

# REHABILITATE AND RESTORE THE IMAGE OF NEIGHBORHOODS DEGRADED BY URBAN IMPROVEMENT OPERATIONS IN THE "WEST-PLAIN" CITY OF ANNABA.

What place for the citizen in the implementation of this policy ?

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Reçu le 07/02/2018 – Accepté le 25/11/2018

## Abstract

This article aims to assess the policy of urban improvement characterizing some neighborhoods of the city of Annaba. A program to upgrade its urban fabric has scored for the year 2010, sixty-two operations for urban improvement including 27 relating to collective habitat. These operations combine all the aspects concerning the rehabilitation of the image of the infra-urban territories by the servicing and the development of their urban spaces. The operations of urban improvement contributed to the evolution of the living environment of several districts, but what about their quality of execution? The implication of the civil society constitutes a decisive stage for the success of any project today, if this politics emanates from a plural action, what is its strategy and which are its tools ?

**Keywords:** Urban improvement, public space, consultation, collective housing, "West plain" city, Annaba.

## Résumé

Cet article se propose d'évaluer la politique d'amélioration urbaine caractérisant certains quartiers de la ville d'Annaba. Un programme de mise à niveau de son tissu urbain a inscrit pour l'année 2010, soixante-deux opérations d'amélioration urbaine dont 27 relatives à l'habitat collectif. Ces opérations combinent tous les aspects ayant trait à la réhabilitation de l'image des territoires en difficulté par la viabilisation et l'aménagement de leurs espaces urbains. Les opérations d'amélioration urbaine ont contribué à l'évolution du cadre de vie de plusieurs quartiers, mais qu'en est-il de leur qualité d'exécution ? L'implication de la société civile constitue aujourd'hui une étape décisive pour la réussite de tout projet, Si cette politique émane d'une action plurielle, quelle est sa stratégie et quels sont ses outils ?

**Mots clés :** Amélioration urbaine, concertation, Habitat collectif, espace public, cité Plaine-Ouest, Annaba.

## الملخص

يهدف هذا المقال لتقييم برنامج الترقية الحضرية الخاصة ببعض أحياء مدينة عنابة. شمل برنامج ترقية النسيج الحضري للمدينة عام 2010، اثنان وستون عملية تحسين حضري منها 27 متعلقة بالسكن الجماعي. تجمع هذه العمليات جميع الجوانب المتعلقة بإعادة تأهيل صورة الأحياء المهمشة من خلال عملية الصيانة والتهيئة لأماكنها الحضرية. ساهمت عمليات تحسين المناطق الحضرية في تطور البيئة المعيشية في العديد من الأحياء، ولكن ماذا عن نوعية تنفيذها؟ تعتبر مشاركة المجتمع المدني الآن خطوة حاسمة لنجاح أي مشروع، إذا كانت هذه السياسة نابعة عن عمل جماعي، فما هي استراتيجيتها وما هي أدواتها؟

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحسين الحضري، التشاور، السكن الجماعي، المساحات العامة، حي "سهل الغربي"، عنابة.

**Introduction :**

Defined as infra-urban territories, degraded or even "sensitive" districts are currently facing particular difficulties linked to the deterioration of their living environment. In 2001, with the recovery in oil prices, Algeria began a financial upturn, enabling it to launch public urban improvement operations aimed at rehabilitating degraded housing areas and improving the framework citizen life. This results in the supply of housing, the presence of shops and services, the issue of cleanliness, mobility within the neighborhood, the quality of outdoor spaces and the feeling of security.

As a major concern of the public authorities, these urban operations are financed by the state, which, under the 2007 Finance Act, has decided to allocate a budget of around 100 billion dinars (about 1.5 billion dollars) for urban development alone [1]. This decision was taken on the basis of the observation made by local governors, who concluded that it was necessary to upgrade degraded neighborhoods throughout the national territory in order to provide a pleasant living environment for the citizen.

**Methodology approach :**

Algeria's experience in the field of urban improvement is recent (2000)<sup>1</sup>, but its evaluation is necessary in order to rectify the errors and rethink the strategies.

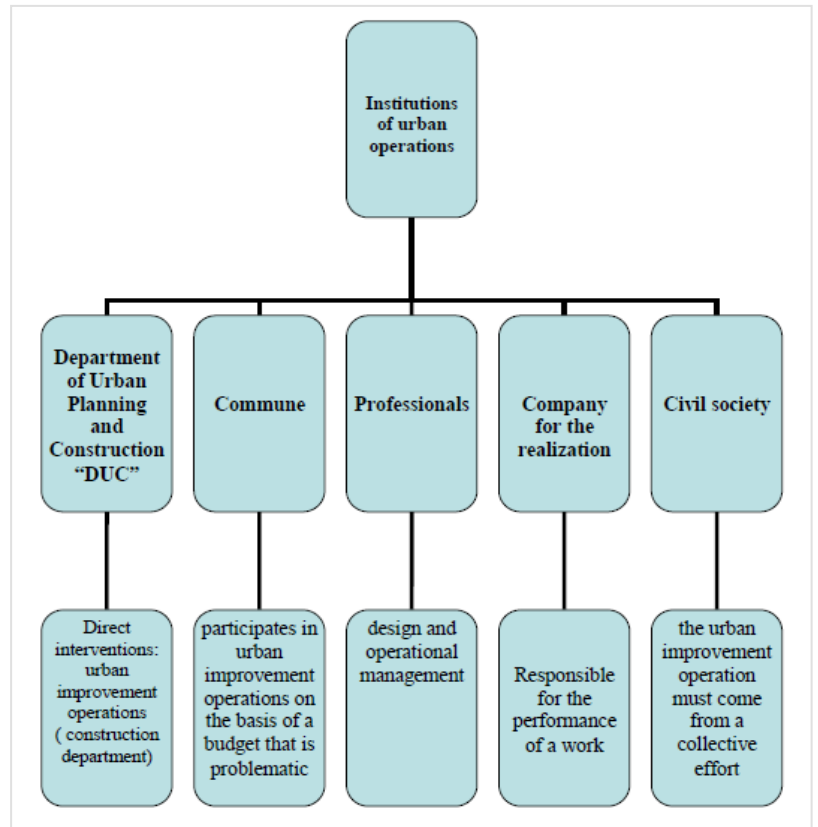
For that we adopt the qualitative approach based on:

- direct visual observation
- collection of data from the departments concerned, that is, the Urban Planning and Construction (UCB) and the Communal People's Assembly (APC).
- And the interview is performed through a survey with a random sample of people. Although the number of people is reduced, this sample is considered significant as it involves the public actors as well as representatives of the resident population. The type of interview chosen is directive so that the respondent can respond with more freedom but on specific questions, focusing in particular on: the involvement of the user in the process of fitting external spaces, the need of the inhabitants in terms of urban spaces, furniture and residential quality. Therefore, in order to obtain a sound evaluation, we analyze the normative requirements for the implementation of the operation.

The operation's evaluation focuses on the collective housing of Annaba. Prior to their

<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted with the services responsible for the urban improvement operation.

assessments, it would be necessary to know institutions responsible for the implementing these operations (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Institutions involved in the implementation of urban operations

**1. The Department of Urban Planning and Construction "DUC":**

The Directorate of Urban Planning and Construction "DUC" performs multiple missions, the main ones being to collect and analyze the data concerning urban planning and architecture and to centralize facts allowing the establishment of urbanism study programs to be chosen in the territory of the Wilaya. It undertakes all actions a view to improving the built environment and the development of a housing that meets the sociological, geographical and climatic and land development requirements. It also encourages actions to integrate precarious tissues. Direct interventions on the urban fabric are currently reflected in the urban improvement operations carried out by the construction department.

**2. The Commune:**

The Commune participates in urban improvement operations on the basis of a budget that is insufficient to meet real needs and is poorly managed by this institution. The problems related to the management and non-recovery of communal property have had an effect on space by the deterioration of certain districts. To remedy this handicap, the State has provided a centralized budget managed by the Ministry of Housing

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and the Prefect as a contribution to the Commune.

The respective actions of the Commune and the State represented by the DUC are complementary. All urban improvement operations are undertaken through a coordination process carried out by the Prefect. The distribution of the sectors concerned by these operations (selection of the sites concerned) is done by negotiation with the Communes. It involves a Commission bringing together the departments concerned with urban improvement in order to set priorities and allocate tasks.

**3. Professionals (Engineering offices)**

They are responsible for the design and then the operational management of works generally on behalf of others.

**4. Company for the realization**

It is responsible for the performance of a work, supplies or service. It should be noted that the client is obliged to make a preliminary financial estimate of his need. He will then choose the offer best suited to satisfy this need. Architectural and urban planning projects are always regarded as financial products and those with the lowest bid, in study or in realization, will have the best chance of being chosen [2].

**5. Civil society**

In public discourse, the urban improvement operation must come from a collective effort and at all levels and the citizens must be associated as closely as possible, with a pluralist redeployment action that involves the urban fate of all Algerians. The involvement of civil society is reflected not only in its advice in the follow-up and in the development phase but also in the maintenance of these spaces.

The urban reality and the field investigation have shown that the citizen has constituted an "invisible" actor in the urban operations as he was absent in this process of implementation. Citizen participation in the decision-making process, which is no longer an optional act, goes through different degrees of involvement: to inform, ask for advice and build with.

Although this consultation tool as an instrument for collective reflection and for the construction of sustainable policies and actions is absent, the work has been concretized within the framework of this urban policy in order to requalify the outside space of the degraded neighborhoods and that of collective housing.

**The revitalization of outdoor spaces in Annaba collective housing**

Unanimously or in absolute majority, the external spaces characterizing the peripheral extensions do not respond to the aspirations of the users ([3],[4],[5]). The solutions recommended for these spaces are simplistic and have no concern for their adaptation to the mentalities of the users. Their residual definition and their treatment a posteriori arouse in the person a feeling of insecurity and

boredom. These spaces are both incomplete and imprecise in their physical delimitation as well as in their character, in which urban and rural forms intermingle [5]. In these empty and rapidly traversed spaces, collective life has disappeared, and only remain the ribbons to circulate and vast monotonous areas are the source of a multitude of illicit practices. These spaces, which have been abandoned for more than three decades, are now becoming an issue for public authorities involved in a program to upgrade the urban fabric.

As part of the Algerian territory, Annaba Township is located in the Northeast benefited in 2007 from two urban improvement operations for a program authorization of 235 million dinars (\$ 2 million).

**Table: Urban improvement at the peripheral city of Annaba**

Sites		Participant	Types of intervention
El-Fakharine		DUC	Sanitation, green space, playgrounds, street furniture
El-Moukawama			Sanitation, sidewalks, public lighting, green spaces, street furniture
Seybous			Sanitation, street lighting, green areas, playgrounds, street furniture
08 Mai 1945			Sanitation, street lighting, green areas, playgrounds, street furniture
West-Plain	687 housings	Private	Roads, parking, sanitation, street lighting, green areas..
	1028 housings		Unidentified content
	1172 housings		

Source : [6]

The 62 operations registered for the year 2010 concern urban fabrics from colonial times (14 operations) and postcolonial times ([6], [7]).

- 27 operations relating to collective housing,
- 05 operations relating to housing estates,
- 03 operations relating to precarious housing estates,
- 17 operations related to roads,
- 10 operations: confused typology.

It should be noted that among the collective housing, the "West-Plain"<sup>2</sup> located west of the town of

<sup>2</sup> The city is composed of two parts separated by a river, commonly called (SAF-SAF 1 and SAF-SAF 2), a term meaning in Arabic "poplar trees".

Annaba and was built in the early 1980s as part of the urban extensions of the type of urban new housing (UNH) (Figure 2). It also benefited (with Oued-Edheb's city)<sup>3</sup> from 10 development operations in addition to those completed before 2007. It was not until 2004 that the public authorities devoted particular attention to the cities of collective housing by improving the living environment of the citizens especially in the most degraded neighborhoods. But the question is whether the finished product is acceptable?

The visual observation shows that the works launched in several districts of Annaba (floor coverings, embellishment of certain arteries, street furniture and street lighting) are focused on the structuring axes, the rest of the neighborhood, if it is not totally excluded from the operation benefits from an almost superficial intervention.

**Implementation of the urban operation in neighborhoods of collective housing, between strengths and weaknesses:**

Urban policy must systematically be evaluated in order to identify its strengths and weaknesses. .

**1. Strengths of the urban improvement operation in Annaba:**

The strengths of the operation that has been initiated to improve the quality of life of the districts studied can be cited as follows:

**1.1. Towards an improved framework of degraded neighborhoods**

Regardless the socio-economic level of the resident population interviewed, its response is unanimous in terms of improving the living environment. The inhabitants are aware that this urban improvement operation has changed the image of their neighborhoods. "Our neighborhoods go from an unhealthy state to a healthier and more attractive state " (Photos 1 &2)

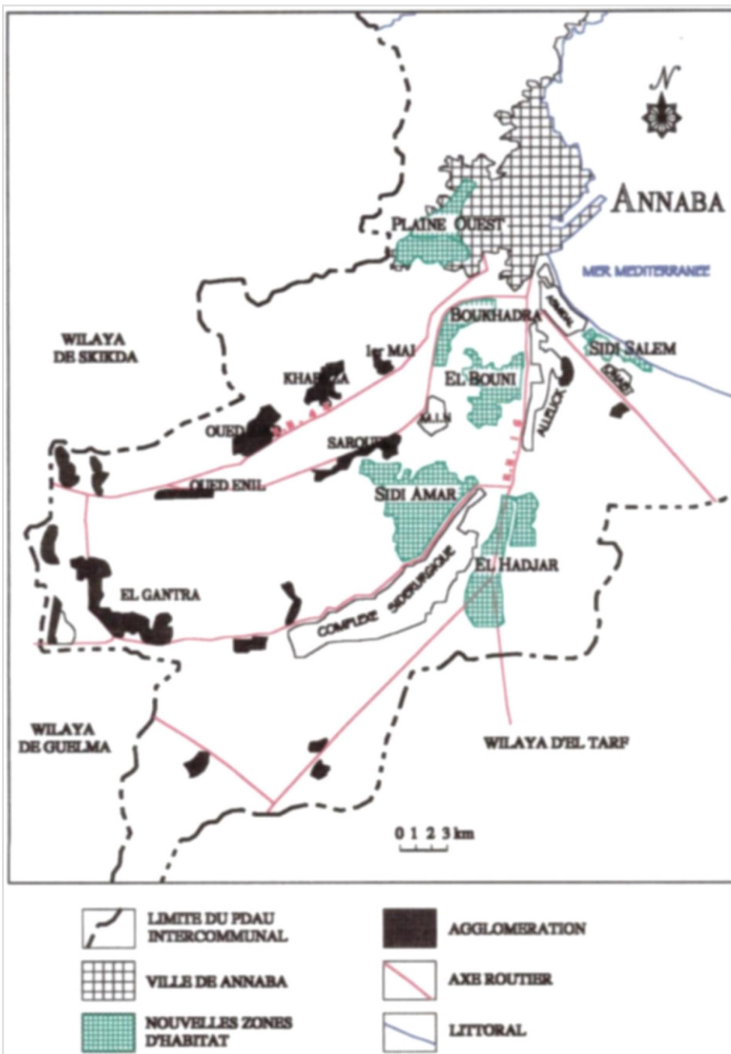


Figure 2: Areas of the city of Annaba [8]



Photos 1& 2: Improvement of the neighborhood image, currently after intervention  
The 1276 housing city before (2002)

<sup>3</sup> This city also located west of the city of Annaba is composed of several types of housing (individual self-built and planned collective).

## 1.2. Development of recreation areas and green areas:

The greenery provides wellbeing, its presence is therefore essential in an urban space. Given its importance, and in response to the principles of sustainable development, international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) requires a minimum of 15m<sup>2</sup> of vegetation cover per person.

Relative to the Algerian city, the citizen has a square meter of greenery (1m<sup>2</sup> / inhabitant). This lack in green space has been studied by the law<sup>4</sup> n° 07-06 of May 13 2007 and concretized thanks to the urban operations which programmed, in almost all the degraded districts, woods and shrubs supported by facilities for users such as: rest benches; playgrounds; and public lighting allowing the perception of obstacles and the nocturnal development of cities (Photos 3).

The green space is part of the landscape and the living environment. Its conception cannot be undertaken randomly as the choice of plants is conditioned by the nature of the soil and that of the climate. Good planning of public urban spaces requires an understanding of the landscape and its technical data ([9] , [10]).



Photo 3: Development of playgrounds and green spaces

## 1.3. Street furniture

Urban furniture as well as all objects and public devices installed in the public space [11] can fulfill several functions. It can affect pedestrian safety, comfort, embellishment, cleanliness or signage.

According to our visits and visual observations, the structural axes of neighborhoods affected by urban operations are equipped with the necessary street furniture: benches, bus shelters, telephone booths, waste bins. The insufficiency is particularly felt in the non-indication of the names of streets, the plan of implantation, the signaling and the programming of spaces of relaxation for the elderly population (shaded

<sup>4</sup> Law on the management, protection and development of green spaces.

areas and public toilets)<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Spatial and normative weaknesses:

The visited districts present weaknesses and inadequacies summarized in the following points:

### 2.1. Spaces of relaxation for the third age population:

From a social point of view, the elderly population has been taken care of by the realization of homes for the elderly, particularly for the homeless, but at the level of the neighborhood and the urban spaces, no development has been devolved to them. The need for space is manifested in this category through the occupation of residual and of undefined spaces.

It should be remembered that the phenomenon of appropriation of public spaces can go as far as the realization of sales kiosks, an act endorsed by young adolescents who use light materials, generally metal, to meet the needs of users and inhabitants (Photo 4).



Photo 4: The share of trade in public space

### 2.2. Defects in the construction of service roads and their accessories:

Roads help to improve the appearance of the landscape, so its layout is necessary. Road works cover all structures reserved for traffic: vehicles, two-wheelers, pedestrians, parking areas.

Defects are noted in the realization of certain roads and their accessories generally referred to the means of implementation. Technically speaking, the pavement is subjected to different constraints causing more or less rapid deterioration and discomfort.

The survey carried out on the site and the recurring visits of the sites show that the coating works are generally undertaken before the passage of the underground networks and that the materials chosen for the coatings of the sidewalks and the pedestrian ways are not chosen for their mechanical and aesthetics

<sup>5</sup>Result of the survey carried out with the elderly

characteristics, not to mention the lack of a good integration in the environment (Photos 5 & 6).



Photos 5 & 6: Sidewalks made outside standards

## DISCUSSIONS

Referring to the examples studied, we can see the real contribution of the urban improvement plan to the evolution of the living environment of several neighborhoods, but the quality of execution of the operations has proved to be "mediocre".

Some local authorities have noticed some shortcomings in certain sites [12] in the absence of specialized companies, hence the difficulty of finding partners who respect the specifications of urban improvement.

The result of an urban operation is closely linked to the choice of consulting firms, to regular site monitoring and, above all, to the citizen's participation in respecting his city, especially as he welcomed these operations. Respondents are absolutely unanimous that these operations have improved the image of their neighborhood. However, these persons would hope for effective involvement and not just information without their input being taken into account in the conception process.

What is consultation?

Consultation is a word meaning "working with" or even negotiating. It is a will to inform and listen to the actors. Undertaking a consultation on a given subject involves committing to working with the participants in the concertation.

This is also a process of collective construction that

continues until the actual implementation of the project and even beyond if necessary. The purpose of the consultation tool is to really improve public participation in project design, even when it is already required by legislative and regulatory provisions ([13],[14]).

The tool of consultation refers to the question of methods, of "how to" which has become central in the debates of recent years. Before starting a consultation, it is necessary to question the timing, the public and the relationship, and on the perimeter. Consultation and public debate are the instruments that enable collective reflection and the construction of sustainable development policies and actions.

Modalities of intervention with the citizens?

The consultation process uses different methods of intervention to allow real citizen participation in the decision-making process. Different degrees of stakeholder involvement can be identified as proposed by Beaucamp ([15], p, 38). This modality can be summarized as such (Figure3):

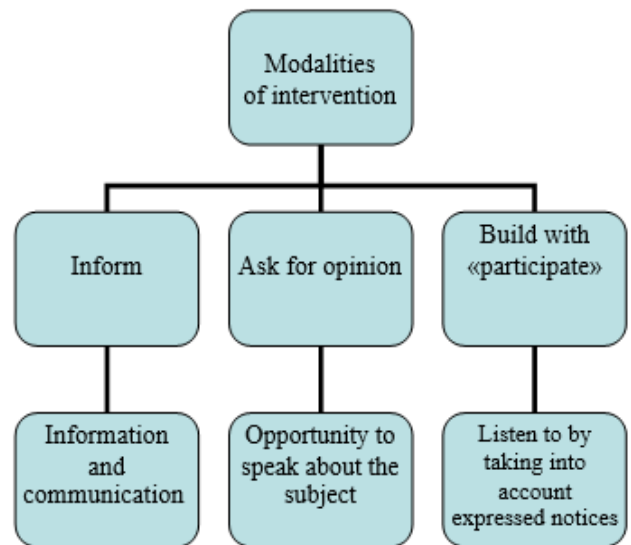
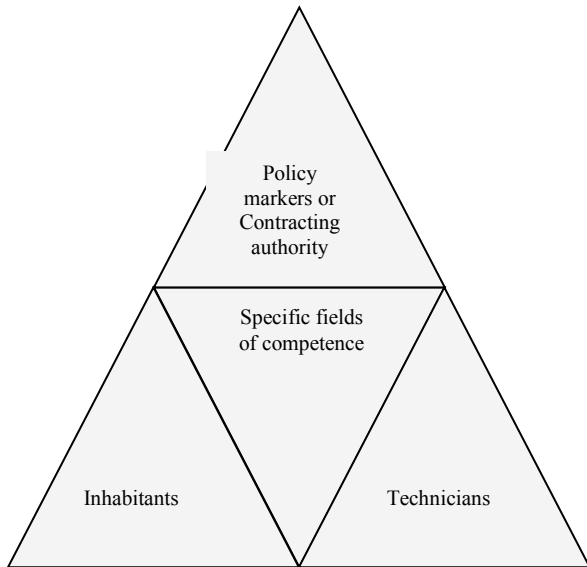


Figure 3: Different degrees of stakeholder involvement

In short, consultation is not a confrontation of interests. It is based on cooperation between participants and is far from being a form of consultation which involves the gathering of opinions prior to a decision: it must lead to a shared reflection, debate and collective const.

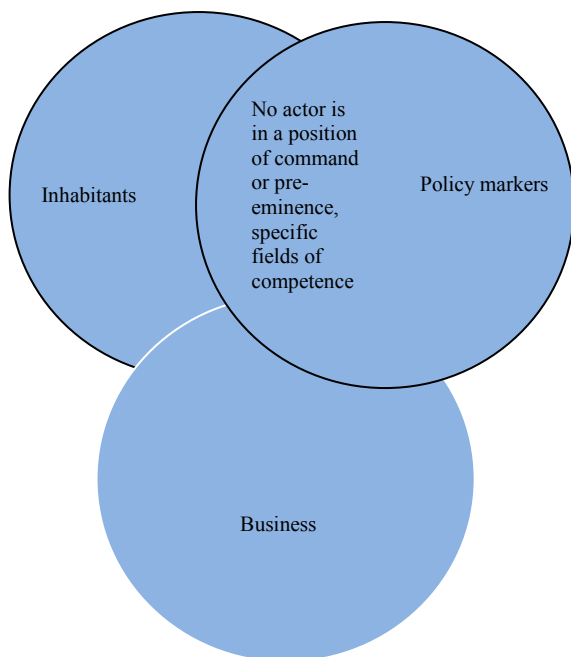
The consultation is part of these participatory approaches translated by several models. The main ones being the hierarchical model and the negotiated model proposed by Callon [16]. Within the hierarchical model, political decision-makers are in a position of command and have defined fields of competences. In

the second model no actor is in a position of command or preeminence, and the fields of competence are intersecting. It is this latter model which promotes "good concertation" and makes us avoid the exclusion of any actor in the process of elaborating a project (see Figures 4 and 5).



Hierarchical model

Figure 4: Decision makers in command position



Negotiated model

Figure 5: Interlacing of the competence areas

## Conclusion

Urban improvement operations have really reflected the will of the State to rehabilitate the image of degraded neighborhoods. However, in order for this policy to see its short-term actions moving towards permanent actions, which will focus on responding to the challenge of an uncompromising future for its agglomerations, it is necessary to mobilize skills through an alliance of all intellectual forces involved in the process of urban improvement.

Urban improvement is not only a matter of rules but also of know-how. For a good improvement of the urban fabric, the public authorities as well as the citizens are called upon to assume fully their responsibilities in this matter. To this end, heavy commitments have to be taken by the political authorities, elected representatives, professionals and also the citizens' community.

The adoption of the concerted approach as a general framework of guidance joins the new objectives of the Algerian State to encourage the citizen to reflect on his social and urban life and to act more in this direction. Conducting a consultation means facilitating dialogue between the participants. The collaborative approach can help avoid rejection reactions, raise awareness of problems that have not been thought of, and manage conflicting stakeholder interests, in other words, it helps to solidly build the project one intends to achieve.

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