

## Investigative Fieldwork Report

### Investigative fieldwork into the morphology of old medina urban tissues in Morocco

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The spontaneous urban tissues in the case of ancient Islamic cities, notably Moroccan Medinas (fig1&2), are characterized by their spatial adaptability to and incremental evolution without the intervention of formal urbanism as it is known today. Indeed, even though they seem as they are developed in a disorderly manner; the logic that inspires the urban form of old medina tissues involves a number of socio-economic and legal concerns that are entangled together to create a complex urban entity. In my doctoral research, it is anticipated that an algorithmic design model is a fitting contemporary solution that can simulate and offer a wide range of objective-based spatial solutions in such an urban context. As part of my current study about the defining factors of the urban form of Islamic cities, I conducted investigative fieldwork in the cities of Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech in Morocco from January 28<sup>th</sup> to February 21<sup>st</sup> 2019. The purpose of this research activity was to collect first-hand information about the urban growth of spontaneous urban tissues of old Islamic cities in Morocco and also to conduct a number of interviews and discussions with researchers as well as various stakeholders.

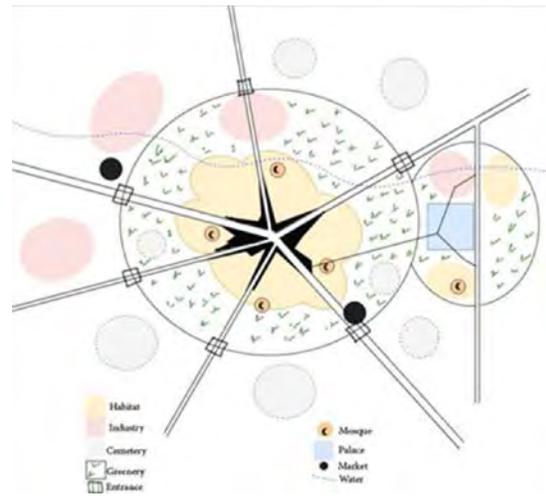


Fig 1: Diagram of the medina typology

I have started the fieldwork by contacting my local research advisor, Professor Larbi Bouayad who specialized in the architecture and urbanism of the Islamic civilization. This led me to gather further relevant information through long-form interviews with professors and researchers of the National School of Architecture of Rabat (ENA-Rabat). Notably to Prof. Harrouni, deputy director of research and to Prof. Mansour, a specialist in sustainable urbanism in Morocco. Consulting with multiple researchers of ENA helped me better recognize literature relevant to my subject. This allowed me to gather more documentation to review previous researches conducted in this field by consulting the library and archives of ENA-Rabat, the national institute of urban planning in Rabat and the Al Saud library in Casablanca. In the following days, I met with M. Salehi Architect and Doctorate candidate of Mohammed V University of Rabat. Getting in contact with him was extremely beneficial to the

advancement of my literature review since M. Salehi is researching about how to interpret old Islamic texts as well as customs and practices of space present in Islamic literature. By interpreting historic scholastic sources about this field it was possible to formulate new urbanism texts and regulations that take into account the Islamic way of arranging and practicing space while also being adapted to today's urban planning standards. My knowledge about his research topic inspired me to investigate my research topic from a new angle including ancient religious texts.

In the second part of the fieldwork, I conducted a field survey for a more hands-on observation with the medina urban typology. In order to establish a more detailed idea about building typologies in the Medinas, I conducted a survey in the Medina of Marrakech in order to familiarize with the field that was subject to the previous research works. I then proceeded to visit a *Foundouq* type of settlement that was recently renovated to know more about how the local equipment types of buildings are integrated into their urban environments and how this can play a vital role in defining the urban form. This survey was conducted while also focusing on the quarter known as Zaouiat Lakhdar which was subject of a study done about computational design in the past (Duarte et al, 2006). It was also a convenient opportunity to focus on the defining aspects of the medina typology, and gather photographic material for further study. In fact, the axiom of this round of investigation was that wall is the base for the urban form (Fig2) in spontaneous settlements in medinas (O'Meara, 2007) and that the Basic housing unit or "*dar*" is the basic cell that forms the urban fabric.



Fig2: The bare walls of the Medina of Marrakech

This fieldwork was an important step in gathering documentation and primary data for refining and narrowing down the subject of my doctorate research. Indeed, discussing with various researchers that are knowledgeable about the topic of Islamic cities was highly beneficial and has allowed me to establish a stronger network that I could rely on in the future steps of my study. The research documentation and photographic material that I gathered, including references in the Arabic language as well as unpublished research thesis only available in Morocco are going to be the subject of further study in the weeks to come after my return to Japan.