

Algeria

Boussad Aiche

From the 1970s until the 1980s

This decade was marred by the structural adjustment program and the reduction it implied in public spending and state investment; very few large-scale public facility projects were launched, especially in the fields of education and health, which had previously created many opportunities for remarkable architectural projects.

These times were also marked by two speeches, one in 1979 and the other in 1986, by the King to Moroccan architects encouraging them to produce higher quality work, and a greater "authenticity" through inspiration drawn from regional and local specificities. In the political backdrop of the times, the speeches had the reverse effect of creating a stereotyped architecture that went against previous work in terms of creativity and contemporaneity; an architecture composed of cladding of arches, green bricks, and zelliges all attempting to vie for 'authenticity', thus losing touch with the project's scale, and failing to integrate in the surrounding space.

A few projects, mainly social housing projects such as Dar Lamane by Abdelaziz Lazrak and Abderrahim Charai and Al Massira by Elie Mouyal, nevertheless provided interesting answers to the context of the time. At the beginning of the 1980s, the National School of Architecture was established under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior. It was the first, and for a long time, the only school of architecture in the country.

The 2000s

The end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s witnessed a major turn in architectural production. A new generation of architects, and new types of programs (commercial, third sector, tourism), combined with the fact that the country was now open to large-scale international investment, helped generate massive architectural production often of the quality of comparable countries. Significant projects carried out by young Moroccan firms or older ones able to change with the times, testify to the influence of major trends in contemporary architecture.

Another phenomenon of note, was the arrival in the middle of the 2000s, of international "starchitects". Approached directly by big public or private operators, these "big names" of the international scene – OMA, Norman Foster, Jean Nouvel, and others – found clients in Morocco attracted by this "Star System" in architecture, to such an extent that it became nearly impossible for a Moroccan agency to make large-scale projects unless associated with a big name. Such a trend is problematic and we are beginning to perceive its limitations considering local reception of such projects.

The 1910s and 1920s:

Stylistic and Neo-Moorish Profusion

The Neo-Moorish style was added to the other architectural styles that had been booming in Algeria since the beginning of the French colonization. Decreed as the official style of the State by Governor Jonnart, the Neo-Moorish style aimed at winning over the local population. By selling France's image as a protector and a guardian of local tradition, the enthusiasm for the Neo-Moorish style at the beginning of the twentieth century would open new vistas for architecture in Algeria. Along with strict aesthetic guidelines with respect to traditional arts, the style proliferated in many public monuments. One of the most typical examples was the Galeries de France in Algiers by Henri Louis Paul Petit. Inaugurated in 1914, it emphasized the legacy of Islamic architectural typologies found in the Maghreb and in Spain. These buildings became true icons and were present in the urban landscape of many an Algerian city, and introduced new visual landmarks resulting from cross-cultural mixing.

The 1930s: the Centennial Celebration

The celebration of the centennial of colonization inaugurated the 1930s in Algeria. Celebrated with great pomp, this important event was intended to give Algeria an international dimension in order to legitimate the French presence there and praise colonial power. Even though the event was unable to hide the political excesses it was leading to, it helped nonetheless launch a large and ambitious major public facilities program that brought innovation and modernity to the country. By adopting architectural codes close to the modern trend, many buildings broke with the Neo-Moorish aesthetic in favor of a modernism adapted to the country's context. Such an ideological influence on the public commission (which wasn't just political but also had a material impact) was clearly visible in the Governmental Palace, as well as the *Maison de l'Agriculture*, by architect Jacques Guilhauchain and the Perret firm. Such icons of modernity should not however overshadow the less radical and more Art Deco approach of a few architects such as Georges Wolff and his *Musée des Beaux-Arts* in Oran (formerly *Demaÿght Museum*) or Charles Montaland and the Municipal Theatre of Sidi Bel Abbes. The Art Deco trend was commonly used in Paris and Casablanca, but took on a more local form, such as in the Hotel de Ville of Skikda (formerly *Philippeville*) by Montaland, which combined a modern spirit with traditional references.

The 1940s and 1950s: Staging Modernity

World War Two caused a turning point in architectural and urban production in Algeria, with a slowing down of all activities in the construction sector. In a political climate of nationalist upheaval, the issues of rural exodus and the housing crisis, which mainly affected a Muslim population, posed the question of housing for the masses. Discussed at the 9th Symposium of the CIAM in 1953, this crucial question is at the core of issues addressed by a new generation of architects who favored the Corbusean school of thought. In Oran and Sidi Bel Abbes, M.J. Mauri and D. Pons, revisited in 1956 the idea of the beehive building built at the *Carrières Centrales* projects in Casablanca, Morocco, by Candilis, Woods and Bodiansky. The historicist alternative offered by Fernand Pouillon follows another line of thought; he combined the spirit of modernism with traditional references for the development in 1953 and 1955 in Algiers of the cities of Diar Essada and Diar el Mahcoul, rallying behind him architects in search of identity referents. The Girls' School of 1956 by J. Pigeon, as well as the airport extension of 1957 in El Golea in the Algerian South by Burgat and Challand, followed that same line of thought. The architectural scene in Algeria in the 1950s is also characterized by innovative experimentation; the 1956 market of Sidi Bel Abbes by Mauri, and the cathedral of the *Sacré-Coeur* of Algiers by Herbe and Le Couteur are proof of the dynamism and the innovative spirit of architects of the time.

After the start of the Algerian War that deepened the trauma of colonization, the Constantine Plan, completed just after the country's independence, would try to accelerate the politics of social housing by launching a vast housing initiative.