

Changes in the distribution of quantitative features of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh

Abstract

At the turn of the 20th century a rapid development of the tourism colonization space in the Medina of Marrakesh began, which consisted mostly of the conversion of historical dwelling houses into private residential hotels or guest houses. The aim of the article is to present a thorough study of the progressive changes in the distribution of quantitative features of the guest houses in various parts of this old town. The cartographical method was utilised, using maps presenting the localization of the guest houses and the average accommodation capacity indicator for buildings in various quarters of the Medina. The distribution of particular features is compared for selected years (1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008). Furthermore, the article engages in polemics with the remarks of other authors dealing with the subject, concerning the distribution of the guest houses and conditions of changes in the aforementioned process.

Keywords

Guest houses • Medina • Marrakesh • distribution

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Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century, formerly unheard-of development of the tourism colonization space in the Medina of Marrakesh has been observed (Escher & Petermann 2013). This has occurred parallel to multifarious globalization (referring to politics, economics and culture) that began to appear in Morocco at the beginning of the 21st century (Cohen & Jaidi 2006). The development of the tourism colonization space consisted mostly of the increase of areas occupied by infrastructure, widely understood to be connected with the hotel trade and recreation, at the cost of former residential areas of the old towns. The people responsible for this process converted many traditional dwelling houses into guest houses (in French, *maisons d'hôtes*). A new population – made up mostly of international tourists – has led to a process of renovation of old Moroccan urban centres, involving profound changes on the architectural and social level. This process – which has been likened to the process of gentrification in cities of industrialized countries – reversed the process of pauperisation and the phenomenon of densification of housing. Some researchers consider the phenomenon of “*guest house-fever in Marrakesh*” to be strongly connected with the process of “touristic gentrification” (Ernst 2013; Escher & Petermann 2000, 2013; Escher, Petermann & Clos 2001). However, it must be added that the authors of other publications have avoided the use of that term while defining the process of functional changes in the Medina, replacing it with the expression “urban requalification” (Kurzac-Souali 2007, 2009a, 2009b). Moreover, some authors have posited that the process assumed such proportions that, in the context of economic globalization (Escher & Petermann 2013), Marrakesh could

be treated as an *affected global city* (Escher 2001) from the first decade of the 21st century.

The first traditional Muslim houses (riads) had already been bought by the early 1990s by energetic lovers of architecture who, according to Florida (2005), could be recognized as the creative class. They were mostly foreigners who belonged in a broad sense to circles connected with art. They bought dwelling properties and restored them, eager to uncover the heritage of traditional Muslim architecture for the eyes of other Europeans and Americans. This was a way to encourage people to invest money in that type of real estate. The buyers were “passionate idealists and conservators of old stones” (Escher & Petermann 2013 p. 103). The restored houses were transformed, step by step, into private residential hotels and guest houses for tourists or, less often, into second houses for retired foreigners (Escher & Petermann 2013). The appearance of the first guest houses was connected with the beginning of the process of touristic colonization of the residential areas of the Medina. The process became more intense after 1999 when, because of the activity of foreigners, mostly from France, a trade boom in the real estate market appeared. The activity of new media and modern transport meant there were crucial factors affecting changes in property structure (Kurzac-Souali 2011).

As a result of multifarious advertising campaigns a large number of (mainly foreign) investors decided to buy riads. Many of the owners, using the new residences only temporarily as second houses and keeping in mind the necessity of renovating the buildings, started to think about converting

their houses into guest houses. In order to encourage tourists to spend time in such guest houses the buildings had to be adapted to modern living standards. The changes in architecture of the riads connected with the creation of guest houses has a negative effect on the cultural heritage of the Medina, as rebuilt palaces were often transformed in structure and appearance and became only conglomerates of the imagined visions or dreams of tourists about traditional Muslim housing. However, it seemed that the phenomenon described above was the only way to save the Medina from complete, irreversible degradation (Escher & Petermann 2013). It is nonetheless worthwhile reflecting that the gentrification of the Medina is not the most important phenomenon with regard to the dynamics of Marrakesh, but it is a unique large-scale example of this process, which has not been observed in the other Maghreb cities.

On the other hand, a number of negative factors were linked to the gentrification of the Medina, with long-time residents forced to leave their familiar districts due to rising prices, destabilization, and fraying of the traditional social fabric. Some of the rehabilitation activities ended up breaking the traditional rules of urban society. In some cases, entire blocks were rebuilt to be sold on the real estate market. Another growing concern was the very visible presence of foreigners in the Medina. This has led to a certain hostility on the part of the local population, since foreigners have tended not to be respectful of Moroccan standards of behaviour in appropriating the urban space (Bigio 2010).

The process of “seizing” former dwelling houses for guest houses in the Medina was irregular. Changes in the structure of the old town appeared only in selected parts. Among other things, it was possible to observe zones of a significant concentration of foreigner-owned houses, including guest houses. Researchers dealing with the analysis of the distribution of real estate changes during the process of gentrification connected with tourism, and indicating reasons for such a situation, include Escher & Petermann, Clos (2000, 2001) and Kurzac-Souali (2007, 2009b). However, their publications used cartographical maps, in practice, only for visual presentations of the described phenomenon. This article aims to treat the subject a little more widely using the cartographical method to investigate changes in the distribution of quantitative features of the guest houses in Marrakesh. The cartographical analysis enabled the compilation of knowledge on the phenomenon of the mass appearance of guest houses in the Medina of the Red City and allowed the author to engage in polemics with the remarks of the above-mentioned researchers.

Characteristics of the data base and assumptions of the research

For the analysis of changes in the distribution of guest houses in the Medina an official list of classified guest houses in Wilaya, Marrakesh was used, confirmed by the Ministry of Tourism and Craft of Morocco and published online by the Association of Guest Houses in Marrakesh and Southern Morocco (AMHMS 2008). It presents a detailed list of buildings used for overnight accommodation at the end of 2008, including number of beds, number of employees, addresses, contact data, names of owners and dates of decisions confirming the suitability for categorisation as a guest house. The list contained 570 items. In comparison with the number of guest houses published in *Annuaire statistique du Maroc* (2009), containing 618 items, the list was incomplete and did not reflect the true situation. However, in the opinion of the author, the absence of 48 guest houses could not cause significant mistakes in drawing conclusions from the analysis.

The initial stage of the research involved arranging and preparing the data base for analysis. Among other things, the

base was extended by adding information on the name of the quarter of the city in which the guest house was located, based on the full address of each guest house, including data on street names. Next, the author identified only those guest houses located within the walls of the Medina, removing those located outside. Information on the selected guest houses needed to be complete, i.e. containing dates of decisions confirming suitability of categorisation for each guest house (information on some of the buildings did not contain such data). Finally, the data base contained 451 items. It should be emphasized that the year of obtaining a decision confirming suitability for categorisation as a guest house may vary from the year in which the guest house was established because many of the guest houses established during the early period of the touristic boom were not initially subject to strict procedures of activity registration.

Before the proper spatial analysis, a recapitulation focussed on the process of the creation of guest houses in the Medina in Marrakesh. This helped to emphasize the most important changes occurring over the years and allowed the selection of parameters, on the basis of which the spatial analysis at the level of quarters was conducted and research assumptions were formulated.

In 2008 the majority of the guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh belonged to private owners of European origin (70%), most of whom were from France (single people or married couples). It should be mentioned that among these owners there were also large groups of English, Spaniards, Italians, Germans, Swiss and Americans. These were the first foreign owners of the guest houses. Over time, Moroccans, married couples of Moroccan and foreigners (most often Moroccan-French couples) and “mixed” companies/associations also started to run hotel businesses in the Medina, beginning with the purchase of riads (respectively: 18%, 2% and 10% in 2008). At the turn of the 20th century a rapid increase in the number of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh was observed. These were mostly guest houses of the second category (Fig. 1).

Over time, the rate of creation of new guest houses slowed down. On the one hand, prices of riads increased year by year, which caused a decline in demand; on the other hand, it was the end of the phase of “euphoria” among buyers, connected with all the advantages resulting from filling in the economic gap. The increase in the number of guest houses in various parts of the Medina was irregular, which has been described by Kurzac-Souali (2009b). The main aim of the article was to check carefully whether Kurzac-Souali’s remarks could be confirmed through the analysis of maps presenting the distribution of the guest houses in the Medina in selected years.

Moreover, the average accommodation capacity indicator, i.e. the number of beds for each guest house, also changed from year to year. At the beginning of the investigated period a significant downward trend was observed, relating to the total number of guest houses as well as the guest houses which were divided into two categories. However, after a short time, values of the indicator settled at a constant level which has remained fairly consistent ever since (Fig. 2).

On the one hand, this could be connected with an imperfection in the statistics, i.e. the increase in the number of guest houses was accompanied by a levelling in the average value of the indicator. On the other hand, it could be explained by the fact that in the early period of time there were more large houses with a high number of beds, while later guest houses with fewer beds were more common. Moreover, the author has assumed that average values of the accommodation capacity indicator for various parts of the Medina were placed irregularly, which should be proved by using the cartographical method.

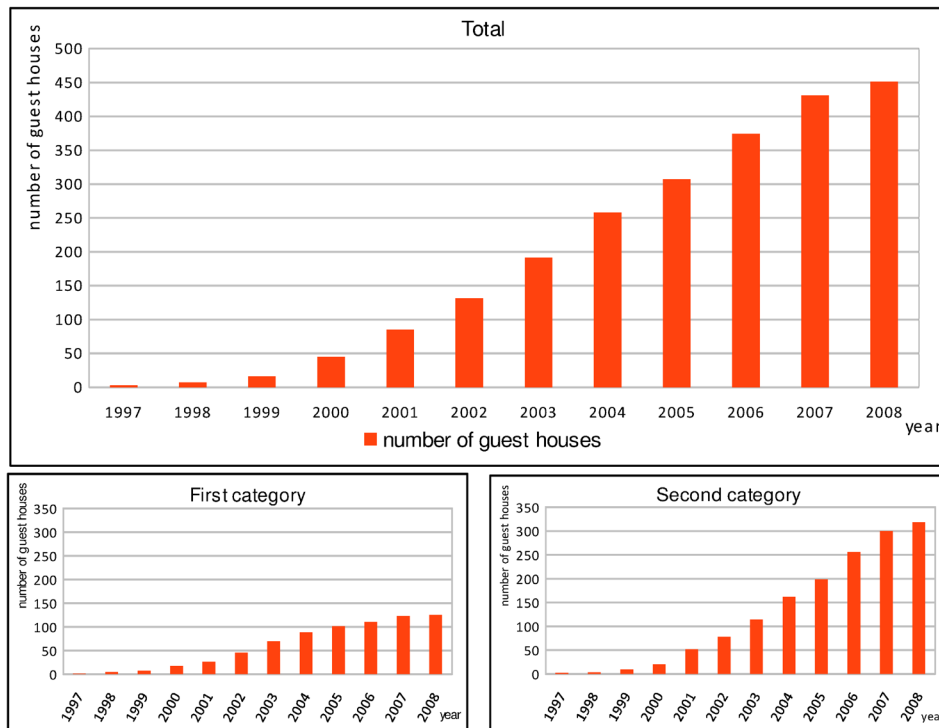


Figure 1. The number of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh, 1997–2008. Source: Own elaboration based on (AMHMS 2008)

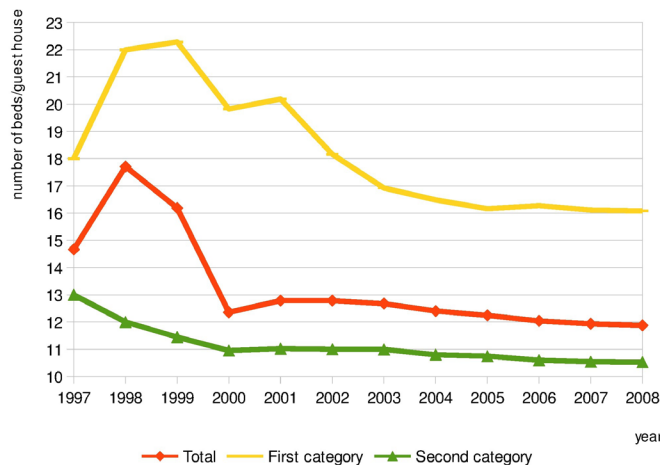


Figure 2. Average accommodation capacity indicator in the Medina of Marrakesh, 1997–2008. Source: Own elaboration based on (AMHMS 2008)

Analysis of maps

As a reference field a plan of the quarters of the Medina was used, according to the division applied by Escher & Petermann (2004) and Kurzac-Souali (2009b) – Figure 3.

On the basis of Fig. 4 it can be observed that at the beginning of the period (i.e. in 1999), the process of touristic gentrification in the Medina continued in a scattered way. However, the quarter Bab Doukala is notable for its enormous number of guest houses. In the following years (2002, 2005, 2008) a significant concentration of guest houses appeared in many zones, from which it can be deduced that the process of “seizure” of dwelling houses for touristic functions took place in selected parts of the Medina.

Similarly, on the maps describing number of guest houses in 2002 and 2005 (Fig. 4), as in the studies of Kurzac-Souali (2009b), a significant division of the old town into two areas can be observed, separated by a diagonal line passing from north-north west to south-south east (between the quarter Kaa el Macharaa and the Bab Ahmar). Areas to the west side of the diagonal contained a large part of the guest houses, with a significant concentration in the quarters of Riad Zitoun El Kedim, Mouassine and Riad Zitoun El Dijd. This was the part of town with the oldest buildings, the most valuable with regards to architecture, and with the biggest residences (of an area above 200 sq. m). In the precolonial and colonial period it was inhabited by the richest people of the upper classes, often aristocracy.

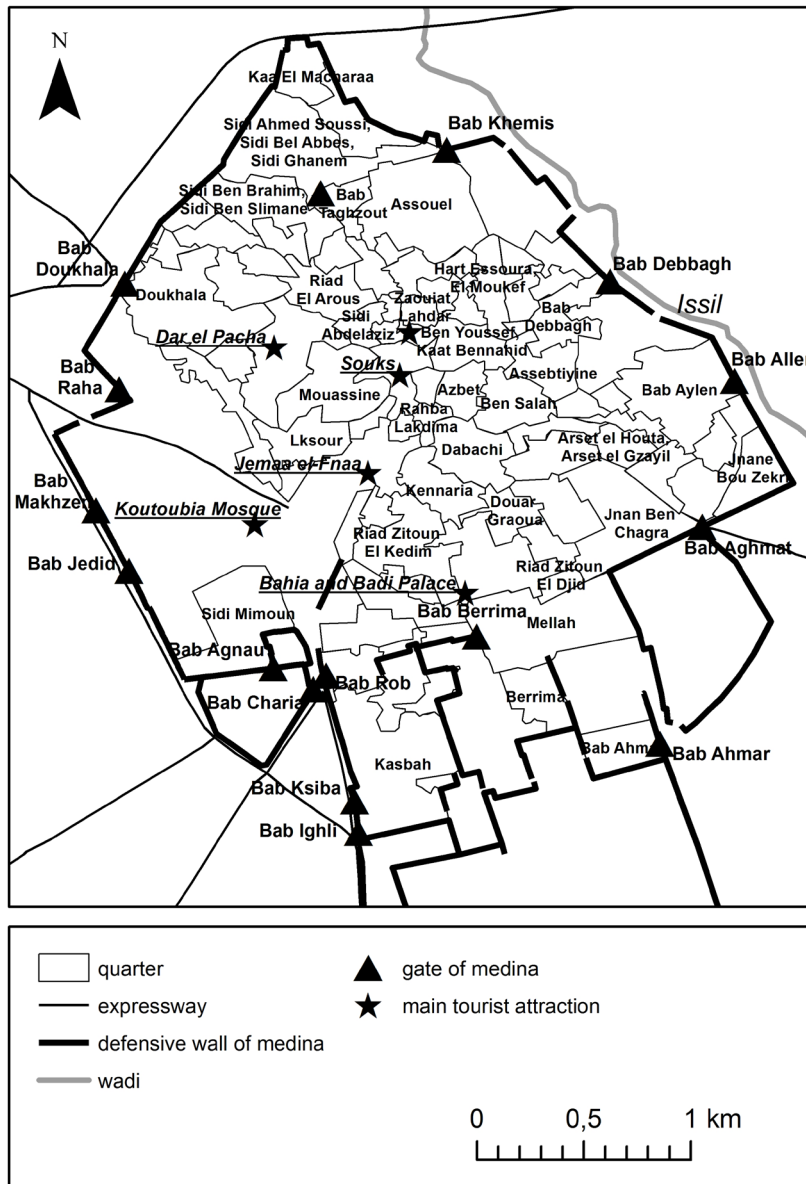


Figure 3. Administrative map of the Medina of Marrakesh. Source: Own elaboration based on (AMHMS 2008, Escher & Petermann 2004)

Figure 5 shows the land use at the end of the 19th century in the Medina. Emphasis has been placed on the presentation of the social segregation of space.

In the eastern part of the Medina the process of gentrification caused by the creation of guest houses continued more slowly, because it was the part of the city most affected by high-density housing, an increase in population density and pauperization in the second half of the 20th century (Courbage 2009). From time immemorial, that part of the Medina was inhabited by the poorest class, the majority of whom were craftsmen (Fig. 5). The area was the site of the most arduous economic activities, strongly dependent on the supply of water from Wadi Issil, such as the tanneries (Fig. 4). This part of the city was also very near to the illegal residential districts (duars), which were especially affected by poverty and a lack of basic infrastructure (Fig. 4). Only in the quarter of Bab Aylen were there more guest houses, which resulted from the proximity of

the city gate and its good connection with the rest of the city via the street system and different means of transport (Kurzac-Souali 2007).

Figure 4. describes not only the distribution of quantitative and qualitative features of the guest houses but also the structure of the use of land in the Medina and adjoining areas, with localization of selected elements of the infrastructure connected with transport and tourist attractions. On the basis of cartographical methods a positive attitude can be taken towards the conclusions of Kurzac-Souali's studies (2007, 2009b) on investors' reasons for choice of guest house location. Choices were made according to strict criteria which can be divided into two groups: those connected with geography and with architecture. Geographical criteria included:

- location • the selection of a building for a guest house was strongly connected with the advantages of its location. For example, buildings located near recreation areas or

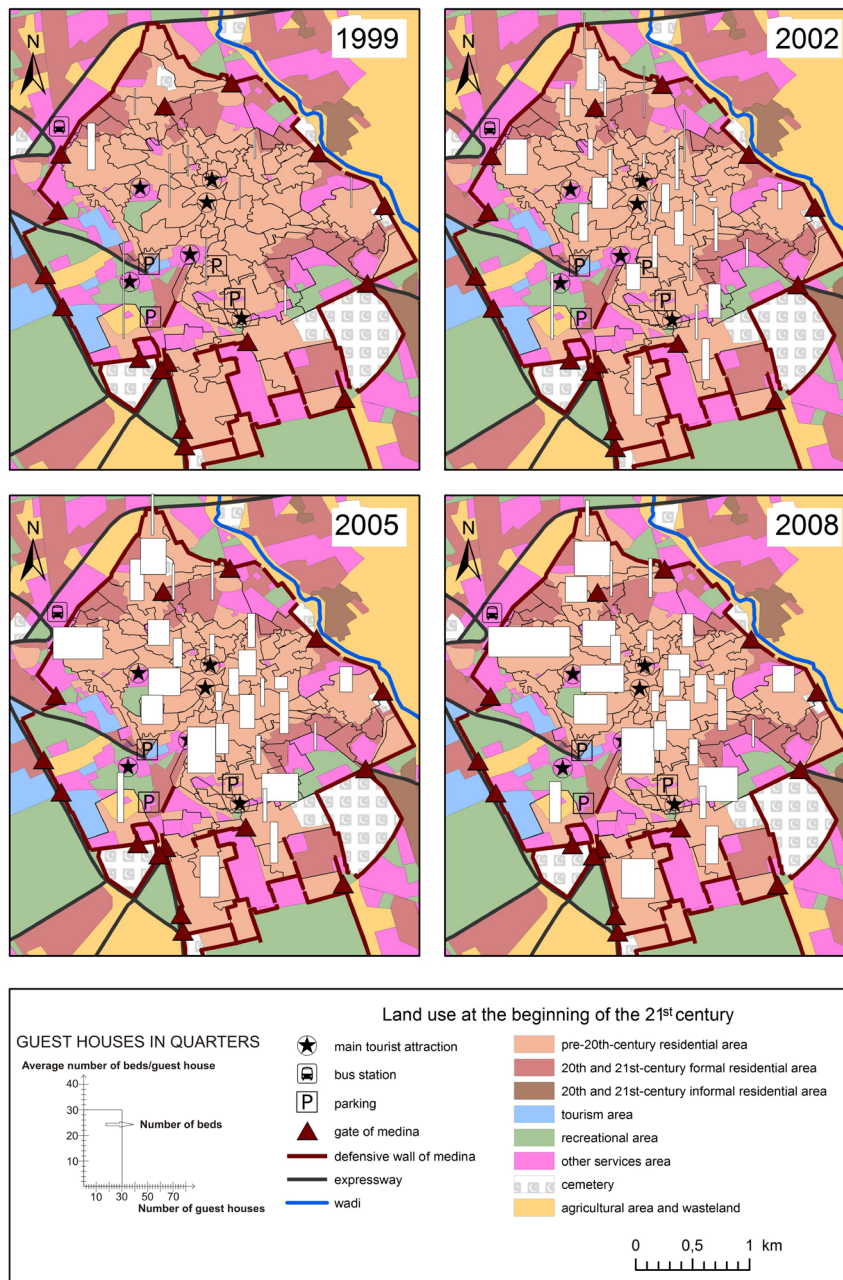


Figure 4. Distribution of quantitative features of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh, 1999–2008. Source: Own elaboration based on (AMHMS 2008, basemap from OpenStreetMap generated in ArcMap 10.1.)

touristic areas were often sought after (i.e. areas with already existing hotels). Buildings located near tourist attractions or with a beautiful view from the roof were often selected. Investors were keen to create guest houses near the Koutubiya Mosque, Jemaa el-Fna Square or the souks (in the quarters of Mouassine, Lksour, Kennaria, Riad Zitoun El Kedim) or near other touristic places – from the quarter Zitoun Jdid it was possible to see the Bahia Palace and from the western part of the Jewish quarter there was a panoramic view of the Baadi Palace. A view of the snow-covered summits of the High Atlas Mountains was especially valuable for buyers;

- good accessibility by transport • in the Medina the quarters with a good connection to the city centre via the street system and various means of transport were favoured. Some eastern quarters of the Medina (Doukhala, Lksour) were near the bus station; others (e.g. Riad Zitoun El Kedim) were easy accessible by car via express routes (connecting with Jemaa el-Fna Square) and also had parking places;
- good condition and maintenance of the quarter and streets leading to the future guest house • buyers were looking for buildings in so-called “good quarters” which were safe, clean, tidy, well illuminated, and near interesting places, historical monuments or souks (Kurzac-Souali 2009b).

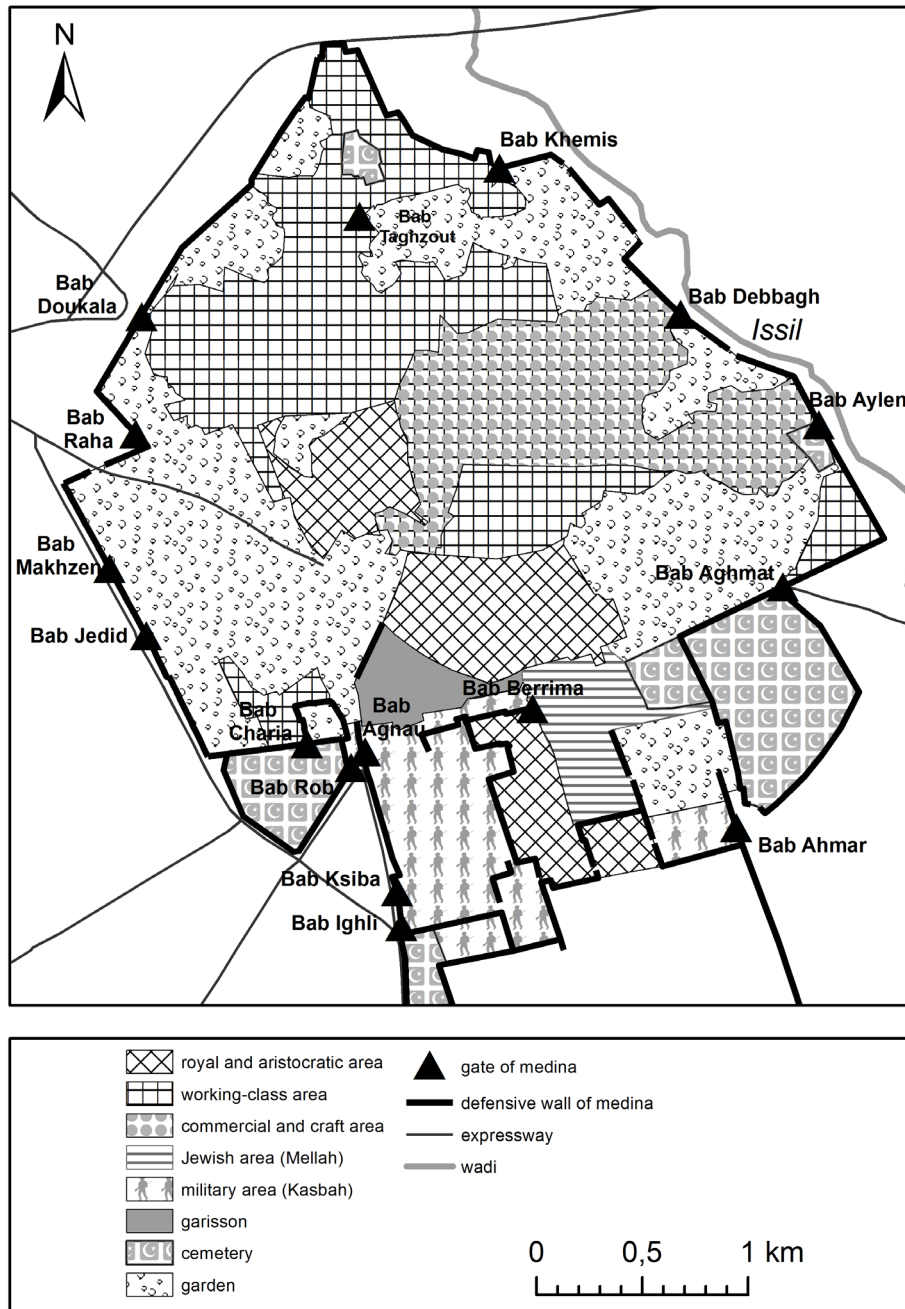


Figure 5. Land use in the Medina of Marrakesh at the end of the 19th century. Source: Own elaboration based on (Bennassel 1984)

Architectural criteria were also very important for buyers in choosing an appropriate building. They paid particular attention to the historical and architectural values of the residences. The older buildings which were better connected with local tradition and culture were favoured. The quarters with plenty of old, traditional Muslim houses, e.g. the former aristocratic quarters of Mouassine, Lksour, Riad Zitoun El Kedim, were chosen more often. The size and technical condition (state of repair) of buildings were important factors in the selection. Most buyers preferred large, well-preserved residences because they wanted to minimize the costs of restoration and rebuilding connected with enlarging the house by joining several neighbouring buildings together (Kurzac-Souali 2007).

However, it should be noted that, especially in the last examined year (i.e. in 2008), the geographical and architectural criteria which conditioned the preferential character of the western part of the Medina for the creation of guest houses partly lost their significance. Over time, more and more guest houses were also established in the eastern part of the analysed area (Fig. 4). This may be connected with the phenomenon of diffusion. The guest houses which had been created earlier lifted the value of neighbouring areas, encouraging people to invest in similar construction projects in the area.

On the basis of Figure 4 it can be ascertained whether the real values of the accommodation capacity indicator in the Medina were distributed in an irregular way. The guest houses

with a high number of beds appeared not only in the quarters with riads of a larger usable area. However, a certain regularity can be noted. Namely, in the central quarters adjoining Jemaa el-Fna Square, a decrease in value of the accommodation capacity indicator is observed over time, which did not occur in other parts of the Medina. It is possible that this was connected with the fact that, in spite of the appearance of larger guest houses in the centre of the Medina during the early period of the analysis, the increase in the number of smaller guest houses over time was more significant there than in other places. This resulted in the statistical average of accommodation capacity of guest houses in the central quarters decreasing more quickly than in other parts of the Medina.

Summary

In the article the advantages of the cartographical method have been used to investigate the process of changes in the distribution of quantitative features of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh. The cartographical analysis enabled the compilation of knowledge on the phenomenon of the creation of guest houses in the Red City. The study confirmed, following Kurzac-Souali (2009b), that the increase in the number of guest houses in various parts of the Medina was irregular. The selection of traditional Muslim houses for transformation into guest houses

depended on their architectural features (e.g. size, architectural value) and on the features of their surroundings (e.g. accessibility by transport, level of safety, condition and maintenance of the quarter, touristic attractiveness of the area). However, over time, step by step, the significance of those location factors diminished because the guest houses which had been established earlier lifted the value of the neighbouring areas, which became more appealing for investments in infrastructure connected with touristic accommodation. Moreover, in the central quarters (adjoining Jemaa el-Fna Square) a significant decrease in the accommodation capacity factor was observed, which did not occur in other parts of the Medina. However, the examination of the reasons for this phenomenon requires further research. Furthermore, due to the lack of an adequate database, the author of this article was not able to explain the disparity in the location of guest houses after 2008, especially with regards to the upgrading of the Medina and new urban projects.

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