STRATEGIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH INTEGRATING THE MARGINAL CHOUF LEKDAD SETTLEMENTS INTO SETIF – ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT:
During the last decade, the city of Setif over jumped its western limits, a green valley called Boussellam that is crossed by the main river in the town. Two human settlements occupied the upper hills of the West side until the end of the nineties, Ouled Hachiche down the hills and Chouf Lekdad on the top. The population is mainly an outcome of the rural exodus from the Southern region of Setif. Thus, a slum grew over the years and became a black spot in the city. In the year 2000, the University of Setif decided to build a new campus in El Bez, a neighboring site to Chouf Lekdad. Now, more than forty thousand students are commuting between this part and the rest of the city. This is a major opportunity for such a marginal area to create informal jobs next door and start to boost its economy. As a result of this urban growth, it happened that the city came to Chouf Lekdad instead of receiving it, i.e. its population. This phenomenon requires a strategy and comprehensive approach to integrate this marginal quarter into the city and stop the rush of new shanty towns around Ouled Hachiche, expecting to gain the sympathy of the Local Authorities when distributing the social housing. This situation puts already more pressure on the local population and threatens the fragile ecosystem of the Valley. The issue is how should we apply scientific information and local knowledge to the understanding and overcoming of poverty, achieving basic services and avoiding environmental degradation in Chouf Lekdad and its surroundings? And how to cope with all those challenges, in order to contribute to the development of deprived settlements in processes driven by the local population?

KEY WORDS:  
Strategy, Integrate, Slums, Chouf Lekdad, Valley Boussellam River.
INTRODUCTION

Chouf Lekdad, as other localities in the Municipality of Setif, was considered a rural area though its proximity to the city. The Valley Oued Bousselam, a large natural space, has always been the limit for urbanization in the Westside of the city [fig. 1]. So, the Chouf Lekdad and El Bez plateaus, beyond that limit, had always been a rural territory. After the year 2000, the new university campus occupied the site of El Bez. Then, the urban area shifted to Chouf Lekdad and El Bez while the city of Setif overjumped the Valley for the first time.

[fig. 1] Map and Cadastral plan of Chouf Lekdad area during the nineties.

Other important amenities followed the University, such as the Medical complex north-west of the campus and the Sports resort in the east. The arrival of these structures activated new communication ways in the city and Chouf Lekdad that was few kilometers away became much nearer.

For many decades, the urban sprawl in Setif was marked by its main direction to the North-East part. It is only during the last decade, when the urban land became scarce, that the Westside of the city started to be invaded by concrete and is now under fusion with the urban area. According to the successive National Censuses, the population of Setif evolved from 170,182 in 1987, to 214,932 in 1998 and almost 300,000 today. Also, the size of the city grew from 313 hectares in 1966, to 646 hectares in 1977, to 1780 hectares in 1987, to 2210 hectares in 1998 and more than 3500 hectares today. These figures reflect the rapid growth of this city and its need for more land that is sometimes acquired on the detriment of agricultural space.

This new situation and the event of such new urban real estates encouraged the Local Authorities to launch a Master Plan in 2008 covering 280 hectares free land over Chouf Lekdad area, bearing in mind the awkward situation of the neighboring Chouf Lekdad settlement. The initial indicators show a new dynamic in the local population's life. There is already an interaction between the inhabitants and students' community. Many informal commercial and service activities are offered everyday to the populated residential halls.

Actually, a new urban sector is born, many projects are still under construction today and the new dynamic is going further. The issue now is how to achieve this urban development in a "human scale" for the future inhabitants and particularly for the local population in Chouf Lekdad. The impact will
definitely be great as this community will be much more urban than before. A progressive upgrading operation may help to integrate this settlement into the city of Setif.

In fact, Master Plan studies in the nineties predicted to develop Chouf Lekdad in order to attract a part of the additional expected population and absorb the future expansions in the mid and long terms (Madani and Diafat, 2002). However, such an urban growth should be transformed into a responsive and sustainable development that allows Setif to meet the "human scale city" requirements.

The intended process will only work if it is based on the community involvement where people ought to be the main actors to fulfill their fundamental needs. The appropriate approach is that one combining urban upgrading of the deprived Chouf Lekdad neighborhood with strategies of political transformation to eradicate social and economical exclusion.

BACKGROUND

By the end of the nineties, Chouf Lekdad was just a marginal settlement in the western outskirts of Setif. Everything has changed in the beginning of the year 2000 when the University of Setif started to build its new campus over 120 hectares. Few years later, the number of students grew up and the Local Authorities had to open a new way between the old and new campuses. Thus, a new bridge crossed the valley Oued Bousselam and the distance shrunk at once between the city and Chouf Lekdad.

Moreover, the students' accommodation halls are so close to Chouf Lekdad that a new kind of life has emerged. Many informal shops opened around the crossroad. Public transport is changing the face of this neighborhood and Chouf Lekdad is becoming a new quarter in the city. Looking at the number of projects coming around the site every day, we can expect a greater transformation of this settlement.
The city of Setif is surrounded by four main settlements in its Commune [fig.2]: Ain Trick in the South, El Hassi in the East, Fermatou in the North and Chouf Lekdad in the North West.

Comparing these four settlements through their population growth in the same periods [Table 1], it is obvious that Chouf Lekdad has the most increasing population rate; it is more than 16 per cent between one period and another (CENEAP, 2007). During the last couple of decades, the population of Chouf Lekdad was multiplied by six times. There is an average of more than five hundred new comers every year since 1987, when the first shelters were installed. But the highest period for rural exodus was the nineties because of the terrorism era. The first illegal occupiers in the eighties were seasonal workers in the agricultural land around the site and in the Valley. Most of them come from the Southern Provinces.

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<td>3,172</td>
<td>4,883</td>
<td>5,272</td>
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[Table1] Population census for different periods in the Commune of Setif. Source: DPAT, Wilaya of Setif, 2010

The pressure of housing shortage draws people to build hutments, according to Payne (1977), "in pockets of unused land left untouched by modern development, whilst elsewhere whole areas were transformed into low-income rented housing … Gradually, both the unauthorized settlements and the over-crowded tenements have become permanent factors of expanding cities and are growing more rapidly than any other form of development."

**REASONS OF THE MARGINAL SITE**

The unfertile and rocky land of Chouf Lekdad added to the old Quarries activity during the French Colonial period, are the main causes of this marginalizing situation. The main access to the settlement was far in the North East of this site, but a new access was opened recently in the South East part of the site to link Chouf Lekdad and El Bez to the city [fig.3]. This sloppy site is also crossed by the dangerous high voltage power lines that are few meters above the ceiling of shelters.

Few years ago, the population came out to the main Road (the National Road number 9 that links Setif to Bejaia in the North) and blocked the way. They were claiming better living conditions in Chouf Lekdad. Since then, the Local Authorities felt the danger of the riots and decided to undertake a political action in order to establish a social rest. So, the main ways were paved and some basic amenities were erected, such as the Mosque, a Health Center, a Post Office and an administrative Bureau. Collective water taps and a sewerage system were provided, electrical power was also supplied. These facilities are added to the only primary school that existed before in Ouled Hachiche.
The crucial problem, as Payne (1977) mentioned it, is that "existing settlements have been self-generated within economic and spatial constraints by groups who have now become sophisticated at creating habitable settlements by operating the rule structures to their advantage." The emphasis, here, is that any change in these rule structures will inevitably have a corresponding impact upon settlement patterns.

**EVLULATION OF THE CHOUF LEKDAD SETTLEMENT**

The initial residents in Chouf Lekdad area were two large families living in their farms; Ouled Hachiche in the lower part near the Valley and Tchier on the upper part of the site near their agricultural land in the west side of the settlement. In 1987, the illicit shelters began to appear in Chouf Lekdad and since then the whole site was invaded.

During the nineties, the Local Authorities decided to allot the space on the edge of the Chouf Lekdad Road that is facing the Valley in order to create rural housing. So, 149 plots were distributed as incremental housing and 79 others as social housing [fig.4]. The idea might have been to stop the expansion of Chouf Lekdad settlement towards the Valley.
In the year 2005, an enormous program of social housing was launched. Nine hundred and fifty housing units were built along the Valley and almost five thousand additional people are living in Chouf Lekdad area [fig.5]. This way of planning is very hazardous for the ecological balance of the Valley. The decision makers should believe to hide the slum housing with the four storey high mid-rise buildings, but they forgot the preservation of the natural space that is the lung to breath for Setif.

One of the last problems occurring in Chouf Lekdad area is the upcoming shanty town adjacent to Ouled Hachiche cluster. By the end of 2009, many shacks were installed facing the new road under construction and in a very short time they reached more than hundred units. The Local Authorities hurried up and asked the Real Estates Agency to fence the remaining land that is destined to receive 300 housing units. Then, the population clashed with the police forces for few days. They consider themselves squeezed between the metallic boundary and the existing houses. Their claim was to be urgently relocated into a new social housing area otherwise they will come back to the street next time. Unfairly, they are very tricky to get decent dwelling while trying to impose themselves on the top priority list and that before those who are on the waiting list for years. This event is becoming a heavy burden for the local community who is also waiting for better living conditions.

THE SPRAWL OF THE CITY TO THE WEST

In the year 2000, the University of Setif decided to build a new campus in El Bez, a neighboring site to Chouf Lekdad [fig.5]. Now, more than forty thousand students are commuting between this part and the rest of the city. This is a major opportunity for such a marginal area to create informal jobs next door and start to boost its economy. As a result of this urban growth, it happened that the city came to Chouf Lekdad instead of receiving it, i.e. its population.

Once the University opened the doors, other important facilities followed. A Medical complex, located north-west of the campus and facing the Faculty of Medical Sciences, is under way to start with two hospitals: a Maternity and an Anti-Cancer Center. Thirteen other private Clinics are fulfilling the administrative procedures before launching their projects. While in the east, a forty hectares Sports resort will be achieved by the end of this year; it had been recently classified National Center for Olympic Education by the Central Authorities. The advent of these Metropolitan structures activated
the process of new communication ways in the city and Chouf Lekdad that was few kilometers away became much nearer.

STRATEGY AND PERSPECTIVES OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE CITY

An urban design project was launched by the City in 2008 covering a free land more than 280 hectares over Chouf Lekdad area, bearing in mind the awkward situation of the neighboring Chouf Lekdad settlement [fig.6]. The program was based on the mixed use urban activities to satisfy the huge demand in housing and facilities of different scales: from proximity amenities to higher tertiary activities.

[fig. 6] West side of Setif: Urban design project for Chouf Lekdad area.

The final proposal was approved by the end of last year and some works started recently as a first phase of the project that aims to be achieved in the year 2020. Also, a project of two thousand housing units has been launched last month in front of El Bez Campus. The long term expected population will be around fifty thousand people including 15 to 20 thousand people in Chouf Lekdad area.

Although, the Chouf Lekdad settlement was not a target for the intervention area, the study included it and a strategy for its integration was implemented. The idea is to diffuse a layout of streets network linked to the new urban project and involve the local population into a progressive urban renewal intervention. Later on, the dwellers will have the opportunity to integrate their houses into the new blocks and benefit from the urban services provided by the Municipality.

This marginal settlement used to be a transit point for many of its occupants before they find a stable situation in the city where more job and business opportunities are available. Now the city has come to Chouf Lekdad and new opportunities will be offered to the local residents who need only to improve their shelter if they find assistance from politicians and other urban actors.
CONCLUSION

The analysis of Chouf Lekdad case showed us that slum housing and shanty towns’ dwellers have understood that only violence and riots can put pressure and bring the Local Authorities around the table. This is a very dangerous phenomenon since the most violent will be served first. It will be more reasonable for decision makers to start the first step involving the population in matters concerning them. Successful show cases are very useful to let them see what the Local Authorities are capable to do when they are invited to assist for services.

Strategy and comprehensive approach are required to integrate this marginal quarter into the city. The population of Chouf Lekdad may be lucky with the approaching city to their home area as new opportunities will be offered to the unemployed youth and girls may have more chance to go to school. Probably a pedagogic work is awaiting social assistants to help this population overcoming the transition from a rural or semi-urban living environment to a real urban environment. This will help to attenuate the conflicts between the local population and the new comers to the future Chouf Lekdad Town.

In fact, a major concern should be devoted to the green Valley of Qued Bousselam in order to preserve its threatened and fragile ecosystem. Also, people should keep in mind that it is a flooding area where construction is forbidden. It will be more adequate to preserve it as a natural space for urban agriculture and open air leisure activities.

These are the challenges to cope with in order to contribute to the development of deprived settlements in processes driven by the local population. Scientific information and local knowledge should be applied to the understanding and overcoming of poverty, achieving basic services and avoiding environmental degradation in Chouf Lekdad and its surroundings.

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