A Look at Other Urban Centres

The Case of Casablanca

Mahdi Elmandjra

A discussion of Casablanca may seem to be an anti-climax after the rigorous examination of the problems of Cairo. Yet Casablanca is a very special city because its history goes back to prehistoric times when it was known as Anfa. Today nothing remains of the old Anfa except the name which refers to the most prosperous part of Casablanca, a residential area similar to Beverly Hills.

The more recent phase of the city's history begins in the nineteenth century when it was named Dar El Beida, Casablanca being the Spanish translation. It was not until the turn of the century that the city began to develop—just a few years before it became a French protectorate in 1972 and remained so until 1956.

In 1900 there were only 20,000 inhabitants in Casablanca and a little mosque in the old medina was the only vestige of the city's history. Hence unlike other Moroccan cities such as Fez, Mekness and Marrakesh and unlike other Islamic cities such as Cairo, Casablanca is a city that has very little to conserve except for a few remainders of colonial architecture dating from the 1920s and 1930s.

It is difficult to understand the development of Casablanca or to speak about its future without a brief reference to the history of the country and to the period of the French occupation. The history of Morocco had been for centuries marked by a north-south movement of people and goods continuing along the trade route all the way to Timbuctu (Mali).

The relations of Morocco with the rest of the Islamic world were also along a north-south axis, through the Sahara all the way to the Sudan. With a few exceptions, the coastal cities were not very developed and the imperial cities were always inland. As a result of colonial occupation this north-south flux was transformed so as to satisfy new objectives.

The French policy consisted in promoting a concept of what became to be known as the "useful triangle" which was made up of the area between three cities: Casablanca, the first port of Morocco where the occupation began, Rabat, the administrative capital (90 km from Casablanca), and Kenitra (40 km from Rabat) situated in the middle of a rich agricultural area.

Thus a country of about 700,000 sq. km. was reduced to a "useful" area of about 2,000 sq. km. to provide the new settlers with a space that could be more easily protected (the complete "pacification" of Morocco took over twenty-five years) and all the economic development efforts were concentrated on this small area to the detriment of the whole population.

The découpage constituted a major rupture. It explains the rapid growth of Casablanca, but it also explains a dualism in the
The economy of the whole country which has not been eradicated even after thirty years of independence. Marshal Lyautey, the head of the military occupation, and the master planner and chief executive of the policies of the French protectorate in Morocco during its first thirteen years, left his imprint on the development of Casablanca.

Lyautey attached a great importance to urban planning and his policy was quite clear. He sought to conserve the traditional medinas and to build adjacent to them new modern European cities. In 1913 he brought to Morocco Prost, a very competent urbanist who supervised for ten years the urban and architectural development of Casablanca as well as other cities. A very surprising fact is that by 1918 Prost had already elaborated a *schéma directeur* for Casablanca. To my knowledge this was the first complete and elaborate city plan in the history of urbanism.

It is true that in 1918 Casablanca had only 100,000 inhabitants but what is impressive is that the plan of Prost was respectfully followed for many years until it was amended by Ecochard in 1954. Ecochard’s plan in turn is still being taken into account. The main point to bear in mind is that although Casablanca is a young modern city, it has none the less a long urbanistic tradition.

Table I shows how fast the growth of Casablanca has been during the last fifty years. Between 1925 and 1956, the average annual rate of growth was nearly 10 per cent. Since independence — that is during the last twenty-eight years — this rate has decreased to a little over 3.5 per cent, which is also the projected annual rate of growth until the year 2000. The population of Casablanca represents today 12 per cent of the total population of the country and 25 per cent of the total urban population of Morocco.

Casablanca, having been chosen as the economic capital of the colonial regime, had of course the heaviest concentration of non-Moroccan inhabitants in the country.
Such figures are indicative of an advanced type of development which is common to most countries of the Third World. These figures are also result from imitating the economic systems of developed countries once independence has been gained.

Urban development cannot be isolated from the prevailing economic and social policies. Casablanca, like other major economic capitals of the Third World illustrates two contradictory trends. Firstly, it is the city which offers the greatest socio-economic facilities and the best living conditions available in the country. The housing situation is a case in point. In Casablanca,

- 85 per cent of housing have toilets,
- 75 per cent have electricity and kitchens,
- 65 per cent have running water, and
- 25 per cent have bathrooms.

Another indicator is the illiteracy rate which is 45 per cent in Casablanca as compared to 80 per cent in the rural areas and 65 per cent in the whole country.

Secondly, large-scale urban development is one of the factors that help to maintain a dual economy: the so-called "modern" economy and the traditional one within the national economic system. Although in general there has been a visible progress made in elevating the standard of living, the existing dualism has impeded the equitable redistribution of the socio-economic gains. This situation is clearly reflected by the habitation density figures for different sectors of the city, by the income distribution statistics, by the transport facilities (one bus for every 4,000 inhabitants and one car for every 20 persons, with pedestrian traffic accounting for more than half the movement), and by the available employment opportunities.

Urbanism has been a massive failure throughout the Third World over the last few decades. The colonial approach had serious shortcomings: it was geared to serving the citizens of colonial powers and their economic interests while it systematically discriminated against the nationals. But it had a logic of its own: a plan, a programme, and a set of legal and aesthetic norms which were imposed and respected.

Mine is much more a criticism of what was done after independence to the big cities in developing countries than an apology for colonial urban plans. The problem is that the newly independent countries did not question the existing policies. The departing colonials were often replaced by privileged nationals and the urban model was not decolonised. But the greatest sin of all has probably been the lack of a search for self-reliant solutions with vision and creativity, considering the economic and socio-cultural relevance of these solutions and inviting the participation of those directly affected.

Since the independence, Casablanca continued on the thrust of Ecochard's 1954 plan, a well thought-out and future-oriented exercise which took into account the needs of the nationals far more explicitly than the Prost plan of 1918.

Now let us envision Casablanca in the year 2000, bearing in mind the present trends. Fifteen years is not a long period in the process of urbanism, because most of what is likely to happen within this span of time has already been largely determined by the actions or inertia of the last five years.

According to the official projected growth rate, in the year 2000 the population of the city will reach 4 million, though in my opinion, this is a low estimate and the figure may be closer to 5 million. The master plan prepared by a team directed by Michel Pinseau has retained, among others, the following targets: a population of 4,000,000 million, an urbanised area of 20,000 hectares and 1,200,000 jobs. Whereas the Prost plan of 1918 was a radio-concentric one which Ecochard adjusted in 1954, the Pinseau project aims at a more

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<td>1915</td>
<td>160,000</td>
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<td>1930</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
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<td>1950</td>
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<td>1983</td>
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linear scheme parallel to the sea.

The Casablanca of the year 2000 will still have a very young population. More than one out of three inhabitants will be attending school. The working population is not likely to represent more than 35 per cent of the total population of the city and over 60 per cent will be employed in the tertiary (services) sector.

The minimum housing needs until the year 2000 are estimated to be 300,000 units or about 20,000 units per year. Yet the present rate of construction does not exceed 10,000 units annually. In spite of this respectable housing programme, the cost of land increases continuously as does the number of vacant (unsold or non-rented) housing units. These exceeded 50,000 units in 1984.

Quantitatively the problems of Casablanca are nowhere as great as those of Mexico City, Bombay, Shanghai or Cairo, but qualitatively there is a common problème de urbanisation in all of the developing countries. We have heard many interesting proposals during this seminar on how to limit the immigration to the cities and how to encourage people to stay in the rural areas. Whether they are tried in Cairo or in Casablanca or in any other major city in the world, these attempts are doomed to total failure because they go against universal trends.

Large-scale urbanisation is unavoidable: it is a natural and even desirable phenomenon in spite of the vast problems it generates. It ensures social and economic progress and favours political emancipation and participation. The role which large cities have played in the liberation of the former colonies in the Third World is incontestable and the case of Casablanca is a poignant example of this process.

Taking into account the limited resources of the developing countries on the one hand, and the pressures of demographic growth on the other, it will not be possible to bring to the rural areas the facilities which are to be found in the cities.

Among the variety of proposals aimed at reducing the pressures of rural immigration on the city of Cairo were those ranging from the improvement of the conditions of rural life, to policies favouring the creation of multiple urban centres in order to facilitate de-concentration. It was even suggested to forbid the rural population from entering into the city.

Such approaches betray an illusion underlying them, though they are not encountered in the context of Egypt alone. They are to be found in the agenda regarding all of the developing countries and are often encouraged by certain international organisations. But no force of any kind will be able to stop the urge and the quest of the rural population to seek to improve their living conditions.

For the first time in the history of mankind, the inhabitants of the cities will constitute, in the year 2000, the majority of the world’s population. Out of a total of 6,250 million people which will then inhabit the globe, 3,200 millions or 51 per cent will be living in urban areas. Cities in the Third World will witness a quadrupling of their surface area and an increase of population of more than 1,500 million inhabitants during the next fifteen years. This calls for the building of 1,000 million new housing units during the same period.

The trends of growth of Casablanca fit well within this general pattern since its urban surface will treble while its population will easily double within the next fifteen years. It would therefore need to more than double its present physical, economic and socio-cultural infrastructure.

The attraction of the cities is not only an economic and material one; it also reflects cultural and political aspirations of people because it is in the cities that man has been really able to defend his rights, to create, to innovate and fulfill or relinquish his dreams.

The most serious challenge, however, for the future of Casablanca or any other city in the developing world is not of an economic, financial or even technical nature. It is the challenge of vision, anticipation, innovation and participation because the use of space is first and foremost a cultural phenomenon and the by-product of a way of life.
In architecture and urbanism each generation suffers from the consequence of the concepts and plans of the one preceding it. Raphael de La Hoz, President of the International Union of architects, has put it quite concisely:

"The problem grows when one understands that, we architects, are encapsulating the lives of the new generation (necessarily different from ours) in the dead shells of the past."

The challenge therefore is how to associate those affected today, and how to anticipate the change of values and styles of life of the generation to come as well as the implications of the scientific and technological changes that are in the making without losing sight of socio-cultural relevance. In short, how can we democratise and detecnocratise the process of urbanisation which concerns bodies and souls more than bricks and mortar.

It is very proper in this marvelous city of Cairo to make a plea against a static admiration of the past which often blinds us from looking ahead and which we use as an excuse for not assessing our present and thinking out our future. The greatest homage we can pay to the past is to try to live up to its standards of creativity by building upon them in an innovative manner and not by mummifying them. Tradition is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Kenzo Tange, the great Japanese architect and urban planner, has stated that: "tradition by itself cannot function as the driving force for creativeness, but it always bears within itself the possibility of stimulating creativeness."

One of the great merits of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture is that it has opted for a future-oriented approach to creativity as a continuum of a tradition to be preserved for itself as well as a source of inspiration for the generations to come. The future of Islamic cities, like that of all Third-World cities, resides in such an approach: how to recuperate the past, re-claim the present and de-colonise the future?