

DYNAMICS OF URBANIZATION IN THE CITY OF RABAT-MOROCCO, WHICH SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION?

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Abstract

In a world where many new concepts and phenomenon have emerged, cities are the first territorial entities to be concerned and impacted by changes in their various spatial, social, economic, political, urban planning and environmental components. In this article, we focus on the urban evolution of Rabat, a city with historical, political, social, economic and environmental issues at stake. As the capital of Morocco, Rabat enjoys many qualities and advantages in terms of its urban evolution, but this development is not without setbacks. An attractive post-Protectorate city is one that suffers from rural exodus, insecurity, urban pockets and so on. With this in mind, in this article we will try to visualize Rabat's urban evolution using a cartographic approach based on time sequences, in an attempt to answer the question: What are the stages in Rabat's evolution, and where is it heading?

Keywords:

Urban development;
 Sustainable development;
 Demographic trends;
 Major projects.

1 Introduction

Sustainable development, sustained development, literal translation of the English expression in force "sustainable development", together designate a new development problem, more respectful of the environment, but also supposed to satisfy an objective of equity, on an intergenerational plan, and without calling into question the need for economic efficiency [1].

Whatever the diversity of interpretations, sustainable development has emerged as an issue that focuses primarily on the temporal dimension. More specifically, it has focused on the notion of intertemporal equity, or intergenerational equity. If sustainable development has so much to do with the temporal dimension, one might think that it forgets the spatial dimension [2].

At the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015, 193 countries adopted new goals for 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 goals relating to three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection; were selected, defined around dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership [3].

There are many definitions of sustainable development, but they all converge on the protection of current natural resources for future generations. With this in mind, we're going to study the territorial evolution of Rabat, with the aim of understanding how the city has been able to chart its course towards sustainability.

The desire to elevate the Moroccan capital to the rank of an international metropolis is behind the interest shown in the latest urban planning concepts and the resulting deployment of new management methods and urban interventions. These changes encourage the "reclaiming" of new territories, and result in the experimentation of new tools and the involvement of new players. This change of scale in thinking about the development of the city of Rabat reflects a repositioning influenced by the international context (globalization), which has had implications at national, regional and local levels [4].

Rabat, the capital of Morocco, has undergone profound changes since the turn of the century and millennium, following two programs initiated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI. The first was launched in 2004, around the development of the Bouregreg Valley site, a river shared by the cities of Rabat and Salé. The second, conceived the same year, as part of Rabat's urban renewal program [5].

The capital is located in northwest Morocco, with a population of 572 717 [6]. It is bounded to the north by the Oued Bouregreg and the Salé prefecture; to the south by the Skhirate-Témara prefecture; to the east by the Salé prefecture and the Skhirate-Témara prefecture; and to the west by the Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 1).

Covering an area of 118 km², it is made up of two communes: Touarga and Rabat. The commune of Rabat is divided administratively into five arrondissements: Hassan arrondissement; Yacoub El Mansour arrondissement; El Youssoufia arrondissement; Agdal Riad arrondissement; Souissi arrondissement [7].

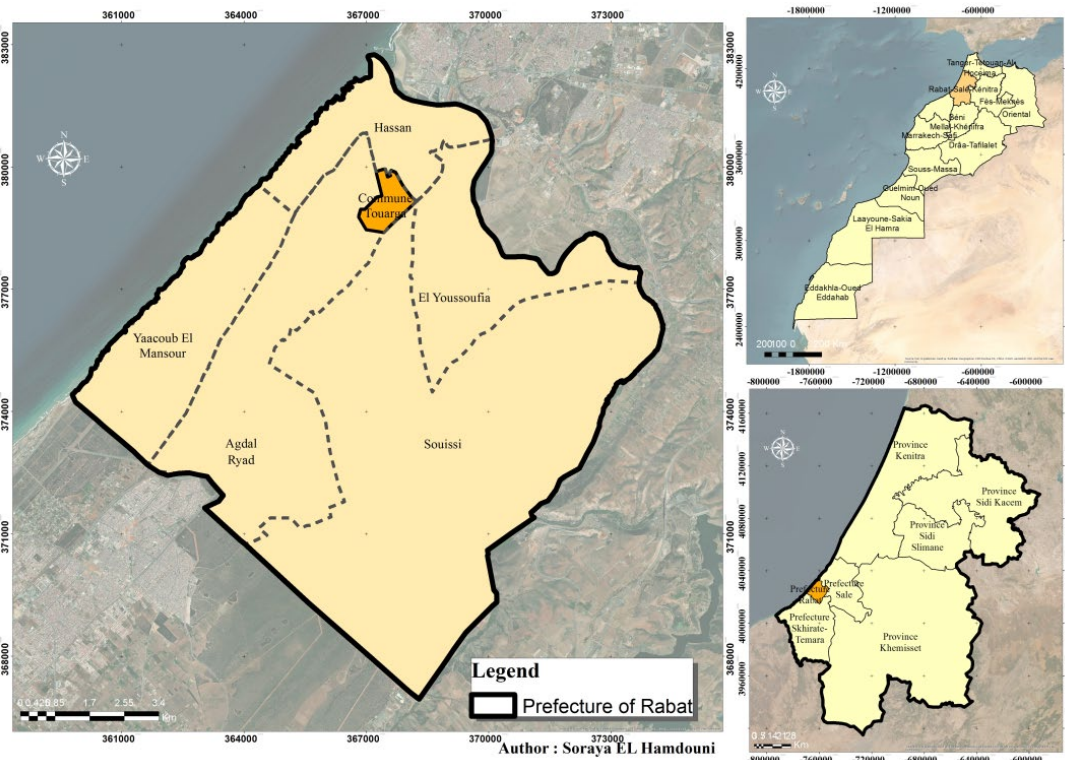


Fig. 1: Geographical location and administrative distribution of the Rabat prefecture.

Rabat's coastline stretches 13 kilometers, from Bab El Bahr (near the Achouhada cemetery) to the commune of Harhoura (part of the Skhirat-Témara prefecture). This is a relatively protected coastal area, even if Rabat borders the old town, its suburbs and suburban extensions. It offers landscapes and ocean views of exceptional quality, and is home to monuments and monumental ensembles of remarkable heritage value. However, its value has been undermined by the dilapidation of the working-class neighborhoods that surround it - both old and new - and by the deterioration of its natural surroundings [8].

To put the capital on the path to urban development, the 2030 strategic vision for Rabat recommends urban renewal, the requalification of public spaces, the link between urban development and urban mobility, and the creation of infrastructures as strategic objectives [9].

The city of Rabat is an open-air worksite of major structuring projects, all aligned in a context of sustainable development. The two flagship projects are:

1.1 Rabat City of Light Project, Moroccan Capital of Culture

In the case of Rabat, we had to wait until the beginning of the 21st century to see the development of a large-scale development project, namely the Bouregreg Valley development project. This development project cannot be seen in isolation from the globalization dynamic in which the Moroccan capital is involved, with tourism development as a priority - Rabat was listed as a World

Heritage Site in 2012 - and the strengthening of its cultural appeal with the implementation of projects such as "Rabat, City of Light, Moroccan Capital of Culture" [10].

According to Rabat Région Amenagements, the company responsible for overseeing the 2014-2018 development program for the city of Rabat, the program is divided into 7 major axes totalling 114 operations, including [11]:

- Axis 1: Heritage preservation;
- Axis 2: Preservation of the environment and green spaces;
- Axis 3: Strengthening basic social facilities;
- Axis 4: Built environment and improvement of the urban landscape;
- Axis 5: Improving urban mobility and promoting multimodal transport;
- Axis 6: Promotion of economic activities;
- Axis 7: Strengthening infrastructure and decongesting the city.

1.2 Bouregreg Valley development project

The Bouregreg Valley Development Project, initiated in the 2000s, was conceived as an urban project, with the aim of providing an original urban and architectural response for this site, which stretches on either side of the river of the same name that separates the twin cities of Rabat and Salé [12].

To bring this project to fruition, the Moroccan authorities wish to take this objective a step further of sustainable urban development with the Bouregreg Valley Development Project. The Bouregreg Valley Development Agency (Agence pour l'Aménagement de la Vallée du Bouregreg - AAVB), a state-owned public institution, was created in 2006 specifically to carry out this development project, and implement an intervention policy based on four key objectives [13]:

- Protecting the valley's environment;
- Social and civic action;
- Heritage preservation and rehabilitation;
- Improving the quality of life of the local population.

The initiative's flagship projects include: Bouregreg Marina; Rabat quays and landing stages; Bab Al Bahr; Rabat-Salé tramway; Rabat Grand Theatre; Oudayas Tunnel; etc.

2 Materials and Methods

Given its political weight at national level, Rabat is an attractive center for higher education and employment. Demographic change and migration have led to rapid urban development, accompanied by numerous dysfunctions on different scales.

The operational definition of the city adopted by most authors: urbanization is taken to mean "the growing concentration of population in urban agglomerations". Nevertheless, there are four main criteria for understanding the urban phenomenon: population size, population density, socio-professional structure and socio-economic diversification (with a preponderance of the tertiary sector) [14].

The evolutionary theory of cities enables us to better understand this evolution, and to better grasp the challenges ahead [15]. From this perspective, a study of spatiotemporal evolution was essential for a successful transition to a sustainable city.

To illustrate and visualize Rabat's urban evolution, we used:

- Arcgis mapping software to create a map of urban development from 1984 to 2020. This map will be divided into 4 sections. The aim of each section is to visualize urban evolution and to identify the main events that have marked the capital. The four phases are: 1984 to 1990, 1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2010 and 2010 to 2020. This approach will help us to explain, contextualize and analyze urban evolution in a detailed way.

- We also used Arcgis mapping software to calculate the built-up area for each decade, so as to know in figures the rate of urban evolution and be able to make a scientific analysis of the urban evolution of Rabat, the subject of this study.

3 Results and discussion

If Rabat's urban planning is making a big impact today, with major projects ranked at continental and even international level, this is partly due to its demographic evolution, its geographical crossroads location, its status as administrative capital and, above all, its relatively long history of development. With this in mind, it's important to take a historical look at the major phases in Rabat's urban planning history.

The history of Rabat is best known from the Almohad period onwards. From 1150, under the reign of Abd El Moumen (1133-1163), the first Almohad ruler, the Ribât was developed into a powerful fortress and military camp.... Yaqoub el Mansour (al-Ma'mûn), grandson of Abd El Moumen (1184-1199), is considered the city's true founder, for it was under his impetus that Rabat underwent a period of major construction. The city was then named Ribat el-Fath (Victory Camp), in recognition of its successes in the war against the Spanish Christians (Alarcos' great victory over the Castilians in 1195). He had a great wall of over five kilometers built around the city, stretching along the Casbah. The city was dotted with towers to ensure its defense.

The wall was pierced by five monumental gates: Bab La'lu (Gate of Height) towards the sea, Bab Z'ayr, Bab el-Lhad (Sunday Gate), Bab er-Rwâh towards the royal palace and a fifth gate, located 880 meters south of Bab er-Rwâh, now part of the royal palace; not forgetting the gate of the Casbah (fortress). Yaqoub el Mansour also built a monumental mosque, the "Hassân Tower" mosque, whose minaret is similar in size and decoration to the Almohad minarets of Marrakesh's Kutubiyya and Seville's Giralda. This mosque remained unfinished due to the death of the Sovereign. During the reign of the Almohads, the city underwent significant development, as evidenced by the ramparts and monumental gates, as well as the minaret and mosque of Hassân [16].

The Qasba des Oudaya occupies the promontory on the left bank of the Bouregreg (Fig 2), and was the origin of the town of Salé-le-Neuf. Its construction dates back to the first Almohads and the rest to the Moriscos and 'Alawites. With the arrival of the Moriscos, the citadel lost none of its character. Although it contains over two hundred dwellings, it remains first and foremost a fortress. It could not have been otherwise, given the battles it had taken part in and the many sieges it had endured. Its very position made it easy to defend.... By the early 17th century, many parts of the Qasba were in danger of falling into ruin. If the Moriscos didn't rebuild it entirely... they at least restored it to its former glory... The Qasba's occupants spared nothing to protect it, whether from attacks from Salé-le-Vieux or from demonstrations of force by European warships. They erected the "Pirates' Tower" along the Bouregreg, concentrating their efforts on defending the landward side [17]. What these civilizations have in common is that they widen at the level of the Bouregreg River and turn their backs on the Atlantic Ocean.

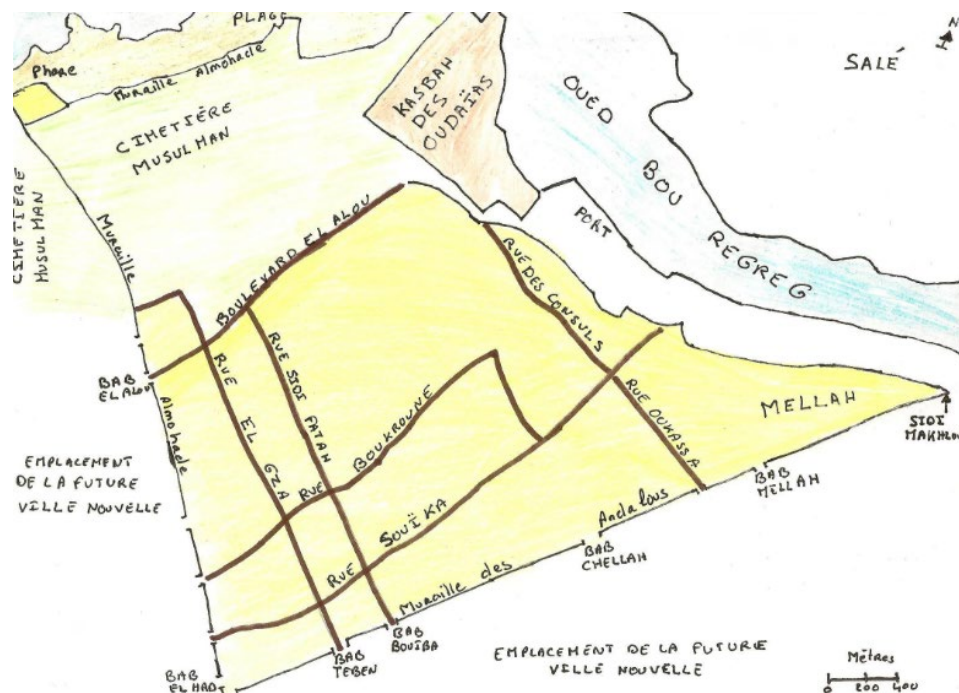


Fig. 2: Plan of the Rabat Medina, 1912-1913 [18].

As soon as the protectorate was established in 1912, France's first resident general in Morocco, Marshal Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), set the challenge of creating model cities, symbols of modernity and progress, in the image of French colonial power... As soon as they arrived in Morocco in 1914, Prost and his team drew up development plans for all Moroccan cities. All the new towns were to be designed on the basis of the urban planning principles imposed by the resident Lyautey, namely: the separation of the old and the new city; the creation, outside the medinas, of a non aedificandi zone for military protection and hygiene; the division of the new city into differentiated districts (zoning)... Prost preserved a number of viewpoints on the panorama of the old city (ramparts, medina, etc.) and its surrounding landscape (medina, etc.) and the surrounding landscape (ocean, river mouth, Salé skyline). With new buildings threatening to obscure the views, Prost decided to turn the first plans into gardens. This is how the gardens and open spaces of the future European city were chosen. To draw up the development plan for the new conurbation, Prost drew up: a traffic plan showing the main communication routes; a plan showing the distribution of the various districts (administrative district, residential and commercial district, university district, industrial district); a plan of open spaces showing the distribution of the various open spaces (public gardens, garden districts of the Résidence générale, planted promenades). Prost's open space plan is a perfect illustration of the park and garden system outlined by Forestier in his 1913 report. As recommended by Forestier, public gardens and open spaces were to be created both outside and inside the Almohad enclosure, before the neighborhoods were built up [19]. It should be noted that it was during the protectorate that Rabat was chosen as the administrative capital of Morocco.

In figures, Rabat has grown from 227 445 inhabitants in 1960 to 572 717 inhabitants in 2014, an increase of 345 272 inhabitants over 54 years (Fig. 3).

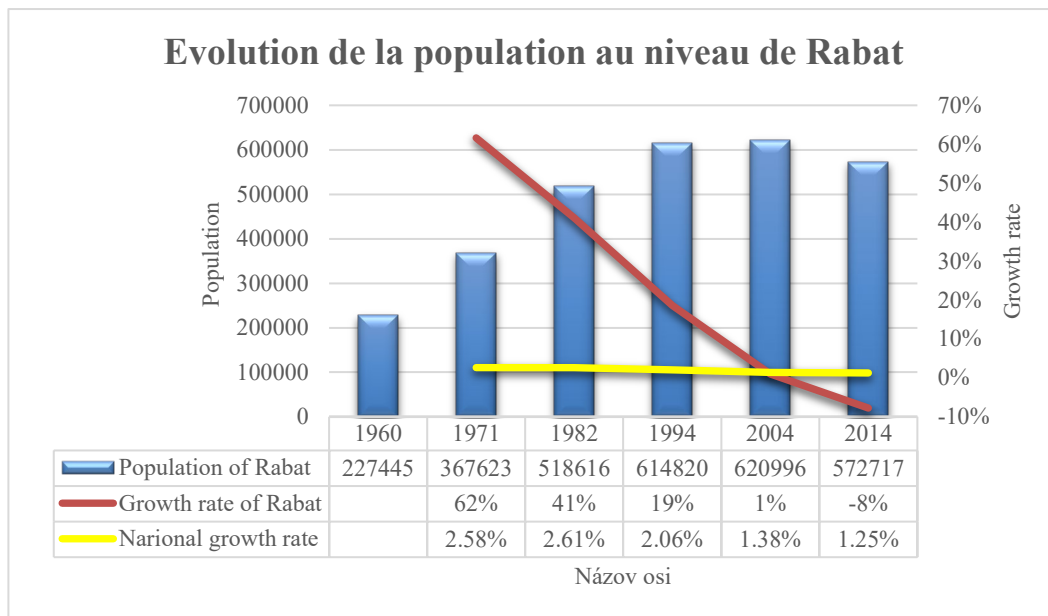


Fig. 3: Demographic trends in the Rabat prefecture [HCP, 2014].

After its independence, the prefecture of Rabat maintained its influence on a national scale, and became an attractive pole in search of employment and better living conditions. In fact, this was the period when Rabat experienced the highest rate of demographic growth in its history, with a percentage of 62%. However, this growth was accompanied by a number of handicaps, such as the proliferation of shantytowns, insalubrious districts, insecurity, and so on.

It should be noted that in the 1960s, Morocco adopted a restorative approach to urban planning by two key decisions: the elimination of substandard housing through the launch of major projects on state land reserves; and the introduction of the concept of urban planning into public policy.

In the 1970s, the Rabat-Salé-Temara urban development master plan (SDAU) was drawn up in 1971. Urban development and focused on major communication infrastructures (freeways, roads, railroads).

The first Urban Planning and Development Scheme (Schéma directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme - SDAU) for the Rabat-Salé agglomeration, drawn up in 1972, identified the south-west of the capital as one of the priority areas for growth, although the document did not specify the exact location of the planned extensions, the required surface areas, their content or their typomorphological characteristics. The main objective of the SDAU was to indicate a direction for the extension of urbanization, so as to eliminate all occupation and prevent any land-grabbing initiatives likely to hinder development [21].

In terms of urban development, Rabat's built-up area rose from 24 km² in 1984 to 72 km² in 2020, representing a total urbanization rate of 60%. (Table 1)

Table 1: Evolution of land use from 1984 to 2020 in the Rabat prefecture

	1984	1990	2000	2010	2020
Built-up area in Km ²	23.71	26.39	48.8	64.38	71.71
Percentage of built-up area	20%	22%	41%	54.5%	60%

The cross-analysis of data on demographic evolution and the urbanization process does not seem to be in harmony: the capital's demographic evolution has been in decline since 2004, in contrast to its urbanization, which is still on the increase. To understand and analyze this phenomenon, we used cartography to highlight the spatial evolution and its orientation, and then superimposed the results with the key events of each period.

3.1 From 1984 to 1990

During the period of regal urban planning, the population of the capital rose from 518 616 in 1982 to 614 820 in 1994, a growth rate of 19%. Spatially, land use in Rabat increased from 20% to 22%, representing a sprawl of 3Km² (tab.1). This sprawl was oriented towards the east (Fig. 4) for a

variety of reasons, including demographic trends, with a growth rate of 41%; the absence of an urban planning framework and an overall vision for the area; land opportunities for low-income earners and migrants; and the low standard of living and accessibility of the city center (Fig. 4).

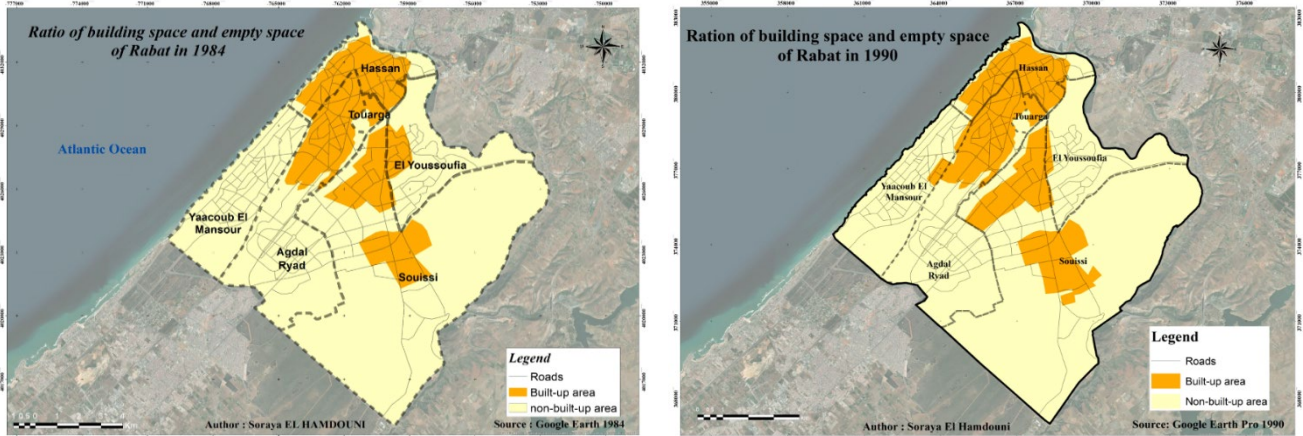


Fig. 4: Urban development of the Rabat prefecture from 1984 to 1990.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Rabat has undergone a deliberate process of socio-spatial segregation driven by the authorities of the French protectorate, as part of a racial segregation separating the new European central districts from the so-called "indigenous" districts... This spatial organization underwent a major turning point in the 1980s following a royal decision to establish a green belt to the south of the city, thus limiting any expansion of Rabat in this area, which represented the main front for its urban development. In addition to the natural barriers formed by the Atlantic Ocean to the east and the Bouregreg River to the northeast, this artificial barrier reduced the city's scope for expansion, and led to a surge in the city's real estate and land markets [22].

During this period, the capital was faced with a wide variety of urban landscapes: ancient fabrics, heritage sites of great architectural value, sectors of high urbanistic value, a seafront of some ten km, a green belt with high environmental potential, but also, composite neighborhoods with a mix of non-regulated and structured districts.

3.2 From 1990 to 2000

Over the period 1990-2000, Rabat almost doubled its built-up area, from 26 km² to 49 km², or 41% of its total surface area. According to figure 5, the city's urban evolution is oriented south-east. In contrast to its urban sprawl, the capital's demographic evolution has seen a timid increase, with a growth rate of 19% between 1994 and 2004.

Since 1999, Morocco has tried to meet the challenge of economic development. However, the increasing urbanization of Moroccan cities has presented them with major challenges: on the one hand, economic attractiveness, and on the other, urban exclusion and the impoverishment of part of the population. The broad outlines of these public policies are outlined in the National Territorial Planning Scheme (Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire, or SNAT), which constitutes a reference framework for the various public policies and sectoral interventions, as well as for the establishment and forecasting of the perspectives and orientations of the State's general policy contained in the various economic, social and environmental plans, as well as in the development strategies relating to the planning of the national territory [23].

This decade was also marked by a legal framework, with the production of urban planning documents embodying the desire to frame the urbanization process in Morocco, including:

- Law 12-90 on urban planning;
- Law 25-90 on subdivisions, housing groups and parcelling;
- Dahir of 1993 instituting urban agencies.

Internationally, the most significant event was the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Through this Summit, the Rio Declaration was born, with the aim of ensuring the best possible management of the planet and its environment. This summit launched a program to combat climate change, desertification, the erosion of biodiversity and the elimination of toxic products.

As for Agenda 21, which is now an action plan adopted at the Rio Earth Summit, it is aimed at local authorities such as regions, communes and so on. The strong point of this agenda is that local authorities put in place a program adapted to their scale, incorporating the principles of sustainable development.

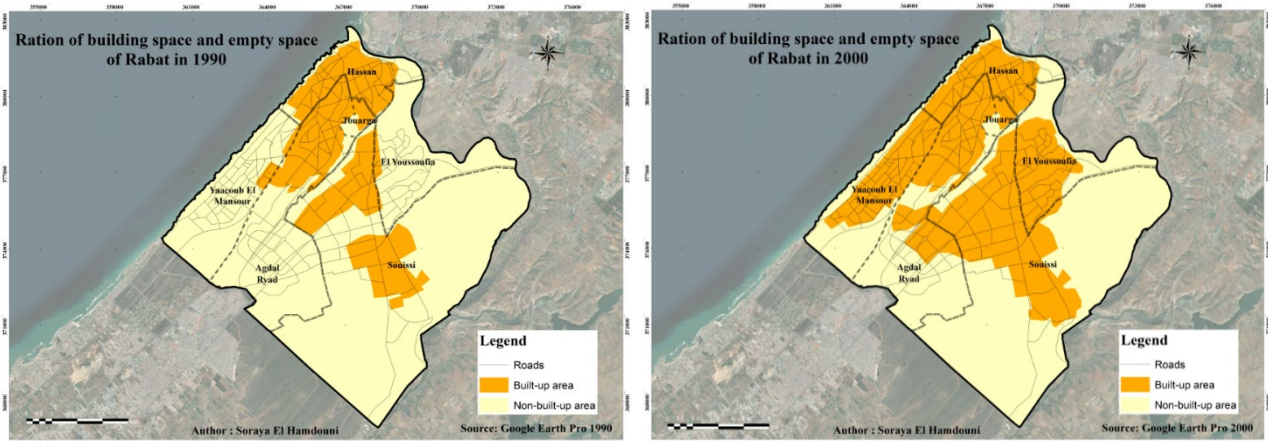


Fig. 5: Urban development of the Rabat prefecture from 1990 to 2000.

It was during this phase that the prefecture finally reconciled itself with its coastline and wadi through a town planning document. The Master Plan for Urban Development (SDAU), approved in 1995, considers that the development of these two sites should be placed among the major actions designed to promote sector-based or specific developments or operations in certain sensitive or strategic urban sectors of the conurbation. For each of these actions, the SDAU affirms the imperative need for public intervention, specific resources and detailed preliminary studies [24]. Among the major actions in the SDAU [25]:

- Development of the coast road;
- Development of the Avenue of Victory;
- Rehabilitation of the gardens;
- The internal bypass;
- The outer ring road (bypass);
- Protection of natural heritage.

3.3 From 2000 to 2010

According to the 2004 RGPH, Rabat's population is growing at a rate of 1%. This low rate can be explained by a falling birth rate, and by the fact that people are leaving the capital for the outskirts, in search of land and a lower standard of living than in the prefecture.

In contrast to its demographic evolution, Rabat continues to spread out on an urban scale from 41% to 54.5% of its surface area (Fig. 6). This sprawl is justified by Rabat's involvement in a number of projects, such as the cities without slums program in 2003, and the development of the Bouregreg valley in 2006. In 2007, Rabat will see a number of projects, including the opening of the Oum Azza recycling center as part of the national household waste program (PNDM), the development of the Rabat quay and the Oudayas tunnel, as well as the high-speed rail project.

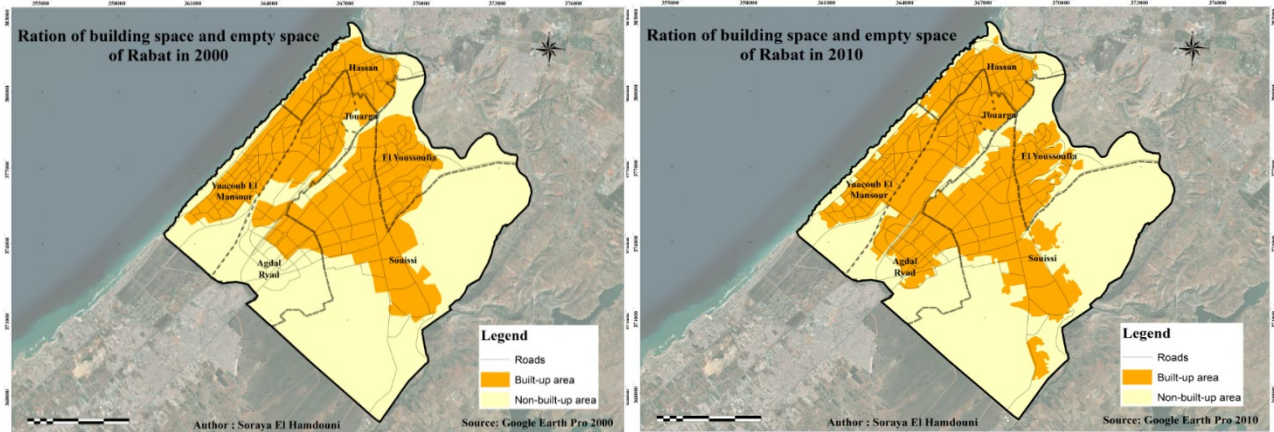


Fig. 6: Urban development of the Rabat prefecture from 2000 to 2010.

The key events of the decade in terms of urban planning and its legislative framework at national level were:

- Investment promotion;
- Attempt to recast laws 12-90 and 25-90 through draft texts 42.00 and law 04-04;
- Draft law 04-04, enacting various provisions relating to housing and town planning;
- SNAT of 2004, which aims to restructure the national territory on solid, sustainable foundations;
- Law no. 12-03 on environmental impact studies, published in the official bulletin on May 12, 2003;
- Law no. 28-00 on waste management and disposal, published in the Official Gazette on December 07, 2006.

3.4 From 2010 to 2020

Moving into the second decade of the 21st century, Rabat has projected itself into project town planning and will strike hard at the level of a gigantic project aimed at reducing territorial disparities, guaranteeing accessibility to equipment and infrastructure and ensuring better quality of life for residents.

In 2020, Rabat is almost saturated in land terms with 60% land occupation of its urban perimeter with an urban development oriented south-east (Fig. 7). As for its population, the capital marked a negative growth rate of -8% according to the RGPH of 2014, this decline is largely justified by the scarcity and high cost of land, the high standard of living, the birth of new towns on the outskirts of Rabat which absorbed the poor to middle population in search of land opportunities and better living conditions. Rabat is now an elitist city with a controlled population.

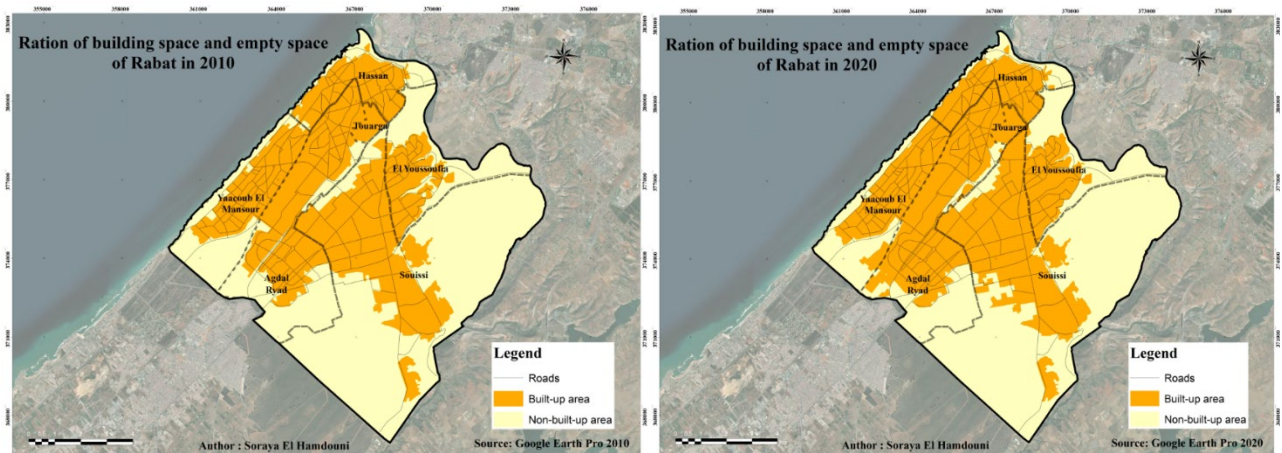


Fig. 7: Urban development in the Rabat prefecture from 2010 to 2020

It is still important to mention that Rabat during this period is at the peak of its positioning at the national level and at the level of the African continent. It was proclaimed a green city in April 2010. The capital made notable progress in 2011 in terms of infrastructure, basic social facilities and urban mobility with the commissioning of two tram lines, the wastewater treatment plant wastewater from Rabat-Temara, and the reconstruction of the Hassan II Bridge. Rabat was included on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2012 as an Outstanding Universal Value.

In the same perspective, the metropolitan area of Rabat is engaged in 2014 in a megaproject "Rabat, city of light, Moroccan capital of culture" with multidimensional components (culture, heritage, environment, structuring equipment, urban mobility, rehabilitation gardens and urban parks, etc.), the repercussions of which will not fail to impact territorial attractiveness and the improvement of living environments.

Since the start of the millennium, Rabat has evolved, moved and opened up to modernity. Its comparative advantages are asserting themselves and, since 2010, its evolution has been linked to a succession of major events. In 2010, Rabat was declared, among five cities in the world, a Green City, by the NGO Earth Day based in Washington, thanks to its assets in terms of green spaces (20m² of green spaces per inhabitant, i.e. double of the commonly accepted international average [5]), and chosen as the first city to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of Earth Day, as a reward for the commitment of all components of Moroccan society in favor of sustainable development and environmental protection. In 2012, Rabat was included by UNESCO on the list of World Heritage of Humanity, a heritage shared with the contribution from abroad, the Roman contribution 2000 years ago, Andalusian, four centuries ago and, European, in the 20th century.

A sharing which necessarily refers to values to which Morocco firmly holds: openness to others, tolerance, dialogue and modernity. In 2013, Rabat hosted the 4th Congress of UCLG (United Cities, Local Governments) at the same time as the 2nd Cities Summit which celebrated the centenary of the global municipal movement in the presence of 3,500 mayors from all continents. The choice of the city of Rabat, which already houses the headquarters of UCLG Africa, was taken unanimously to reward Morocco's efforts in terms of decentralized cooperation, controlled urbanization and safeguarding cultural heritage. This meeting made Rabat a landmark city in the global movement of cities and local authorities which have the desire to play a major role in all debates relating to the good management of local affairs, the consequences of urbanization, the problems of habitat, sustainable development issues and risks linked to climate change. In 2014, Rabat implemented, as we mentioned... a major urban renovation project for the period 2014 - 2018 which aims to improve the use of its space, solidarity between its human components and sustainability of its environment. This project is based on the city's planning instruments, notably its development plan, the municipal development plan and the urban mobility plan, a program based on the added values of the city and its main functions as a cultural capital and environmental [26].

The significant events of this decade in terms of urban planning as well as its legislative framework at the national level are:

- The new constitution of 2011: the co-construction of public policies, sustainable development, the right to decent housing, social justice, the reduction of spatial disparities;
- Morocco of major construction sites;
- Resurfacing of the Rabat step in 2013,
- Advanced regionalization;
- The national charter for the Environment and Sustainable Development;
- Law 81-12 relating to the coast;
- Bill 99-14 relating to town planning documents.

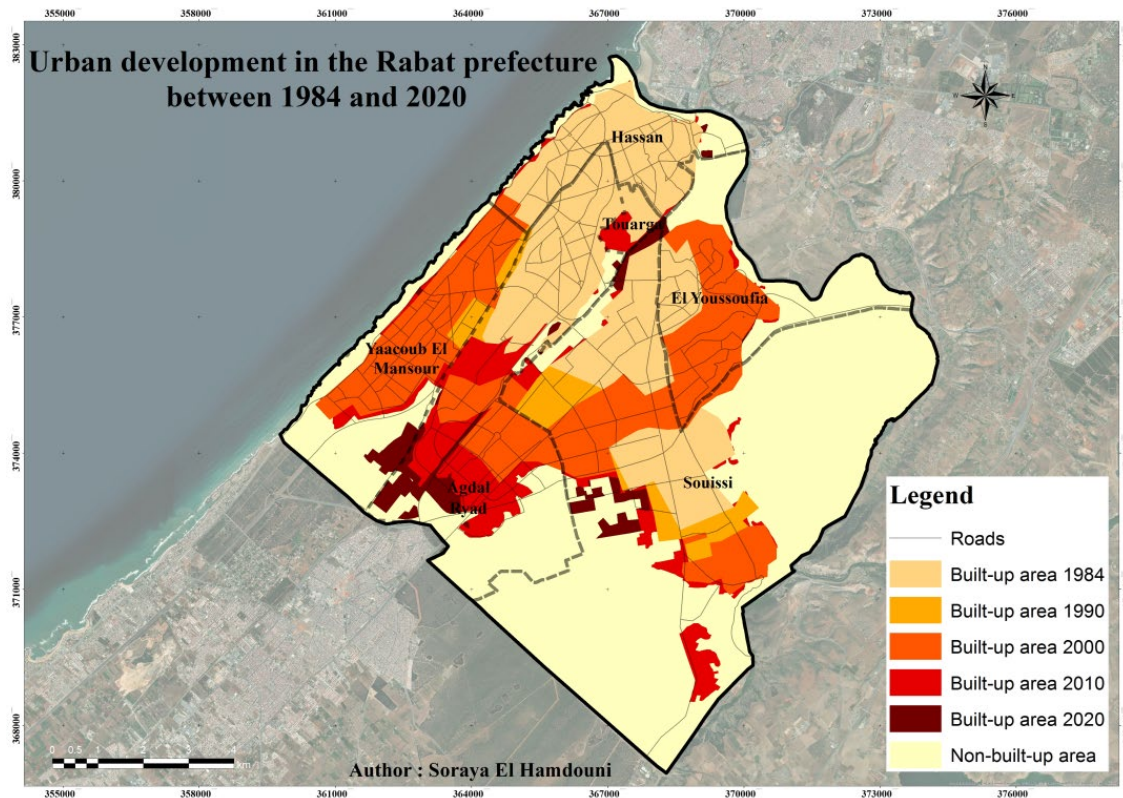


Fig. 8: Summary map of urban development in the Rabat prefecture between 1984 and 2020

4 Conclusion

Rabat, situated on 60% of its built-up area, boasts significant advantages in terms of green spaces, providing 20m² per inhabitant—double the international average. Amidst ambitions to elevate its status to that of a global metropolis and a heightened focus on preserving its Historic Urban Landscape (PUH), Rabat faces a dual challenge. On one hand, it must adhere to a comprehensive urban development agenda aimed at metropolitan expansion. On the other, it must fulfill commitments stemming from its UNESCO World Heritage designation, which carries universal significance beyond its immediate territory.

Despite ambitious initiatives such as the construction of the new Ibn Sina hospital, museums, the Mohammed VI tower, the grand theater of Rabat, and upgrades to infrastructure like the Moulay Abdellah complex, Rabat Salé airport, tram lines, and a new bus station, alongside efforts to rehabilitate the old medina, Rabat continues to grapple with several challenges. These include issues such as unemployment, illiteracy, social disparities, and land speculation, which persistently impact its development trajectory.

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