



International Conference – Green Urbanism, GU 2016

## From a Crossroad to a Gateway City: Case of Setif and its Connections, Algeria

Diafat Abderrahmane<sup>a,\*</sup>, Tacherift Abdelmalek<sup>a,b</sup> and Madani Said<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Laboratoire PUViT, Université F. A. Sétif 1, Algeria

<sup>b</sup>Université Mohamed Boudiaf, M'Sila, Algeria

---

### Abstract

Herein is presented one of the main gateway cities in Algeria and its key elements. Green urbanism fundamentals may improve environmental performance if considered in early stages of urban design.

As a crossroad, Setif is a gateway city to the Eastern Highlands. The motorway and Airport are among many factors that made of it a national trade centre. Two “green” campuses, at the east and west gateways, will be connected by the tram through the city center. A new project will provide 700 hectares for the future industrial investors. Worthy efforts, though environment and sustainable development remain a great challenge.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of GU 2016

*Keywords:* Gateway city; Crossroad; Eastern Highlands; Connections; Sustainable Development; Setif.

---

### 1. Introduction

This research work aims to present one of the main gateway cities in Algeria and the key elements behind this role. The local Authorities in Setif are willing to reinforce this Metropolis of 300 thousand inhabitants. Many new projects are to face the growing local and incoming demand. Improving environmental performance seems possible through green urbanism fundamentals considered in early stages of urban design.

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +213-675851007; fax: +213-36620022.  
E-mail address: [azzouz\\_diafat@yahoo.fr](mailto:azzouz_diafat@yahoo.fr)

As a crossroad, Setif is a gateway city to the Eastern Highlands. Its proximity to the east-west motorway confirms its attractiveness, in addition to the international Airport few kilometers away from the city center. Setif is famous by its secular iconic fountain, the prestigious football club and commercial character that made of it a great national trade centre. The recent Park Mall, a unique shopping center of its kind in the Eastern Region and the biggest in size nationally, created a new dynamic and attracts daily thousands of shoppers from everywhere.

Setif owns two “green” campuses located at the east and west gateways and host over seventy thousand students. To strengthen the connection between city center and its gateways, the tram is introduced for the first time into the city; the starting line will be achieved by the end of next year (2017). The expanding industrial area is so diverse in its activities and partners that a new project is launched to provide 700 hectares for the future investors. Plastics and electronics are major industries in Setif leading now the land demand in the vicinity towns. However and in spite of the worthy efforts, environment and sustainable development remain a great challenge for the city and decision makers.

The aim is to set urban strategies for sustainable land use in Setif and promote urban agriculture in the *Oued Bousselam* valley with full of natural space. In terms of urban planning, a strategic vision is an absolute necessity as the shaping of territory is the result of a series of measures and projects with effects that are visible from the beginning of the decision-making process. Maximizing the benefits of dialogue and exchange of knowledge is necessary, but sharing ideas between experts, practitioners and officials in the field is a viable sustainable approach. The participatory process should be respected as a good practice.

The urban territory should no longer provide a mere geographical space, a resource to exploit or just a support for infrastructure development. These are collective results of our history, the organization and role of business and labor, action of the various actors, practices and social ties, systems of political representation.

## 2. Background

The future of Setif is rooted in its history, in the process that led to its existing economic, social and spatial characteristics. The changing lifestyles and location of people, business and facilities generate a redistribution of urban functions on the territory of the city. These changes occur in particular through the land use remodeling.

Setif offers goods and services relatively specialized not only destined to its local population, but also to those of its broad regional influence area. Its weekly markets (Souk) - especially that on Friday, with their crowds from elsewhere confirm its leading rank on the socio-economic level. We should point out that throughout history and during the Roman period Setif was an enormous domestic market and played the role of transit city until its decline during centuries later. In addition to the fertile farmland surrounding such a site, Setif becomes now an industrial and academic pole, a major commercial centre, a city of culture and sports. Today, its population is over 300 thousand inhabitants and it covers almost 4000 hectares. However, several development projects nowadays pay little attention to sustainability and rational use of natural resources.

Camborieux<sup>1</sup> shows how the population of Setif grew during the first half of the twentieth century and wrote: *Located some 130 kilometres west of Constantine and by the early twentieth century a crossroads for regional trade, Setif experienced a period of great economic and demographic growth after the First World War. In the thirties, it was an urban community of just over thirty thousand residents, growing to 53 thousand towards the end of the fifties and to 96 thousand just before Algerian Independence in 1962.*

In Setif, some positive urban spaces are offering better conditions for a sustainable environment and marking the contemporary history of the city (see fig. 1); such as the public gardens dating back to the colonial period or the “Citadel” amusement park that occupied the ancient site of the military camp in the 1980’s.

During the first century of the French occupation, a regular shape traced the perimeter of the 'intra-muros' city in order to provide the same regularity for the site layout and streets pattern. According to Malverti and Picard<sup>2</sup> this is how Setif clearly shows “*the importance of the walls as a program element of the city where ordinance and marked tracks on the territory are closely put together to define the limits between rural and urban space*”.

The significant urban expansion of Setif is due to the creation of major projects such as mentioned by Diafat and Madani<sup>3</sup>: “*the two new university campuses, sports centre and medical complex, the huge public investment in and provision of services, and the emergence of new secondary urban centers*”.



Fig. 1: City Centre of Setif, view from the sky, 2009.

The rejuvenation of urban spaces becomes a promising experience contributing socially, economically, physically and aesthetically to regenerate the local urban environment and leisure activity. The sustainable urban development provides city designers with criteria of social and ecological rationality that are different from those available in the market. Consequently, the concept of sustainability becomes the keystone of the urban development process. The fact that the city crossed the *Oued Bouselam* valley in the Westside, to expand on the opposite riverside, can be considered as a good opportunity to promote the greenery wherever it is in the town.

However, the landscape has this ability to play the role of a central lever of education. It is time to advocate that the issue of landscape is beyond the world of agriculture and becomes a national duty, and that the landscape is not confined to the garden, but can focus on major social problems of our time. It must promote a philosophy of public space. Also, the landscape would be well placed to conserve open space.

### 3. Strengths and opportunities

As referred to in the National Report<sup>4</sup> on Housing for the Conference on Housing Habitat III in 2014: *The efforts of the state are moving towards a diversified emerging economy that creates employment and wealth and that relies on a performance strategy and an inclusive and equitable sustainable development. As such, the intention is to strengthen the investment in job-creating sectors such as agriculture, industry, tourism and crafts and to promote the development of small and medium enterprises in order to improve the growth rate and maintain a downward trend in the unemployment rate, especially among young people and graduates.*

At the occasion of his new post in 2015, the president of the Regional Delegation for the Heads of Enterprises' Forum (FCE: Forum des Chef d'Entreprises) declared to HuffPost Algérie<sup>5</sup> *"the Wilaya (Province) of Setif is on the way to launch the biggest industrial area in the country with 740 hectares"*. This project is expected to give a new dynamic for the local economy. The new president is also President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry *EL Hidhab* (the Highlands). He mentioned that *"The Wilaya of Setif counts more than 77 thousand merchants, entrepreneurs and industrials"*.

Also, the *Wali* learned, to HuffPost Algérie, that the expected investments will create 40 thousand jobs at the medium term and added *"we received 4000 demands of private investment, 600 of them have been agreed and more than 250 concession acts delivered in addition to the 146 investors who already deposited the building permits"*.

In his occasional speech, the FCE President Haddad evoked the great opportunities of Setif as “*an industrial Metropolis, having a predominant position among the Eastern Highlands Provinces and its activity impacts the whole region*”. He added that Setif is “*a transit zone, regarding the goods coming from the South, and going through to the ports of Bejaia and Jijel, but also due to its airport connected to the national and international networks*”. The strategic position of Setif made of it “*a neuralgic centre in logic of territorial animation and attractiveness*”, as it is surrounded by a set of Provinces that are very important in the heart of the Algerian economic activity.

The national daily Newspaper *EL Watan*, noticed that with the 12 thousand registered small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the Wilaya of Setif has immensurable advantages, ranging as a leading regional economic and industrial center. The journalist Beniaiche<sup>6</sup> wrote “*paradoxically, the difficult economic situation currently facing the country did not affect the enthusiasm of the operators of the Setifian Highlands, where the private sector remains the largest creator of jobs and wealth. The Park Mall, which attracted more than 5 million visitors since it opened in February (2016), is a good example, as are the Compacto Safer complex, electrical cables plant KPLAST, Iris tire factory and the Cevital group megaproject that will be on service in early 2017, with a production capacity of 8 million units per year and 90 per cent of the products will be for export. This is only a sample of large investments in a region lying with the advent of the East-West Motorway, now only 2 hours of Algiers. For many businessmen, who have chosen to invest, Setif is the new periphery of the Capital*”.

The hotels stock is reinforced by new business hotels; such as the Ibis and Novotel with a capacity of 502 beds and 4 stars Marriott, an integral part of Park Mall, with 360 beds. These two facilities will improve the accommodation capacity of Setif that will reach 3,200 beds. This important factor in addition to the airport asset, reducing distances, is a great support for the local operators who are gaining market shares in Africa.

Regarding the environmental expectations of the city, Zoghbi<sup>7</sup> reports in the Newspaper *El Moudjahid* that “*the urban pattern of the city and these great amenities that will be part of the tram with more than 19,000 square meters of green space that will emerge around and throughout this new line of 15.5 kilometers with no less than 6,622 trees will certainly meet environmental and aesthetic characteristics*”.

As a matter of fact, the next points should be mentioned:

- The position and territorial assertion of Setif as an attractive city at the regional, national and even North African level confers it a leading role.
- Therefore, it is called to be modernized. It should provide spaces of High Architectural and Environmental Quality and modern facilities that meet international standards.
- To make the new expansion areas as integrated urban fabrics, the first act of planning is to identify the major structural ways, extend and use them as path anchor for the urban projects and disseminate the concept of urban mix use.
- Regarding the growing industrial activity, there is a need to assess the vulnerability of Setif town to the environmental risks.

The *Wilaya* of Setif has to meet the national territorial development policies actions and thus should aim to deal effectively with the urban problems, through coordination between all stakeholders. The objective is also to consolidate the whole efforts made by different sectors that contribute to set conditions for a qualitative management of urban spaces. This qualitative policy, as underlined in the National Report 2014, includes:

- Establishment of urban policy, through legal and regulatory framework related to management and promotion of the city.
- Upgrading and promotion of cities, in order to improve the quality citizens' life conditions.
- Creation of new cities and major integrated urban centers.

#### 4. Weaknesses and threats

The urban expansions regarding their extent and mono-functional use are currently unbalancing the centre with its periphery. It is an opportunity for a new town planning practice that breaks with the operational urbanism. This new approach aims to value the territory of the entrances of Setif and provide an image of a modern and attractive city.

In Algeria, the notion of social utility has replaced other utilities; all assignments were legitimized without control over the allocation of land or its destination (see the diversion of marginalization of economic activities in the areas of Warehouses and Economic Activities - ZEA - to use them in some cases as residential space).

The movement of land distribution accelerated after 1986, the rent-driven redistribution of land replaced that of oil profits. The second is accelerating the sharing of land during the 1990s. Then at the results of this operation, the latest restrictive provisions in the mid 2000's if they permit consensus for the initial adoption of the texts were diminished, then completely erased by successive amendments and regulations.

The approach seems to be the same for the redistribution of private heritage as a whole to adopt various measures with initial drastic constraints then continued to pressure, repealed by successive amendments to the funding and heritage legislation gained thanks to these restrictions.

Urbanization is an effort in which the land use changes and becomes the medium of construction. Local investors and the allowed transformation of the soil must be recovered through charges to build and real property taxes, expenses and profits of urban growth. To do this, land should remain the cities' property. Controlling land is the key resources for the creation of the town by local authorities for not chasing the expropriations which can delay or jeopardize the implementation of public services when needs are felt.

#### 5. Future Challenge and issues

The control of urban growth is one of the main challenges that Algeria has to meet while ensuring to our cities a development that takes into account environmental requirements and their charge capacity. It is an urban development that must not, in any case, be identified to an addition of housing units, but which must fundamentally integrate the economic dimension which grants functions and elements to human establishments, to promote urban activities and grant them attractiveness. The strategic position of Setif has an impact on the spatial layout and sustaining some tendencies of uncontrolled urban growth would raise a double problem, as warned by Madani and Diafat<sup>8</sup>, in terms of: *“a conflict between agriculture and urbanization, where agricultural land is the most vulnerable while the existing urban structures may not be responsive to the future needs of the city”*.

The major orientations for the next ten years, according to the National Report 2014 again, must include the implementation of the national strategy of the city, which is under development by the Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and City, aiming to *“analyze trends, upgrade existing instruments, set up new urban planning and management tools as well as necessary quantitative and qualitative tools for this analysis (norms, ratios, revised standards, methodological guides, appropriate equipments grid, evaluation indicators dashboards, rules and regulations of urban planning)”*.

However, medium and long-term projects or programs for city development should be formulated through a strategic planning to anticipate and control the urban growth, but good urban governance is required to get the most of the proposals resulting from the different urban actors' involvement. Rethinking the urban fabric is necessary and for Panerai<sup>9</sup> *“The future of the city cannot be considered without examining the urban fabric. It is by combining a road layout with a definition of plot divisions that we set the terms of the evolution of that fabric, in other words its capacity to adapt constantly to the occurring social changes. The fabric issue is a key point, the place where false debates are revealed and real differences emerge”*.

#### 6. Conclusion

Setif lies at the heart of a hub of "up-market" services as such as gravity centre for the cultural and scientific entertainment, leisure and recreation but also trade of high value products. Setif owes mainly its attractiveness to the following factors:



- Position at the crossroads of communication ways,
- Rank of administrative centre in the *Wilaya* providing high-level services,
- Ability to create jobs (third sector, industrial and construction activities).

Environment, ecology and sustainable development should be the keywords that underline the development strategy to be undertaken in the suburbs of this town.

Hence, the following recommendations could serve the urban development of Setif:

- Situated at the crossroads of major structuring ways, Setif is in a unique position to play a role of command in the Eastern Highlands. The existence of infrastructure such as the airport, railway and East-West highway, adding to that a performing and very well structured industrial area that puts Setif on the front of major challenges to enhancing the level of its facilities.
- Every development project set for Setif should not mean to be sticky to a standardized model city, which would be less operating in its territory. It must be based on history, a strong local conviviality, to outline the future city called to be adapted to the new challenges.
- The economic aspect is not thus limited to redefine the location areas, but also includes a wide variety of logics of action: actors' involvement and organization, skills enhancement, organization of urban space, the development of hosting “products”, realization of amenities, promoting skills, successes and projects, development of dynamic monitoring.

The new centralities present one of the fields of interest within the framework of the urban project. They are featured by their situation in the outskirts of the city and their capacity to offer goods and services able to meet the expectations of populations. Introducing the “urban mix” notion into the arrangement of these spaces will make them more attractive. A good design of these peripheries will create a more pleasant living environment for the inhabitants while offering viable spaces for tourism, leisure and culture.

The urban project presents the actions and ways to build these centralities and manage the city’s development happening in these peripheries through a process including the organization of both built and open spaces. The involvement of different urban stakeholders is a lever to stage varied programs; outcome of an urban analysis that aims at reading and understanding urban space before intervention.

The old districts of Setif are located near the historical center, in an advantageous position. These spaces are sometimes deteriorated and facing squalor due to the Authorities who are busy with the need to produce large numbers of new housing units. Hence and given that the urban project is a thought and designed strategy of the city, it is urgent to lead an architectural and urban expression to shape the city within its social, economic, urban and territorial stakes in order to achieve a global project able to recreate the “urban”, promote the emergence of new forms of using the urban space while intensifying the expressions of urban life through contact, exchange, play in public spaces. Among the challenges is to promote the renewal of urban landscape and environment, conduct actions based on the development works providing public spaces of quality.

To improve the urban environment in Setif, there should be provided spaces of high architectural and environmental quality with modern facilities that meet international standards. The current urban sprawl should be better controlled in order to prevent unbalancing the centre with its periphery. All new projects represent an opportunity for an innovative town planning practice that overcomes the operational urbanism. This new approach should aim to value the territory of the town entrances of Setif and provide an image of a modern and attractive city. To make the new extension areas as an integrated urban fabric, the first act of planning is to identify the major structural ways, extend and use them as path anchor for the projects extension.

Finally, beyond the fact that the tram on its way to strengthen the connection between city center and its gateways, this study revealed how Setif could shift from a crossroad to a gateway city in more than a century and a half and how it developed its connections nationwide, but also it is confirming its role in North Africa as a major and dynamic city.

## References

1. Camborieux, A. *Sétif et sa région: Essai de monographie historique, géographique et économique*. Carcassonne : Imprimerie Gabelle; 1978.

2. Malverti, X. and Picard, A. Les tracés de ville et le savoir des ingénieurs du génie. In Tome 2 '*Les villes coloniales fondées entre 1830 et 1870 en Algérie*', Ecole d'Architecture de Grenoble and MEL/DAU-BRA, Paris;1989.
3. Diafat A. and Madani S. Urban Changes in the City of Setif, Algeria: Colonial and Postcolonial Periods. In: Carlos Nunes Silva editor, *Urban Planning in North Africa*. Routledge; 2016. p. 93-102. (p. 97)
4. National Report on Housing for the Conference on Housing Habitat III; 2014.  
<http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Algeria-National-Report.pdf> [Visited on October 13, 2015].
5. Rédaction HuffPost Algérie. *Ses atouts ont été célébrés par Ali Haddad: Sétif va ouvrir la plus grande zone industrielle du pays*. In: online Newspaper HuffPost Algérie; Published on September 18, 2015.  
<http://www.presse-algerie.net/open-400417-presse-francophone-huffpost-algerie.html> [Visited on September 19, 2015].
6. Beniaiche K. *Projets d'investissement à Sétif: le privé mise sur l'exportation vers l'Afrique*. In: Newspaper El Watan; August 22, 2016.  
[http://www.elwatan.com/economie/le-privé-mise-sur-l-exportation-vers-l-afrique-22-08-2016-327286\\_111.php](http://www.elwatan.com/economie/le-privé-mise-sur-l-exportation-vers-l-afrique-22-08-2016-327286_111.php) [Visited on August 22, 2016].
7. Zoghbi, F. *Pour permettre le passage du tramway de Sétif, la fleur du Lotus déménage*. In: Newspaper El Moudjahid; August 21, 2016.  
<http://www.elmoudjahid.com/pdf-elmoudjahid/2110> [Visited on August 22, 2016].
8. Madani, S. and Diafat, A. *Intermediate Cities and Sustainable Development: Case of Setif – Algeria*. In: Review Netherlands Geographical Studies - NGS 303; 2002. p. 183-193. (p. 191)
9. Panerai, Ph. Cities, Fabrics, Usage. In: EAV Review '*Enseignement architecture ville*'. Ecole d'Architecture de Versailles, Paris, vol. (3); (1997). p. 12-19.