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**AN INTEGRATION APPROACH FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE
COLONIAL HERITAGE**
The case of the colonial checkerboard

Thesis booklet

Doctor of Philosophy in Architectural Engineering

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Abstract

Algeria, a North African country, that is historically defined with a great diversity of cultural influences marked by its architectural and urban character. The French colonial memory, which resulted in prestigious productions and city planning, contributes as an actual indicator to the identity of the Algerian built heritage. The authenticity of the pre-colonial cities, intersected with visions of the French engineering in the colonial period, frames a unique meeting of identities. This hybrid heritage becomes a lesson for patrimonial adaptations in Algerian history.

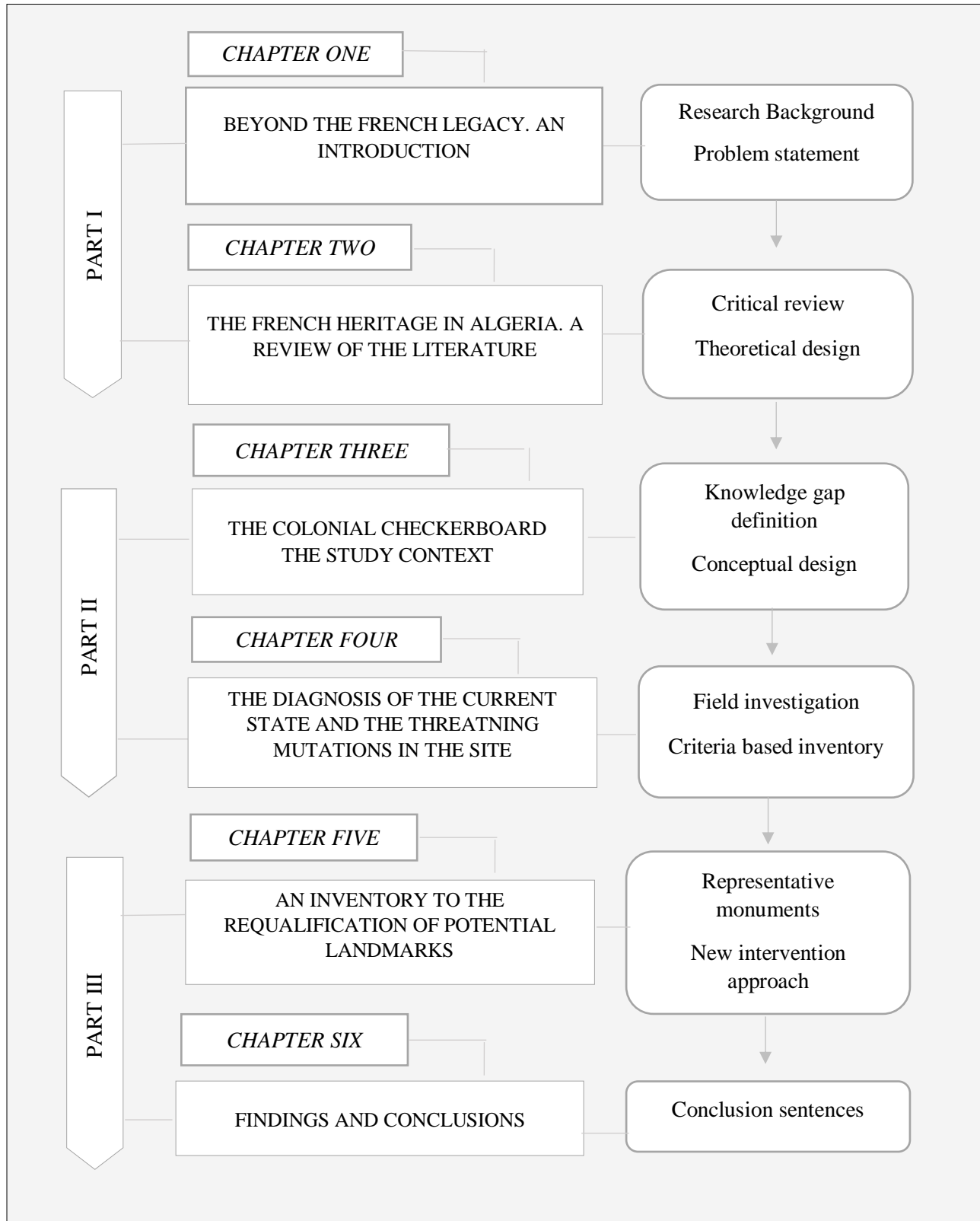
The historical legacy of French Algeria is the vanishing point for modern preservation practices. The perception of the colonial heritage is a vulnerable subject and requires an objective understanding and interpretation. Today, the situation of the French historical centers is problematic and lacks adequate preservation strategies. Moreover, significant monuments belonging to this period are endangered, abandoned, and at risk of disappearance, which announces the essential interrogations for this research. The aim is to introduce a new methodology for the requalification of the French-built heritage and its acceptance as part of the national identity.

The colonial checkerboard in the city of Biskra is an example of neglected French centers. The research approach aims first to evaluate and diagnose the current state of the built heritage, and the mutations threatening its stability. The results of the investigation classified the French quarter's constructions according to multiple criteria, based on the identification of the related conservation statuses; to finally generate the condition and the situation of all the constructions in the checkerboard. The deteriorated state of the center and the loss of its significance is the focus of the investigation. As a result, the definition of the French checkerboard's potentials and the resolving of the different problems and pathologies is essential to the study.

Based on the evaluation and the classification database applied in the historical center, an inventory strategy was developed to define a new logic when dealing with possible conditions in the French historical centers. The diagnosis inventory proceeds with a selection of representative monuments where the monography of the emblematic buildings serves as a definition of potential landmarks, based on their qualities and significance. In the process of requalifying the image and the experiences in the colonial checkerboard, the inventory approach highlights the significance of the selected monuments in a cultural circuit, presenting a unique patrimonial path in the ex-European city that sets the light on both the values and the conditions of the built heritage, and contributes to a better understanding of this French legacy in Algeria and the preservation of similar historical centers.

Keywords: Colonial heritage, Preservation, colonial checkerboard, Requalification, Inventory approach, place identity, Qualities.

The organization of the research



1. Overall aim of the research

In the aim of meeting the aspirations of the research, the investigation of the subject focuses on finding the methodology and the right strategy to revalue the qualities of the French-built heritage, regardless of the period of history it represents but rather to the significance it has on the urban space today. The evaluation of the historical centers is done by the creation of an inventory manual, that covers the different possible cases, resuming the condition, and the classification of the types of French constructions in the historical downtowns. The results of the research are confirmed according to the study of one particular French center in the city of Biskra. The application of the study method and the analysis approach, defines a new logic for the theoretical protection strategy that is followed by two steps, the city inventory and the emblematic monument inventory. Both of them can be concluded in the creation of a cultural path that sets the light on the studied constructions.

2. Research questions

With the aim of meeting the aspirations of the research, the definition of the main questions is required in the process of the study. The essential problem is to revalue the legacy of the 19th and 20th century in Algeria and achieve the preservation of its historical centers and significant monuments.

The investigation is focused on the colonial checkerboard of Biskra, the evaluation of the former French site is related to the perspectives and orientations towards answering the main aims of this research.

The questions of the research are defined as follows:

- ❖ How to preserve the qualities of the French heritage in the historical center of the checkerboard?

- ❖ What is the right approach to integrate the colonial heritage in the preservation process and development planning of the national and the local heritage?

- ❖ What is the right approach to understand and appreciate the values of the French legacy based on its architectural and urban features and regardless of historical periods of conflict?
- ❖ What is the current situation of the French legacy in the French historical center of the checkerboard?
- ❖ What are the potentials and the future of these constructions and monuments?

3. Research objectives

To answer the questions of the research, the research objectives are specified as follows:

- ❖ Discover the French heritage in Algeria, with a profound historical evaluation, to determine the characteristics of the architecture and the urbanism in the colonial period.
- ❖ Determine the significance and the values of this heritage in the past that put the buildings in the colonial checkerboard in the historical context and provide a diachronous analysis to link the value and its loss.
- ❖ The diagnosis of the current situation and condition of the constructions in the colonial checkerboard of Biskra and present a city inventory that specifies the main problems and degradations in the site.
- ❖ Construct a database, that covers the state of all the constructions in the French checkerboard following a criteria-based classification.
- ❖ Define a logic that selects representative monuments of possible cases with a detailed inventory that upgrades them into potential landmarks.

- ❖ Integrate the French heritage by presenting a new strategy that serves as a guideline to define the right approach of treating all cases in the colonial checkerboard and the treatment of possible conditions.
- ❖ Raise awareness of the values and the bad conditions of the French heritage, not only in the colonial checkerboard of Biskra but also in the rest of Algerian regions with defined recommendations to propose the development of this heritage.

4. Conceptual Framework design

The main aim is to present a new approach for the integration of the French legacy in Algeria, mainly investigating the colonial checkerboard in the city of Biskra. The creative design of the conceptual framework was a result of the critical review of the theories, methods, and the reflection on the literature available on the subject, intending to respond to the gaps and limitations of the previous studies. The conceptual framework is designed around two main axes: the values of the French legacy and its loss.

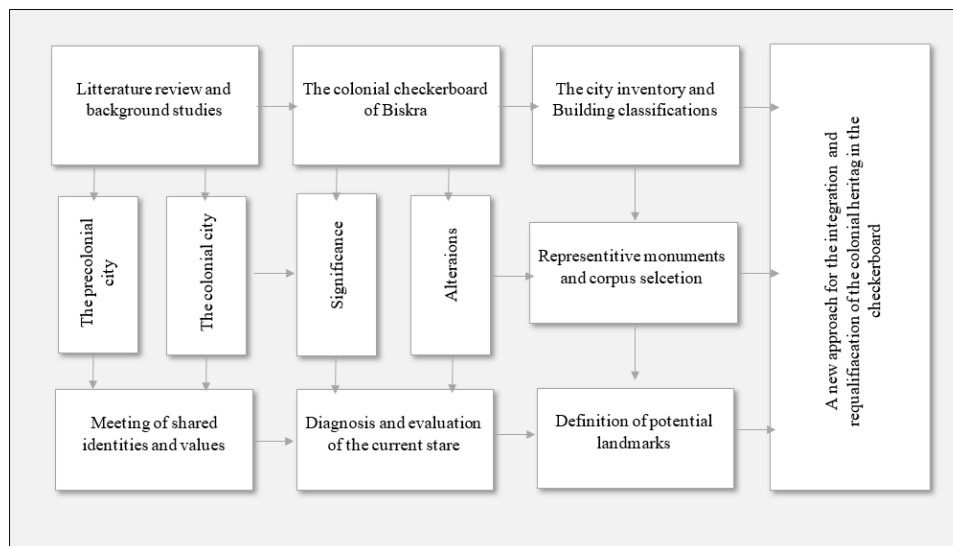


Figure. The conceptual framework of the study

5. Scientific findings

1st theory

The colonial styles in Algeria are originally defined by various design approaches following the periods of occupation. In the general forms, the French features adapt familiar European models, however, it is fundamentally sharing values with the local architecture. The identity of a shared heritage influenced by the specificity of the region and adaptation of pre-existing forms are the main elements that shaped the significance of the French heritage in Algeria.

The theoretical classification of the colonial and the local features shows that the qualities of the French productions in north Africa and Algeria are specific to the morphologies of the local terrains. The creation of the Arabisance style proves that interpretation of the local features is an emphasis on the hybrid quality and a new definition for the colonial value.

The Analysis of the historical emergence of the colonial heritage in Algeria is the first step in the research, with the definition of the urban and architectural characteristics of the colonial heritage. The classification of the French styles, that correlate along to the main three periods of occupation was the result of the historical evaluation and documentation phase.

The presentation of critical reviews of the colonial features, from historical, architectural, and urban perspectives aims for identification of the French period characteristics in comparison to the precolonial period and its impact on the post-colonial reality.

A comparison model has been presented, to indicate the qualities of shared heritage between the traditional city and the new European structures.

2nd theory

The situation of southern heritage in Algeria generally does not receive the same interest as coastal and northern cities. Moreover, there is an unbalance in preservation strategies between the local and the colonial. The lack of adequate approaches that deal with smaller historical centers like the checkerboard of Biskra is the essential cause for the degradation of the colonial heritage.

The creative design of the conceptual framework is based on the empirical findings of the theoretical review. The development of the methodology focuses on the historical center of the colonial checkerboard in the city of Biskra. The site choice is justified after the reflections on the limitations and knowledge gaps, and the diverse situation of the center's structure, where intervention measures need to be applied.

The introduction of the significance and qualities of the colonial checkerboard in Biskra is based on the historical overview and monographic reconstruction of the site, from the historical evolution to the transformation between the oasis to the European city.

According to the research, historical centers like the colonial checkerboard of Biskra are neglected and degraded faced to other preservation actions, that concentrate on bigger sites, of local identity. Based on the definition of the knowledge gaps, the conservation practices in Algeria are somehow focusing on the collection of architectural surveys and monographic descriptions of monuments. Although this is an essential step in the historical documentation, it is shown that there is a lack of accurate strategies for the revalorization of the colonial heritage.

3rd theory

The criteria-based assessment of 273 constructions and the classification of buildings, proved that 54% of the area is occupied by post-independent constructions that are in a good condition. This shows that a significant part of the Algerian history of architecture is gradually disappearing.

The diagnosis of the current conditions and threatening mutations in the French checkerboard, based on the creation of an inventory catalog on the constructions occupying the study area, presents a detailed database for each block in the former French center. A criteria-based evaluation approach has been developed that is illustrated in the results of the building classifications and the related conservation statuses.

The Findings show that three main categories can be classified, which can cover all conditions in the historical center:

- A. French buildings in the original state
- B. French buildings in a reconstructed state, two subcategories were defined
 - B.1.Reconstructed state, where most pieces are remaining French (French character);
 - B.2.Reconstructed state, where most pieces are renewed (modern character);
- C. Post independent buildings in a new state.

Moreover, the results show that 147 construction are entirely renewed in the post-colonial periods, with modern architectural styles, 49 properties are partially reconstructed, where 34 buildings preserve a French character; 15 are rebuilt with some indications from the French design styles. 67 constructions in the original French state, stand in serious conditions, with minor changes in the authentic architectural and structural systems.

This rate of change is impacting the image and the continuity of the French heritage in the former European city. The diagnosis report indicates serious pathologies and mutations that need immediate interventions.

4th theory

Assessing the significance of the colonial checkerboard based on the values of the historical monument is a key solution to the recognition of the colonial heritage. The study narrows down the probability of conditions from 360 to 15 representative conditions. It is determined that the definition of the potential landmarks is essential to reinvent the image of the checkerboard.

The creation of a new approach based on the city inventory findings, that has proceeded with a selection of representative and emblematic cases. The logic of the monument inventory covers the probabilities of all building conditions selecting a sample that generates possible scenarios. The theory promotes these historical monuments into potential landmarks based on the quality analysis statements and proposing intervention strategies to the different cases.

The original building classification, in the study area, introduces a total of 360 cases, when counting all the constructions in the urban blocks, however, based on the defined criteria, findings show that by multiplying the chances, the research can narrow down the count to 15 possible cases. This selected corpus is directly related to classification and the building condition. The theory presents guidelines to the different situations, where the landmark significance is essential to conclude the right measures and recommendations.

5th theory

The preservation manual and the theory can be generalized in contexts with the same history and timeline of architectural productions. The identified approach is a guide to the conservation of colonial values and significance. A new definition is associated with the colonial heritage that gives meaning to the qualities rather than historical realities.

The preservation approach orients towards the significance of the French heritage in the colonial checkerboard, moreover it defines measures and strategies to deal with the current conditions. In the aim of understanding colonial heritage, similar contexts with the same history can benefit from

this theory, including North African countries that share some historical details with colonial Algeria.

This research introduced the need and the necessity to preserve all productions of the past, which have a certain value and patrimonial interest. We tried to build a comprehension paradigm that can be easily applied and used for practical orientations in the field of heritage conservation

6. Research contributions

The research presents a practical approach to the integration of French legacy with the rest of the local and national developments. The evaluation of the French historical center in Biskra was conducted, in the aim of defining a new strategy to deal with heritage of the 19th and the 20th centuries.

The diagnosis of the current alterations and the assessment of each block with all different constructions provides not only a database but a catalogue for future intervention projects and an actuality report faced to the rapid change of the checkerboard image.

The new logic of definition for potential landmarks contributes to the requalification of the image of the site and its monuments. The inventory provides the strategic methods for the use and intervention on the constructions, based on the values and significance. It helps to raise the awareness on this heritage.

The research serves as a manual for the issue of heritage preservation in Algeria and dealing with critical periods of history. It defines the guidelines to treat different scenarios and appropriately intervene on cultural properties. With the proper definition of stakeholders, the findings of the research introduce a manual for understanding the history of the heritage, its current conditions and situations and how to deal with its problems.