



UDC 712

EXPERIENCE IN THE FORMATION OF THE LANDSCAPE URBAN ENVIRONMENT IN NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES – MARRAKECH AS A CASE STUDY**Al Echeikh El Alaoui Douaa.***PhD student*

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Abstract. *This paper explores the evolving landscape of urban environments in North African countries, with a specific focus on Marrakech, Morocco, as a representative case study. The research delves into the historical development and contemporary challenges faced in urban planning within this region, particularly under the influence of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties. By examining Marrakech's transformation from a historic city to a modern urban centre, the paper sheds light on broader trends and strategies applicable across North Africa. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, intertwining architectural history, urban sociology, and modern planning techniques. It scrutinizes how historical legacies, especially in heritage sites like the Medina of Marrakech, intertwine with current urban planning initiatives to address challenges like urban sprawl, sustainability, and cultural preservation. The role of adaptive reuse, legal frameworks for conservation, and community-centric planning initiatives in fostering resilient urban landscapes is critically analysed. Findings highlight the unique interplay between preserving historical urban fabrics and meeting contemporary needs in North African cities. Marrakech's experience, characterized by its integration of traditional values and modern planning principles, provides valuable insights for managing urban growth and heritage conservation in similar contexts. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for urban planners and policymakers in North African countries, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive, sustainable urban development.*

Keywords. *Landscape urban environment, Urban Evolution, Architectural Heritage Conservation, Urban Planning Strategies, Sustainable Urban Development, Historical and Modern Urban Dynamics.*

Introduction.

Formulation of the Problem. The goal of the research is to articulate how urban landscapes in North African countries, particularly Marrakech's medina, have developed over time, merging historical significance with modern-day functionality.

In accordance with the goal, there are the following tasks:

- To chart the historical development of urban landscapes in Marrakesh.
- To identify the methods by which these areas have preserved their cultural heritage amidst urbanization.
- To examine current urban planning strategies that balance the need for growth with the imperative to protect historical and environmental integrity.
- To Assess: Evaluate how these regions have managed to preserve their historical and cultural essence in the face of modern development.
- To Analyse: Examine contemporary urban planning approaches that prioritize both heritage conservation and modern-day urban needs.



Materials and Research Methods. The study harnesses a variety of data to examine the transformation of urban landscapes in North Africa. Historical texts provide insights into the evolution of Marrakech's medina, while contemporary scholarly articles offer analysis of urbanization trends. Satellite imagery is used to conduct a spatial analysis of the region, and urban planning documents shed light on the policies shaping current development. Using GIS technology, the research maps the physical changes over time, and comparative analysis with other urban centres in North Africa helps identify both unique and shared elements of urban planning strategies, as well as a deep dive in documents provided by the Urban Agency of Marrakesh (UAM). This methodological framework ensures a detailed and scholarly examination of urban landscape formation.

Analysis of Recent Research Sources and Publications. Recent academic studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of the evolving urban landscape in North Africa, particularly in Marrakech, where the balance between historical preservation and modern urbanization is a prominent theme. Hakim's 1986 work [1] provides foundational insights into Arabic-Islamic city planning and architecture, emphasizing the importance of cultural and environmental considerations. Bertaud, in 2018 [2], discusses the challenges posed by urban growth, focusing on how market forces shape cities, a concept directly relevant to Marrakech's rapid development. A study by Ait Hassou in 2012 [3] delves into Marrakech's urban growth and social reorganization, with a particular focus on the redevelopment of the Medina. Another critical perspective is presented in the study "Development Against Sustainability? Marrakech as a Case Study" [4], which examines the city's adaptation to global development trends, especially in the tourism sector following the expansion of its airport. Complementing this, "The Sustainability of Urban Heritage Preservation: The Case of Marrakesh" [5] evaluates the economic, social, and physical changes in the Medina, arising from recent investments, and discusses the sustainability of urban heritage preservation in Marrakech. Additionally, a remote sensing study [6] highlights a significant reduction in vegetation cover in Marrakech between 1990 and 2020, underscoring environmental concerns amidst urban expansion. These diverse works collectively offer a multifaceted view of Marrakech's urban evolution, illustrating the complex interplay between traditional heritage and contemporary urban challenges.

Main Text.

Building upon the historical foundations laid out by the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties, Marrakech's urban landscape has evolved over centuries, embodying a saga of growth, resilience, and adaptation [7]. The ramparts, a defining feature of the Medina, encapsulate the city's historical lineage and its perpetual evolution. Initially established in the 12th century, these defensive walls have borne witness to expansions and modifications, reflecting the city's responses to emerging threats and urban pressures across time [7].

The Medina's present outline, still broadly reflective of the original Almoravid fortifications, forms an irregular polygon that has profoundly influenced the city's development and expansion strategies. Each gate of the Medina, whether in its original or altered form, narrates a segment of Marrakech's history, serving as both a historical marker and a functional component of the city's urban dynamics. Marrakech stands as



a testament to the intricate interplay between traditional urban planning and contemporary interventions, aiming to preserve its historical essence while embracing the inevitable march of modernization. At this juncture, it is pertinent to present (Table 1) which provides a comparative overview of the strategies employed in Marrakech's Medina.

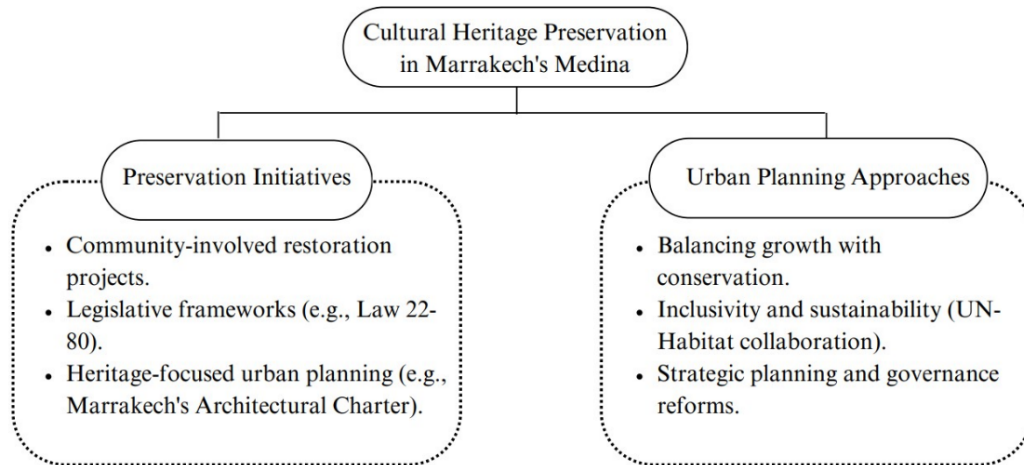


Figure 1. Integrative Framework for Cultural Heritage Preservation and Urban Planning in Marrakech's Medina (Created by author)

This table highlights the synergy between heritage preservation and modern urban needs:

Table 1: Cultural Heritage Preservation Methods and Contemporary Urban Planning Approaches

<i>Cultural Heritage Preservation Methods</i>	<i>Contemporary Urban Planning Approaches</i>
Adaptive reuse of historic buildings	Urban growth management and zoning
Conservation laws and regulations	Strategic urban and regional planning
Traditional building techniques	Inclusivity and sustainability in development
Public-private partnerships for funding	Participation of stakeholders in decision-making
Cultural heritage in urban planning	Integration of societal changes in urban policies
Community engagement and awareness	Development of operational and contractual acts for urban governance

(Created by author)

The city's urban planning practices, enriched by centuries-old traditions and the challenges of rapid urbanization, offer valuable lessons for the preservation and sustainable development of heritage sites globally. This multifaceted approach is visually captured in (Figure 2).

The community-centred initiative in Marrakech represents a significant stride in heritage management, emphasizing education, location conservation, and the promotion of local values. Such projects aim to foster a sense of belonging and challenge misconceptions about traditional buildings, particularly in the context of a global tourism market that often pressures private ownership of old houses. The success of these projects is seen as a catalyst for a new conservation culture, not only within Marrakech but also as a model for heritage cities worldwide. These efforts are crucial as Marrakech navigates the challenges of urban sprawl, architectural



hybridization, and public space pressures, demonstrating a commitment to an urban planning approach that honours the city's living history while preparing it for a sustainable future. To synthesize the details found, the Medina of Marrakech's urban system is increasingly guided by Morocco's evolving urban policy, which now emphasizes inclusive and sustainable city development [10]. UN-Habitat's collaboration with Morocco focuses on implementing Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 11, aiming to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (UN-Habitat, 2023 [10]). This collaboration takes a holistic approach addressing territorial issues, bridging urban divides, and involving stakeholders in decision-making.

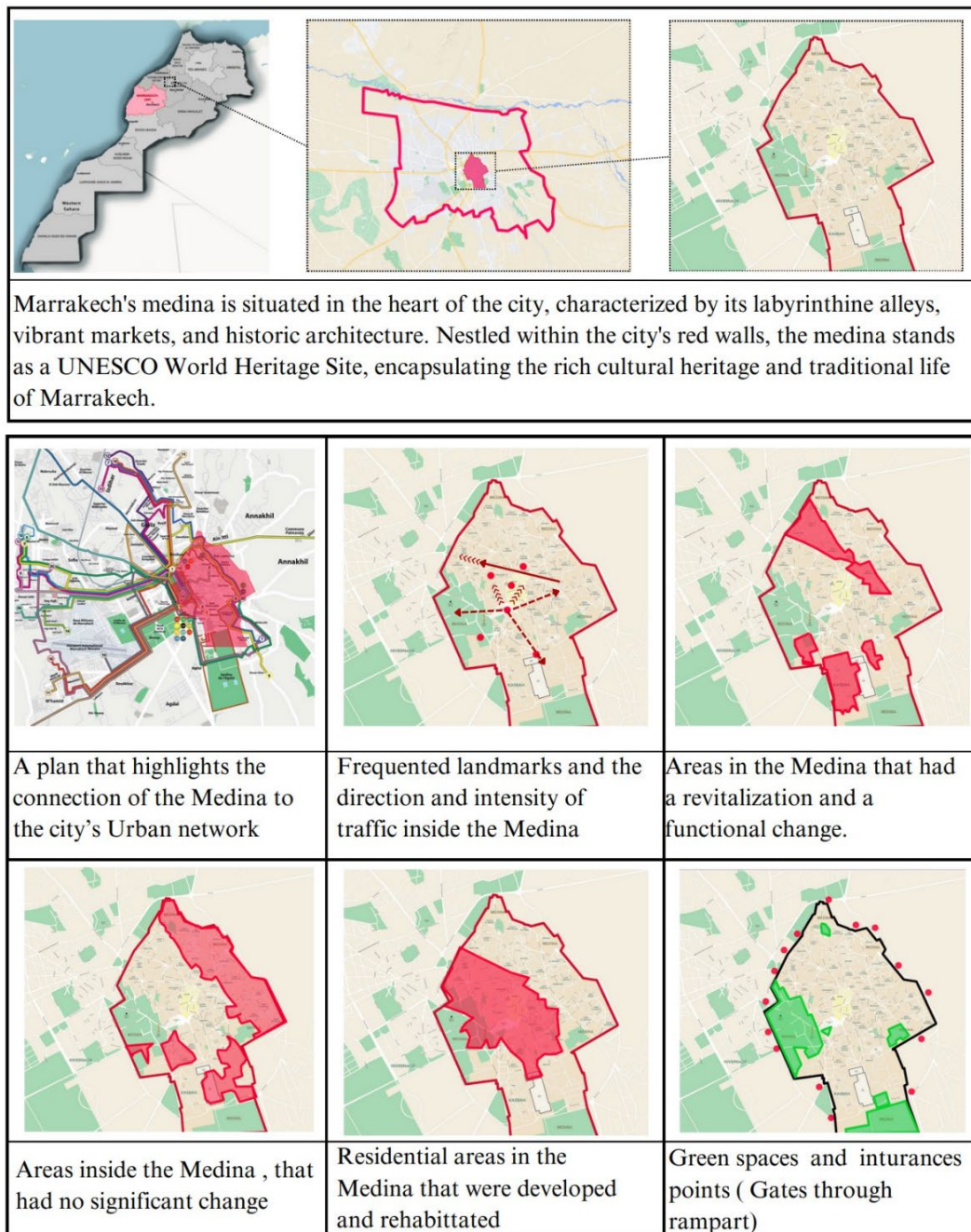


Figure 2: Historical Urban Patterns and Contemporary Adaptations in Marrakech's Medina (Created by the author based on observed documents at the UAM)



The Ministry of Housing and Urban Policy, in collaboration with Al Omrane Holding, oversees urban strategic planning and the management of city growth, striving to balance productivity with inclusivity and to align urban and regional planning visions [9]. The General Directorate of the Local Governments supports strategic urban planning through financial and supervisory roles, reinforcing the capacity of communes for strategic planning (General Directorate of the Local Governments, 2022 [8]). Together, these entities work towards an integrated urban system that not only focuses on the technical aspects of urbanization but also embraces social and environmental considerations, as evident in the ongoing conservation initiatives within the Medina.

Summary and conclusions. This study underscores the delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and advancing urban development in North African urban environments, using Marrakech as a key example. The success of Marrakech in integrating historical preservation with modern urban planning highlights effective strategies like adaptive reuse and active community engagement. These approaches demonstrate the potential for sustainable and resilient urban development that respects and incorporates the historical and cultural context.

Looking ahead, further research is needed to examine the applicability of Marrakech's urban planning model in other North African cities, especially those facing rapid urbanization. Future studies should focus on adapting these strategies to diverse urban settings and evaluating their long-term impacts on social, economic, and environmental sustainability. This will be crucial in guiding the development of culturally sensitive and sustainable urban landscapes across the region.

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