



International Expert Meeting on the Conservation and Revitalization of the Kasbah of Algiers, a World Heritage property

January 21-23, 2017, Algiers (Algeria)

Concept note

The international experts meeting on the conservation and revitalization of the Kasbah of Algiers will take place from 21 to 23 January 2018 in Algiers. It will be part of UNESCO's contribution to the implementation of the **United Nations 2030 Agenda**, in particular concerning **Target 11.4** on strengthening efforts to protect and preserve the **world's cultural and natural heritage**, which is part of **Sustainable Development Goal 11** on Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The meeting will also build on the Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2011.

General Context: the potential of the Medinas to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entered into force in January 2016. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) support a universal, transformative, integrated, broad-based and people-centered approach to development. SDG 11 on Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable directly and fully concerns the conservation of urban cultural heritage. In October of the same year, the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) dedicated its central theme to *Sustainable Urban Development: The Future of Urbanization*, aiming at fostering global commitment to a new urban agenda.

At this conference UNESCO presented a report (*Culture: Urban Futures*, 2016) which highlights the essential contribution of culture to the sustainability of cities. This global report provides an overview of specific situations, trends, threats and opportunities in the urban context of Arab countries, including a reflection of the role of the medinas in sustainable development. Considered by modernist theories as typical architectural forms far from a viable urban model, they would be doomed to progressive destruction. This report emphasizes though that a reinvention of the urban model of the medina could open new perspectives, as the medina is a vital source of diversity. Its urban morphology and the typology of its dwellings make social, generational and functional diversity possible. Being a dense and compact city, the medina is a poorly polluted pedestrian area and represents an urban ecosystem that could serve as an example for the future sustainability of cities. A key element of urban citizenship in the Arab world, the urban heritage of the Medinas can be a real strength in favor of social cohesion against the backdrop of economic, social and cultural restructuring.

The World Heritage Convention

The World Heritage Convention, adopted in 1972 at the seventeenth session of the General Conference of UNESCO, is one of the most ratified and internally influential legal instruments for the protection and conservation of exceptional natural and cultural heritage. This shared heritage is distinguished by its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), as defined by the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (the Operational Guidelines), which gives it the World Heritage status.

The holistic approach highlighted by the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011) is an effective tool for addressing one of the challenges faced by historic urban centers to ensure sustainable conservation and development.

The specific context of the Kasbah of Algiers

The Kasbah of Algiers was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992. Its outstanding universal value, as indicated at the time of inscription, is defined as follows: "The Kasbah of Algiers is an outstanding example of a historic Maghreb city having had extensive influence on town-planning in the western part of the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, located on the Mediterranean coast, the site was inhabited at least from the 6th century BC when a Phoenician trading post was established there. The term Kasbah, that originally designated the highest point of the medina during the Zirid era, today applies to the ensemble of the old town of El Djazair, within the boundaries marked by the ramparts and built at the end of the 16th century, dating back to the Ottoman period. In this living environment where nearly 50,000 people reside, very interesting traditional houses, palaces, hammams, mosques and various souks are still conserved, the urban form of which bears witness to an effect of stratification of several styles in a complex and original system that has adapted remarkably well to a very hilly and uneven site."

Since 1992, the World Heritage Committee has been monitoring the state of conservation of the property, which shows serious deterioration of its physical integrity and major challenges related to its management, including overpopulation. The Algerian Government adopted and published in 2012 a "Permanent Plan for the Safeguarding and Enhancement of the Safeguarded Sector" (PPSMVSS) of the Kasbah of Algiers. In conformity with this plan, the Ministry of Culture and the Wilaya, in coordination with the presidents of the Municipal Communal Assemblies (APC) of the competent communes of the protected area, implemented during the second quarter of 2014 an action plan which was financed with financial means allocated by the Algerian Government.

As of today, the responsibility for the implementation of the PPSMVSS lies with the Wilaya which continues to spare no efforts to improve the state of conservation of the Casbah. It does so through enhanced protection and management, but many challenges are faced, including improving national coordination of all stakeholders involved.

Even if several problems have already been addressed, the factors affecting the Kasbah of Algiers can be summarized as follows:

- Degradation of public space and its infrastructures (sanitation, water, electricity and gas) that may cause a domino effect and produce the collapse of buildings)
- Degradation of the urban fabric (empty or ruined plots)
- Densification of the occupation, frequent change of the population of the Casbah

- Lack of maintenance of habitat leading to increased insalubrity
- Loss of traditional conservation techniques
- Lifestyle disruptions and of traditional knowledge systems
- Complex land tenure making public conservation interventions difficult
- Lack of application / insufficient exploitation of the existing legal system
- Incomplete implementation of the Safeguarding Plan
- Multiplicity of institutional actors / Need to strengthen institutional and operational coordination

Objective of the meeting

The purpose of the meeting is to support the effective implementation of the PPSMVSS and the conduct of all other related actions by defining an integrated and coordinated approach to the management and rehabilitation of the urban fabric, as well as the revitalization of its socio-economic structures. To this end, the meeting will address key issues related to the conservation and management of the Kasbah of Algiers by taking into consideration UNESCO's recommendation on the historic urban landscape, and review international case studies that will allow enrich the range of operational solutions.

The specific objectives of the meeting are:

- to evaluate the legal, land, urban, social, economic, management, administrative, and housing challenges related to the preservation and revitalization of the Kasbah of Algiers, within the broader context of the historic city of Algiers.
- to identify operational and institutional actions that could strengthen current national measures in the short, medium and long term;
- to determine the implementation mechanism for these measures using a specific timetable.

Expected results:

- the situation of the Kasbah of Algiers has been evaluated with an approach centered on the historic urban landscape, in the broad sense of the city of Algiers;
- A set of operational and institutional measures has been defined with the aim of enriching the PPSMVSS and improving its implementation. The measures concern: (i) the coordination between the institutions involved in the implementation of the plan, (ii) the state of conservation of the World Heritage property on the basis of all its components, and (iii) the physical conditions and the social and economic aspects to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the Kasbah in the context of sustainable development;
- A number of priority actions have been identified as well as a timetable for their implementation.

Programme of the meeting

The meeting will be organized around 4 sessions:

1. A first session will focus on understanding the diversity of issues affecting the conservation, management and revitalization of the Kasbah of Algiers as part of the wider urban context of the city of Algiers, thus beyond the boundaries of the World Heritage property. This session will also

address all dimensions (historical, topographical, graphic, environmental, political, institutional, legal, socio-economic, urban architectural, health and safety, etc.) that interact at the heart and outside of the property.

2. Through presentations of case studies of urban ensembles –whether inscribed or not on the World Heritage List, the second session of the meeting will give the floor to international conservation actors, confronted with issues similar to those of the Kasbah of Algiers, in order to focus on different processes of conservation and revitalization of historic urban centers and to inspire useful approaches for the Kasbah of Algiers.
3. In order to propose operational measures with an implementation schedule, several working groups will focus on the major issues identified, such as (i) coordination and integrated management, (ii) land tenure and enforcement of the legal framework; (iii) urban conservation and integration; and (iv) revitalization of the socio-economic fabric.
4. The meeting will conclude with the presentation of the conclusions of the various working groups and the roadmap for the implementation of the activities identified by the meeting.

An opening cultural evening entitled *The Kasbah of Algiers in contemporary Algerian history* will be offered on the evening of 20 January. It will highlight the history of the Kasbah in the collective memory through literature, painting and cinema.

Participation (approximately 120 participants)

- The **Ministry of Culture**, its central directorates (DPLBCVPC, DAJ, DEPDI, DCE) and its supervising institutions (National Agency for Safeguarded Sectors (ANSS), Office for the Management and Exploitation of Cultural Property (OGEBEC), the National Agency for Major Culture Projects, the National Maritime Public Museum, Palais des Rais (Bastion 23);
- **Ministry Departments** (Ministry of the Interior of Local Government and Territorial Planning, Ministry of Housing, Town Planning and City, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Wakfs Property, Ministry of Water Resources and the environment, Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, Ministry of Transport (Directorate of land and urban transport, undertaking of realization and exploitation of the urban railway for the agglomeration of Algiers «Algiers metro "), Ministry of Finance (Directorate General of the National Domain), Ministry of National Defense).
- The **Wilaya of Algiers** and its executive branch' wilaya directorates (Culture, Cadaster, Land Conservation, Commerce and Chamber of Commerce, Habitat, Town planning, Domains, Land Management, Town Planning and Construction, Public Facilities, Regulatory and General Affairs Branch).
- The **Communal Popular Assemblies of the Casbah** (APC) (Kasbah of Algiers, Algiers center, Bab El Oued, Oued Koriche) and the People's Assembly of the Wilaya of Algiers.
- The **Civil Society** (Association of the friends of Algiers, association of the ramp Louni Arezki, Foundation Casbah, association of the owners of the property of the Casbah, students concerned and interested by the theme of the conference at the level of the Polytechnic School of architecture and urban planning (EPAU), other architectural institutes).
- The **University** (the EPAU, Saad Dahleb University, Mouloud Mameri University of Tizi Ouzou, etc.)
- **International organizations and partners** (ICOMOS, ICCROM, ALECSO, Arab Regional Center for World Heritage (ARC-WH),
- National and international **experts**
- Representatives of **UNESCO** (World Heritage Centre and Rabat Regional Office).