Tafíllet, a community project to preserve the M’Zab Valley

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Abstract

The urban morphology of the valley of the M’Zab (Ghardaia, southern Algeria), is characterized by a continuous developing landscape: first a growth beyond its ksour’s (fortified villages, singular ”ksar”) battlements, then within the palm groves which initially hosted a secondary habitat, transformed into permanent habitat by the uncontrolled urban growth. Nowadays, Tafíllet, a community projet, with local architecture style, associated to the modern comfort and partially funded by Algerian state, is giving a good exemple to be followed of a responsible implantation, outside the valley. This communication will attempt to demonstrate, how Tafíllet has to considered as solution to preserve the M’Zab’s valley, how housing policies are involved in funding and what was the role of this community in its implementation.

Keywords: Town planning, housing policy, community, palm grove, M’Zab.

Introduction

The M’Zab valley in Algeria houses 5 ”Ksur” (fortified villages, singular ”ksar”); El Atteuf (around 1010), Melika (1048), Bunura (shortly after Melika), Beni Isguen (1050) and Ghardaia (1053), exhibiting homogenous and specific urban shapes. The population of these Ksur is predominantly Ibadite, it is characterised by quite strict behaviour rules and morals. Commonly called pentapolis, on account of the number of Ksur, the M’Zab valley holds a very rich architectural and cultural heritage. Inscribed since 1982, on the list of world heritage sites, this millenary masterpiece of human genius, erected under particularly unfavourable (climatic, topographical) conditions may be toppled by the massive occupation of housing on lands which until then had not been devolved to that usage. From the Oued bed, to the flanks of the valleys, new constructions accentuate the threat of seeing palm groves disappear, which would mar its urban landscape, as well as damage the equilibrium of its ecosystem, since the valley has enjoyed strong urban growth, and in the absence of adequate zones of extension, the oasis space has seen its perimeter decrease systematically, causing palm groves to be whittled away permanently. Today, safekeeping of the Ksur and of agricultural lands is imperative; the local population is quite aware of it. Thus, this communication will endeavour to show how a housing programme called ”Tafíllet project” was created in that crucial moment; when the M’Zab valley needs to relieve the urban pressure and to put an end to spontaneous implantations, by imposing a new type of extension, on a territory marked by erratic urbanisation. This communication will be structured in two parts: first a brief overview of the M’Zab’s valley urban morphology, then the presentation of Tafíllet to better understand the urban context in which it operates.
Evolution of the urban morphology of the M'Zab valley

Figure 1. The 5 ksour Valley before the colonial period

It is important to point out before any operation on the urban fabric of the M'Zab valley that the traditional institutions have been in force until nowadays. Indeed, the Mozabites have quite a particular organisational system, which has long shaped their cities independently from any administration, and furthermore, by securing perfect autonomy. In this region, situated 360 miles in the South of Algiers (capital city of Algeria), occupied by a population following predominantly the Ibadite Rite, the social, political and religious conventional structures are still present, even if they do not have the same influence as before, formed of sages, and prominent people of the town, they remain quite present, more particularly inside the Ksur, even if their contribution seems to be limited to the social aspect (financial support of widows, orphans, neighbourhood feuds ... etc), and the omnipresence of the conventional structures in the different spheres of life in the past does not appear so operational. the latter endeavour to preserve the ancestral values and to transmit them to the younger generations, but they tend today to weaken, nudged by soaring individualism. What makes the difference between a M'Zab city and other ones of its time, is that in its germ, the city already contained it organisation.There is nearly thousand years, the M'Zab’s valley had been urbanized (Roche 1973).

The increasing urbanisation in the M'Zab is destroying the characteristics proper to this exceptional territory without the slightest care, on the architectural and urbanistic as well as economic, social and maybe especially religious planes. These oasis, although remarkable in many ways, tend to wane inexorably under concrete and inevitably, the urban landscape has experienced considerable changes, to the extent that the M'Zab is now a far cry from its ancient status; far from a pentapolis which clearly overshadowed the other types of town of this vast desert (Frey 2005). The beginning of the urban, social and architectural transformations can be noted as the annexation of the Mozabite territory in 1882, during the French Occupation, indeed a new administrative structure was imposed on the towns of the confederation during the colonial period (Didillon, Donnadieu 1977), which has disrupted the traditional organisation, which had long worked free from all administrative constraints. The industrialisation of the region and the discovery of gas and recently oil fields has also impacted the organisation of this territory, in addition to its geographic situation, on the doorstep of the desert on one of the most important road axes at national scale and the presence of an international airport.
Today, the balance seems most unstable, between responsible urban planning, and spontaneous town planning. Even if at the moment the political volition to organise the national territory, most pointedly that of the M’Zab, becomes meaningful, essentially when the population is involved.

Factors of urban growth

The growth of the towns in the M’Zab is governed by very complex factors, situated in this arid, desertic environment, with this unforgiving soil as described by Bourdieu, as a soil which is almost exclusively rocky, with sandy beds in the deep of the Oueds, primitive unsuited to cultivation (Bourdieu 1958), the towns of the M’Zab have developed in an almost paradoxical context. According to several hypotheses, the formation of the towns of the M’Zab has not been the product of chance and depended on several factors: “The M’Zab is located in the desert, and was seemingly at the time of its foundation, remote from any significant caravan road. But undoubtedly the region of the M’Zab was part of the displacement zone of the Ibadite merchants, and, to settle in the M’Zab, they certainly had to know the region” (Brahim Benyucef 1986). The Mozabites, when they settled in such a remote and hostile place, in a nature forsaken environment, which at first did not offer any opportunity for urban development, not to mention self-fulfilment, were obviously looking for seclusion. Contact with the outside world was then limited, so as to defend and protect their ideology, which could not but give rise to social organisation systems, as well as to power structures which secured the guarantee of a socio-political autonomy to the M’Zab, as mentioned previously.

After a few centuries of withdrawal and seclusion, the Mozabites finally open up to the outside world, first of all by emigrating to the North (the Tell) for commerce, which constituted a necessity, since agriculture could not provide in itself the sole economic activity of the valley, the oasis, as E.F. Gautier wrote, cold not long remain self-sufficient, it is a catch-22 situation, a financial paradoxon, and, properly speaking, a millionaire's fancy (Bourdieu, 1958). It should be noted that in addition to this economic mission, it represented a social mission since it would enable to so secure work to the members of the community, thereby highlighting strong mutual aid.

On the other hand, the M’Zab saw increasing commercial exchanges, since the local Ghardaia market has been turned into a true commercial focus and the Mozabites, although witnessing the progressive opening up of their society, have long succeeded in preserving their originality. This period of withdrawal was characterised by urban stability, possible stagnation, since water was the major constraint to the development of the towns in Sahara, more particularly those of the M’Zab.

Water was distributed parsimoniously, and the authorities of each Ksar made sure that the water supplies were apportioned fairly between the upstream and downstream parts of the valley, since from time immemorial, in the M’Zab, the rains have been rare. Water arrives thereto through a lengthy valley from the North, (Delheure 1975) it was extremely precious and the deployed techniques required so much human and material investment that it might have caused disagreement quite easily.

The Wilaya (county) Council in Ghardaia accounts for more than one third of the whole population of the Wilaya, which means that half the loads necessarily associated with the population is concentrated in the M’Zab valley (county capital city), in addition to the administrative, educational facilities and others, in a site inscribed in the list of world heritage of the UNESCO, which calls for particular attention and protection from the local authorities, which is far from a straightforward task. The Ksur have been and are still the first affected, since the house in the Ksar sometimes put up several families inside a single lodging, thereby causing the Ksur to be saturated, and the developed sites to become deteriorated, three cases can be observed: either refurbishment or demolition then reconstruction, recovery or abandonment (which is quite seldom) (Didillon, Donadieu 1977). It should be borne in mind that in Ghardaia the historical centres have never been deserted, like most towns in the Algerian Sahara. The constructions have begun to develop first of all on the flat lands, between the Ksur, beyond the ramparts, far from the mushrooming urban centres, experienced by the valley when it was created, some 1000 years ago.

Until the end of the XIXth century, the M’Zab valley has seen few changes. Up to its annexation and its occupation by the French authorities at the end of the XIXth century. The Ksur of the valley
included a few extension areas inside the ramparts and the core of the colonial town was planted between Ksar Beni Isguen and Ghardaia, in what had been a portion of the Melika palm grove, in-existent today. The valley at that time did not house any industrial structure, whereas its economy was mainly based upon agriculture and commercial exchanges and the M’Zab’s villages firstly groth by attraction from different points (Mercier 1932). The different Censi established by the French authorities in 1896, 1926, 1954, and then in 1964 clearly show that the growth of the population has been very low. One had to wait until the independence, then the discovery of the hydrocarbides to see a demographic as well as economic boom, and a urban extension (Benyucef 1986). It ought to be mentioned that this growth of the population is the result in a first step of the settlement of nomads, but also of the influx of new populations. All of these events have obviously translated into the erection of numerous dwellings in Ghardaia, on account of its attractiveness as the capital city of the M’Zab. It is almost exclusively in areas adjoining the ramparts or close to the latter that the new districts were built, thereafter a little later towards the middle of the XXth century, the constructions have developed little by little close to the road axes. Ksar Ghaidaia was the first to be extended, with a fabric developing by the ramparts, with a few scattered buildings beyond its enclosure, between Melika and Ghardaia, on both sides of the road linking Beni Isguen to Ghardaia. This is certainly due, as mentioned previously to the sedentarisation of the nomadic populations (a consequence of the colonial period), who are not residing in the Ksur, the best way to remind them that they are aliens. As of the 1960s, the pentapolis saw a development of a new nature, with the resources derived from oil, and the development of hydraulics (which gave rise to a new economy), highlighting that the latter factor, as well as the discovery of a significant water table have enabled to extend several palm groves. Lots of efforts have also been made during that period so as to set up a good infrastructure in terms of transport networks: roads, airline connections and others, thus rendering the pentapolis more readily accessible, incidentally French architect André Ravereau was already surprised when he came back to the MZab during that time (the Sixties), not to say shocked by the rapid and negative evolution of the architectural developed sites which might in the middle term alter the image of the M’Zab (Badoui, Potié 2003).

With regard to the period of the Eighties and of the Nineties; it already foreshadowed the disaster inflicted upon the MZab valley today, since the surfaces with agricultural vocation were already turning into built-up plots, and the valley was beginning to be victim to high pressure, and furthermore, particularly in the wake of the creation of a very large industrial park in Bunura, in 1970. In addition to a Mozabite population who came to work there, populations from other more remote regions could also be encountered, as they started to settle in Ghardaia (county capital city) which offered many working opportunities. The most significant industrial sectors were: the building material industry, the iron and steel industry and the agro-food industry. This discovery of a new mode of production had a negative impact on the palm groves and the agriculture of the region, downturns could be observed in Ghardaia in particular: in 1960 no fewer than 130000 palm trees, over more than 2500 acres, with a production of 3000 tons of dates, versus 1300, in 1970, and 1000 tons in 1972 corresponding to 105000 date trees.

The transformation process of agricultural plots into urban plots is based on several factors, especially the fragmentation of the family plots and the abandonment of the traditional irrigation system, often replaced with modern techniques (electric pumps). The agricultural space is being turned into a land reservation, where the urban fabric reproduces the palm grove fabric, it will be thus noted that the agrarian hierarchy of the land plots tends to disappear to the benefit of a hierarchy based on the surface area and that the secondary habitat situated in the Summer town (in the palm grove) tends to become permanent, which accentuates the massive destruction of the palm groves, since before, this habitat was perfectly in keeping with agricultural plots, without disrupting the irrigation structures, nor even the quietness of this summer-holidaying and agrarian city (Roche 1973).

Today, it has become a matter of urgency to weigh in on the town planning of the valley, since all the plots which might have been suitable to housing purposes are fully saturated, and the agricultural plots situated in the bed of the Oued should be banned from any construction project, regardless of its vocation, since inns are flourishing in several places of the palm grove, which are often unsuspicious of the dangers lurking behind, also the demographic growth seems to be impossible to curb, which
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proves a threat on the urban growth, since if the latter is not controlled and planned, urban drama will then be unavoidable. What is paradoxical, on the one hand the cultural and social traditions are everywhere omnipresent and attempt to endure, but on the other hand the tradition of this rigorous Mozabite town planning, is not, mentioning what took place during the last floods of 1st October 2008, which caused some fifty deaths as well as very significant material damage, when the Mozabites invested in floodable lands, which appears to be contradictory, since this population is supposedly aware of the flood dangers. These qualities of a responsible town planning tend to disappear, just like this ingenious occupation of the soil which was fascinating, choosing to build Ksur on hillocks, as regards the Oued bed, it was designed for receiving the palm trees and other plantations where the soil was most fertile, also the mozabits would never been able to implant oasis, without performing the highest level of culture (Brunhes 1902).

At the moment, the valley cannot cope with new constructions, since it already filled to bursting point, it is time to find a remedy. Building plots are flourishing on the plateaux, as well as plots made viable on hills, especially on the road to the airport (Numerate site), but it ought to be noted that due to the success of a major housing project which was used as an example, that the land developers, regardless private or public, have followed the example and managed to settle outside the valley; this innovative project is the **ksar Tafilelt Tadjdit**.

Figure 2. M’Zab Valley

![Figure 2. M’Zab Valley](image)

Source: aerial orthophotography, 2005

**Tafilelt, when tradition, modernity and community come to terms with one another**

**A project for the safekeeping of the M'Zab:**

Whereas the government real-estate operations abound all over the Algeria territory, showing the will to resolve the housing crisis, with the emphasis on the aids to home ownership intended for average income households, in Ghardaia, an uncommon housing programme was set up; where even low income households have become home-owners, with the utmost respect for traditional architecture. The Tafilelt housing programme saw the light at a time when implantation outside the valley became unavoidable; in a context where habitat in palm groves has become permanent. The traditional model of habitat in the M'Zab is based on two typologies: the winter house (withdrawn in the Ksar enclosure) and the summer house (situated in the palm grove which appeared much later). This peculiarity which we shall not study in this article, of an alternance-based occupancy rate, according to the seasons,
remains vastly underrated, since the model of the ksar house is still often associated with the traditional Mozabite habitat, perhaps since the summer house appeared much later than the ksar house? What is certain is that this form of space occupancy of the palm grove which differs totally from that of the Ksar, appears to be omitted continuously and has apparently never been researched scientifically.

The ksar Tafilelt Tadjdit (new ksar of Tafilelt)\(^1\) is a communautary housing project intended for low and average income households, emanating from the will of the local population, more particularly that of the Ksar Beni Isguen, through the AMIDUL (non-profit-making) association. It is the latter which has initiated a private real estate development, a collection of dwellings built on a rocky hill, deprived of any vegetation. It is a responsible implantation which claims to be a testimony of the community's awareness, of the urbanisation state in the M'Zab. The first objective of this project is to bring down the housing crisis partially which has befallen the valley over the last decades, due to uncontrolled and uncurbed urban growth and which has also accelerated the individualisation process, but has also generated collective projects (Cherifi, 2003).

The building plot has implanted itself on a site without detriment to the palm trees, under the pressing emergency of an imperative implantation outside the valley so as to preserved its palm groves, which were already quite undermined by the massive occupation of dwellings in the remotest places of the Oued. The latter has transformed little by little a space, which once has an exclusively agricultural vocation, into a land reservation. Tafilelt has also been designed for the purpose of stopping any construction in sites without development approval; to protect the developed sites in the Ksur and to secure their preservation.

\(^1\) We shall agree that the designation Ksar is a local designation, used by the Mozabites, even if these urban areas are often far from having the same characteristics as the Ksur.
Considered as the extension of the Ksar Beni Isguen, this new city was erected thanks to a very interesting financial deal, that we shall endeavour to explain, with the contribution of: the State (participative social housing programme) and the future buyers (the Mozabites from Beni Isguen), and furthermore, through the AMIDUL association. It is important to remark that the State assistance was valuable in this project which financed some dwellings, up to half their costs.

For some years Algeria has doubled efforts in its housing policy and home-ownership, by offering a multitude of arrangements. Hit by a far-reaching housing crisis, due to several complex factors, the Algeria government tries to remedy it by giving priority to the most destitute populations. Thus, a vast range of social housings have come to light, from private to public developers; everything is implemented to render the property accessible to all and resolve this solve, even if often the local context, the architectural style and the quality of the areas are not the foremost priority of the developers, more particularly public developers, apart from a few exceptions.

Indeed, these projects which generally addressed average income households have boosted the morale of more than one. Tafilelt is a project which benefited from the PSH (participative social housing) scheme, according to which the developer, as soon as the plot has been allocated by the competent Wilaya Committee, must submit a base file with the Wilaya (county) agency of the NHF (National Housing Fund). Once the receivability of the file has been examined, the next step is the implementation of the project convention, which sets the developer's rights and obligations, as well as the instalment payment modality. Finally, the developer must submit a file requested State assistance for home-ownership (HO) including several documents pertaining in particular to the applicants and their own request. Thus type of housing targets, theoretically, an average social category; it also means that its realisation involves the housing applicant's participation, a first down payment is then required, then the rest is paid for over several instalments, but under certain conditions, in particular the payment of half the value of the housing over 18 months, then the complementary payments will be made on a case to case basis, according to the size of the housing, but especially the means of the various applicants. It is precisely where the originality and the specificity of the project lie, since the traditional institutions with the assistance of the community also bear the costs, in whole or in part, of this down payment, for those who cannot afford it, which means that the PSH scheme, designed originally for average income households, also addresses low income households. However, they will have to participate in the building side and will be called upon for the duration of the works. The building site was generally visited on week-ends by the future buyers, for a collective assistance “Twiza”, a symbol of a very strong social cohesion where the general interest remains at the heart of all the operations. Regarding week
days, the work was done in groups, with a rotation of the shifts so as to avoid monotony and but to
mobilise the maximum of qualifications. The use of local materials (stone, plaster, lime,... etc.) was a
decisive element in the Tafilelt project, since in addition to being a concern of ecological nature, it is
one of the reasons which enabled housing prices to be more affordable.

To encourage and to promote this kind of real-estate operations, private developers, AMIDUL in the
case of Tafilelt, benefit from an 80% allowance on the transfer price of the land, when the latter is a
state-owned property (national plot), which implies directly significant reduction of housing costs. It
should be borne in mind that at the onset the Participative Social Housing (PSH) scheme only related
to State-run projects, and could on no account be granted to private developers as in the case of
AMIDUL, which was one of the first to benefit therefrom.

It is mandatory to emphasise that the implication of the inhabitants of the valley in communautary
actions is no novelty; it is rather the financial assistance from the State, its wise usage and the
participation of future inhabitants in the design of their own housing which shows innovation.

Built in the local style, the works in Tafilelt started in 1997. Initiated and supervised by the AMIDUL
association, headed by Dr Nuh, the founder and project manager; the first lot was delivered in 2004
(close to 250 dwellings) and inaugurated by Algeria president Abdelaziz Bouteflika, it was supposed
to include 870 dwellings at the onset, it today numbers 1007.

The inhabitants' involvement in the design as well as the building of this project remains a peculiarity
which reflects a very strong social solidarity. The construction progressed step by step, and as the
different lots were completed, the occupiers had to be questioned about the quality of the areas.
Indeed, The aim was for the developer to see how the inhabitants occupied the space and how they
made it theirs. Was it suitable for their daily pursuits? Whether they suggested any modifications or
transformations or the future constructions?
"It seemed to us imperative for the project to succeed and for the traditional spaces to be preserved, to
involve the inhabitants, to know how they use spaces, as well as their new requirements so as to adapt
the dwelling. The modifications have been quite minimal for the inhabitants of Tafilelt, there has not
been any major changes in the layouts, except for a few operations for enlarging or reducing rooms,
which we find extremely encouraging"

Interview with Mr Mustapha Tellai, secretary general of the AMIDUL company, 08 August 2009

Their remarks and impressions were then taken into consideration for building the future lots. It is for
this reason among others that several types of layouts are available, leading us to confirm that the
Tafilelt houses cannot be reduced to a single model, since each dwelling has its peculiarity, according
to the surface area, but especially the topography of the site, which constituted a constraint.
Figure 7. Traditional house (Ravereau 1981)

1- Staggered entry  
2- Center of the house  
3- Chamber of the loom  
4- Foyer  
5- Prayer room  
6- Staircase  
7- Latrines  
8- Upstairs toilets  
9- Multipurpose room  
10- Gallery, ikomar  
11- Open space.

Figure 8. Plan of a house Tafilelt (medium house)

1. Entry 5. Kitchen  
2. La cour 6. Chamber of the loom  
3. Le patio 7. Bed room  
4. Office 8. Toilets.

The traditional social commissions are still operational, they notably take part in the attribution of dwellings and sometimes even the distribution of the population in the organisation of the islets, so as to foster social mixity inside the city. They also assist the members of the administration in their decisions, but they are no longer exclusive decision-makers. All the housing applicants must first of all submit a file. After the study by every case, the latter are classified by priority, incidentally, one of the major conditions lies in that the interested party should not own another dwelling in his name. Every islet is generally comprised of dwellings of variable sizes, this compels certain mixity in the islet. It should be borne in mind that the population of Tafilelt exclusively comes from Beni Isguen, since this experiment was initiated by Mozabites of this Ksar, who wanted to set the example to the other Ksur, so as to encourage the same extension operations, but also to ensure better management of the city, now more convenient thanks to the prior knowledge of the future buyers. “If the inhabitants of the other Ksur wish to have a project similar to ours, they simply need to get up and do the same. Now, they have a model to follow, which they can improve if they wish.”

Interview with Mr Nuh,, chairman of the AMIDUL association, 27 April 2008
As for the accessibility to and from Tafilelt, the town is served by a tarred road and a bus line connects it from Ksar Beni Isguen, and drives around the city, making its inhabitants feel they are not secluded from the Ksar, since it can be noted that the historical town has managed to preserve its role as a centre and the relationship between the older urban centre and the new extensions (Bisson 1983) is still clearly visible. Moreover, the population of Tafilelt predominantly consists of young households, who have a strong link to the Ksar, where most often their parents and relatives are still living.

Figure 9. Redensification of the summer town, Beni Isguen palm grove (2009)

Composed of bystreets, little squares and sheltered passageways, Tafilelt is quite adamant to preserved an architectural as well as social tradition. It emphasises the underpinning of the Mozabite thought, which is equalitarian and where no sign of wealth ought to be visible. The outside of the houses is similar. Regardless of the size of the housing or the social status of its occupier, the polychromy of the terraces can also be observed. It is not the only detail reminding of the traditional town as mentioned previously, since the very organisation of the houses of this modern-time Mozabite city is strongly reminiscent of the those of the Ksar, even if certain permanent organisation of the cells can be observed, it also revals a certain variety in the plans.

This city is the typical example of this Mozabite know-how mentioned by André Ravéreau (RAVEREAU 1983) in all his works on the MZab. A lesson in living architecture, rigour in task, as well as ancestral town planning are as many features that the Mozabites endeavour to perpetuate and furthermore, through new urban and architectural forms, which are harnessed to the older fabric. When visiting Tafilelt for the first time, after walking through the town, one has the feeling of a very uniform aspect, of quietness, organisation and rigour. This new "urban area" has also beckoned to us, since the Ksar Beni Isguen, at the foot of the hill; its source of insight is clear, legible in the smallest feature whereas the continuum of the developed site as well as its homogeneous appearance are strongly reminiscent of the Ksar (Bousquet, 1986). The introversion and the organisation of the spaces around the "patio" will also stick in the mind, since it remains a central element in the Mozabite house, which remains sexed; as regards usages, they still enjoy certain space mobility (although less significant than before).

However, this modern project, impregnated with the traditional Mozabite architecture has its own characteristics, since the introduction of the car into the city of Tafilelt already provides the first element which forms a sharp contrast to the spatial configuration of the Ksar. Although the houses of Tafilelt tend to re-interpret the traditional model of the urban houses (Mercier 1929), new spaces have been introduced, such as the courtyard and the office, in addition to the new spatial arrangements imposed by the constraints of the relief, since sometimes the same programme can be encountered with different dispositions of spaces, in particular the courtyard which may be situated at the entrance to the dwelling and not adjoining the patio as in most layouts.
The Tafilelt project, in addition to assist young households in becoming home-owners, also contributes to fixing the population in the South territory and more particularly in Ghardaia, and hence to limiting the migration to the North where the climate is more pleasant, and the working opportunities are more numerous. All the more so because today the need to migrate to the North is not as pressing as before for carrying commercial activities. It should be borne in mind that the Mozabite lived exclusively off the gardens of their palm groves (staged agriculture: palm tree, fruit bearing trees, cereals...etc). It is only later, towards the XIVth century, that the Mozabites started to emigrate to the North, for commerce, and launch the economy of the valley which was essentially based on agriculture. (Boudidah, 2004).

Tafilelt completely blends in with the natural landscape of the Mozabite valley, thus confirming total and successful integration to its environment. As mentioned previously, it is the result of a voluntary and responsible implantation on a rocky site to preserve the ecosystem and to encourage a new model of architectural and urban development which defends nature and demonstrates how one can create, on a rocky soil, in an austere climate of vegetation, life spaces and encounters, as was the case once for the first facilities of the region. Intensive urbanisation of the MZab valley as well as its continuous and accelerated redensification can be observed, which causes an alarming situation, since the occupation of the non-built spaces and in particular the palm groves relentlessly multiply. The latter have had experienced a true disaster, in particular that of Ghardaia which has become a major residential district, offering a very dense urban landscape on the whole valley lightly scattered with...
palm trees. Indeed, several building plots have seen daylight, and the effect was overwhelming urbanisation in all the fields accessible from the flanks of the hills up to the beds of the M'Zab Oued. The urban area of Tafilet is 70% occupied, as Mr Mustapha Tellai, the AMIDUL administrator tells us. It includes: a school, shops, paying halls, parking areas and day nurseries; other facilities are still under construction. Regarding the management of the city, AMIDUL has set up in collaboration with the municipality a company called "Tafilet services", which bears the costs of the maintenance of the Ksar: maintenance of lighting and carriageways, gardening and wardens, in exchange, the inhabitants pay a symbolic contribution of some twenty Euros per year.

The model of "Tafilet Tadjtit" is regarded as one of the ultimate solutions in the face of this threat of an irresponsible occupancy mode which has already surrounded the valley. This project is remarkable on more than one account, because of its ingenious implantation firstly, then through the participation of the population in its design, its management and sometimes even in the financing scheme of certain dwellings, by contributing to the collections intended for the neediest; which exploits the ancestral mutual aid (Twiza) and tightens up the social connections.

In a constantly evolving socio-economic and spatial context, the impact of this project seems to have driven a point home; indeed, a myriad of projects have amply taken inspiration from it and have multiplied; this far-reaching experience can now be used as the keystone for a new responsible town-planning mode, which secures the safekeeping of the M'Zab valley.
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