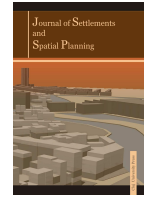




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A New Type of Housing Integrated into the Algerian Urban Landscape

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ABSTRACT

When an urban practice operates outside the normative mechanisms established by public authorities, it is considered informal. Over the course of several years, the Algerian State has undertaken multiple initiatives to combat illegal dwellings, with the primary objective of regularizing these forms of housing without any associated land appropriation. The aim of this research is to analyse the rapid proliferation of the urban fabric in Constantine, which has resulted in the emergence of new forms of unregulated urbanization since the liberalization of the real estate market in 1990. Illicit urban neighbourhoods have formed, characterized by well-constructed houses. The legislative power is currently committed to regularizing the vast majority of these illegal quarters within a few years.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global urban population continues to experience a steady increase (1.58% per year) with urban residents constituting a dominant majority (nearly 55% in 2017) (Clerc and Deboulet, 2018). The urban space is recognized as a catalyst for growth and social innovation. However, approximately half of this growth occurs in non-regulated or informal forms (Chikaoui-Berry, 2007; Clerc and Deboulet, 2018). This trend has garnered attention on the agendas of international organizations for over 30 years, resulting in over a billion inhabitants residing in informal settlements worldwide at the beginning of the 21st century (UN-Habitat, 2003). This staggering number underscores the significance of these unregulated housing arrangements. “Informal” serves as an

adjective used to describe settlements deemed illicit, irregular, or illegal (Clerc, 2005; Clerc, 2010; Maachou et al., 2018). Presently, illicit dwellings represent a prominent urban dynamic that geographers extensively study due to their contribution to intra-urban segregation and fragmentation, ultimately causing profound transformations in urban landscapes (Nijman and Wei, 2020; Clerc and Deboulet, 2018; Thémines, 2022). The evolving urbanization patterns observed in developing countries showcase the predominant manifestation of urban transformations, with Southern cities playing an increasingly influential role in shaping contemporary urban trends (Pfirsich and Semi, 2016; Thémines, 2022).

Globalization and urbanization processes have been accelerated in less developed countries, where the population is most concentrated, reaching 3.2 billion

compared to less than 1 billion in the North (Véron, 2008). This rapid increase has necessitated a revision of urban planning policies by managers since the 1990s, with a focus on engaging the private sector and local communities to ensure appropriate and sustainable housing (Kadri and Madani, 2015; Saharaoui and Bada, 2021). Illicit dwellings have emerged as a significant urban challenge in North Africa, to the extent that some argue that “*informal dwellings have taken over the city*” (Belguidoum and Mouaziz, 2010; Nassar and Elsayed, 2018). In their study, Agyabeng et al. (2022) mentioned, that the situation is complex due to the heterogeneity of informal housing realities, both globally and specifically in North Africa. Given the profound transformations that have taken place in the region over the past decade, an examination of the illicit housing situation in Algeria becomes imperative within this research (Navez-Bouchanine, 2005; De Barros, 2012). The illegal urban space is in a constant state of evolution, assuming new forms outside of Algerian legislation and regulations and involving diverse actors. Presently, local and national authorities commonly refer to these forms as illicit neighbourhoods (Chikaoui-Berry, 2007). This issue has garnered significant attention from the Algerian urban actors who seek avenues for real estate regularization. In evaluating this phenomenon, we have focused on three research sites, which we extensively investigated between 2017 and 2019. These sites represent large illicit neighbourhoods in a major Algerian city that has long faced demographic pressures resulting from rural exodus. This paradoxical evolution has led to the emergence of expansive landholding quarters within an unregulated framework that persists to this day. The landowners in these quarters have sought means of regularization with the State, while retaining ownership of their land. These landowners can be categorized into two types of actors. The first group operates legally and has created formal subdivisions, approving the sale of land deeds to buyers. The second group operates illegally and has facilitated land sales through customary contracts in the city’s outskirts. The objective of this research is to analyse the recent history of rehabilitation and regulation policies for illicit neighbourhoods in the Constantine province, following the enactment of Law 15/08¹ by the State to address illegal dwellings.

2. CONSTANTINE METROPOLIS: A NON-CONTROLLED URBAN DYNAMIC

Prior to and following the Arab Spring, North African countries have faced an acute housing crisis driven by demographic growth and the demand for adequate housing, leading to the emergence of new spaces characterized by informal constructions. The

management of urban space has been particularly strained and inadequately addressed, resulting in these informal developments (Lakabi and Djelal, 2011). Algeria, like other nations, has experienced ill-suited precarious housing conditions, marked by population vulnerability, overcrowding, and inadequate infrastructure networks (Meskaldji, 1994).

Constantine, located in the north-eastern region of Algeria, serves as a major metropolis, the regional capital of the East, and ranks as the country’s third most populous city (Cherrad, 2011; Lakehal, 2014). It occupies a strategic position, extending far beyond its historical role as a defensive stronghold on the original rocky site. The city’s socio-economic facilities, urban expansions, and diverse infrastructures span the surrounding physical environment (Guerni, 2009; Cherrad, 2011). It is located 431 km east of the capital, Algiers, covering a land area of 2,297 km². In terms of population, according to the last general census of population and housing conducted in 2008, the city was home to approximately 448,374 inhabitants accounting for 47.77% of the province’s total population. Over the course of two centuries, Constantine has undergone continuous evolution, transitioning from its initial urban spread around the rocky terrain to an intense and uninterrupted urban expansion. However, the city has now acquired a mismanaged urban image, despite the existence of planning systems and regulatory tools such as the PDAU² (Urban Development Plan) and POS³ (Land Use Plan). Theoretically, these tools aim to address the increasing demand for housing resulting from demographic growth and immigration flows.

To conduct our research on illicit housing in the province of Constantine, we have selected three entirely informal neighbourhoods, namely: Sissaoui, Ennakhil, and Naadja Sghira. The choice of these neighbourhoods was based on investigations conducted since 2013, across various neighbourhoods in Constantine, leading to the selection of these three in 2017. The studied neighbourhoods are situated on the outskirts of the province of Constantine.

Sissaoui, the first neighbourhood, emerged in the east of the city towards the late 1970s. It is located between Constantine and the municipality of El Khroub, covering an area of 639 hectares and comprising nearly 800 structures with a population of around 5,000 inhabitants (ONS, 2008) (Fig. 1). Naadja Sghira developed in the west of the city, within the lower centre of the Boussouf neighbourhood, during the 1980s (Fig 2). As for the Ennakhil neighbourhood, also

¹ Law 15/08: establishing the rules for bringing constructions into compliance and their completion.

² PDAU: Plan for Development and Urban Planning: Plan aims to be a legally mandated instrument for spatial planning and urban management.

³ POS: The Plan occupation des Sols (POS) has long been the reference document for municipalities in terms of urban development. It also concerned private individuals and served as a starting point for the feasibility of many projects.

known as DNC, it was established towards the end of the 1980s. Situated on the hill of Draa Boufrika in the

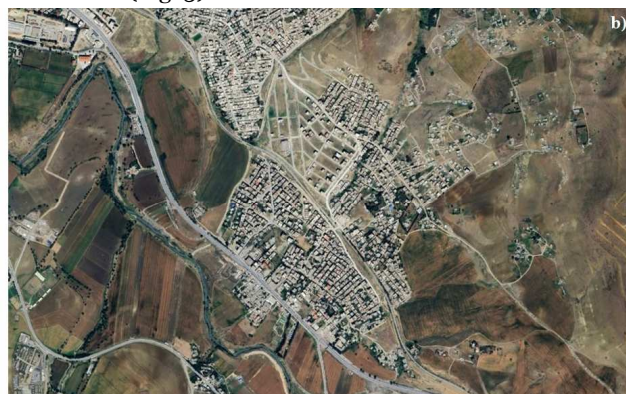
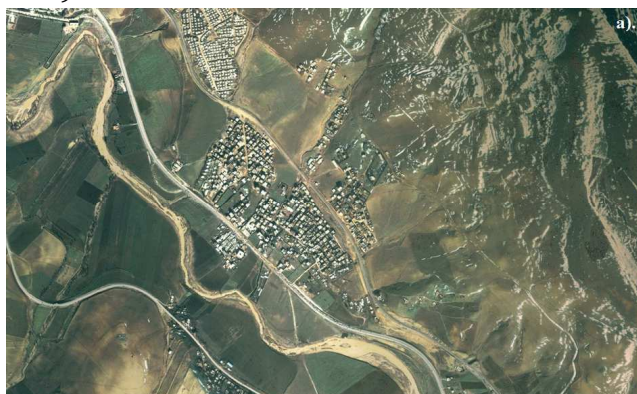


Fig. 1. Sissaoui City: a). In 2003; b). In 2023 (source: Google Earth).

north of Constantine, it faces the university campus of Zarzara (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Naadja Sghira City: a). In 2003; b). In 2023 (source: Google Earth).



Fig. 3. Ennakhil City: a). In 2003; b). In 2023 (source: Google Earth).

3. CONCEPTUAL CHOICES, DATA AND METHODS

Urban research on Algerian cities often reveals the existing disparities between laws and practices, as well as the discrepancies between programs and their real-life implementation in the field (Belguidoum and Mouaziz, 2010). To scientifically investigate these phenomena, numerous inquiries have been directed towards urban managers and property owners, aiming to understand the motivations behind the choice of illicit dwelling. To what extent have the mentioned national legislative developments affected local public action in Algeria? Which social category do these new

builders belong to? Why have they resorted to illegal housing construction? Are there (or will there be) strategies associated with illicit dwelling or illegality in general? This conflictual phenomenon poses significant challenges for urban territorial management, entangled with multiple problems.

This study is based on the findings of investigations conducted on the real estate market within the three illicit quarters of Constantine province. Our approach combines various research protocols, including field observations carried out as part of a doctoral study in urban planning under the supervision of Prof. S.E. Cherrad, as well as semi-structured interviews with property owners, architects, and

construction companies. While these investigations have begun in 2014, interviews with the relevant stakeholders could only be conducted between the latter months of 2017 and 2019. This period allowed for the tracking of the evolution of illicit quarters. “The analysis of these residential areas and the daily lives of their inhabitants facilitates the reconstruction of their life trajectories and aspirations to live as ordinary citizens within the city” (Belmessous and Naceur, 2019, p. 40).

From a methodological standpoint, our research endeavours to initially quantify the actual magnitude of this emerging housing production. Subsequently, we aim to comprehend and elucidate the underlying rationales and strategies employed by this new category of dwellings. Our investigation begins by examining the position of illicit quarters as a counterforce to real estate public policies in Algeria, giving rise to a novel generation of illegal urban spaces through unregulated traditional transactions between owners and buyers. Despite the laws and regulations established by the State to manage urbanization in major Algerian cities, these illicit quarters continue to rapidly expand. In the second part of our study, we will explore the State's efforts to address the urban and non-property status of these types of dwellings, as well as how legal institutions and procedures intervene in the daily lives of inhabitants who contribute to the establishment and growth of these quarters. The objective is to bring them in line with the norms governing regulated urban areas within the city.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which may impact the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Firstly, the study relied on available data and field investigations conducted in specific neighbourhoods in Constantine, which may not fully represent the situation in other Algerian cities. Thus, caution should be exercised in extrapolating the findings to the entire country. Secondly, the methods employed in this study, including field investigations and analysis of legal and regulatory texts, provide valuable insights but may have limitations. The accuracy and completeness of the data collected and the interpretation of legal documents could have influenced the results obtained. Moreover, the complex nature of informal urbanization and its associated social, economic, and political dynamics may require additional research methods, such as interviews or surveys, to capture a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Emergence and development of illicit dwellings in Constantine

The Martyrs neighbourhood, established in 1953, holds the distinction of being the first indigenous

city in Constantine (Grangaud, 1998). Throughout the post-independence period, Constantine, much like other major Algerian cities, has experienced significant population growth. As noted in Table 1, there is a notable concentration of population in the urban agglomeration of the regional capital, with an evolution of 111,879 and an increase rate of 3.47% during the initial decade of 1966-1977. In the subsequent decade, population growth continued, albeit at a slower pace, with a modest increase rate of 2.34%. It is important to note that, aside from natural growth, the phenomenon of rural exodus and migration has also contributed to the demographic surge. The “black decade” period in Algeria is widely recognized, characterized by social upheavals and a substantial loss of human life. These circumstances explain the relatively lower population growth rate observed in Constantine, as well as other cities (Tamine, 1986).

Table 1. Demographic evolution of Constantine city.

Years	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008
Population	245621	357500	450738	481947	438161
Rate of growth (%)		3.47	2.34	0.61	- 0.72

Source: ONS. <https://www.ons.dz/>

Between 1998 and 2008, a noticeable decrease with a negative rate of -0.72% can be observed in Constantine's population. This decline can be attributed to a portion of the population migrating from the city centre to the Nouvelle Ville Ali Mendjeli and the satellite towns. Consequently, the urban fabric of Constantine underwent significant expansion, and from 1959 to 1970, the occupation of unsuitable urban areas for urbanization began (Lamri et al., 2020). This initiated the emergence of urban problems in Constantine characterized by fabric heterogeneity and precarity (Acheuk-Youcef et al., 2019).

After 1970, the city of Constantine embarked on planned urban extensions to address the gaps in the North-East and South-West regions. The early 1980s, known as the “post-urbanization” period, witnessed a surge in constructions along inter-regional axes beyond the urban perimeter, resulting from uncontrolled private allotments and the emergence of precarious dwellings (Kadri and Madani, 2015; Acheuk-Youcef et al., 2019). Constantine's development expanded beyond its traditional boundaries, encroaching upon ancient colonial villages such as El Khroub, Ain Smara, Didouche Mourad, and Hamma Bouziane, which together form the Constantine agglomeration, along with the new town of Ain El Bey. This uncontrolled spatial growth, coupled with the loss of thousands of hectares of low-value agricultural land, has raised significant concerns (Chouguiat-Belmalem, 2014).

Constantine presents an intriguing case study for this type of dwelling due to specific physical constraints. Distinct features, primarily consisting of

individual constructions, characterize the urban sectors of the commune of Constantine. The liberalization of the real estate market through the 90/25 law led to private lands supplying the real estate market, thereby contributing to the development of this form of illicit habitat. Neighbourhoods like Benchergui and Sissaoui pose challenges in terms of accessibility due to their association with prominent local families who serve as private property owners. For instance, the Ennakhil neighbourhood: was built on land owned by three major families: Benabdelkader, Bensmara, and Boumaza. The initial nucleus was established in 1973 by the Bensmara family's constructions on their property, later expanding to encompass the Benabdelkader family's land in the early 1980s. As for the Boumaza family, they opted to wait until the 1990 law to legally develop their lands.

4.2. "Non-Regulatory" or "Illicit": new forms of urbanisation

Illicit dwellings in Algeria are intricately linked to the appropriation of urban land. Despite the liberalization of the real estate market since the 1990 law on real estate orientation, illegal housing continues to thrive in Algeria, albeit in a new form (Fig. 4) (Fig. 5). (Fig. 6).

While the phenomenon has seen some reduction in recent years, a new generation of more "presentable" illegal dwellings has emerged. This new mode of construction is no longer limited to rural and disadvantaged populations who lack knowledge of urbanization rules (Spiga Boulahbel, 2005; Benlakhlef and Bergel, 2016). The traditional form of informal housing has typically arisen from a pressing social need to secure a roof over one's head, regardless of its form. Houses are constructed incrementally based on the financial means of the family, often spanning one or two generations. However, the current generation involved in this practice belongs to a relatively wealthier and socially elevated category. They have a longer presence in the city, a deeper integration into urban life, and a better understanding of its dynamics. This category includes professionals, entrepreneurs, large merchants, immigrants, and even government officials.

In Naadja Sghira, our investigations reveal that 61% of property owners are government officials, 20% are engaged in liberal professions, and 19% are merchants. In the Ennakhil neighbourhood, the majority of proprietors owning large-sized houses are from either merchant families, entrepreneurs, or returning immigrants (Benlakhlef and Bergel, 2016).

To comprehend the reasoning behind these categories of inhabitants justifying their unlawful acts and the strategies they employ to regulate their constructions, we must address two crucial questions. The public authorities responsible for urban planning

consistently combat this type of illicit housing, which continues to be prevalent in Algerian cities. However, it appears that illicit housing in Algeria is entering a new phase.



Fig. 4. Illicit houses in the city of Naadja Sghira.



Fig. 5. Illicit houses in the city of Sissaoui.



Fig. 6. House built according to architectural standards, but illegal in the city of Ennakhil.

A new generation of builders, unable to acquire land plots through legal means, constructs their houses based on an established or prerequisite plan. These neighbourhoods, created at the outskirts or in inappropriate areas for urbanization, are the work of prominent real estate property owners. The sold plots are delineated according to the clients' requests,

without a comprehensive allotment plan, and range in size from 100 to 1000 square meters. The real estate owners sketch out street layouts based on plot sales, resulting in roads that resemble narrow passages.

The accompanying images depict modern and well-finished dwellings in two illicit neighbourhoods in Constantine, characterized by unfinished constructions devoid of a plan and construction license. These structures are situated closely together, presenting a unified appearance, whether through the red hue of exposed brick walls or the perpendicular grey coloration. What is particularly disconcerting is that these constructions exhibit a level of completion as if they were being prepared according to administrative regulations. Remarkably, over 25% of the observed constructions adhere to an architectural plan. Conversely, others are built without a plan, disregarding the urban regulations of the city. Notably, certain houses lack the required space between the road and the building, contrary to the urban standards that dictate leaving a gap between the entrance and the road, for instance, constructing 80 hectares on a 100-hectare plot.

The neighbourhood Naadja Sghira covers approximately 63 hectares and comprises nearly 400 constructions, all executed according to an architectural plan, but without adherence to real estate regulations (field investigation, March 2008). Similarly, the Ennakhil neighbourhood spans an area of approximately 60 hectares and includes 795 constructions, with 105 of them being part of a property development project. Consequently, the constructions in these three neighbourhoods adhere to urban construction norms, but lack in compliance with real estate regulations. These areas have witnessed the emergence of a new generation of illegal actors who construct their homes according to an architectural plan, albeit within the realm of illegality due to their lack of legal land ownership.

The illicit occupation of urban land stems from the emergence of an illegal real estate market that originated in the 1990s following the liberalization of land in Algeria. Peri-urban landlords, fearing expropriation by public authorities, while aiming to maximize profits, began selling large family properties in the form of plots, without adhering to urban planning

rules. Transactions were conducted through signature, a form of sales recognition witnessed by two individuals, which lacks true legitimacy and, consequently, remains unrecorded in cadastral documents. Subsequently, the purchasers initiate construction on these properties, considering them “legally” acquired since they have made payments to their legal proprietors. These practices serve to exclude public access to urban real estate property circuits.

4.3. Transitioning from “Illegal” to “Legal”. Regulation policies

The Urban Planning Law 90/29 imposes restrictions on unplanned construction and requires obtaining a building permit for any structure. Non-compliant constructions are subject to demolition. However, the security conditions Algeria faced during the “Black Decade” (1991-2000) resulted in widespread urban violations. The influx of internal migration towards major cities like Constantine, driven by security concerns, led to property fragmentation and the illicit sale of properties by owners in proximity to the urban development zone. These unauthorized transactions, commonly known as informal sales, emerged following the deregulation of the real estate market under Law 90/25. Consequently, the initial seeds of chaotic neighbourhoods in the city began to take root. Following the restoration of security, local authorities found themselves confronted with entire neighbourhoods in disarray. Despite the implementation of laws and decrees by the Algerian government to regulate urban real estate activities in major cities, the effective management of these endeavours remains a persistent challenge. Throughout different periods, ranging from the socialist system to the market economy, each era has corresponded to a specific mode of planning. The Algerian system has thus enacted a series of legal provisions, directly or indirectly addressing the issue of illicit constructions, with the aim of improving urban management and planning for these real estate movements.

Table 2 provides an overview of the laws that have played a crucial role in shaping strategic orientations for managing and planning urban areas in Algeria.

Table 2. The evolution of laws and orders of the urban fabric management in Algeria.

Source	Orders	Contents and Articles
Official Journal	No. 70-91 of December 15th, 1970	“This order, which pertains to the notarial profession, prohibits the use of standard contracts for all signed documents between the seller and the purchaser. Additionally, it mandates that notaries handle all property and residential transactions”.
Official Journal	No. 74-26 of February 20th, 1974	“Bearing constitution of communal real-estate reservations for the benefit of communes”.
Official Journal	No. 75-67 of	“Relative to construction licences and subdivision licences”.

	September 1975	<p>Article 1: "...It is not allowed to undertake any construction, whether it is for accommodation purposes or other purposes, including the transformation of various aspects and structural work, without obtaining the necessary construction license".</p> <p>Article 8: "For all constructions to be built in an approved allotment, the construction licence will be provided only if these constructions conform with the prescriptions of subdivision licence and dispositions contained in the allotment file".</p> <p>Article 13: "no operation with the objective of the creation or extension of allotments, by virtue of the building construction and accommodation purpose or other, or by virtue of industrial establishments or establishments with an industrial character set up, can be undertaken without prior deliverance to a subdivision licence".</p>
Official Journal	No. 85-01 of August 13th, 1985	"On a temporary basis, the rules regarding soil occupation are being adjusted in order to ensure the preservation and protection of the land".
Official Journal	No. 90-25 of November 18th, 1990	<p>"Bearing real-estate orientation".</p> <p>Article 66: "The consistence of urbanised and urbanisable soils is determined by the planning and urbanism instruments".</p>
Official Journal	No. 90-29 of December 01st, 1990	"Relative to the planning and urbanism" following the reforms the country has known after the constitution of 1989.
Official Journal	No. 15-08 of July 20th, 2008	<p>The law establishes regulations for ensuring compliance with construction standards and the completion of construction projects. This law grants authorization for both compliant constructions and those that have not been fully completed, but possess a valid construction license.</p> <p>According to the article, if the landlord or the contracting authority of the construction site possesses a property deed, a possession certificate, or any other official document, and the township commission approves their request, the file is forwarded to the president of the relevant popular and communal assembly. The purpose is to establish whether a construction license for regularization, a completion license, or a conformity certificate should be granted, as outlined in articles 20, 21, and 22 mentioned earlier.</p> <p>In such cases, the president of the popular and communal assembly requests the declarer to complete their file in accordance with the aforementioned provisions and the existing legislative and regulatory requirements.</p>

The Order of 1970, which aimed to regulate the notarial profession, did not effectively address the issue of illicit operations. In 1974, municipal authorities established real estate reserves within their urbanization perimeters, designating specific land sites for housing or infrastructure projects. Private proprietors involved in these areas either sold parcels without proper property deeds or constructed buildings themselves. As a result of the city's inability to provide housing for its residents, individuals were pushed towards engaging in illegal practices, such as acquiring land prior to the establishment of real estate reserves. Starting from 1975, there was a surge in illicit constructions, and this trend further intensified after the liberalization of the real estate market under Law 25-90 (Meskaldji, 1994). The Algerian government implemented two laws to address the issue of urban housing: Law No. 85-01 of August 13th, 1985, which temporarily established rules for land occupation, preservation, and protection, and Law 15-08, which set

regulations for construction compliance and completion. The most recent law regarding urban regulation, Law 05-08, focuses on requiring a conformity certificate rather than resolving property ownership issues. On the contrary, rural property owners relied on the rationale of integrating into the urban development zone and sought to leverage the regularization process in light of the relocation of collective housing units facilitated by public entities. A decision was made to reassess the boundaries of the urban development zone, proposing an expansion towards the Al-Naajah Al-Saghira neighbourhood. However, subsequent to the technical studies conducted by local authorities, the expansion of the urban development zone in that direction was rescinded due to technical considerations. These considerations encompassed the classification of the area as a red zone, where construction is prohibited due to the susceptibility to landslides, as well as the conflicting matter of private ownership control.

The main significant change introduced by the law 15/08, compared to previous legislation, is the establishment of neighbourhood committees responsible for supervising construction works to ensure compliance with construction licenses and the demolition of structures built without proper authorization. Despite these efforts, the issue of illicit dwelling continues to persist within urban areas. The Algerian government extended the validity of law 15/08 until August 3rd, 2022, and the Minister of Housing and Urbanism urged citizens to seek assistance from certified architects and authorized study offices to prepare technical files that would help regulate their housing situations. The law, enacted on July 15th, 2008 (Law 08-15), provided citizens with a five-year period to complete their constructions and outlined four specific scenarios:

- the first case pertains to constructions that possess a construction license but remain unfinished as of July 20th, 2008;
- the second case involves constructions that possess a construction license, but do not comply with the issued licenses;
- the third case addresses completed constructions that were achieved, without a construction license;
- the fourth case deals with unfinished constructions that were built, without a construction license.

Law 15-08 was enacted to establish regulations and conditions for the regularization of informal dwellings in Algeria. For a file to be considered eligible, the construction of the house must be located within the urban perimeter defined by the Provincial Planning and Urbanism Master Plan (PDAU). In 2019, out of over 6,777 files submitted to the Municipality of Constantine, only 1,430 were successfully regulated. In the case of Naadja Sghira, all submitted files were rejected due to the neighbourhood being outside the urban perimeter. Conversely, all regularization requests from the other two neighbourhoods were denied due to ongoing disputes over the designated sites.

Among the three neighbourhoods included in our study, Ennakhil neighbourhood stands out as being better located. It does not face significant physical constraints, as its lands are not of high agricultural or pedology value, making them suitable for urban development. Additionally, the neighbourhood is set to benefit from the presence of a tramway station and a mosque, which can be seen as an implicit recognition of the neighbourhood's importance by the city authorities. On the other hand, Sissaoui neighbourhood presents a more complex and longstanding case. The eastern part of the neighbourhood, known as El Gammas - ONAMA, was reclaimed by the city of Constantine. Real estate proprietors on their own lands erected the initial constructions in this area. These lands are historically

linked to prominent urban families of Constantine, whose history intertwines with that of the Ottoman Beys. The first buyers of properties in this neighbourhood were fortunate Constantine families seeking large land parcels. In contrast, Naadja Sghira neighbourhood is located outside the urban perimeters of Constantine, occupying agricultural lands that are unsuitable for urbanization. This region is vulnerable to landslides, further complicating its suitability for housing development.



Fig. 7. Public sector practices in a sliding-prone area.



Fig. 8. Ground floor of a building rendered uninhabitable.



Fig. 9. Unregulated expansion of informal individual housing beyond the urban development zone, alongside the risk of sliding in the area.

Figures 7, 8 and 9 depict the submergence of the ground floor of a building in Naadja Sghira neighbourhood following a landslide triggered by the foundation works of illegal constructions located at lower elevations. This situation exemplifies the proliferation of large collective settlements invading the neighbourhood, the emergence of numerous informal urban entities on its outskirts, and the deterioration of multiple structures vulnerable to the effects of soil movement.

Although the observation is concise, it suggests the emergence of a new generation of informal settlements in other Algerian cities, where authoritarian measures and demolitions have proven ineffective. In such cases, the implementation of a participatory renovation concept within the framework of institutionalized informal housing could yield better results. Notably, scholars such as Jouve (2007), Semmoud (2009), and Belhimer (2015) emphasize the role of social regulation through the instrumentalisation of social cohesion as an urban management policy aimed at enhancing territorial competitiveness. Tsaki (2018), in his research, compares the European experience, which focuses on security, diversity, and urban renewal objectives, with the Algerian experience centred around housing construction and the mitigation of precarious dwellings.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the illicit occupation of urban land in Algeria and its implications for the urban landscape and governance. The illegal occupation of urban land in Algeria stems from the emergence of an illicit real estate market that began in the 1990s following the liberation of land. Peri-urban owners, driven by the fear of expropriation and the pursuit of maximum profit, have sold large family properties as undeveloped plots without adhering to urban planning regulations. These transactions are carried out through signatures and witnessed recognition, lacking true legitimacy and thus not being recorded in cadastral documents. Subsequently, the buyers commence construction on these properties, considering them legally acquired, due to the payment made to their original landowners. These practices contribute to the exclusion of public access to urban real estate.

The complex and uncertain relationship between public authorities and population engaged in informal urbanization is indicative of governance as perceived by international stakeholders. However, it subjects these populations to dependence and undermines the prospects for normalization and integration of their territories (Semmoud, 2015). This research aligns with a broader scientific discourse that exposes the inadequacy and inefficiency of urban

management instruments in Algeria (Belguidoum and Mouaziz, 2010; Bergel and Benlakhlef, 2014; Semmoud, 2014; Kadri and Madani, 2015). The Algerian government believed it had contained the issue of illicit housing in cities by addressing the housing needs of the population through extensive public housing programs. Concurrently, the 2008 law outlined the conditions for regularization of illegal constructions. However, illicit dwellings have become an integral part of the urban landscape, often overlooked by the local authorities. Whether regulated or not, the residents of these areas consistently demand their fair share of amenities, similar to residents in legally developed sectors of the city. Despite the challenges in meeting citizen's needs, public authorities strive to ensure a minimum standard of living in informal settlements.

Furthermore, the longstanding presence and social influence of informal proprietors in Algerian society, particularly in Constantine, have played a significant role in shaping this non-regulatory phenomenon, as they are the original landowners of the sold plots. The illegal nature of these neighbourhoods arises from the absence of recognized property deeds and construction licenses, as well as non-compliance with urban planning regulations and construction norms, which authorities condemn. Authorities struggle to address the illicit nature of these neighbourhoods and face difficulties in finding remedies for the situation. Ultimately, the only remaining option seems to be recognizing the towns through regularization and accepting the existing reality (Meskaldji, 1994). The results obtained from this study highlight the challenges faced by the Algerian government in managing informal settlements and regulating illicit constructions. However, the effectiveness and feasibility of proposed solutions, such as regularization or participatory renovation concepts, require further evaluation and experimentation. In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the illicit occupation of urban land in Algeria, it is important to consider its limitations and the need for further research to advance our understanding and address the challenges associated with informal urbanization in the country. By addressing these limitations and continuing to explore effective strategies, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards creating more inclusive, sustainable, and regulated urban environments.

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