

## SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION OF TUNIS LANDSCAPE: FROM A BOURG OF CARTHAGE TO CAPITAL OF THE COUNTRY

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### **Abstract**

*The heritage conservation concept requires a deep knowledge of its values and its architectural, social and economic features. Preserving heritage should include an operational policy.*

*This submission explores issues of heritage conservation based on the study case of the preservation and enhancement experience in the historic quarter of Tunis, the Medina.*

*Today, one may say, that a conservation policy is actually well under way. The result programme addresses four main core areas. These are:*

**Key Words:** *Spatial transportation, tunis landscape*

### **1- The regulation management:**

What institutional, legal and financial means did we have at our disposal to tackle the city's problems, which range from the day-to-day management of a particular neighbourhood to the safeguarding of a universal heritage under threat?

### **2-The public support and outreach:**

The legal structure and the legislation by it selves cannot succeed in protecting heritage. Without helping people perceive the embedded values of their heritage, the work of governments in the area of heritage preservation cannot be fulfilled.

### **3-Actions and realisations:**

The issue related to this topic is to find a viable compromise between keeping what should be conserved, changing it where appropriate, adapting it to the various trends and replacing or refurbishing it. On an architectural level, these projects consist of rethinking the traditional fabric and the detailed architectural features of the Medina.

### **4-The enhancement of the built heritage:**

Restoration works aim at the protection of the heritage while integrating it into the general functioning of the city by adapting buildings to new functions. The reuse of buildings leads to a clash between the existing state of the monument and the further development of its functions. Acting with and on this heritage means go beyond former periods and proceed towards a current creative expression. The challenge is to find the right balance between reviving historic authenticity and providing it with social functions.

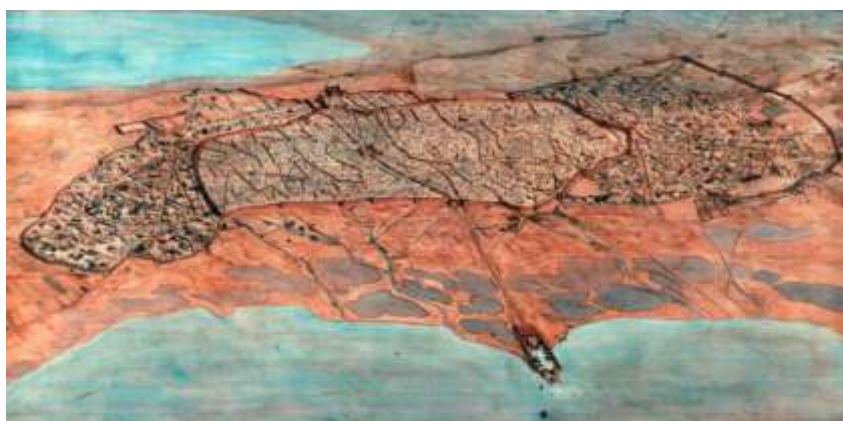
Heritage conservation raises issues related to identity, aesthetic standards and time. Could contemporary touches and elements be reintroduced? How "**to create in the created**"?

The conservation of patrimony requires a good knowledge of this concept, its values; architectural, social and economic characteristics as well as the identification of an intervention strategy. This strategy must be essentially aimed at conservation. Based on a case study-in our case the historic centre of the city of Tunis (The Medina) and the experience of

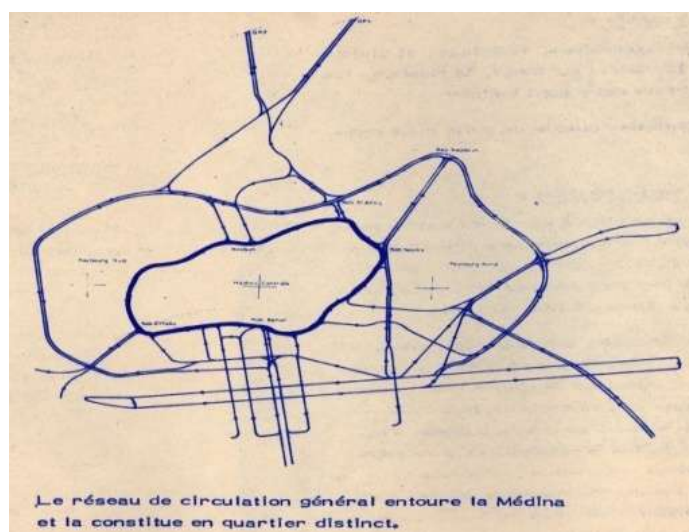
its preservation which began some forty years ago-reflection on the different proposed research subjects could be developed from specific actions.

It would be therefore useful to introduce briefly the Tunis Medina, the subject of this reflection.

It is with the Islamic conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century that Tunis became known. Her location, entrenched, which had never been an advantage for the city in ancient times, gave her after the Islamic conquest an extremely important defensive and strategic position. The city inherited certain advantages from Carthage without having the inconvenience of the position: neither too far from the sea nor too exposed to its threats.



The city includes a central nucleus of two boroughs. The managed boulevards on the site of the demolished ramparts represent the boundaries of this urban unit and make of it a neighbourhood that is distinct from the remaining parts of the city.



Tunis is the capital of the country since the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. This historic site represents an important patrimony of great value covering an area of 270 hectares inhabited by over 100.000 people.

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a new city opposite the Medina was born. Excluding the religious centres, all other political, economic and cultural centres moved to the city that developed under the French protectorate (1881-1956)



Tunis on 1883

After independence, this new city did not lose its characteristics and became more tertiary and controlling increasingly the economic sector in general. In the sixties, the Medina, like other Medinas in the Maghreb and in the East were considered in decline because of the degraded infrastructure, abandonment, overpopulation, the impoverishment of the population, the extension of roads inside the Medina or what has been perceived as renovation work (demolition and reconstruction).



The old city, home to the elite bourgeoisie, was deserted as its original dwellers left. Under the pressure of rural exodus, the old city became a subject of social and political concern. In 1967, the Association for the Protection of the Tunis Medina (ASM) was created. The association was set up in the aftermath of the project involving a roadway to link Avenue Habib Bourguiba to the Kasbah throughout the Medina leaving only isolated monuments: Ezzitouna Mosque, Hammouda Pacha Mosque. This was a courageous political decision far ahead of its time. The project was planned at a time when fighting against underdevelopment was much more important than concerns with cultural, traditional and patrimony concerns.

Forty years ago, the conservation of the Medina of Tunis was confined to ASM. The mission included the conservation of livelihood, activities, traditional wealth, urban and architectural characteristics and ensuring at the same time its inevitable development. The Medina was then an old capital that had suffered from the loss of her economic, political and cultural roles as well as her social content. This marginalization aggravated after independence. Today, the Medina has survived but how has this marginalization been avoided? What means and what procedures have been adopted to ensure her revival?

Today, we may speak of a conservation strategy that has developed over the last 4 decades and whose major characteristics can be identified as belonging to various levels:

1. **At the level of legal management:** what were the means at disposal to face these issues varying from the daily management of a living neighbourhood to the conservation of a threatened universal patrimony? How were the opportunities seized to propose solutions to the various problems?

The Association for the Conservation of the Tunis Medina, (an association created by the Tunis Municipality), was given the scientific tools and a plural-disciplinary team for purely pedagogical ends namely:

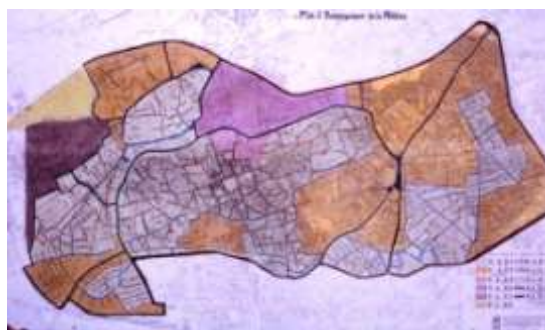
- Understanding the structure of the Tunis Medina
- Understanding the structure of its population
- Censusing economic activities
- Analysing the state of buildings



Plan of the Medina at 1/250

The results of this diagnosis were the proposition of integrated projects but the problem raised was the absence of the appropriate legal and institutional framework for their implementation.

In 1980 there was an important opportunity to seize and it was the Management of the Tunis Community Plan. A specific legal framework for the Medina, applicable until now despite some insufficiencies, has been passed to regulate construction permits.



There was no need to wait for perfect laws. This is how technical assistance to the inhabitants has been set up. At the same time, reflection work continued to seek better legal means for the protection of the historic city namely with the National Patrimony Institute until the promulgation of the 1994 Patrimony Law by the Ministry of Culture. Ever since, the patrimony sector entered an important phase of its history.

2. **At the level of awareness building and training:** It is true that laws by themselves cannot save the patrimony. The inhabitants remain the core of the issue. Building up awareness among the stakeholders and the population and mainly young people through training, workshops and participation in restoration and rehabilitation work is a priority action.

The second characteristic of the strategy was then to develop a defence for the conservation and rehabilitation of the Medina in order to show that it is a culturally revalorizing, socially necessary, economically positive and financially feasible process.

Launching the process of conservation and development of historic cities depends, often and essentially, on political awareness and management decision makers. A form of technical assistance was developed by the ASM along with training at various levels:

2-1 Training and awareness building: Involving young people remain an important challenge in order to ensure the sustainability of all revitalization actions and development of the patrimony. It is within this framework that training workshops are organized benefiting students from various disciplines and nationalities in the form of volunteer camps.



2-2 Training small companies specialized in rehabilitation as well as specialized labour in traditional architectural construction areas (stucco, artisan paint, ceramics etc...) in order to ensure the continuity of an ancestral know-how in this field.

2-3 Training engineers who must be capable of guaranteeing a traditional structure and ensure the approval of the control bureaux.

3. **At the level of action and realized projects:** At this level, the challenge is striking a balance between conserving what should be conserved and modifying what is likely capable of adapting to new usages in different epochs and constructing new buildings where the city requires that. On the architectural level, these projects are a testing of the reinterpretation of traditional typologies of the Medina's architectonic jargon.

The strategy adopted could be summed up as an attempt to meet the requirements of the city's developing reality and find a solution to its revival by carrying out conservation action, conversion and renovation solutions for the threatened buildings. Case by case, and starting from well-developed plans and the possible means, decisions were taken to restore, rehabilitate, reconstruct, adapt or entirely renovate buildings. The objective was the valorisation of both the individual buildings and the historic city as a whole.

These different modes of intervention have been applied individually or to a number of grouped buildings according to the situations, opportunities and the nature of projects. Important investments have been deployed in the Medina for the last years involving infrastructure, equipment and housing. These include the Hafsia Project, the *Oukalas*

(buildings housing a large number of families together) project, the construction of the City Hall at the very heart of the historic town in the strategic location of the Kasbah.

These projects have had a very positive impact on the Medina in architectural, social, economic and patrimonial terms. They have allowed the rehabilitation of entire neighbourhoods identified by the specific Medina Management Plan as restructuring zones because of their advanced state of degradation. These projects equally helped the launching of a housing rehabilitation policy with all the implied solutions at the level of intervention mechanisms including the institutional, financial, legislative and technical frameworks.

The first opportunity seized by the ASM to launch practical projects in the old Medina was the Third Urban Project with the proposition to renovate the *Hafsia* neighbourhood, the old Jewish quarter.

Situated in the lower part of the Medina, in the *Hara*, the old Jewish quarter, *Hafsia* witnessed the first demolitions in the nineteen twenties followed by two waves of demolition and construction in the nineteen thirties.



View of the quarter before and after project

The renovation work took place in two phases:

- From 1972 to 1975, a construction phase was completed involving 100 patio houses and about one hundred shops renovating Souk El Hout (the Fish Market) which links Sidi Mehrez and El Grana markets. The merit of this project awarded the Aga Khan Architecture Prize in 1983, was its challenge to anterior urbanism with its orthogonal ways and vertical constructions. Main and secondary roads lead to alleys and to homes. Each block has its own square, closed to traffic, where children can play. Some of the houses have a central patio while others at the ground level have gardens or large terraces on the first floor. The patio houses, while preserving the advantages of traditional architecture, avoid exposure to open air in winter. All the houses are equally equipped with small yards for laundry washing and drying

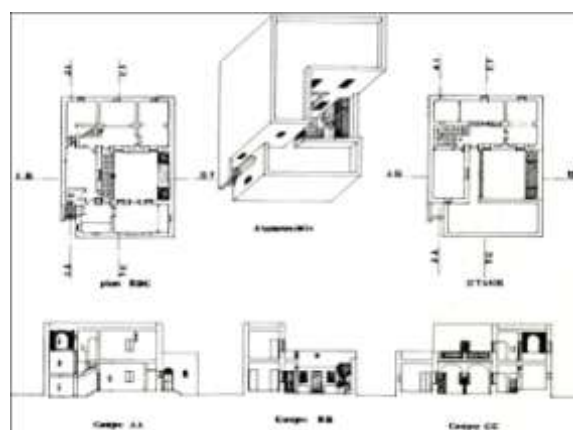


- The second phase began in 1980. The project master was the Tunis municipality and the main constructors were the Urban Rehabilitation and Renovation Agency and the ASM. This project was designed on a mass basis with as objective the mending of the layout while respecting the housing typology and the urban morphology. Homogeneity between the new constructions and the old construction fabric surrounding them was ensured through double continuity.

- i. That of the projected and existing roads
- ii. That of the old and new constructions



On the architectural level, it was an attempt to reinterpret traditional patio typology and the architectonic vocabulary of the Medina. The principle of the patio house has been preserved but its architectural formulation is different as the ground level and the first floor are two separate residences. To avoid the passage through the patio (which is not always central), movement inside the house is carried out through other spaces such as the living room, the hall or the room.



One of the objectives of this project was the rehabilitation of the existing constructions after de-densification aimed at providing each family with a living area of 40m<sup>2</sup> provided with at least one water point and a kitchen. To achieve this, the project benefited from an intelligent montage whose principle was: the new must be advantageous to the old and renovation must take into consideration rehabilitation. This section was also awarded the 1995 Aga Khan Architecture Prize.

However, we cannot claim that we have saved the architectural and urban patrimony without taking into consideration its deprived inhabitants. This leads us to address the *Oukalas* Project which constitutes, until now, a deep scar in the old town. This phenomenon was threatening the extinction of an entire historic estate with unique architectural value.

Since the nineteen thirties, the Medina, which had been home to an urban population, started welcoming extra urban migrations. Rural populations settled in the *fondouks*, the *Oukalas* and in the cemeteries inside and outside the town walls. This exodus accelerated after independence. Rural families moving into the city seeking employment squatted in the abandoned traditional houses. *Oukalas*, where families rented a single room, had been hotels for single workers who would rent a room for the day or for the week. The Medina was a suitable hosting structure. The large empty houses with their patio typology were suitable for letting independent rooms. This phenomenon, dubbed "*oukalization*", concerned not only the traditional houses but all forms of buildings suitable or not for housing including palaces, *medrasa* (schools) and even buildings with religious vocation. In each room lived a family regardless of the fact that the building had not been modified in any suitable way for the

purpose in terms of utilities, toilets, water points and kitchens which were shared by all the dwellers. The *Oukalas* had problems of insalubrities, promiscuity and delinquency. They became overcrowded spaces where people lived in inhuman conditions. The *Oukalas* became a social phenomenon and the subject of concern.



The *Oukalas* were a threat to their dwellers (collapsing structures, cracking walls...) because of their degradation caused essentially by the total absence of maintenance and made worse by the absence of a legal framework namely a law for the maintenance of let spaces and the management of tenure.



Taking into consideration the pauperization of the Medina, the Tunis Municipality and the ASM planned for a social and patrimonial policy aimed at providing dwellers with better living conditions. This is how the project of cleansing the classified the “*oukalas*” where over 3000 families lived materialized. It was developed with in mind the following objectives:

- Saving the tenant families from the risk of collapses
- Saving a real estate patrimony with a universal value

The project was partially financed by the Arab Social and Economic Fund and began in 1990. It was carried out in 4 phases. The fourth phase was launched in June 2004 with the usual two major components:

*The First Component:* The emergency resettlement of households. This involved the emergency resettlement of over 2000 families evacuated from 366 buildings and was carried out by the municipality in three phases over municipal lands in peripheral areas. The houses were attributed to the resettled families who would become the owners. This was an opportunity for a population ineligible for ordinary social housing schemes. From the status of tenants, these dwellers have become owners of lodgings of 42 m<sup>2</sup> over a land lot of 80 m<sup>2</sup> with the possibility of extension vertically. These houses were attributed within a scheme of



tenant-purchaser over a period of 25 years and without interest (monthly payments being \$32 to \$42 a month)



***The Second Component:*** Rehabilitation and restoration of public and private patrimony: The second important component of this project involved the renovation of 404 buildings classified as recoverable by means of consolidation works and renovating their structures. Accent was on the necessity to launch rapidly renovation works which would allow the consolidation of the buildings in order to avoid the risk of their collapse and threat to human lives on the one hand and to stop the degradation of the real estate patrimony on the other.

***Rehabilitation of private patrimony***

***Loans:*** a credit loan for the rehabilitation of buildings was put at the disposal of owners with an interest rate of +5% refundable over 15 years and a free technical assistance provided by the ASM. To date, no less than 500 loans have been attributed to private owners involving over 700 houses.



***Rehabilitation of state owned and municipal patrimony***

40 buildings owned by the state have been rehabilitated. The inhabited buildings have been upgraded to comply with the living standards through management after de-densification in order to have houses providing living conditions equipped with private sanitation and kitchens. During the work, the inhabitants were housed in temporary houses used for this purpose (old student dorms, abandoned schools)

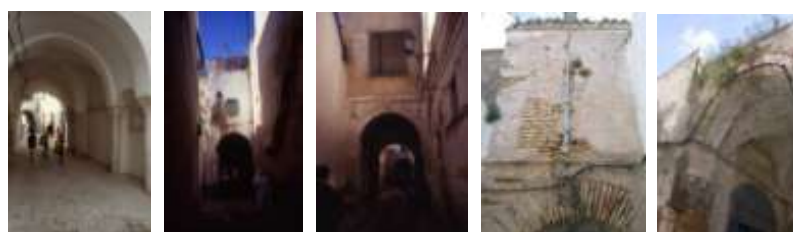
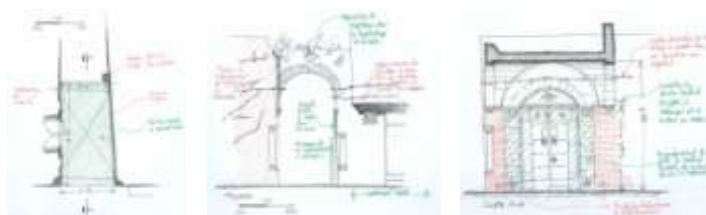


***Restoration***

Buildings with specific architectural and/or historical value are proposed for restoration following a reassignment programme to be used for cultural purposes and socio-communal ends.



Within the framework of developing the old town, operations involving the restoration of the alleys' architectonic and urban elements were carried out with the restoration of about fifty *Sabbats* (vaults, covered parts in a an alley) out of the Medina's 400 some of which were used as *Kuttab* (Koran learning school)



4. **Developing monuments:** Along with the actions cited above, historical monuments restoration projects have been carried out with as objective their integration in the development process seeking to reconcile the necessity of conservation and the requirements of the age thanks to contemporaneous specific assignments. Restoration works have been carried out with as objective saving the patrimony and adapting it to contemporary uses. But the notion of adaptation implies a conflict between the present state of the building and the evolution of its vocations. To the question whether buildings which have lost their original vocations could survive we may have a positive answer. Such buildings may survive thanks to contemporary vocations. This means building within a spirit that is ours (and not that of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries). These buildings must be operational, not in the rational or functional architecture sense but rather as a new different creative expression using adapted means in harmony with the environment. The challenge is therefore to find the tricks to adapt an old building to new needs. Is it possible to find the elements of comfort in such a building namely what is related to lighting, sound, temperature? How to assign them new vocations compatible with their typologies? The challenge to the architect-conservationist remains striking a balance between the traditional typology of the building and the contemporary vocation: What type of materials to use? Is it possible to integrate contemporary elements? How to mark the age? How to create in the already created? **Some achievements include:**

1/ ***Dar Lasram:*** The ASM head office is an 18<sup>th</sup> Century palace that was purchased in the sixties by the Tunis Municipality. The palace covers 2000 m2 and was in a desolate ruinous state. The challenge was to find tricks to adapt a traditional palace structured around a patio to a new vocation and new needs. Is it possible to find the elements of comfort and working conditions in such a house namely lighting, sound and temperature?



Arno Heinz, the architect and the project manager, questioned the impact of this project “of a new semi public services center on a secondary road”. The restoration team chose to preserve the palace’s inner riches and variety. The palace is made up of five parts:

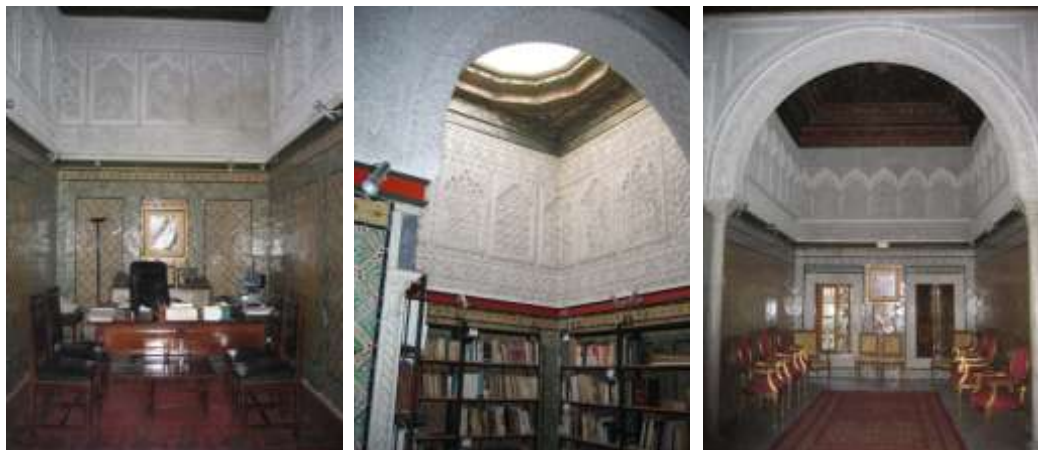
- The main house compound surrounding the patio
- The guests’ compound
- The chores compound
- The servants’ compound
- The supplies compound and the barn

The family house is built over the massive supplies’ compound’s vaults and the old barns which are used now as a cultural center: Club Tahar Haddad.



The pillars have been consolidated and a new roof of brick and stone was laid. These premises, which have been obscure before, have been flooded by daylight thanks to French windows that open on the inner planted courtyards. These openings have been reinforced with concrete in order to avoid any risk of collapsing.

From the *Driba* we enter the Guests’ compound where we have set up the administration offices. The old kitchen, managed around the chores’ compound, has been converted into a photo lab, the slides library and the printing workshop. From the *Driba*, a series of zigzag halls lead to the large patio. The T-shaped rooms and their alcoves have been used as offices and documentation center while the large cross-shaped ceremony room is, like the old library, used for conferences and receptions.



Behind one of the T-shaped rooms, the restoration team discovered buildings in ruins that date from the period between the two world wars. It is in this space, and in two levels, that ASM's architecture and urbanism workshop was built. To ensure sufficient lighting, the roof was made of glass. This section hosts the permanent ASM exhibition.

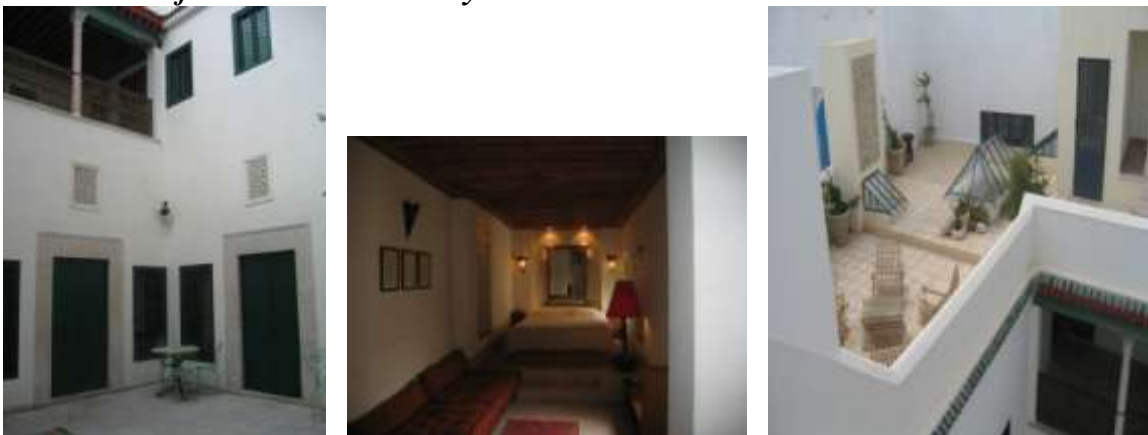


Ever since, a large number of buildings, *Madrasas*, houses and *kuttab* have been restored and given new vocations.

2/ **Palais Kheireddine**: The palace has been restored into a cultural center. It is the Tunis City's Museum and is managed according to the exhibition standards required by the most prestigious museums. To link the two parts of the palace, the ASM team of architects designed a bridge and did not hesitate to use contemporary materials. The footbridge was conceived as a wagon made of steel and glass.



*3/ Conversion of a house into a luxury hotel:*





#### 4/ Restoration and conversion of *Madrasas*:



#### Training center for craft trades

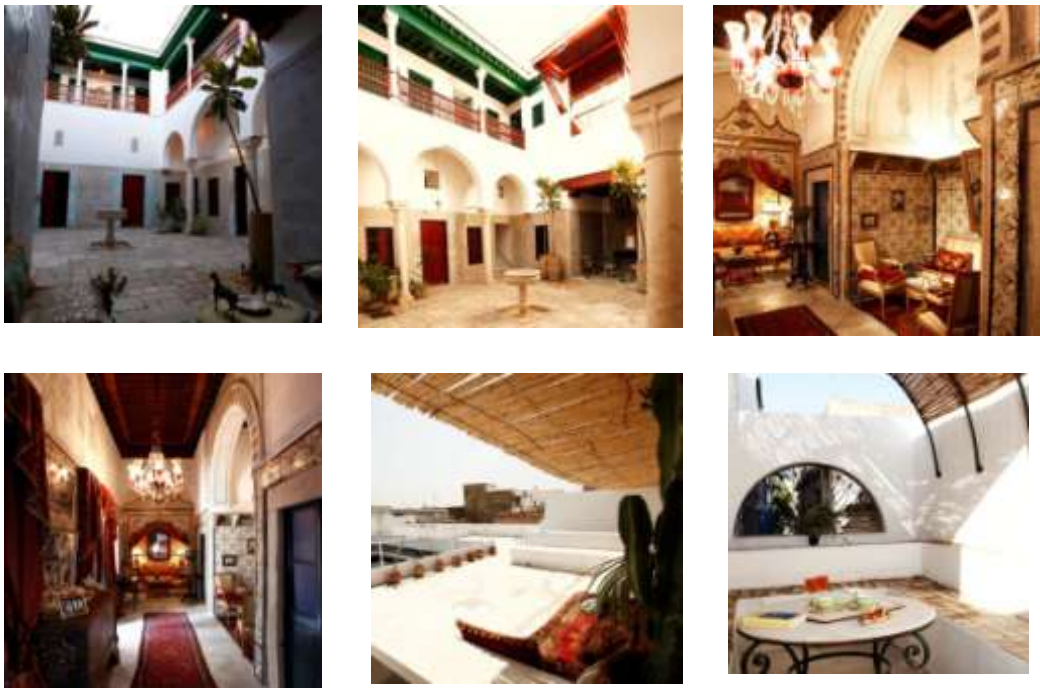
#### Initiatives of some private investors:

The success of this heritage development policy has had a ripple effect early on private owners who took the initiative to restore their homes and caused a phenomenon of recovery of old buildings by intellectuals, artists, students, young couples or executives seeking to settle in the various districts of the Medina. Interest in the built heritage and believes, also, interested local investors who have restored and reallocated buildings of architectural interest, new cultural and commercial activities (art galleries, boutique hotels, luxury restaurants, etc. .) reveals that after the restaurants, the current trend is the transformation of private houses in hotel (thirty hotel projects in progress, three hotels are already open).

#### Hôtel Dar Ben Gacem:



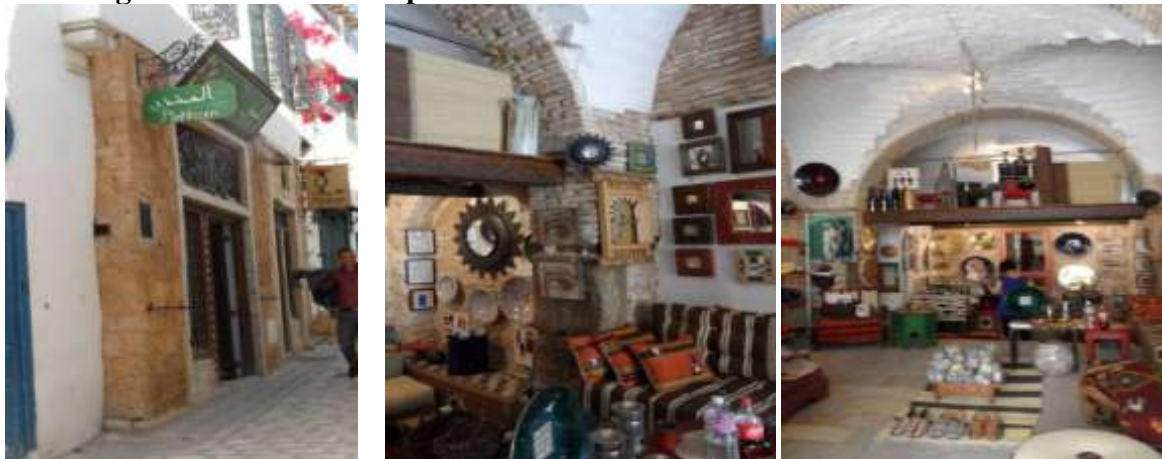
**Dar Traki: Guest House**



**La chambre bleue: bed and breakfast**



**Installing Creative Crafts shops**



**Fondouk converted into space the promotion of crafts and tea room**



**Conservation of recent heritage: the architecture of the Nineteenth - twentieth century**





Palaces on the medina



Municipal theater

Festival off the Medina ... Cap on Tunisian music!



Medina ... the evenings of Ramadan





### "Dream City": Street art

"Dream City" is a contemporary art biennial multidisciplinary in public space designed as a global work of art, choreography interpreted by spectators carrying energy from work to work. It was created in 2007 by dancers and choreographers Tunisian Sofiane and Selma Ouissi to the Medina of Tunis.

The concept "Dream City" was released in November 2007 and continues in 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2015 (4-8 november). It is part of the Tunisian artistic community as an act of defiance around a contemporary aesthetic. "Dream City" is a project that breaks free of the traditional form of the festival and the only demonstration of pre-existing works. Designed as a space for free expression and freedom of movement, "Dream City" encourages artists to experiment more sociability and citizenship by creating a close relationship with the territory (creation in situ) and populations. It establishes relationships unpublished modes with the population by involving, directly or indirectly, in the creative process.

"Dream City" presents the creations of Tunisian artists (visual artists, musicians, actors, dancers, set designers, choreographers, photographers, directors, filmmakers, architects, writers,...) Produced by the association Street Art, creations of artists MENA guests in residence, guest companies, film, video art, meetings ... in enclosed places and open, unusual, social porters, culture and heritage (cafes, houses individuals, chapels, restaurants, schools, squares, streets, libraries ...).





After January 2011, civil society has developed in Tunisia



L'medina wal errabtin



An action for the development and conservation of Hammam-s



**DOOLESHA:** walking the Medina

"It's a good that there is still some cities where we can get lost"

Through a walking tour of the old medina of Tunis, Doolesha attempts to revive the Medina by sharing the stories, legends, memories, and lived experiences of its inhabitants while simultaneously the opportunity for cultural exchange between visitors of the Medina and its residents. It's said, that in the medina, there are spirits, which are constantly revived, through prayer, and music, get lost in winding streets.....



Throughout these fifty years of experience, ASM ensures henceforth various missions in the Medina (consulting, project management works, control works, catering, office, teaching ...) and became the partner essential in any work on the historic center.

It remains above all a place of meetings and research on urban, architectural and socio-economic issues affecting the historic city.

**And Medina will remain the place of life of all generations and all social classes!**

