

Spatial planning in Algeria

1- The natural characteristics of Algeria:

The importance of Algeria's natural features is highlighted through their prominent impact on the spatial distribution of the population and various economic, social, and urban activities. This underscores the necessity of understanding the key natural characteristics of Algeria, with a focus on its topography.

Algeria is located in North Africa and spans a vast area of approximately 2,381,741 km². Due to this extensive territory, it exhibits a diversity of topographical features, leading to the division of the Algerian landscape into three major topographic regions (see Map: 01), separated by natural mountain ranges. These regions manifest in the form of parallel north-to-south belts as follows:

1. Coastal Zone: This region is situated between the coastline and the Tell Atlas Mountain range.
2. Plateaus and Plains: Extending between the Tell Atlas and the northern foothills of the Saharan Atlas, this region is characterized by plains and plateaus, making it suitable for agriculture.
3. Desert Zone: Encompassing the entire southern Sahara region below the Saharan Atlas.

These topographic regions have a significant influence on the distribution of the population and various economic, social, and urban activities in Algeria. Understanding these natural characteristics is crucial for effective development efforts and future planning in the country.

2- Human and urban characteristics in Algeria:

Exhibit significant spatial variations across different geographical regions. The Tell region stands out with a high concentration of population, a major cluster of economic activities, and significant urban infrastructure. Here are some key characteristics of this region:

- The population in this region is comparatively higher than in other areas of the country.
- Major cities like Algiers, Oran, and Annaba are concentrated in this region.
- It hosts numerous industrial activities in various industrial zones like El-Hadjar and Arzew.
- It is home to several water facilities, including dams and water reservoirs.
- The region features fertile agricultural plains like the extensive Annaba plain and the Matija plain.
- It includes essential transportation networks and infrastructure.

This concentration of population, economic activities, urbanization, and infrastructure in the Tell region reflects the significant impact of natural and geographical factors on the distribution of human and urban characteristics in Algeria.

3- Stages of spatial Planning in Algeria:

Spatial planning in Algeria has gone through several stages in response to the prevailing political, economic, and social conditions in each era. These stages can be outlined as follows:

3-1- Spatial Planning During the Ottoman Protection (Pre-1830):

The Ottoman presence in Algeria was primarily for protection, and they organized the Algerian territory into two patterns of human settlement:

- The Settlement Pattern: This took the form of cities concentrated in the coastal region and some scattered oases in the desert, where trade was a predominant economic activity.
- The Nomadic Pattern: This involved small population centers and settlements scattered in the Saharan region, relying on agricultural activities that characterized the economic and social life in these areas.

The population during this stage numbered around 3 million people and was distributed with significant disparity between the cities, which held about 5% of the population, and the rural areas, constituting the remaining 95%. This led to a predominantly rural character in the Algerian landscape with the practice of trade in traditional, non-industrialized products, as industrialization was virtually nonexistent, and existing workshops were of a rudimentary nature.

It's worth noting that the Algerian territory was subject to a specific administrative organization in its northern part, with divisions known as "beyliks," which included the Eastern Beylik, the Titteri Beylik, and the Western Beylik, in addition to Dar El Sultan, a region surrounding the capital city of Algiers (Brulé, Fontaine, 1986).

3-2- Spatial Planning During French Colonial Rule (1830-1962):

Over a period of 132 years, French colonial rule in Algeria brought significant changes to the organization of Algerian life in various economic and social aspects. The colonial administration introduced a new developmental organization model aimed at controlling the territory. To achieve this, the French colonial authorities enacted a set of laws and regulations, with the most important being the "Sinatus Consult" Law (22/04/1863) and the "Warnier" Law (29/07/1873). They also implemented the system of municipalities (full authority municipalities and mixed municipalities).

As a result, the following developments occurred:

- Control over property and land.
- Exploitation of agricultural resources.
- Exploitation of mineral resources.
- Establishment of infrastructure and transportation networks.

Consequently, the Algerian territory became characterized by the presence of advanced areas (development basins) and underdeveloped regions. French colonial rule created significant regional disparities, which are evident through various urban planning projects aligned with the interests of colonialism. Some of the most notable projects included:

- Construction of ports in coastal areas to optimize resource exploitation and transportation.
- Development of a railway network connecting ports with each other and with areas rich in agricultural and mineral resources.
- Construction of dams to expand irrigated agricultural areas and generate electricity for industrial units.
- Emphasis on the agricultural sector, aligning it with the requirements of the French market within the framework of integration.

- Focus on the exploitation of mines, particularly iron and phosphate.

The late colonial period also witnessed the emergence of the Constantine Plan, which covers the years 1958-1963, and the Urban Development Plan for 1958 (Laarouk, 2008; Laarouk, 2009; Brulé & Fontaine, 1986; Rahmani, 1982).

3-3- Post-Independence Spatial Planning (Post-1962):

After gaining independence, Algeria faced several challenges in the field of Spatial planning, including:

1. Eliminating underdevelopment and dependency.
2. Organizing and structuring the economy while considering the spatial dimension.
3. Resolving problems inherited from the colonial era.
4. Reducing regional disparities.
5. Integrating various regions of the country into the development process by efficiently utilizing natural, economic, and human resources (Benachenhou, 1982, Brulé & Fontaine, 1986).

To achieve these goals, various developmental policies were implemented using diverse methods and tools over successive time periods.

***- Period 1962-1967:**

This period was characterized by:

- Adopting the socialist path of development, also known as the non-capitalist path of development.
- Transferring foreign social and economic development experiences and attempting to benefit from them.
- Implementing various sectoral programs (agriculture, rural housing, etc.).
- Establishing an administrative system and defining local communities (wilayas, municipalities) and creating elected municipal councils. However, there was a lack of comprehensive spatial planning during this period, except for rural planning (Cote, 1993, Brulé & Fontaine, 1986).

***- Period 1967-1977:**

This period was marked by the adoption of centralized sectoral planning, relying on annual and national economic plans, primarily the three-year plan (1967-1969), the first four-year plan (1970-1973), and the second four-year plan (1974-1977), with the aim of achieving comprehensive economic and social development by implementing projects in the most suitable locations, without considering their economic, social, and regional implications. This led to an increase in pre-existing disparities within the Algerian territory, prompting the introduction of specialized plans aimed at marginalized and impoverished areas.

Despite these challenges, this period was characterized by:

- The establishment of the Algerian Fund for Development and Urban Planning (CADAT).
- The creation of industrial zones with a focus on their development.
- The emergence of urban planning tools, primarily the Urban Renewal Plan, Municipal Development Plan, and Main Urban Plan.
- The creation of new urban residential areas (ZHUN).
- The introduction of real estate reserves (Brulé & Fontaine, 1986, Tajani, 2000).

***- Period 1980-1990:**

This period is considered a transitional phase and was characterized by:

- Deepening regional disparities between different geographical regions of Algeria.

- Significant variations among different regions.
- Widespread effects of the coastal concentration phenomenon.
- Functional dominance of the capital city, Algiers, and its region.
- A rise in unemployment rates.
- Decreased levels of services and weakened infrastructure.
- Growing demands for employment, water, energy, and housing.

During this time, the Quintuple Plan (1980-1984) emerged, which included economic and social development options that aimed to address urban planning. These choices were intended to direct the population and activities towards the highlands and promote urbanization in the plains and highlands.

This period also witnessed an emphasis on the spatial dimension through the National Spatial Planning Plan (SNAT), established by Law No. 03/87 dated January 27, 1987. SNAT introduced a hierarchical set of sub-plans (SNAT-SRAT-PAW-PAC). The National Spatial Planning Plan was characterized by three features: spatial dimension, temporal scope, and transformative goal, evident in its portfolio of projects, which included:

- Rehabilitation projects.
- Projects with national and Maghrebian dimensions.
- New city projects.
- Projects for the preservation of ecological systems.
- The objectives of this plan were:
 - Establishing a comprehensive and integrated strategy for urban planning in Algeria.
 - Restoring spatial balance by shifting agglomerations and concentration from the coast to the highlands and the south.
 - Focusing on small and medium-sized industries to drive development and reorganize the agricultural sector.
 - Ensuring proper water management and equitable distribution among various economic sectors.
 - Emphasizing the tourism sector and working on its development.
 - Managing the growth of major cities and paying attention to medium-sized and small cities to ensure urban balance.
 - Developing rural areas and prioritizing the development of marginalized and impoverished regions (Law 03/87 dated January 27, 1987, Larouk, 2008, Larouk, 2009, Tajani, 2000).

***- Period 1990-2000:**

This period was marked by the issuance of Law 90/29, dated December 1, 1990, which pertains to urban planning and development. This law introduced the Directional Plan for Urban Planning and the Land Use Plan (PDAU and POS). These plans covered most municipalities to meet urban expansion needs and manage the territory.

During this time, several economic, social, and security problems arose. Some of the key characteristics of this period included:

- Continued regional disparities between different areas of the country.
- The persistence of the coastal concentration phenomenon without any mitigation.
- A rise in unemployment due to workforce layoffs and a lower standard of living.
- Weak investment.

These challenges led to the emergence of the document "Algeria Tomorrow," consisting of two significant parts: "Algeria Today: The Current Situation" and "Reclaiming National Territory" (Larouk, 2008, Law 90/29, "Algeria Tomorrow" document).

*- Period 2000-2020:

This period was characterized by a voluntary determination to implement a new strategy in the field of urban planning, which was evident through:

- The establishment of a legislative framework encompassing various legal texts, such as the Law on the Planning and Sustainable Development of the Territory (Law 01/20), the Environmental Protection Law within the context of sustainable development, the Law on the establishment of new cities, and the Guiding Law for Cities. These laws gave rise to multiple urban planning schemes, with the National Plan for Regional Planning and Sustainable Development being one of the most significant.
- Institutional development based on a decentralized system, supported by the presence of numerous observatories for supervision and monitoring of the urban planning strategy, with such observatories present in every wilaya.
- Financial resources through the creation of specialized financial funds based on geographical regions, the promotion of environmental taxation, and the establishment of an economic growth support program.

All of these elements signify the presence of a new policy for regional planning and sustainable development aimed at restoring territorial balance between different regions and re-establishing integration between rural and urban areas. This policy is grounded in a strategy for regional planning and sustainable development, based on sound governance in managing the region and preparing it for integration into the global economy (Larouk, 2008, Larouk, 2009, Law 01/20).

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