Tool 5
Analysis of economic parameters and socio-cultural values
Tool 5
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Which socio-economic parameters must be considered?

The operation of property markets in the centres of historic towns has carved itself a place in the dynamic of local property markets, in the dynamic of the markets of the different towns that structure the territory of the country, and even in the urban dynamics of larger geographical areas corresponding to geopolitical regions subject to the same rules and influences or in specific tourist markets.

Beyond these external dimensions, the evolution of historic districts is marked by socio-demographic evolution and urban development putting pressure on property markets and urban structures; the place and function of districts are displaced in history, and it is a very rare old centre where the morphology and structure do not have to be modified to adapt to new uses.

Property structures can therefore evolve rapidly, an accelerated evolution going along with the development of residential mobility, tourist attractiveness and the tertiarisation of employment. This evolution makes the maintenance of the traditional social and functional diversity of these districts more delicate, particularly when needs for urban rehabilitation mean that property restoration is required and the improvement of districts risks encouraging the exclusion of families and less well-off people from them. The increase in land and property values must therefore be controlled by land action policies and support for the production of social housing.

Conversely, some historic districts become run down because of the gradual loss of their historic place in the urban network – the displacement of administrative, trading, economic or political functions to other towns or districts. This process of devaluation sometimes leads to them becoming insalubrious and to a loss of the economic attractiveness of territories, processes which marginalise the district into merely receiving disadvantaged populations. The fall in land and property values and their consequences for the deterioration of buildings (putting some properties in single ownership into joint ownership, division of mansions and historic buildings into several accommodation units) cannot be overcome without tough action to aid the conservation of the structures of buildings and to preserve the most important buildings in the sectors. These situations require actions to support owners, who are often financially incapable of bearing the cost of property restoration, and land and property actions to replace the failing private ownership of public or private operators.

The approach to old centres and districts of towns will therefore, in all cases, require precise identification of the place and function of residential and urban property in property markets, of the district in the history and evolution of the town and of the town in the history of the territory. This approach will be carried out on many levels – from the district to the block and down to the individual property – and will call on various disciplines and analyses, giving rise to the drawing up of a scheme and of particular intervention programmes making it possible to act against the dysfunctions identified.

1. The place of the town in the urban hierarchy of its region and its place in its territory will be the first criterion to be taken into account in order to appreciate the place of the local property market in the territory’s property price hierarchy. Various indicators make it possible to understand the cycle in which the local property market is evolving: the income level of the local population, the demographic development of the region, its economic dynamism, the structure of the ownership and quality of the housing, the housing costs and labour cost. Land and property prices in the sector and the volume of annual transactions, together with the vacancy rate for housing or the speed of transformation of shops will characterise the probable evolution of sectors and will give useful details for understanding the changes, the types of investors (or disinvestment) and the average amount of investment in the sector. This data will make it...
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The economic type studies should analyze the structure of the property and the existing real estate dynamics, two important factors in relation to the possibilities of management of the rehabilitation operations.

possible to characterise the price rise or devaluation cycle occurring in the districts and to specify the aid to be put in place to run the programme for rehabilitating the housing and commercial functions.

All old historic sectors have been subject to price rise/devaluation cycles depending on the tensions in the markets and the place of property in the historic centre in the local housing market. Devaluation cycles generally accompany the impoverishment of a region, but they can develop in active property markets as a result of the rigidity of the land market or the absence of a range of housing available for the most disadvantaged people or for families – while price rise cycles can develop in not very dynamic regions, from the simple fact of tourist pressure.

In effect, the rigidity of land markets, expressed by the resistance exercised by certain owners to transferring their property (or transforming it) in an attempt to boost land prices, accentuates the trend towards the deterioration of the old fabric. The agreed strategies of certain owners who prefer to wait for the opportunity to demolish and rebuild rather than undertaking considerable work to restore their assets, accentuate these phenomena, which block the development of the market. The absence of comfort and facilities in the housing, limiting the attractiveness of groups of properties to young people, families and the middle classes, will limit the development of populating the district and accentuate the degradation of certain parts of
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Historic centres, often affected by the aging of their populations. These factors will accelerate the process of property devaluation, even more so if the prevailing property rehabilitation or restoration rules do not allow poor owners to carry out work to bring their properties up to a level without considerable aid from the group. The means of public action will, therefore, be even more necessary, in proportion to the accommodation needs of the populations and the need to improve the housing.

2. It will be even more important to identify and specify the functions of historic town centres in town planning documents in as far as they strongly affect the rehabilitation policy to be carried out and its different categorisations of the different types of heritage and buildings to be protected or invested in. The constraints of the programme and the rehabilitation levers will be different depending on whether local urban planning allows the extension and development of tertiary functions to fill the gap in historic centres. Receiving new tertiary activities in other districts, receiving tertiary functions compatible with the identity of the district (cultural facilities, school facilities), the displacement of polluting economic activities and the maintenance of basic necessity commercial activities are the main objectives to be achieved in local planning. The purpose of the project will be to create new balances between the structure of the districts, their social composition and their place in the town, acting on the property structure and sometimes the land structure.

3 Commercial and economic activities, partly supported by the demand of resident populations and partly by tourist or leisure demand, can become incompatible with the desire to maintain residential uses in the districts. In certain extreme situations, these displacements of commercial functions can amount to complete “destructuring” of certain sectors, accelerating the departure of traditional populations because of the nuisances created – nuisances linked to the development of car traffic, to the needs for parking or sometimes even night-time nuisance linked to the transformation of the ground floors of buildings (transformation into car parks, shops or restaurants and cafes).

This phenomenon can only be controlled by police-enforced regulations and very precise, detailed rules for rights of occupation of land of the kind that can contain these developments within reasonable proportions. In fact, conflicts of use of public space very often spring from the proximity of competing activities (demand for local space for residents and demand for space for the development of shops). These phenomena will be even more accentuated as the profitability of economic activities is sometimes out of proportion with the profitability of residential activities. They sometimes prevent the reuse of floors of properties as housing or damage the residentialisation of districts. The ways shops are handled will be one of the important issues to be tackled, and the negotiations with the representatives of this economic sector will be particularly important.

4 Traffic and transport constraints, traffic regulation methods and the handling of public spaces will be thought out to control or supervise these developments. Public transport will therefore be given preference over individual transport.

5. The analysis of property structures will be essential for understanding the different strategies of owners, whether they are landlords or occupants, buyers or occupants, in the face of these various developments. The nature of ownership, the sizes of the assets held by the owners in the sector, the proportion of...
property that is public or subject to complex transmission regulations and the general state of buildings must be analysed. The transformation of the property structure will be that much faster if the transformation of the dominant function of the districts is not controlled or planned, or even supervised. But the transformation of heritage and its adaptation to modern housing standards requires the establishment of levers for particular interventions.

6. The population of the districts is also a determining factor, depending particularly on their history and the range allowed by the housing in the sector: a range of locations characterised by the size of the accommodation, its degree of comfort, its location and its cost; a range of access possibilities where the accommodation attracts new populations seeking property opportunities corresponding to their needs; a range for investors seeking asset investments or tax investments when financial regulations favourable to investment are established on the districts; commercial range...

The classification of the function of the districts (area receiving households looking for their first homes, area receiving families, refuge area for vulnerable and disadvantaged populations...etc) for the local populations will be one of the important points of the diagnosis preceding the drawing up of an intervention strategy for the district.

Summaries of the development of the sectors and the choice of priority intervention targets may be drawn up depending on these analysis elements in order to specify the intervention levers making it possible to guide the programme for property rehabilitation and structuring the district.

Three types of tools will be essential for use in the sectors:

- the tools for improving housing, particularly aid and subsidies to owners for carrying out agreed works,
- the tools for property action necessary for restructuring certain blocks to dedensify them or to acquire property in order to define its use or to restructure it,
- the tools for producing social housing, essential for rehousing the population.

They will be mobilised to a greater or lesser degree depending on the difficulties in dealing with the districts and the social, economic or urban issues involved.

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1 The term “property restoration” is used here to characterise far-reaching intervention on the integral structure of old, run-down property: architecture, structure, distribution, sanitation. This is more than merely improvement and maintenance of the housing (comfort, safety). One might also say “heavy rehabilitation”.

New shop beside traditional commercial premises in Tunis medina
The people living in traditional architecture. The case of Nicosia

Settlements develop as a result of human concentration in specific localities, favored for their physical characteristics (location, climate, topography, etc). People there, form communities and networks that support their living and well-being. Social, cultural and economic tights are developed between them, within the settlements but also to other localities outside the boundaries of the settlement. These relations provide the socio-economic framework as well as the means for development. As socio-economic factors change in time due to external influences, settlements enter into cycles of deprivation and regeneration. These cycles have an inevitable impact on the population characteristics, as population and the built environment have a mutual relationship. Cities are more than buildings connected in an urban tissue. They embody the social, the economic and the cultural character of the past and contemporary networks of people that have called it their home.

People move and settle into the settlement forming initially its core. As the town grows, new-comers tend to settle in specific patterns, developing a microcosm of their own. Thus, neighborhoods are formed as clusters of people of the same characteristics: ethnic, national, religious, according to their occupation, social status, etc. With the passing of time people move from one part of the city to the other according to their changing needs, means and status. Mainly families of upper and middle classes move into new residential areas in the suburbs. At the same time more people are moving into the settlement, occupying empty dwellings. A relative static demographic situation is maintained when people of a similar situation as of those living come to live in the area. In areas where continuing outward movement takes place without an equivalent in-migration, the population structure frequently becomes increasingly dominated by older people. The decline in the residential population is often accompanied by the increased concentration of commercial activities.

The effects of in-migration are most clearly seen where the migrants belong to an ethnic group different from that of the majority of the city's population. In the past adaptation was an inevitable process, since immigrants were usually permanent. In today's globalized world, the movement of population due to the economic restructuring but also to the easier means of transport has been considerably increased, but also not so settled. People, tend to move easier from country to country following their work opportunities. On the same time the information technology allow them to be better connected to their country of origin. Thus, migrant communities are less or slower integrated in the recipient community, than before. Since they are more or less separated from the rest of the population because of their race, language, religion or customs, they are likely to form themselves into distinctive clusters, both for economic and social reasons. Moreover, as immigrants are entering a strange social environment, they are attracted by areas in which their compatriots are already living and where they can find a place to live (since discrimination often gives them a limited choice). In such areas it is easier for them to recreate something of the atmosphere of their old place or practice their religion. They might also be attracted by relatives or friends that already live there, the pioneers of their own society established in an alien environment.

The demographic analysis should establish the bases of the strategies for fomenting social cohesion: detection of pockets of poverty, of unemployment, of population "ghettos", of gentrification processes and expulsion of the autochthonous population.
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The example of Nicosia

The urban geography of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, has developed over the centuries, reflecting the troubled history of the island. Its population, a mixture of local Orthodox with Muslim Turks, Armenians, Maronites and Latins, that have been arriving in the island since the Frankish period, found their place and formed their microcosm within the city. The basic element in the fabric of the city was the neighborhood. These were developed around the religious buildings of each community, the church or mosque, and became centers for citizens of like ethnicity, and religion. Moreover other areas were formed with the concentration of people according to their social class or occupation. The trust that developed between the two bigger communities in a later period led to the establishment of mixed town quarters. Modernization and the economic restructuring brought with it building redevelopment but also the first signs of population exodus. However, the process was interrupted by the brutal separation in two parts of the city following the intercommunal troubles between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots and the establishment of the ‘green line’ in 1963. The situation was made more permanent in 1974 following the Turkish invasion to the island. The impact on the physical fabric of the city and its physical and functional continuity was significant as it was for the population of the city. People from both communities moved to either side of the ‘line’ altering the demography. The ‘green line’ divided the city not only in physical terms but also in visual, psychological, political and emotional terms. The heart of the city, its main commercial area was devastated being in the buffer zone. In the years to follow, the total of the adjacent area was to be further abandoned as insecurity drove people away. In a number of empty dwellings refugees from the occupied area were housed forming a new displaced community. Moreover, new uses were added in the abandoned dwellings, workshops further deteriorated the buildings and their environment and shifted the predominant use from mixed residential-commercial to workshop. Further factors contributed to the decline of the walled city: traffic congestion, lack of parking space and the ageing of the building stock that could not respond to the new, improved, standard of living, led to the move of a substantial number of inhabitants (of the middle and upper class), enterprises and administrative offices to the periphery of the city and to the new, better served, suburbs. Today, the ageing of a considerable part of the building stock of the inner city makes it unable to meet the contemporary life
standard. On the same time the increased property values of historic buildings and the high cost of their rehabilitation to meet the contemporary living standards, make it difficult for their owners to rehabilitate it. Furthermore, they are put off by the social change and deprivation in the historic core. Thus, the return in the city of the original inhabitants is a difficult aim.

The poor condition of the building has resulted in low rents that attracted immigrants. In the opposite case, rehabilitated listed buildings, are used as high cost residences for mainly high class families or as bars, restaurants, offices or cultural centers.

Currently the population of the city consists of mainly immigrants, refugees and few old local people. The low cost housing opportunities have attracted a considerable number of immigrants in the old city. These can be distinguished in two groups: circular migration of mainly Philippine, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and eastern European nationals and ‘permanent’ migration of Diaspora Greeks. The latter enjoy a special status both before and after the Cyprus accession to the European Community and migrate with their families for a permanent stay. Recent research has shown that 65% of the residents of the area are non Cypriots.

In a process of adaptation, social networks of different ethnicities have created social structures that attract immigrants to a friendlier environment. For example, a new market orientated towards the everyday needs of these networks is currently developed: stores selling Russian products alongside with Indian spices and sari, Call Centers with low prices and internet cafes, money transfer agencies, laundries, butchers that don’t sell pork, Sunday hairdressers in garages or halls, etc.

With the concentration of a large number of immigrants living in the city, a new urban geography is being formed. Or, to be more precise, the long lost division of the city is being revitalized. Thus, the once Latin quarter is used by the catholic Philippine, Indian and Sri Lankan nationals that attend the Sunday Mass at the Catholic Cathedral. The old St Joseph school has been converted to a Community Center by the Catholic nuns, while the old Convent offers its gardens and sheltered areas for the Sunday tea. The Municipal garden as well as the Walls moat nearby, are used for the Sunday’s stroll, picnic, party or even as a small bazaar. A bigger open-air bazaar is organized in a parking lot on the Medieval Walls. Cypriot tradesmen offer their low-price, low-quality goods, adjusted to the taste of their immigrant customers. They often employ immigrants as salesmen to facilitate the sales. Rarely immigrants are the bosses, usually selling music tapes.

The Muslim community is organized around the city’s Mosque, a former Gothic cathedral, converted into a Mosque during the Ottoman period. Hairdressers, butcher shops, convenient stores, money transfer or DVD clubs are situated in shops in the adjacent streets to serve the community.

The Orthodox community of the Greek Diaspora, is located in the area around the Phaneromeni Orthodox church. They are actually...
settlers and since they share the same language (usually as second language) and religion they are better incorporated in the local community. Their network is more loosely connected than these of the previous mentioned groups. However, their impact on the city everyday life is significant since they use it in a round the clock basis. The once deserted area is now filled with children’s laughter, groups of women gossiping on the benches and companies of men staring the passersby at the square. Cypriots living in the area are usually either old people that remained in the area after their children have left, or professionals who mainly have their studios in the area but live outside the historic core. There is a small number of young families that have chosen the area for their permanent residence. These are either refugees, housed in the government’s refugee camp, in the rehabilitated by the Local Municipality Chrysaliniotissa area or in other better preserved or rehabilitated buildings.

The main street (Ledras street), however, is frequented by all kind of people. Families with small children choose the pedestrianised street for their walks, enjoying their coffee in the fancy cafeterias such as Starbucks or Flo (multinational chains). People of all ages and from both the city and the near villages go for an ice-cream at Heracles. Turkish-Cypriots pass the checking point for shopping and for a western feeling. Tourists are attracted by the traditional architecture, the museums and the tourist shops and restaurants. These networks of people of different ethnicities, cultures, religions and interests, usually pass by each other or coexist in the same urban fabric and at the same time moments, but without really living together. Their worlds meet in a fleeting instance: a service in the shop or restaurant, a smile on a pretty baby, a snapshot, a glimpse of disapproval or hostility… Each group is carrying its own story, and its relationship with the city differs dramatically. An urban space is conceived and interpreted in a different way for each one. What is important for the one is indifferent for the other. It is thus the people who give life and value to the public space, but also the space facilitates the concentration and intensity of the people’s activities.

The city today is enriched by different sets of values or symbols inherent in the different cultures that occupy it. It is a scene for various plays often spontaneous or unpredictable. The city seems to follow its own dynamics. However, this juxtaposition of difference, diversity and social extremes of affluence and poverty does create considerable tension and public debate.

The walled city is in an undisputable process of regeneration. For its physical rehabilitation a 10 million Cyprus pounds from the Structural Funds will be spent the next three years. Further funds will be used from other Governmental sources. But the main question remains: regeneration for whom? And how are the targeted beneficiaries included in the decision-making process? How exactly are the ‘Visiting’ communities seen in the kaleidoscope of the cities’ issues since, at this moment, they have the greatest impact on the city’s life and are most likely to be more affected by the regeneration process. Furthermore, what is the impact of these networks of people on the regeneration process? Is it significant or are market and political forces stronger than the social forces they create?
The anthropological values of traditional space

To perform an analysis of our heritage from a social and anthropological point of view we can draw on a wide range of sources of information. While this information may coincide at times, we need to perform separate historical and technical analyses. These various sources of information and the variety of ways in which they can be analysed offer us a better “picture” than one can obtain from a simple architectural vision of urban shapes.

When starting this analysis one has to take into account the primary sources of information related to our heritage as a whole, from the information provided orally by inhabitants to direct knowledge of phenomena such as the traditions associated with architectural spaces and the social use they generate. To gain a better insight into the current relationship between inhabitants and their architectural surroundings, studies of the urban fabric are being carried out. In these studies, data is being collected in the form of graphs which provide information on routes used, on how inhabitants function, on their relationships with their surroundings and on the time they spend in particular areas. This information is then compared with the physical structure of these areas. These studies, which analyse the current relationships between inhabitants and their heritage, give us a different point of view to consider when it comes to the planning of urban constructions. They offer us a better insight and they often provide us with unexpected information.

In addition to analysing the current state of affairs we also have to be sensitive to the constant modifications that these areas and buildings have undergone. By carrying out a study that enables us to assess how certain areas have altered their morphology very subtly over the years while maintaining their symbolic or social values, we can obtain useful tools for new architectural projects. In this sense, it is necessary to draw on a range of sources which are not primary sources in anthropological terms but sources which can help us to determine the cultural value of certain areas within communities and society. By obtaining this information, however diffuse, we can perform a diachronic analysis of the relationship between the population and the surrounding buildings. In addition to the usual use of documentary and photographic archives or the search for historiographical bibliographies, it is also important to look at literary sources (novels, chronicles, yearbooks) or graphical sources (illustrations, prints) which are situated on the periphery of the study of architectural heritage. From these sources one should not expect a precise answer to a question but instead a wide, dynamic vision of the values of different areas and their relationship with their inhabitants.

The social and cultural value of a particular part of our heritage is something variable and diverse. Furthermore, the constant, direct bond which inhabitants establish with their surroundings can challenge the canonical distinction between traditional and modern marked by the 1920s period and used to define our architectural heritage. This distinction, which is based purely on architectural technique, can distort or oversimplify studies of our heritage. The complex way in which the old town of Barcelona grew from the beginning of the eighteenth century up to the twentieth century, for example, contains a number of elements which require more than a simple technical analysis and which show a variety of urban solutions which need to be analysed from more than one point of view. The changes made to the area before the introduction of the motor car or the use of reinforced concrete were just as profound as those made in the twentieth century and the resulting morphology has been able to...
incorporate them, preserving elements that may have lost their original function.
In the same way, the houses in the coastal populations north of Barcelona, have been adapted in ways which go beyond simple technological evolution. Diverse social groups and public private relationships have brought about changes to these buildings: the façades, the entrance areas, the interior and even the courtyards. These buildings have housed inhabitants as diverse as fishermen in the nineteenth century, middle class summer holidaymakers at the beginning of the twentieth century and business people linked professionally to Barcelona at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These inhabitants differ tremendously in their habits regarding work, communication and leisure. However, while the symbolic or social values of the buildings may have changed, they have maintained their validity as urban structures right up to the present time.
By understanding the historical social and anthropological values which have developed alongside but separately from the intrinsically architectural changes we are able to look at our heritage from a different point of view and obtain more detailed conclusions. When the inhabitants of an area do not change it does not necessarily mean that the heritage will be physically preserved. In the same way, changes in the use or symbolism of a building do not necessarily lead to spatial or structural alterations. The conflict that may arise in the relationship between the anthropological, social and architectural value of our heritage, as a result of the information provided by the aforementioned sources, can only be beneficial to our analysis. A diachronic analysis offers us flexibility when studying our architectural heritage and enables us to act more effectively when deciding future architectural projects.
The social and cultural values of traditional housing

What is the fundamental nature of housing in the sociocultural system?

This issue points to an explanation which is more extensive depending on how far the cultural and social nature of housing is recognised. So, housing, as a cultural product serving a social need, stems from a similar production logic to that for other objects produced in the same cultural area. Put another way, a culture, more precisely, a cultural area, is a result of the same “faculty” and uses the same mechanisms to create a social response and assume the successive transformations over time in order to ensure they are adapted to a world in perpetual change. This faculty is “consciousness”. It can behave in two ways, depending on the conditions a culture finds itself in.

Consciousness is critical when it is maintained watchfully, because it is subject to intellectual activity. This situation happens at a particular time when a society faces a new problem or to the need to review the solution to a problem whose details have developed.

By contrast, consciousness is spontaneous when a society is already equipped with responses to the collective problems that concern it and tends to reproduce them without asking itself the questions “Why?” or “How?”. The response takes the form of a total concept, a sort of standard shared by the whole group and which is spontaneously produced at any time when the requirement to satisfy a need of any kind (existential, spiritual, etc.) is shown.

By way of example, weddings are the “response” to a problem raised in all societies. They take specific forms in each culture. They are a complex “action-response” like an organism, that include rituals, meals, clothing, dances and various manifestations in which forms and content are codified. The slightest lack of respect for one of the components of an event as important as a wedding lead to discontent and severe criticism. In all the traditions, it is important for the organisers of the party to attend to and receive the critical point of view of the guests. Because of this, every society has its own representatives in charge of “official criticism”, who see that standards are scrupulously respected. In Algeria, these are the women, notably the oldest ones, because they are the holders, preservers and depositors of the norm for “weddings”.

The traditional form of habitat is also a cultural product that describes a way of collective living and of social and human relations.
cultural cohesion is assured, and which in fact guarantees the cohesion, coherence and unity of cultural production. This is, then, what explains the unity of old towns. The houses all belong to the same conception of a house. The variations are, at a first level, an adaptation on the ground to practical requirements: location in the town (centre, periphery, etc.), position in the fabric (corner, edge, inside a block, etc.), the topography (flat site, sloping one). At a second level, social considerations come into play (sociological type: division of buildings into socially defined districts) and economic ones (hierarchisation of the components of the town: division of districts into areas of activity accentuated specialisation depending on development).

At a higher level, town and village are also types in as far as they form a kind of response to living, a particular way of understanding the agglomeration which, in all cases, tends to produce the qualities of a real organism. Proof of this is the resemblance of villages, towns, medinas and ksours, which is easily noticeable in the same cultural area. Concerning architecture, it is easy to note that historic centres, as the best possible centres of heritage know-how, reveal, through the harmony of the group of buildings, the existence of a behavioural law adhered to by the majority of constructions. In effect, this concerns the capacity of each building to affirm through its architecture the concern to respond individually from all points of view to the user’s needs and, above all, to develop the typo-morphological aspects necessary for the harmonious formation of the group of neighbouring buildings.

This associative condition offers one of the most important guarantees for the establishment of urban fabric, where the configuration firmly and explicitly points to the organisational nature of human society.

So, the typical building is never designed at all, but it is rather an integral part of a physical environment from which it may not be dissociated. Nowadays, this quality is lost. The act of creating architecture is essentially based on seeking exuberance – standing out at any price – and on the intention to affirm distinctiveness under the stranglehold of fashion and, particularly, the type dominating the production of clothes. Because of the combined behaviour of the heterogeneity of their architecture and of the leaning towards distinction, new districts tend to show the image of a cultural situation dominated by uncertainty rather than the effects of aesthetic work committed to quality through the diversification of forms. All the preparations made prior to urban schemes, as well as the decoration operations undertaken afterwards, have not succeeded in returning to these groups the spatial character necessary to consolidate them in social life. This is because the town planning regulations tend to uphold the idea of the distances to be maintained between buildings; they do not encourage the search for the means of bringing them together to form an aggregate capable of giving rise to a fabric representing the profound aspirations of society.

The consequences of this choice of increasingly atomised urban forms will have unfortunate effects on the social organisation of districts and towns. Districts in historic towns, as “little towns” within the “town” because they have a certain structured morphological autonomy (main street, centre, periphery, etc.) are territories in which the hierarchised organisation of social groups takes place spontaneously. Each age group has its specific space in the district and the whole takes on the configuration of a kind of house, in which rules of behaviour and responsibilities are scrupulously respected.
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The social and cultural values of traditional housing

It is also easy to note that the built-up historic heritage represents, through the unitary nature of its language (grammar, lexicon and syntax), the reflection of social unity. On the other hand, accessibility to the comprehension of architecture and town planning, as well as its future, is guaranteed for all citizens thanks to the readability of the forms and functions.

Nowadays, conversely, the different societies on the shores of the Mediterranean show more than a century of libertine architectural production and town planning, not anchored in local tradition, under the pretext of seeking new “models” in the furrow of modernisation, but, in fact, translating a state of cultural crisis. So, heritage, because it is absolutely coherent in constructed language according to a process similar to the phenomenon of language itself, in fact becomes the specific landmark, the place of reference for a possible take-off, breaking with the linguistic disinheritance of our times, which the spirit of consumption does not cease to maintain and impose. It is a form of environmental pollution which damages well-being: the excess simultaneous practice of different languages in the same urban organism leads, unavoidably, to disorder, chaos and the paralysis of citizen participation in the affairs of the City. The most fashionable criticism finds this “deconstructed” aspect of the modern town interesting and does not have any difficulty in comparing it with the attempts at research practised for a pictorial work. Here, exploration, projection towards the future for the future, curiosity and trying things out are no longer considered as methodological departures, but as results that must be replaced in the aesthetically accomplished work. This situation, which tends to erect modern “creator” in opposition to the traditional concept of artist, can only be explained because of the forced relegation of spontaneous consciousness to oblivion and the installation of the uncertainty of the activity of critical consciousness.

Traditional housing, a reference and a context for a return to the roots

The different current roles attributed to traditional housing tend to be summed up in its link to local economic development. Tourist attractiveness and its economic effects on various sectors of activities, such as accommodation, catering, job creation, etc., as well as its capacity to provide premises for commercial and craft activities or accommodation are “buzzwords” for public authorities when it comes to justifying operations to be undertaken to rehabilitate historic districts.

The development of the discourse in favour of the economic interest is explained because of the fact that the notion of “well-being” presented in the traditional building (which, moreover, all societies seek) escapes all quantitative evaluation. Although certain indicators referring to “quality of life” have been drawn up, notably through regulations controlling the production of new extensions, traditional housing has found it difficult to fit into this quantitative systematic and globalising approach. In the same way, the reality of traditional housing cannot be marginalised in a constraining role in relation to the open field of planning. Resistance to “change” is the paradoxical translation of the tacit will to maintain consensual housing in use and to preserve it from all individualistic replacement likely to forever alter a quality it has that cannot be put into figures. It is in these, not very explicit, terms, that modern society expresses the recognition of typological values, which are in essence qualitative, and justifies the practice of legal protection measures for traditional housing.

And it is also through the development of local tourism, which continually gain ground compared to foreign tourism, that it is appropriate to recognise the existence of a new need engendered by the everyday dehumanising pressure of the modern built-up
environment. A short stay in a coherent built-up environment fashioned on a human scale (historic centre, villages, etc.) constitutes a means of going back to the roots, like a “change of scene” in an area dominated exclusively by nature (desert) or country life (cultural park).

Tourism is only acting as an attraction where the causes are mixed with the search for the values of a historic built-up environment. And the greater value of traditional housing is none other than the match between its formal and structural manifestations and the nature of human society itself.

1. It is generally a question of seeking a response to a new need induced by contact with another dominant cultural area (whether directly through physical occupation or by remote influence).

2. The persistence of “types” concerning cultural response can also be verified among people obliged to emigrate to other cultural areas. The example of the cosmopolitan situation in the city of New York, shown by the juxtaposition of culturally different group buildings, demonstrates the will to preserve the existential balance (own culture) based on spontaneous awareness rather than encouraging the “change” to the change in favour, in all cases, of another neighbouring culture. Discourses on the integration of the North African populations carried on in many European countries sometimes tend to ignore this human phenomenon, which consists of them inevitably and permanently bringing with them a heritage of solutions to problems of life without the slightest intention of getting rid of them. All of us, for example, feel the desire to find a restaurant where the menus are close to our culture.

3. Lots of examples bear witness to the existence of a concept of agglomeration. The M’zab valley has several ksours which are fascinating because of the identity they share as well as their dimensions, the choice of site and, notably, their architectural components. This demonstrates that an old agglomeration imposes a threshold on its urban growth for reasons it is not worth mentioning here, and operates by founding a replica of another agglomeration that tends to be produced in the same conditions as the first one.

4. Here we adopt the term “building”, more precisely “base building” to indicate a house. By contrast “specialised building” refers to all buildings resorting to spontaneous consciousness to make use of the set of collectively acquired experiences but which introduces an element of intention on the part of the person who designs the product. Traditional architectural criticism has introduced the following pairs of opposites: major architecture and minor architecture; architecture and architecture without an architect. This distinction becomes valuable in our explanation, but it reconsidered the value judgement. Primary status is given to the base building because of its importance in building fabrics and the town itself and, above all, because of its role in the chronology of the formation of the town. “The base building” is the condition that takes precedence over the existence of the “specialised building”. Evidence of this is the familiarity of the know-how that can be picked up in the same cultural area between the architecture of a simple house and the architecture of a mosque or a church, or even a palace.

5. It is useful to remember that fashion, as a manifestation characterising the consumer society, has not penetrated all areas of cultural production equally. By way of example, the area of cuisine is relatively reluctant to call into question the traditional menu in favour of another one which we might call uncertain. The vital nature of the culinary world, which places more importance on the nature of the product to be ingested than its appearance, is quite difficult to fit into the game of fashion. The scale of the effect of fashion on houses lies between the areas of clothing and cuisine. On one hand, what most marks modern society is the quite small space reserved for the manifestation of the typical because of the monopoly attributed, often with no possibility of sharing it, to the architect. From now on, “you don’t build your house you look for a house”.

6. Nowadays we talk more about reclassification than rehabilitation when it comes to correcting the urban incoherence showing up in modern residential estates.

7. This attitude of contemporary town planning regulations illustrates the trend of modern societies to unconsciously reinforce social malaise by encouraging individualism.

8. In a medina, the district is called a “houma”. It is said to note that the “houma” as an urban space with its group of residents has disappeared in the large urban developments carried out in Algeria from 1958 to the present day. Modern society’s inability to organise itself inside big residential developments, despite the existence of “district committees” agreed by laws concerning associations, demonstrates the influence of the spatial organisation of a built-up framework on the organisation of society.

9. The artist, in all traditional societies, is a character provided with a particular power, who has the capacity to translate into clear and accessible terms everything society as a whole feels but finds it difficult to express. Sometimes official criticism has condemned young singers, judging them uninteresting, but the large number of discs they sell then proves them to be real interpreters of the feelings of the general public.