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Quaderni

Villes Minières | Mining Cities

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دفاتر

VILLES MINIERES | MINING CITIES

edited by

Cecilia Fumagalli, Eliana Martinelli, Emilo Mossa



Series “**Quaderni/دفاتر**”

Editorial Committee: Michele Caja, Francesco Collotti, Cecilia Fumagalli (coordinator),
Martina Landsberger

Villes Minières | Mining Cities

(edited by Cecilia Fumagalli, Eliana Martinelli, Emilio Mossa)

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Edition n. 1

Milano, January 2020

ISBN 9788894488500

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Associazione Culturale Nostoi

C.F. 97839560154

20125, Via Stefini 2,

Milano, Italy.

Printed in Italy by Pixartprinting S.p.A.,
Quarto d'Altino (VE), Italy.

Limited-edition 50 copies. Non-profit publication.

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From Reference to Design

Experimentation Tools for Contemporary Villes Nouvelles

Eliana Martinelli

The urban and architectural workshop *Villes minières* [Mining cities] is aimed at investigating compositional methods and urban design strategies for the planning of contemporary *villes nouvelles*, based on the analysis of some case studies from the late 1920s onwards in Morocco. The workshop resulted in three urban projects, which, while representing very early-stage proposals, convey an innovative vision of the future of Moroccan cities and of site-specific design, open to further developments and explorations.

Adopting a design methodology common to the three projects and involving the choice of references upon which the designs are based, the same urban settlement models have been deconstructed in order to understand their main features and identify the resisting elements of the city. Such elements, which cannot be reduced to simpler components, could be recognized as the *éléments discrets* mentioned by Cecilia Fumagalli in her essay¹. The final projects resulted in the definition of a new system – otherwise defined as *organisme complexe*² – in which the *éléments discrets* have been reorganized to give shape to the urban designs.

The first step of the composition process was the choice of references. As a matter of fact, the action of choosing implied an overall consideration of the conditionings that would be imposed by the conflict between the completed form of the reference itself and

¹ See the contribution in this book by Cecilia Fumagalli, “Historic Models for Modern Urban Settlements”, 47-53; and Roberto Berardi, “Espace et ville en pays d’Islam”, in Dominique Chevallier, *L’espace sociale de la ville arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979): 100-101.

² Dominique Chevallier, *L’espace sociale de la ville arabe* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979).

the pre-existing characteristics of the site. Evaluating the pros and cons of each solution and the possibilities of adapting the reference, made it possible, at the same time, to deal with the main design questions.

The adopted representation technique was the *collage*, which consisted in pasting the reference plan on an aerial view of the site. The chosen references, along with their main characters, were then re-contextualized within the site. The correspondent compositional technique is that of *montage*: the selected urban models were extrapolated from their original context and transposed to the new site by adapting them to its specific constraints.

Russian filmmaker Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn (1898-1948) defined the *montage* as the product of a conflict between two parts that are put side by side. Only this conflict is able to give rise to a new thought³. The two elements of *montage*, originally separated in time and space, are reconnected and re-signified in being contemporary⁴: “The main characteristic lies in the fact that any two pieces, arranged one close to the other, merge into a new idea, arising from this comparison as something different in terms of quality. [...] When two distinct objects are considered in relation in front of us, we are led towards making a deductive generalization, according to a certain predetermined scheme”⁵. Moreover, Ėjzenštejn pointed out that in the composition of any work of art that makes use of *montage*, the representation and the general image should be expressed simultaneously. For this very reason, the representation technique – in this case the *collage* of different architectures – and the resulting general image – the project – should be conceived as indissoluble⁶.



First design exercise: collage Medina

³ See Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, *Il montaggio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1986): 11-12.

⁴ See Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, *Teoria generale del montaggio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1985).

⁵ Translated by the author. Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, *Il montaggio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1986): 90.

⁶ See Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, *Teoria generale del montaggio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1985): 7.

⁷See Sergej Michajlovič Ājzenštejn, *Teoria generale del montaggio* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1985): 78-87.

The architectural example to which Ājzenštejn himself referred in his book in order to prove his theory, quoting a long extract from August Choisy's *History of Architecture*, is the Acropolis of Athens⁷. Choisy's description assumes the presence of a spectator moving through the monuments along a path displaying a sequence of four framings: the Propylaea view; the first look to the square (Athena Promachos); the Parthenon and its angular perspectives; the Erechtheion. The juxtaposition of views, differently composed in the frames, is in itself the perfect architectural ensemble. The distance between two points of view gives a specific rhythm to the composition and allows the spectator to perceive precise impressions, obtained through different types of symmetries and repetitions, capable of expressing the rigorous uniformity of the system. Going back to the design experimentations, the references were chosen on the basis of their urban model relevance and their adaptability to the project site, with particular consideration to their measures, dimensions, proportions, road systems and housing types.

As for the first *collage*, the students adapted a portion of the urban fabric of the Rabat medina, located between the districts south of the Rue Souika and some minor roads (rue Doura, rue Ahmed Bennani, rue Açam, rue Sabat Bouhlal, rue Derb El Hout) and between the north-south axis of the rue Sidi Fathe and the districts east of the Rue des Consuls. The portion of historic city considered by the students is characterized by the presence of the main thoroughfare of the medina, the Rue Souika, connecting two of the main city gates, Bab-el-Had and Bab-el-Rahba. As the name of the road implies⁸, this is the main commercial backbone of the medina, along with the Great Mosque. Parallel to Rue Souika, Rue Bouqroune is the backbone of the residential districts⁹. While choosing the disposition and the orientation of the medina's reference within the site, the students considered the

⁸*Souika* or *souïqa* is the diminutive of *suq* (market).

⁹See Said Mouline and Serge Santelli, *Rabat City Guide* (Singapore: Concept Media Ltd, 1986).

interconnection of these main routes with those of the adjacent modern neighborhoods of Khouribga. Therefore, Rue Souika was chosen as the main axis of the entire project, which dictated the orientation of the new settlement. In doing so, the students chose to leave the urban system open: the compact, dense structure of the ancient city, transposed in the project site, does not actually have exact boundaries; indeed, it is able to spill out into the surrounding areas without any definite limits. The persistent elements, in this case, are the road scheme and the system of aggregated housing.

In the second design exercise, the reference was Edmond Brion's working-class neighborhood of Khouribga, the *Cité Ouvrière des Phosphates* (1936). In consideration of its dimensions, this example seemed to be particularly appropriate to the project site. Unlike in the design method previously described, the students chose to define permeable limits along the longer sides of the area, through the repetition of similar housing blocks taken from Brion's settlement. The second step consisted in redrawing and regularizing the original blocks, in order to find a precise and replicable modular system. At this point, through the technique of *collage*, it was possible to adapt the sequence of buildings to the new site. This procedure led to the definition of a hierarchy of private and public spaces, strictly linked to different ways of space appropriation, which also characterized Brion's neighborhood.

Finally, the third project was elaborated starting from Michel Ecochard's plan for the *Carrières Centrales* in Casablanca (1951-1955). In the first place, the students



Second design exercise: definition of permeable limits of the site

analyzed the city of Khouribga and its historic development in order to find the original settlement and its rules, on which to base the directional pattern of the design. The Ecochard's grid was then analyzed and de-

constructed into its most elemental units. The elements thus obtained were reconfigured according to a different compositional scheme, creating a system of small open spaces conceived in relation with the private patios of the single houses. Housing types were studied and reinterpreted in order to find new aggregative solutions, in line with the needs of the contem-

porary ways of living. The project also proposed the development of each module in height, foreseeing future needs not originally considered by Ecochard. The raised volumes were designed to host different types of housing; as a consequence, the students have dealt with the problem of the solar lighting at the ground floor.

In conclusion, the design solutions developed by the students should be considered as open, and not as final results, but rather as the starting points for a further urban and architectural development of the site, in continuity with the preexisting city of Khouribga. During the whole operation, the persistent modernity of the selected urban models, along with the possibility of reassembling their resisting elements in new organisms, has been verified, confirming the implicit value of the architectural reference, which is still capable of giving meaning to the entire design process.



Third design exercise: Collage Ecochard



Aerial view of Khourbga and the project site



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