan had provided for a non-aedificandi zone, where all construction is prohibited, a non-altiustenlendis zone, where heights must not exceed a height of 5 to 8m due to the proximity of historical monuments, a reforestation perimeter, and a sports activity area

<sup>14</sup> Zones where construction is prohibited

<sup>15</sup> A text of law (Dahir n° 1-05-70 of 20 Chaoual 1426 (23 November 2006) promulgating law n° 16-04 relating to the development and development of the Bouregreg valley) conceded project management to a development agency created for the occasion (Société d'ménagement des Berges de Bouregreg subsidiary

from slogans in advertisements, we found no documents specifying how this collective memory was approached, particularly in relation to the affected population, i.e., those who were in the area before the project (residents, users). Communication about the project is one-sided and top-down, originating solely from the project sponsors, who communicate through intermediaries (press conferences, official websites, brochures, and newsletters). This mode of communication is part of the project's confidentiality strategy. Access to information is sealed, both for researchers and citizens.

In this context, the initial inhabitants found themselves excluded from the project, despite the project's claim to have a social approach<sup>16</sup>. This approach was limited to the modalities of compensation and the relocation of households to be displaced; the right to the site was inherently excluded. *“The project Agency was able, according to principles that promote the values of citizenship and social cohesion, to put an end to unsanitary housing for a large number of households through raising awareness among the target population of the importance of this project, facilitating the relocation of families and involving various relevant government departments”*.<sup>17</sup>

The project sponsors argue that these negotiations allow for the anticipation of potential problems, *“The implementation of financial, economic, social, and psychological support measures for the populations to ensure sustainable handling of the project's consequences and effective improvement of the beneficiaries' living conditions”*<sup>18</sup>. However, we question the value of raising awareness among a population that will not be integrated into the project, especially since, at the time of relocating one population, the Bab LBahr project was unveiled to attract another audience. This happened during the Moroccan Real Estate Exhibition in Paris (SMAP IMMO 2009) held from May 21 to May 24, 2009, at the Paris Expo Paris-Porte de Versailles.

The establishment of “Bab El Bahr” on the right bank of the river, situated between the two medinas of Rabat on one side and Salé on the other, has raised concerns regarding the “privatization of the view.” Some apartments, located on the estuary side, offer a privileged view of the Kasbah des Oudayas, which is the most emblematic landscape of the site. However, spaces for the public, such as restaurants and the marina, are located opposite to this view.

When questioned about this configuration that appears to favor a few residences at the expense of openness to the public, a spokesperson provided a mixed response, explaining that a special procedure had been established for the sale of these apartments and that the generated surplus would be reinvested in the project. Nevertheless, the interposition of the residential complex of Bab El Bahr between the two medinas has been met with regret and even frustration by the users and residents who had always enjoyed an unobstructed view. This view was one of the key elements that had guided the design of the new city and its development plan by Prost.

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<sup>16</sup>Official Site of the projet talks about it extensively [www.bouregreg.com](http://www.bouregreg.com)

<sup>17</sup> Agence d'Aménagement des Berges de Bouregreg, « Bouregreg news 2009, Vallée du Bouregreg : un chantier en action»

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.





**Figure 3: La Kasbah Des Oudayas Depuis Le Projet Bab El Bahr.**

Source: Cliché K. Karibi.

Indeed, Oued<sup>19</sup>Bouregreg has always served as a natural divide between the two medinas of Rabat and Salé, bearing witness to sometimes conflicting, sometimes peaceful relationships that connected them. Their face-to-face proximity lent this pair a strong symbolic dimension. However, since the early 20th century and Prost's urban plan<sup>20</sup>, the two cities began to follow different destinies. While Rabat was promoted as the political capital of the country, Salé was sidelined from any vision of development and relegated to a dormitory city. This differentiation became the central issue in any discussion about the two cities. The discourse surrounding the Bouregreg project made this question one of its concerns, presenting itself as a way to mend the bond between these close cities.

The connection between the two banks was more symbolic, expressed through the picturesque panorama that each city offered to the other beyond the river, summer swims across it, and boat crossings.

The Bouregreg project aimed to be the urban center that would reconcile Rabat and Salé. However, urban development seems to have created an irreversible physical rupture, as a concrete barrier was erected on the right bank, facing Salé's medina. This concealed its walls behind a linear concrete structure, despite their historical significance dating back to the 13th century. This construction was presented as a potential heritage to be preserved and celebrated. Instead of achieving cohesion between these medinas, the project has created a division. "This concrete wall suffocates me, I feel that I have lost forever the grand open view of Salé," [F, a salary man, Rabat].

These constructions raise two main questions regarding their location and architecture. First, they indicate the cementing of a fragile site, the riverbed, rich in a unique ecosystem in the region. This is in stark contrast to the statement from 2009 that *"Bab Al Bahr is a jewel of architecture and an urban planning achievement, taking into account the specificities of heritage and the ecological balance of the wetland area. Bab Al Bahr is more than just a city in the classical sense; it is a way of life that celebrates differences in a milieu aspiring to modernity while preserving its traditional substratum."*<sup>21</sup>.

Architecturally, these constructions are presented as a return to local sources: *"Bab Al Bahr combines authentic culture with a myriad of style and aesthetics influences with a touch of contemporary urbanism. It is a subtle alliance of*

<sup>19</sup>Oued (river in Arabic) automatically designates the Bouregreg river, this rustic name, which is part of the heritage of the site, seems to be attenuated to give way to a name which fits with the image of the new project, the banks of the Bouregreg

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<sup>21</sup>Agence d'Aménagement des Berges de Bouregreg, Bouregreg, « news 2009, Vallée du Bouregreg : un chantier en action».

popular, cultural, artistic influence and human and geographic diversity of Rabat and Salé."<sup>22</sup>. However, these attributes remain vague and largely reside in the realm of advertising rhetoric.

Furthermore, these high-end residences are offered at prices unaffordable to the usual users of the site but accessible to an upper social class, which will benefit from the historical and landscape heritage of the area. These new residents will be the only ones to enjoy a view of Rabat's medina facade and the public spaces along the quays. The result is that these rows of buildings form a veritable visual barrier, physically and symbolically breaking the connection that the project's designers had intended to foster.

With this barrier, the Bouregreg project turns its back on Salé in its most iconic part. From Salé, this panorama is no longer visible. The gamble of constructing in a heritage area and making it the project's leitmotif questions the definition of heritage and its preservation, as well as the principle of sharing it.

This raises questions about the meaning of heritage sharing and the boundaries between the discourse on heritage preservation and the marketing logic of this urban project.

For the project's designers, their aim was the rehabilitation of historical monuments and their integration into a contemporary urban process. But for the residents of Rabat and Salé, heritage preservation resides in the collective memory of life along the riverbanks—a living heritage that blends ritualized social practices in a heritage environment. "*Many of Elie's memories are mine, much older, but they are the same: the tea and the gazelle horns of the Oudaias...the swimming crossings of the Bouregreg...the woods of the Agdal where we ran barefoot, the games around the Hassan Tower...the Sunday morning walks along Cours Lyautey and Avenue Dar Makhzen (we "made" the avenue)...*"<sup>23</sup>

The disappearance of these practices has concerned local residents, leaving them feeling dispossessed of their memories. "*I can imagine that the Bouregreg will be beautiful when the development project is completed, but it will lose a bit of its natural history,*" [cohenelie, [www. Dafina.net](http://www.dafina.net)]. The regulars feel dispossessed of their memory "*I can no longer find the wadi that I knew and loved*" [M, 50 years old, filmmaker].

The selective heritage approach is intrinsic to the project's production process. The discourse on heritage preservation is thus addressed to a non-local population, and collective memory is something to be shared with new audiences. What remains of this memory, if not a reconstruction of a new one to be instilled in new users as if it were ancient?

The presence of some of the valley's occupants is measured by their roles in marketing the project. This applies to the boatmen, fishermen, and restaurateurs who have been redeployed as elements of collective memory in the new landscape, leading to a social and spatial reconfiguration of the site.

## **THE MEMORY OF PLACES TESTED BY DEVELOPMENT LOGICS**

In its rustic aspect, the riverbanks have ingrained themselves in the mental map of their users as a set of lived social practices, giving meaning to frequenting a natural place enveloped by heritage elements.

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Jean Cournollet, [www.dafina.net](http://www.dafina.net)



For instance, the Chellah<sup>24</sup> necropolis was a place of Nezahas<sup>25</sup>, whose marabouts were and still are visited, especially on Fridays (with free access), by women and young people seeking good fortune, offspring, or a spouse. These spaces, integrated into the project's heritage vision, served as reasons for women and their children to go out. These outings, once frequent and abundant, have become scarce and disappeared for some sites due to the social changes that Moroccan society has experienced. They have shifted toward new shopping centers, gardens, and public squares. This demonstrates that practices give heritage its social significance. The rustic nature of the Bouregreg riverbanks made them distinctive because they were primarily used by men, boatmen, fishermen, and adolescents.

With the creation of furnished quays equipped with restaurants, the left bank was opened to other audiences.

Featuring an embankment with franchised restaurants and their terraces, green lawns, spacious esplanades, the project has created new public spaces not available in the two medinas with their labyrinthine alleys and dense fabric. The quality of development, open space, cafes and restaurants, parking, and security have attracted a diverse population to these new spaces, which are busy every afternoon and weekend mornings.

New social profiles visit them; couples find romantic spots to come and admire the sunset at the river's mouth, families use it as an open promenade that their neighborhoods do not offer. For tourists, these developments have become an essential stop to have ice cream at the Oudayas. Scenes are set up for the duration of a festival or a music concert. However, despite this apparent diversity, franchised cafes introduce selectivity based on solvency, as the prices are high and not accessible to all social categories. As a result, these cafes have seen the arrival of an affluent social class that did not previously frequent this space and, in general, deserted central public spaces. Furthermore, these restaurants and cafes are the only shaded areas along the quays; therefore, only their patrons enjoy a comfortable place to contemplate the natural and heritage landscape. Consequently, these outdoor public spaces only see increased use when the intensity of the sun decreases.

At the same time, resistance is observed; young people still engage in their favorite activity, swimming. They use the guardrails of the quays for diving and adapt to the pavement that has replaced the rustic ground.

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<sup>24</sup>Ruins of the ancient Roman city Sala colonia and the Marinid necropolis dating from the fourteenth century.

<sup>25</sup>Picnic



**Figure 5: School Children and Young People on the Quays on a Sunny Spring Day.**

*Source: Photo O.Messous*

If the new practices couldn't displace the old ones because they were deeply rooted, they nevertheless managed to largely embed themselves in the territory and dominate the previous practices. The process of heritagization is carried out through the reinvention of new relationships with this space.

This is how certain old activities have been reclaimed by the Bouregreg project and designated as heritage elements, such as the boatmen. They were a dominant part of the landscape on both riverbanks. The social and economic history of the medinas was marked by their activity. Over the past centuries, they formed a powerful guild that long "ruled" the river and influenced economic exchanges between northern and southern Morocco. With the construction of the bridge over the river, their activity declined, and it was limited to passenger transport. These boatmen are integrated by the Bouregreg project as anthropological heritage elements. After their halt during the works<sup>26</sup>, users expressed their dismay because this activity is part of the site's collective memory. In their approach, the project designers made sure to include them as components of animation and attraction.

It seems to us that this is a folkloric approach<sup>27</sup>, as their retention occurs by negating their former and primary function as ferries between the two riverbanks. Mobility is ensured by the new relocation projects undertaken within the framework of the said project, namely the tramway and the construction of a large-capacity bridge. Their role, which is in decline<sup>28</sup>, is now oriented toward a purely tourist and recreational purpose, offering a rustic image complementary to the

<sup>26</sup> The coming and going of the boats stopped in May 2006. It was frozen following a negotiation with the SABR for the advancement of the project. As compensation, the agency agreed to pay them monthly compensation, the amount of which varies depending on the status: 900 DH for unauthorized boats operating part-time, double for unauthorized boats working full time, and 2,500 DH for boats registered with the Merchant Navy (43 of the 73 listed).

<sup>27</sup> The producers of the project tried to reintroduce the traditional clothing of the boatmen.

<sup>28</sup> This is an old practice (2 cents for the crossing). Today, the number of barcassiers has increased and the smugglers find themselves waiting more than an hour to leave. Unfair competition began in the 2000s (barcassiers only have the right to take on six passengers) 1.50 dirhams/person. And for those who want to take a walk and go up the river, the price varies between 30 and 100 dh. The barcassiers of the wadi, who ensure the crossing of the Bouregreg between Rabat and Salé,

modern one provided by the nearby marina, where luxury yachts are moored not far from weathered boats. They must adapt to the new spirit of the place.

## **HERITAGEIZATION, A PREDEFINED RECONSTRUCTION OF PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SPACES**

Heritagization is understood here in reference to three actors: project leaders, new beneficiaries, and authentic users. In this framework, construction primarily occurs at two levels, the producers and the new beneficiaries. The actions of the former are centralizing and unilateral. They are reinforced by the confidential management of the project. The Bouregreg Valley development project is the only one whose scope allowed it to encompass the highest concentration of heritage. It mobilized the monuments that preceded it as a brand image and added value to the project. Through this action, the producers subjected the space and its users to a remodeling and renewal operation they sponsor to give the site an image of modernity and luxury tourism. It represents a transition from the tangible to the symbolic. The Bouregreg Agency also aspires to create new landmarks that will inscribe a living testimony of our time into the larger metropolitan area. The grand Rabat theater project on 72,000 m<sup>2</sup>, a competition in which some of the greatest architectural stars participated and won by Zaha Hadid, is a witness to this, as well as the Mohammed VI Tower, the tallest in Africa.



**Figure 6: Project for the New Rabat Theater Designed by Zaha Hadid.**

*Source: Photo K.Karibi*

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first had competition from the steam ferry between 1913 and 1936, then activity decreased since the construction of the Moulay Hassan Bridge between Rabat and Salé.

The producers were convinced that the heritage of the two cities would benefit from the Bouregreg Valley project. In an interview with MAP<sup>29</sup> (Maghreb Arab Press), the Director of the Marketing Division at the Bouregreg Valley Development Agency (AAVB) emphasized that "the concentration of monuments around the Bouregreg Valley makes this space a blessed land for culture and tourism."<sup>30</sup>

New users without prior connections to the space are integrated into this model and project themselves onto it. Nevertheless, they are not entirely passive; they eventually imprint it with new practices, sometimes not foreseen by the producers. However, through this appropriation, they confer a certain legitimacy on the heritagization process. This process successfully reconfigures and spatially and socially marks the space, but its regular users resist through the continuation of their practices. This raises the question of heritage appropriation. It is perceived differently by the three actors. While it is a living space for the first group (medina residents), it becomes an added value for the second group (designers) and contributes to space design. Finally, it serves as an inducer of new emotions for the third group (new users).

It represents a shift in the perception of heritage when the economic dimension is integrated through commercial and paid recreational activities. The population does not have a "normative" understanding of heritage because, for them, its value is measured by the intensity and nature of its practice. This is why the riverbanks are more frequented than historical monuments. The Moorish café in the Oudayas is an example of this because without it, this monument would not have the same number of visitors.

The peculiarity of heritage sites in Morocco lies in the fact that they are generally still inhabited. Heritage is not sacred in the minds of Moroccans as a representation or memory of a glorious past; it can only be so when it is practiced. When the space is stripped of this meaning to become merely a structure to be preserved, citizens find no compelling reasons to maintain it, become disenchanted, and let it deteriorate. The container cannot be dissociated from the content, especially in interventions in heritage sites. The opposite approach would lead to the "museification" of the space and compromise the rights of the original occupants.

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<sup>29</sup>Maghreb Agence Press.

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