1. Traditional architecture in Morocco

In Morocco, traditional architecture can be divided into two main groups: rural and urban.

In the field of traditional rural architecture, there are different types of implantation: *douars* in the mountains, *ksours* and casbahs. *Douars*, groups of single-storey houses, are found in the valleys of the whole of the north, centre and mountain ranges of Morocco. *Ksours* are fortified collective implantations inside a town wall with a single gateway and a regular layout of narrow streets. Houses with a central courtyard are usually built on two levels and are found in the pre-Saharan valleys and the oases in the south. The casbahs are fortified single-family buildings of several floors, inhabited by the tribal headman. They are found in the pre-Saharan valleys and the oases in the south.

The construction materials and techniques used include earth, pisé and adobe, and stone masonry for bearing walls. Timber and reeds are used to build the floors, with rammed earth. Decorative elements are found only at the top of casbahs and on some doors of the ksours. These types of human concentration and implantation are well adapted to their physical and
human environment. The inhabitants of this traditional architecture in the rural world are mostly farmers and semi-nomadic stock-keepers.

Traditional urban architecture in Morocco is mainly found in the medinas of old towns. The forms and spatial layouts are the result of a combination of influences from the East and sub-Saharan Africa. This cultural crossover has generated a centuries-old urbanism that distributes the surface area between the dwelling, collective facilities and the street layout. The medina is usually surrounded by a town wall that encloses a specific, hierarchical urbanism laid out around an urban nucleus. This nucleus contains religious establishments with their squares, alongside districts devoted to commerce and the craft industry. Then come the residential districts with, between them and the town wall, urbanized green spaces. In these quarters, the narrow winding streets converge on larger and more important thoroughfares that lead to the medina’s gateways in the walls.

The houses turn their backs onto the street and open up onto their gardens or interior courtyards, ensuring total protection of private family life. The use terraces were traditionally reserved for the women. The riads or traditional houses comprise rooms laid out symmetrically around the courtyard, or wast ed-dar. The façades are made up of colonnades or arches, doors, b’hou or sekaïa. Inside the rooms, windows flank the doors and alcoves. The service spaces (kitchen, wet areas, circulation) usually occupy the corners. The traditional use of these houses was marked by a degree of nomadism, in accordance with the seasons. The stairs turn around themselves, resting on the masonry walls. As a rule, these constructions do not stand higher than two floors.
1.2. Social issues in the medinas

Moroccan independence in 1956 saw the start of migration of the richer population, moving from the medina to the new town built by and for the Europeans, who had just vacated it. This led simultaneously to the abandonment of the large residences in the medina, which, in the absence of maintenance, began to deteriorate. In the 1960s and 1970s, upheavals in the social and economic order also began to generate new conditions. They modified traditional society and economic and production systems and their values, bringing about a rural exodus towards the town. This in turn led to a general abandonment of the rural world and, consequently, its associated habitat. As a result of its fragility and lack of maintenance, this form of housing has deteriorated both very fast and easily.

Due to progressive abandonment and marginalisation, the medinas have become a container for substandard housing. The new inhabitants of the cities came to live in the medinas, in the dwellings left vacant by their owners who moved to new neighbourhoods. This led to overpopulation of the medinas, with inhabitants living in deplorable conditions of overcrowding and degradation in buildings that are now dangerous due to their poor state of conservation. This phenomenon has been taking place in most of the Maghreb's medinas for 30 years now and is the result of a process that has three principal phases: a rapid increase in population; increased density of housing, and the pauperisation of the population.

The phenomenon of over-occupation has become more marked in recent years, with the massive arrival of migrants from the rural world due to drought. Traditional structures were not designed for such intensive use, leading to the degradation and depreciation of the old models, accompanied by a breakdown of the social fabric that gave the medina its internal coherence.

Furthermore, the 20th century saw a new phenomenon starting to bring about structural changes with regard to the location of the medinas. Buildings, particularly riads, began to be bought by foreign nationals, mostly European, who rehabilitate them for use as guesthouses. This phenomenon, which might be considered very positive as a way of regenerating and revitalizing abandoned, run-down traditional architecture, has unfortunately spread without public planning or control. This absence of control...
and follow-up by the public authorities has allowed unbridled development. Today, then, new tensions are emerging due to the social differences between the new residents and the pressures of tourism, and the local population, with radically opposite cultural and traditional attitudes. What could have served as an element of social cohesion has become a new source of tension.

1.3. The rehabilitation of traditional architecture in Morocco

In the course of recent decades, Morocco has developed a good many experiences in the field of rehabilitation of traditional architecture. Most of these experiences have been initiated by the Ministry of Culture in relation to world heritage sites and nationally listed monuments or buildings. In general, they have involved a heritage-centred approach to the restoration of monuments rather than the revitalisation of this kind of architecture by means of rehabilitation. They were followed by private initiatives in the field of cultural projects or tourist-related investment, set firmly in the dynamic of rehabilitating and promoting traditional architecture.

The rehabilitation or reuse of our predecessor’s buildings is a very old human trait, and the examples in Morocco are many and varied. To speak of recent examples, the period of the French Protectorate saw the rehabilitation of several residences or fortifications as archaeological or ethnographic museums. This tradition continues and has grown with the multiplication of experiences in other sectors of cultural activity. Further cooperation projects between the Moroccan government and its partners, particularly in Europe and the Mediterranean, are based on traditional architecture and old urban fabrics. The tourist sector has also, in recent years, become the foremost promoter of rehabilitation schemes in different parts of the country, particularly Marrakech and pre-Saharan areas.

The maintenance and rehabilitation of houses in the medinas are becoming increasingly important.
A new national initiative that considers development in all its economic, social and human dimensions has been launched. This is the INDH programme (Initiative Nationale de Développement Humain), launched by the King of Morocco in May 2005. It consists of implementing development projects throughout Moroccan territory with the inclusion of all the institutional and territorial agents and civil society. The creation of structures based on social measures and proximity is a new feature of the involvement of the State and local collectives. This type of structure should play a very important role in local life. The existence of this structure is seen as increased awareness of the role of local residents’ involvement in the management of district affairs, including the rehabilitation of traditional architecture. In the field of social action, the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism has also launched the VSB Programme (Ville Sans Bidonvilles), which works on the redevelopment of traditional housing and buildings in a poor state of repair. This programme foresees the referral of residents to welcome sites, agreed with the Wilaya (regional prefecture) and local councils.

1.4. Marrakech and the rehabilitation of its Medina

Marrakech, the red city, home to artisans and traders, with its rich built heritage, is an expanding touristic and cultural destination. The apparent successes of this rapid development conceal a worrying social reality, however. The extremes of luxury and poverty exist side by side in the old quarters of the medina. With traditional houses renovated by rich owners (often foreign nationals) and overcrowded, rundown dwellings, the concept of social mix unfortunately seems likely to remain a distant dream for a long time to come. The local elites and emerging middle classes have not yet made any move to return to the traditional spaces of the medina.

Over the centuries, Marrakech, essentially a cosmopolitan city, has created its social cohesion in very built-up spaces governed by the rules of proximity, respect and tolerance that derive from the Muslim religion. The architecture of the houses and riads (garden houses) of Marrakech is not a simple collage of forms; it is the perfect response of an urban population to its housing needs, in keeping with the demands of a site and a climate, using traditional materials and knowledge. The Medina of Marrakech has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985. In addition to its great mosques and monuments, it is Marrakech’s particular urban structure and the way its houses cling together to form derbs and neighbourhoods that is considered essential proof for future generations of humankind’s skill in organizing space for communal life.

Despite major investments made to promote (mainly for the purposes of tourism) the old quarters and the architecture of some large residences, the Medina of Marrakech still has serious social problems. Old houses are subdivided, sometimes squatted by families without the means to aspire to decent dwellings. Far from regressing, this phenomenon actually seems to be on the increase in some disadvantaged districts.

The Marrakech City Council has undertaken a programme of social measures in a disadvantaged district of Marrakech, leading to the constitution of a local outreach structure, the CASU: Coordination pour l’action sociale et d’urbanisme. This project is now being implemented, with a working team that was constituted in late 2006. Further, some 1,568 households living in fondouks and poorly maintained, even dilapidated buildings with specific traditional characteristics are the target of a programme organized by the Ministry of
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Housing and Urbanism, the City Council and the Wilaya in the framework of the contract of VSB (Ville Sans Bidonvilles). This programme proposes to move residents to developed sites, subject to the agreement of the partners, by the year 2007. The schemes carried out by the different actors involved in the housing sector and their partners have not yet been extended to traditional buildings in the Medina of Marrakech. The matter is now being studied and will probably serve to include the Medina’s housing problems in the VSB programme.

The RehabiMed pilot operation, applying its specific method, will serve as a model for intervention to the various actors in local development, both institutional and regional.