Limits of residents' participation in the heritage conservation operations - The case of Constantine

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the residents' participation in the public operations for the rehabilitation of the built heritage carried out in the old town of Constantine. Constantine has undergone several intervention operations on its built heritage. However, few of them have been completed. This brings us to ask about the causes of these failures. Several hypotheses can be envisaged, including the predominance of private property, which represents 71% of the urban fabric, and the lack of effective participation of its residents. To confirm this, one case studies have been carried out: The pilot project for the rehabilitation of the street "*Mellah Slimane*" in 2005. The research followed a qualitative approach using several data collection instruments. The results of this work show several shortcomings in terms of the effectiveness of the participatory approach focusing on the residents during the studied operations. Understanding these limitations could help to rethink public action for heritage conservation in inhabited historic centers.

1. Introduction

Urban heritage is a major component of sustainable urban development given its intrinsic qualities of sustainability (Rodwell, 2008; Del Espino Hidalgo, 2019; Lai et al., 2019). Urban heritage links the past with the future and provides a source of cultural knowledge, pleasure, and a viable economy for local societies through heritage tourism (Wang et al., 2019). Achieving sustainability in urban heritage conservation can be possible through value-based conservation, rational decision making, and finally, community involvement (Lee, 2019).

After having been reserved for political practices, citizen participation is now introduced in various fields of urban life. This can be explained by the cultural and social progress which has contributed to the change in urban lifestyles. "A relatively rich, educated, informed, recognized and enhanced citizen as a free actor cannot be governed in the same way as man in pre-industrial or even industrial times" (Defarges, 2015). Therefore, the contemporary debate on the active involvement of the residents in the conservation of the urban heritage focuses on the historic centers. These areas are mainly characterized by the predominance of the residential character, which favors perpetual development over time through economic and social exchanges. With the development of new urban and environmental theories such as sustainable urban development, the residents' participation in the conservation of historic urban centers became more and more a real issue (Steinberg, 1996). International conventions and

charters stressed the importance of participation at an early stage (ex. ICOMOS, 1987 – Art 3).

Algeria was an early adherent to international conventions on sustainable development. Therefore, it has had to adapt its urban policies so that they become more open to citizen participation, notably through the promulgation of Law 06-06 on urban policy (Safar Zitoune, 2011). Nevertheless, the recognition of historic centers as urban heritage in Algerian policy only came with the law of 1998. Before this law, historic urban centers were considered as monuments. This late recognition had serious consequences (Dris, 2005). Also, Law 98-04 on the protection of cultural heritage does not fundamentally resolve the impasses in which the conservation programs stood (Lesbet, 2006). The assumption of responsibility for the rehabilitation of built heritage by public actors alone has not produced the expected results, particularly as regards private property (Zadem, 2008).

The old town of Constantine is an illustrative case of this situation. It has been the object of particular public interest in terms of its heritage for the past thirty years, mainly by the public intervention operations launched on its built heritage. Today, some of the restoration projects undertaken on its architectural monuments have now been completed (ex: *Ahmed bey* palace...). However, most of the operations concerning urban and private inhabited heritage, which account for 71% of the urban fabric (PPSMVSS, 2012), remain blocked. This observation leads us to further question the reasons for this situation. The lack, or non-efficiency, of the participatory approach addressed to the residents of the rehabilitated properties seems to be one of the reasons. Therefore, the study of the residents' participation during the rehabilitation projects of the built heritage within the old city seems relevant, in order to detect possible operational failures and their causes.

A number of academic researchers have studied rehabilitation projects for old buildings in the old city of Constantine, most of them having participated in rehabilitation projects (ex. Benedjma & Mahimoud, 2020; Boufenara & Belabed-Sahraoui, 2016; Fantazi et al., 2019; Hafiza, 2014; Merouani, 2015; Touam, 2012). Some of this research has focused on the aspect of consultation between stakeholders (Boufenara & Belabed-Sahraoui, 2016) and others were concerned about what factors encourage or prevent people from participating (Benedjma & Mahimoud, 2020). However, the question of the effectiveness of the residents' participation in the process of the operations and its impact on the results has not been addressed, which seems an opportune opening for us to make our contribution.

The paper aims to study the residents' participation in the rehabilitation projects in the old town of Constantine. The pilot operation rehabilitation of the street "Mellah Slimane" in 2005 have been selected for evaluation. To achieve the objective, various documentary analyses, semi-directive interviews with institutional actors and residents, and in situ observations were carried out.

1.1. Citizen participation in heritage conservation

Citizen participation, the action of "taking part" (Merlin & Choay, 1988), has experienced a real boom in the field of planning and urban development from the second half of the twentieth century. Then, it gradually emerged in urban heritage conservation as a contrasting paradigm to rational planning, and as a principle favouring soft intervention in old centres. Participatory conservation is more than a concept. It provides a way to respect cultural rights of access to cultural life (Spiridon & Ion, 2015).

Nevertheless, in terms of conservation practices, the practice of rehabilitating historic centres, as in Bologna (from 1969), has not spared the shortcomings in terms of citizen participation (Légé, 1986; Tanter, 1979). Moreover, in terms of the legislative

process, and despite the interest of international institutions in participation, it has been argued that international charters such as the 1964 Venice Charter have adopted an "Authorised Discourse on Heritage" (AHD) (Smith, 2006) which pits 'participants' against 'experts', thus making them passive by pushing them into the role of beneficiaries (Waterton et al., 2006). Thus, the heritage process is frequently associated with forms of conflict between actors who possess power and knowledge and those who do not (Gravari-Barbas & Veschambre, 2004; Giuseppe Cina et al., 2019). Several studies suggest a greater focus on the perceptions of those who live, work and recreate in historic towns and conservation areas (Townshend & Pendlebury, 1999).

Accordingly, research on participation has moved from a phase of raising awareness to a phase of researching the effectiveness of participatory approaches. In this respect, evaluative research began to appear, in order to examine the effectiveness of participatory action in urban actions. The study by Sherry R. Arnstein (1969), considered a pioneer, denounced for the first time the participatory actions of federal urban renewal programmes, describing them as "*tokenistic*". Thus, participatory issues in urban planning develop from knowledge and practical experience; they are then theorised in the field of urban studies (Bacqué & Gauthier, 2011).

Habermas' ideas (Habermas, 1987) became the guiding principles for evaluative research. He argues that the rational way to make collective decisions is through a "fair" and "competent" discourse (Renn et al., 1995). Much of the recent literature on the topic is based on this theory (Koorosh et al., 2015; Mannarini & Talò, 2013; Rowe & Frewer, 2004). This literature has studied participation through its means: tools, actors, processes, or through its objectives: level of participation. Nevertheless, in terms of means, each study adopts its own grid according to its context. No grid can be universalised, given the difficulty of generalising the criteria (Rosener, 1981). In terms of participation objectives, several typologies are used as Arnstein's 'ladder' of participation (Arnstein, 1969) seems the most appropriate. It is divided into eight degrees: the highest degrees correspond to effective participation, while the middle and lowest degrees correspond to token participation and non-participation. These lower degrees may generate more conflict (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017). Many improvements have been made to this typology by several researchers such as Wilcox (1994), Pretty et al (1995).

However, a typology does not say as much about what will make participation effective or successful (Swart et al., 2018). Moreover, the applicability of Arnstein's typology beyond Anglo-Saxon countries does not indicate high levels of participation, as confirmed by Donzelot's studies (Donzelot, 2009). In emerging countries, given the difference in the way power is redistributed between the state and citizens, Choguill (1996) proposes an alternative scale (Table 1).

Table 1. Between the Arnstein's ladder of participation, and the Choguill's Ladder of participation for emerging countries

The Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969)		Choguill's Ladder of participation for emerging countries (Choguill, 1996)	
Participation	Citizen control	Support	Empowerment
	Delegated power		partnership
	Partnership		Conciliation
Tokenism	Placation	Manipulation	Dissimulation
	Consultation		Diplomacy
	Informing		Informing
Non-participation	Therapy	Rejection	Conspiracy
	Manipulation	Neglect	Self-management

2. Materials and Methods

To put these theories into practice, the rehabilitation operation of Mellah Slimane Street 2005 was chosen, with reference to its experimental and pilot character. Four dimensions were examined: the participation stakeholders, the tools of participation, the participation process and the effects of the residents' participation on the projects' finality. We based on a qualitative approach, through the interpretation of the relative texts of the project, so as to learn more about the stakeholders, the tools and the process. We also surveyed the concerned residents and the institutional managers involved using semi-directive interviews, in order to know the effects of participation on the finality of the projects. The interpretation of these data can help to classify the typologies of participation in the scale. The choice of these operations in particular seems relevant, given that it is the largest operation of its kind in the old town of Constantine. An evaluation of the level of participation in the operation can provide information on the evolution of the participatory logic in the public action related to the management of urban heritage in Constantine.

3. Results

3.1. The pilot operation for the rehabilitation of Mellah Slimane Street

Mellah Sliman Street (formerly Perrégaux) is the main backbone of the lower part of the old town. It connects the Bab El Djabia square, the southern entrance of the Souika, to Larbi Ben Mhidi street. Today, it is characterised by a very varied commercial activity whose attractiveness exceeds the scale of the historic centre. Its landscape is characterised by precarious conditions where informal commerce by stalls has emerged (Figure 1). The pilot project for the rehabilitation of Mellah Slimane Street was therefore an emblematic attempt to rehabilitate its built heritage, given the large extent of the operation and the value of the street concerned. The operation was launched in 2005 by the wilaya of Constantine by cooperation with the university laboratory "Ville et Santé".

Figure1. View on Mellah Sliman Street

Source: Authors, 2018

The main intention of the public actors behind this decision was to give a "traditional" image of the entrance to the medina. Therefore, particular importance was given to the rehabilitation of Bab El Djabia square and its urban facade (the only part of the operation that was entirely carried out). As for the university actors, the experimental character of the operation was the main interest to which they were motivated, as it allowed them to put into practice all their theoretical knowledge about built heritage (particularly during the Algerian-Italian cooperation for the elaboration of the Master Plan between 2003 and 2005), as well as the new urban vocabulary in terms of sustainable development and urban projects. This experiment was also an opportunity to provide training for architecture students and local craftsmen, in order to possibly extend the dynamics of rehabilitation to the other districts of the old city.

The operation was implemented in two phases. The first aimed to rehabilitate the façades and the VRD along Mellah Slimane Street and Bab El Djabia Square. During this phase, the work made it possible to rehabilitate the street's ground floor and to rehabilitate the facade of a single house in Bab el Djabia as an experiment. Subsequently, the consultations undertaken between the various political, technical and academic stakeholders, as well as civil society, made it possible to extend the operation to a second phase which will focus on rehabilitation projects for a few houses on the street (TOUAM, 2012). In 2007, several houses were selected for rehabilitation operations of an 'experimental' nature (Merouani, 2015), of which 7 houses have effectively started studies and rehabilitation work (see table 2 and the map in Figure 2).

Table 2. Details of the rehabilitated properties

N	Property	Function		Legal status	Current progress	project
1	Houses 12 and 12 bis	Housing commerce	and	State-owned property for rent	Completed	
2	Houses 19 and 19bis	Housing commerce	and	Private	Completed	
3	Dar el wesfane 21	Housing and traditional rites		Private	Completed	
4	Dar Ali bouderdja 5	Housing		Private	Stopped	
5	Dar gaid errahba 02	Housing		Private	Stopped	
6	Dar el arch 28	Housing		Private	Stopped	
7	Dar bourbaia 52	Housing		Private	Stopped	
8	Dar chikh el arab 93 and 93bis	Housing commerce	and	Private	Ongoing	
9	Tobacco manufacture 94	Housing		Private	Not started	

These operations have been financed exclusively by public funds using various sources: the communal development programme (PCD), culture funds and the housing tax (Boufenara & Belabed-Sahraoui, 2016). However, all of these projects encountered several operational constraints (Merouani, 2015), which led to the suspension of several of them after their start. In this respect, the investigations carried out on the cases of the houses that have been completed and others that have been stopped can give us rich lessons on the causes of these blockages, as well as on the place of the residents during this operation.

Figure 2. Location of rehabilitated properties in the street Source: PPSMVSS 2012 edited by the authors

3.1.1. *The participation of the inhabitants in the operation*

- Engaged stakeholders

The operation had an experimental approach, as it was the first experience of this kind in Constantine, which made it a good opportunity to experience concretely the practice of heritage rehabilitation. In terms of stakeholders, the pilot project was directly supervised by the Wilaya of Constantine, which is the main initiator. The authorities of the Wilaya insisted on the "collaborative" approach (Boufenara & Belabed-Sahraoui, 2016), by involving both university actors (research laboratories, researchers and students), and civil society associations, such as the association of the friends of the rock, the friends of the palace, and the association of the owners (Merouani, 2015). On the other hand, the department of urban planning and construction "DUC" was in charge of the management of the project. At the same time, the involved associations have played a major role in raising the awareness of the residents, or even in proposing architectural designs for the street façades (ex, figure 3).

Given the lack of a specialised structure for the rehabilitation of heritage in Constantine at that time, a structural adaptation had to be made in order to manage the operation effectively, to bring together the stakeholders involved and to facilitate

communication between them. In this respect, a rehabilitation cell was set up¹ as a local intermediary structure bringing together representatives of the various institutional and civil actors. It supervised the coordination and consultation between these stakeholders. *"The members of the cell were all from the old city; therefore, they were all motivated to do something good there"* (Extract from an interview with a former member of the cell).

Figure 3. Façade proposed by a member of the association les amis du muse
Source: Boufenara & Sahraoui, 2016

Dialogue with all the stakeholders, especially the concerned residents and users, was one of the principles of the operation, as confirmed by these passages written by one of the university researchers involved: *"We focused our greatest interest on dialogue as a very strong tool for legitimising the project"* (Hafiza, 2014).

The objectives of the communication approach were to reach the different social groups in the street with specific tools: the owners and tenants directly concerned, the shopkeepers and the passengers. However, due to the lack of communication specialists during this operation, the consultation process remained rather simple on the whole: *"Being the first experience in this field and in the absence of a specialised staff (no sociologist, communication specialist, etc.), our communication process had to remain simple, to gain the trust of the users and to facilitate their participation"* (Hafiza, 2014).

- Participation tools

Besides the technical and financial means mobilized for the studies and the realization of the project, specific means have been mobilized for the participation of street residents in the project. These means vary from billboards, awareness raising campaigns and public meetings in the head office which was dedicated to the rehabilitation cell in the Medersa of Constantine (located at the northern end of the rue mellah Slimane). The residents of the rehabilitated houses, as being directly concerned, were targeted through specific tools: a questionnaire survey and consultation meetings in the headquarters of the cell (Hafiza, 2014).

¹ According to the consecutive decrees of the Wali N 23 of 08/01/2003 and N 1769 of 13/11/2005 (Merouani, 2015).

- The participation process

The process of the pilot project was partly similar to that of ordinary public projects, in that it was divided into several phases: a phase of project preparation by the decision-makers; a phase of study preparation by committed architects and university teams; and a phase of execution of the works by the selected construction companies.

During the project planning phase, the participation of the residents was not solicited by the official top-down process. However, some decisions relating to the operation were not widely communicated to the general public, such as the selection criteria for the houses to be rehabilitated. In this respect, our interviews show that some owners, thanks to the mobilization of their knowledge networks, were able to take early action to benefit from the operation and include their houses in the list of rehabilitation projects. Moreover, some of these owners have offered to put their properties available to the cultural department in order to convert them into cultural infrastructures: " mentioning for example the conversion of *Dar Gaid Errahba* (house 02) into a musical café, and of *Dar Ali Boudarja* (house 05) into an association for heritage " (Boufenara & Sahraoui 2006). Such initiatives, benefiting from certain ambiguities accompanying the decision-making process, can constitute bottom-up participatory mechanisms.

Figure 4. The Gaid Errahba house after the closure of the rehabilitation site and acts of vandalism. Source: Authors, 2018

Consideration to involve residents concretely in the operation did not begin until the study phase. Thus, street merchants and passengers were addressed through billboards and awareness campaigns. The main objective of this approach was to gain their understanding and avoid their anger following the planned disruptions (Hafiza, 2014). On the other side, the residents of the houses to be rehabilitated, being directly concerned by the projects, were addressed by special tools: demographic surveys and meetings. It was necessary to know the social composition of the housing and related commercial spaces in order to plan the temporary rehousing.

In some cases, the preparation of architectural studies in particular saw a significant degree of involvement. A number of residents have stated that they participated in the preparation of the designs together with the architects, as the owner of Dar El Bahri shows: "the architect did not do anything with his head. It was me who told him what to do". However, the inhabitants of houses 12, 12bis and 19, 19bis stated that they had been consulted, but their opinions were not really reflected in the established plans.

The realization phase, unlike the previous one, was not very favorable for the presence of the residents, most of whom were moved away from the old town (residents of houses 12, 12bis and 19, 19bis) or had residences elsewhere. Only a few of those interviewed stated that they were present during the works, such as those in the Dar el Bahri house, where the project was successfully completed. Moreover, public actors did not provide tools to inform the residents of the progress of the rehabilitation work on their house in real time. This was the cause of several problems, as in the case of the Dar Gaid Errahba house (figure 4), where work was interrupted without informing the inhabitants. As a result, the house was left unguarded for several days, resulting in vandalism and looting of these valuable architectural objects.

After the completion of work on the three rehabilitated houses 12-12bis, 19 19bis, Dar el Bahri, these houses were reopened to allow the residents return to their residence. However, the inhabitants of houses 12, 12bis and 19, 19bis claim that no official document of receipt of their projects has been given to them, as the whole operation is still in progress. Moreover, although a periodic inspection program has been planned to ensure that the operating and maintenance rules of the rehabilitated houses are respected, our interviews show that this program has not been properly implemented. In addition, after a few years of occupancy, the residents claim that the rehabilitated houses have already suffered damage to the interior and exterior plastering. This damage was explained by the residents interviewed by the poor execution of the works by the companies which proceeded with techniques that, according to them, were imported from the hot Saharan towns, making them unsuitable for the climate of Constantine.

- The effects of participation

In order to analyse the impact of the participation of the inhabitants on the success of the operation, we first surveyed the residents of the three completed houses, then the residents of the other houses that had not yet been completed.

For the "Dar el Bahri" house, the owner proved from the outset his willingness to be present during all the phases, through his efforts to include his house in the project, the consultation of the studies with the design studio, and his permanent presence during the realisation. Indeed, the owner has shown his great satisfaction with the effect of his participation on the realisation of his project. In spite of this, the owner had some complaints about the quality of the plaster used, which had deteriorated a few years after delivery, which prompted him to embark on further work on his own. This work consisted of putting in place an earthenware cladding for the patio of the house (Figure 5).

Figure 5. The patio of the Dar el Bahri house between the reception of the rehabilitation project (2016) and after the rehabilitations works made by the owner (2019). Source: Authors

However, the case of the houses 12-12bis, 19-19bis (figure 6) seems different. The residents stated that they were not sufficiently involved in the study phase: *"The design studio made us narrow and unventilated rooms... we share the entrance of the house with an external neighbour of the family... The plaster is deteriorating... look we have brought some supplies to recover it"*. Moreover, the experimental aspect of the operation was widely denounced by the inhabitants: *"they experimented their skills on our house... it was degraded at the beginning, but it was more adapted than it is today"*.

Figure 6. View of the house 19-19 bis showing the detachment of the external plaster after the works. Source: Authors, 2019

Dissatisfaction and conflicts related to the lack of residents' participation seem clearer in the cases of houses not yet completed, as shown by the case of the Gaid Errahba house mentioned above, or the case of house 93. In this case, the work caused serious damage to the interior façade of the house (the patio), which partially fell into ruin. As a result, the house owner expressed his anger at the incompetence of the companies, and decided to resume the work alone with his own means in order to save his family's house.

However, we can notice other positive effects of this operation on the increase of the residents' motivation to participate in the conservation of the old town, which was particularly manifested through the rehabilitation demands submitted to the rehabilitation cell. According to Azziz, (2006), no less than 612 applications for heavy and light rehabilitation were submitted by the residents to the cell in charge of the rehabilitation operation of Mellah Slimane Street (Azziz, 2006). This dedication can be explained, on the one hand, by the introduction of a financial package enabling the residents to benefit from a state subsidy of up to 60% of the cost to rehabilitate their houses as part of the heritage fund. The number of applications fell after the operation, where the ANSS registered 41 applications between 2013 and 2017 (the time of the survey) to benefit from this subsidy, despite the fact that this scheme has remained frozen until now due to austerity measures. On the other hand, this dedication can also be explained by the freezing of re-housing programs by the Wilaya, whose aim was to encourage residents to stay in place and rehabilitate their homes.

4. Discussion

Table 3 below summarises the participation actions in this operation. The interpretation of the data collected shows a higher level of participation compared to the first operations studied. On the other hand, the choice of the participation tools used is a "one-way" type of communication (Rowe & Frewer, 2000) in most cases. This can be explained by the fact that the concern of decision-makers and experts was focused more on the knowledge of the social context relating to housing, informing to avoid possible misunderstandings, consulting the project choices (Hafiza, 2014). As a result, the dominant aspect has been maintained, sacralising the political and expert word over the word of the ordinary residents. Moreover, the organization of the participative actions according to the project phases reflects a relatively late involvement of the residents, with an absence of participation in some phases. However, the spontaneous actions of the residents in the operation reflect their motivation to mobilise for actions related to their inhabited environment and their identity.

Table 3. Summary of the participation actions in the operation

Action model	Phase		Operation set-up	Study	Realization	Reception	Typology of participation
	Level of participation						
Public action	Information			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays Meetings Awareness campaigns Survey questioned * 		Proposed rules for the use of rehabilitated dwellings	Tokenistic
	Consultation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation Meetings for project decisions 			
	Concertation						
Social action	Automobilization	Initiative to include houses in the project*.	proposals of opinions for design* funding proposal*	Space preparation* Assistance on site*	Modification and remodeling of spaces* Resumption of stopped work * Maintenance and care*		Partnership/ Self-management

*: *partially observed*

The involved public stakeholders confirm the difficulty of implementing this operation for several reasons, notably the conflicts with the residents following the different decisions taken: the land operation, the future use of the buildings, the long duration of the projects, the unsuitable construction techniques and the damage to the rehabilitated dwellings. However, several improvements were noted in this operation compared to the previous program, especially the strong involvement of university actors and the structural adaptation carried out through the creation of the rehabilitation cell in order to be closer to the residents. The latter played a considerable role in bringing together institutional actors, civil society and ordinary residents.

Overall evaluations of the degree of residents' participation in this operation remain difficult to make. Nevertheless, it can be concluded from our analysis that participation cannot be qualified as "effective" in the sense of Arnstein (1969) or Chouguil (1996): partnership, delegation of power. The participatory actions recorded fall within a typology of moderate and rather token participation according to Arnstein's ladder, determined by actions of information, one-way consultation, and rarely, by two-way consultation, with a limited spontaneous contribution from the residents.

5. Conclusions

The objective of this article was to study the residents' participation in public rehabilitation operations of the built heritage in the old city of Constantine. The investigations on the pilot operation for the rehabilitation of the Mellah Slimane Street revealed that the implementation of residents' participation in the public heritage conservation actions in Constantine is still confronted with several deficiencies. These deficiencies were detected both at the level of the stakeholders through the centrality and domination of the decision and the lack of communication specialists; at the level of the operations process through the late and non-continuous adoption of participation; at the level of the participation tools through the adoption of one-way communication techniques. All of this implies that the effects of the participatory approach on the finalities of the conservation operations are far from the expectations. In fact, the logic that can summarise the policy of public actors with regard to the residents' participation is indeed a set of 'techniques, prescriptions and ideologies' (Lussault, 2007), which allows public institutions to strengthen their power over urban spaces and societies rather than to ensure their empowerment. Participation in the studied case was clearly existent, although symbolically, as long as it remained 'consultative' rather than 'deliberative', and did not succeed in destabilising the "administrative routine" (Safar zitoune, 2011). The residents' role does not go beyond the power of suggestion and not of decision (Kadri & Kettaf, 2018).

Face to this form of implication, residents' responses varies from passive submission, to a clever ruse to achieve personal objectives, or to frontal opposition to stop actions that encroach on their rights. In these actions, the inhabitants demonstrate various "civic competencies" (Berry-Chikhaoui & Deboulet, 2002; Deboulet & Nez, 2013; Nez, 2015) in mobilising, communicating and structuring for the formation of pressure groups.

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