



PLANNING MALAYSIA:

Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners

VOLUME 23 ISSUE 4 (2025), Page 825 – 840

PERSPECTIVE ON MODERN HERITAGE: IDENTIFICATION AND COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT FOR THE HERITAGE VALUES OF THE LARGE HOUSING ESTATES OF ORAN 1950-1962, ALGERIA

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Abstract

Until now, no research has been carried out on how to develop criteria for assessing the heritage values of the built legacy that is the large housing estates, with the aim of launching reflections on heritage production. The aim of this document is to identify and assess the value of the architecture of large housing estates with a view to proposing its possible preservation. The article makes a comparative assessment of four large housing estates located in the city of Oran, chosen on the basis of relevant factors relating to the architect's fame, varied urban form and amalgamated destination between large housing estates for Muslims and large housing estates for Europeans. The study was based on the fusion of two empirical methods, qualitative and quantitative, also known as the mixed method (MMR). The first was based on semi-directive interviews, which offered the opportunity to identify new criteria in the field, and the second on 200 questionnaires distributed to two samples of the population, residents and professionals, whose data was analysed using Atlas.Ti software. The research also began with a review of the relevant literature to take stock of the values attributed to modern architecture included on the UNESCO World Heritage List and the Docomomo criteria. Finally, the results of this comparative study reveal that the values vary from one case to another according to the degree of the criteria, some of which are relevant in relation to others. This can trigger the choice of contextually relevant criteria which directly affect the score of each large ensemble and influence the heritage approach, since the criteria explored constitute important reference points in relation to the heritage production of domestic architecture in the second half of the twentieth century in Algeria.

Keywords: large housing estates, heritage values, assessment criteria, stakeholders, inhabitants, Oran (Algeria)

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INTRODUCTION

This is a spatial and social formation of urban forms built in the suburbs bordering Oran, constituting urban extension zones, as well as some implanted in the city center. These constructions developed significantly in the 1950s (Rezgui et al, 2020), a period marked by their establishment as symbols of modernity. Their current location lies at the very heart of the city of Oran, due to the city's constant eastward expansion. Some were built on the edge of the old city center or in nearby suburbs (Filali et al, 2023). Within a discourse of valorization and real estate classification, the large housing estates of the 1950s considered as modern colonial architectural heritage have been stigmatized, marginalized, and even forgotten in heritage practices. However, initiatives aiming to reveal their hidden beauty through rehabilitation, maintenance, as well as exhibitions and vernissages, are beginning to emerge. These gestures, however, remain timid due to a lack of awareness of this shared heritage (Volait, 2005). This heritage reflects the transition from an insalubrious way of life to a revolutionary one, transferred from the metropolis to the colony. It stands as an inescapable testimony to an architectural history that forms part of a broader chain of production, dating from 1831 with the arrival of the French in Oran, until their departure in 1962.

The backbone of this research consists in the contribution of a new approach to heritage evaluation, a model evaluation grid is proposed which goes beyond certain current values by emphasising the distinctive criteria for access to the heritage of this modern architectural heritage which requires recognition of the diversity of elements which will allow the identification of values (González Martínez, 2023) for this reason three major series of questions on the future of large housing estates have been raised, on what relevant criteria can or should the heritage of large housing estates be based? What constitutes heritage in large housing estates? Are there any housing estates in Oran that require heritage protection? The hypothesis is that heritage value is assessed on the basis of the Criteria, which are a model that is constantly evolving over time as societies change (Carabelli et al., 2022), modelled according to the specific context that is different and varied in every country in the world, which is why the question of the heritage value of social housing is made possible by changing the heritage logic (Hadbi, 2020), and their effectiveness must be defined by a scientific method. This is precisely what this research sets out to do.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern heritage values

The expansion of the heritage concept has fostered extensive debate on the notion of value, now seen as central to conservation (Davallon, 2006; Polious, 2014). Value is approached as dynamic (Laurent, 2003), multidimensional economic, aesthetic, and ethical (Bos et al., 2023) and linked to criteria that determine

conservation (Salvo et al., 2018). Rooted in Riegl's seminal work (1902), value theory identifies monuments through a system of historical, contemporary, commemorative, use, artistic, and age-related values (Harrer, 2017). This original typology has continued its course to be revisited and even remodelled according to well-defined requirements by the various expert researchers, having compared different variables, a selection of sets of typologies of values linked to the built heritage has been summarised in the development of an explanatory table in the research carried out by Fredheim & Khalaf(2016) , this updating of values cannot be complete or lasting but rather perpetual in mutation over time and according to societies. It is impossible to draw up a set of complete and universally applicable typologies of values (Rudolff, 2006) because several elements come into play in the elaboration of a typology of value, despite several aspects such as the type of heritage object (habitat or building, monument), the context in which it is paid for, the nature of the actors (expert or non-expert (citizens, inhabitants)).

The efficiency of DOCOMOMO AND UNESCO

Similarly, DOCOMOMO establishes classification criteria that are linked to innovation and to the cultural, social and economic changes that have altered the built environment of the twentieth century. Since 1999, DOCOMOMO has been working in collaboration with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to establish criteria for selecting twentieth-century sites in order to guarantee their protection, and its capacity to evolve (Tiry-Ono et al., 2023) a distinct model of built heritage that emerged at the time of the modern movement, namely the large 'social heritage' ensembles, to which various researchers have contributed in order to identify values with a view to its inclusion on the heritage list , According to Gyurkovich(2021) , the large Polish estates resulting from the modern movement often present high urbanistic and architectural values and are currently the subject of revitalisation measures, in addition this specimen derived from the modern movement immerses a work of modelling value (Heinich,2017) , all depending on several factors, that said could not be defined outside any geographical, social, historical context (Courbebaisse et al., 2022).

Heritage Values of Large Housing Estates

Highlighting a body of work whose objectives are linked to the question of the heritage values of large housing estates, each researcher focusing on one or two values for the evaluation of large housing estates as much as heritage, this field so fragile and complex at the same time which has become a laboratory for a new way of thinking (Reichen, 2000), this research engine must not be limited to a few current architectural, aesthetic or historical values (Amougou, 2007). With the rehabilitation method for the Ancely housing estate in Toulouse, France, where the value of use is analysed as a potential approach in order to enhance

practices, perceptions and appropriations as a strategy for understanding a changing space (Issot, 2023), among other things, the historical value of housing estates in Algeria is a radical break with rural architectural style, as for the artistic value, which refers to the topical value theorised by Riegl, which lies in a modernity that does not free itself from the local and from history (Smair, 2019). Notably (Tapie, 2014) other ‘quality’ values linked to large housing estates are introduced, namely spatial, urban, proximity and, finally, reputational value. That said, the values shared by the various researchers are no more than personal experiences in order to identify and determine an object to be given heritage status (Carabelli, 2022). This has made it possible to classify cold values into two categories, where the information is objective and the results are therefore the same for a specific case study, such as urban and architectural value, whereas warm value is approached in different ways by researchers, with divergent results, such as use value, which is based on the experience and stories of residents of large housing estates, expressed in terms of the degree of attachment to places, i.e. the contribution of residents to shaping their living environment, as seen in (Table 1).

Table 1: Modelling a typology of hot/cold values for large housing estates.

Cold heritage values	Warm heritage Values
1. historical	6. Use
2. Urban	7. Memory
3. Architectural	8. Artistic
4. Reputational	9. Aesthetic
5. Proximity	

Authors elaborated with information from Literature review.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study sought to define criteria for evaluating the 1950s large housing estates in Oran, key elements of twentieth-century urban structure (Gyurkovich, 2021). Using a mixed-methods approach (Shwani, 2021), qualitative data were gathered through ethno-architectural analysis, interviews (Robert, 2023), and photographs (Pinson, 2016), complemented by field investigations to test hypotheses (Baribeau, 2005). Interviews with institutional and professional actors in heritage and housing provided essential insights, supported by clarifying questions (Angers, 1996).

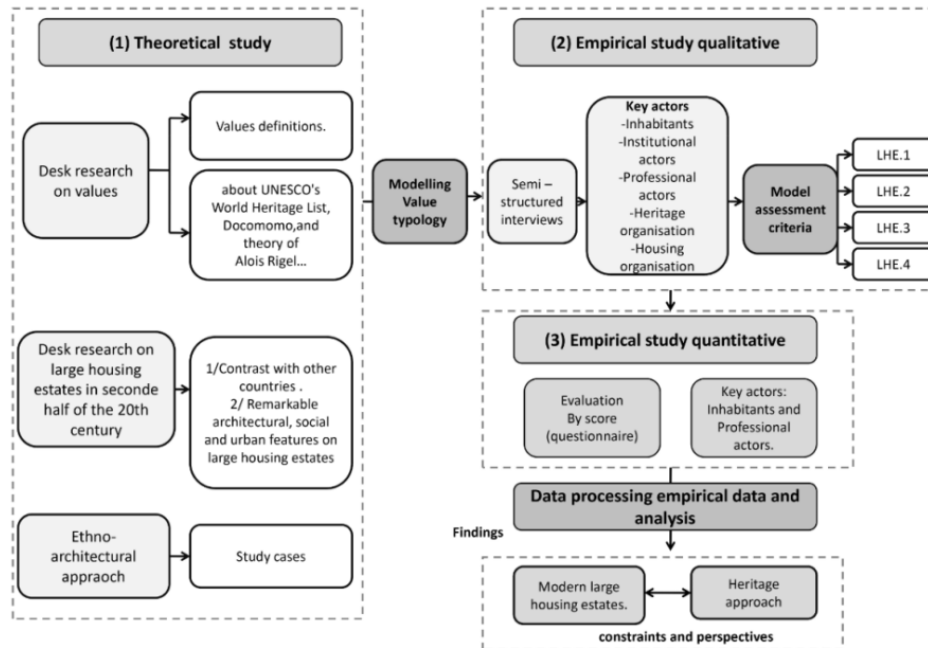


Figure 1: Research Diagram

Heritage values were assessed through a mixed-method approach. Semi-structured interviews helped refine criteria based on stakeholder input, while questionnaires with two population samples assigned scores to each predefined criterion (Table 2). On-site observations further validated the findings by highlighting consistencies and discrepancies between reported and observed data (Elizondo, 2024).

Table 2: Participants interviewed from large housing estates study cases in Oran

Interviewees group	Number of Interviewees stage one	Number of Interviewees stage two
Focus groupe « inhabitants of each large housing estate »	160=(4x4)	800=(200x4)
Institutional actors (architects teaching at various local and foreign universities, sociologists in the Department of Architecture, and others in the Department of Sociology of Architecture at the CRASC Oran research centre).	20	

Interviewees group	Number of Interviewees stage one	Number of Interviewees stage two
Professional actors (architects from the Oran Department of Culture and the Arts, civil engineers working for the Construction Technical Control (CTC) body, architects from the Technical Design Office.	25	25
Heritage organisation: heritage associations, environmental protection associations, Bel Horizon, Sid el Houari health association (SDH).	15	
-Housing organization (employees of the administrative subdivision of the housing department of the wilaya of Oran, OPGI, Center for urban studies and planning, Housing Department (DL).	22	
Total	242	825

Source: Authors.

STUDY CASES

Oran has a strong identity, reflected in its rich and diverse architectural heritage. These traces of the past contribute to shaping Oran as a modern city. As Camus (1947) noted: “*Oran is, on the contrary, a city without suspicion*”, in other words, a completely modern city. The 19th Mediterranean Games, held in 2022, have further established Oran as a place of exchange and encounter. Its public buildings and urban ensembles from earlier periods are generally subject to preservation and classification, with this form of heritage management particularly linked to the continuation of colonial approaches (Aouchal, 2023). This, however, is not the case for housing, particularly the large, unprotected housing estates dating from the 1950s, which by default are all considered “ordinary,” even though this extensive corpus represents 20% of the city’s collective housing stock (Filali et al., 2023). The large housing estates that were originally located outside the city walls and away from the city center are, relatively speaking, better positioned today, as the city has since expanded. They are generally well connected to the city center by public transport (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Map of the Oran metropolitan area and selected large housing estates with distance markers between the city centre and the neighbourhoods. Compiled by the Authors from a Google Earth © image.

Apart from two examples originally intended for the families of naval officers, civil servants, and workers from mainland France, the large housing estate of Dar Beida designed by Pierre Jean Guth, Grand Prix de Rome (1951), is exemplary. Comprising 580 units based on the *improved council housing* (*H.L.M. amélioré*) model from metropolitan France, it combined generous living spaces with an ambitious social vision. The north–south orientation of the main façades optimized winter sunlight and summer sea breezes, while the integration of district-scale facilities and public spaces underscored its role as both an architectural and social project (Kefif & Hendel, 2024).

Similarly, the Valmy estate, designed between 1954 and 1956 by Fernand Pouillon, a renowned specialist in social housing. Consisted of 614 dwellings strategically located for climatic advantages and connectivity with Oran. Its broad, open forms embodied the modern principles of urban planning while addressing the pressing demand for social housing. Overall, the housing capacity of LHEE exceeded that of LHEM by 60% highlighting its greater scale and urban significance (Figure 3).

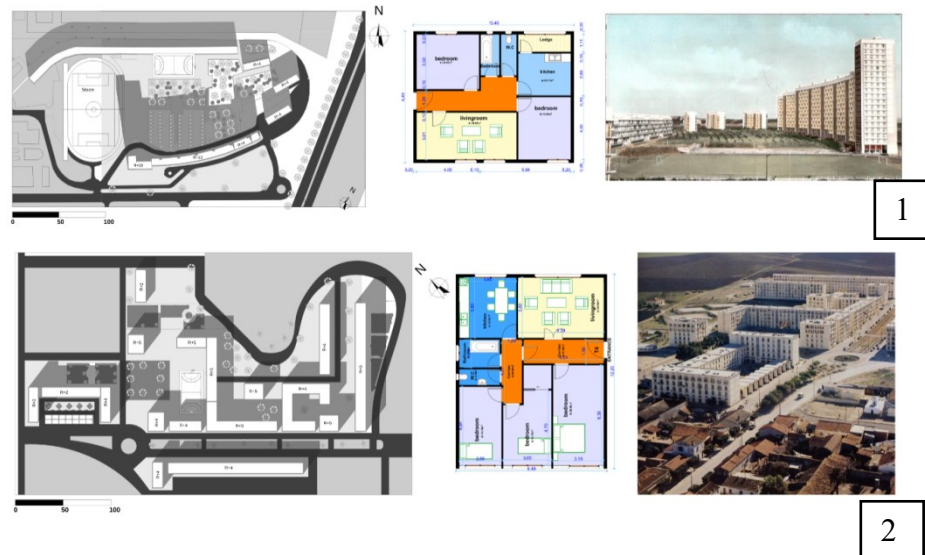


Figure 3: LHEE plans, dwelling models and photos. From top to bottom: 1. Dar Beida 1951, 2. The Valmy 1954-1956. Mass lay-out and plans made by the Authors. Photos from Oran archive.

The housing of LHEM, financed by the Algerian Cooperative Society for Muslim Housing, introduced a new approach to modern architecture adapted to Algerian traditions, offering an alternative to the design of conventional traditional houses. The large housing estate of La Quietude (El Hanaa), built by the French architect Justin Marie between 1955 and 1956, relied on standardization and cost-efficiency. It comprised an average of 254 flats organized in four-storey blocks around a central courtyard, though without integrated facilities or essential services. The project offered three housing models arranged in a linear and monotonous layout.

By contrast, the co-owned housing complex on the Mirauchaux plateau, constructed in 1958 during the implementation of the Constantine Plan by Messrs. Mauri, Pons, and the Atbat group (which included architect Georges Candilis), provided 144 units in a variety of housing models. This ensemble was distinguished by a richer architectural vocabulary and greater attention to spatial diversity (Figure 4).

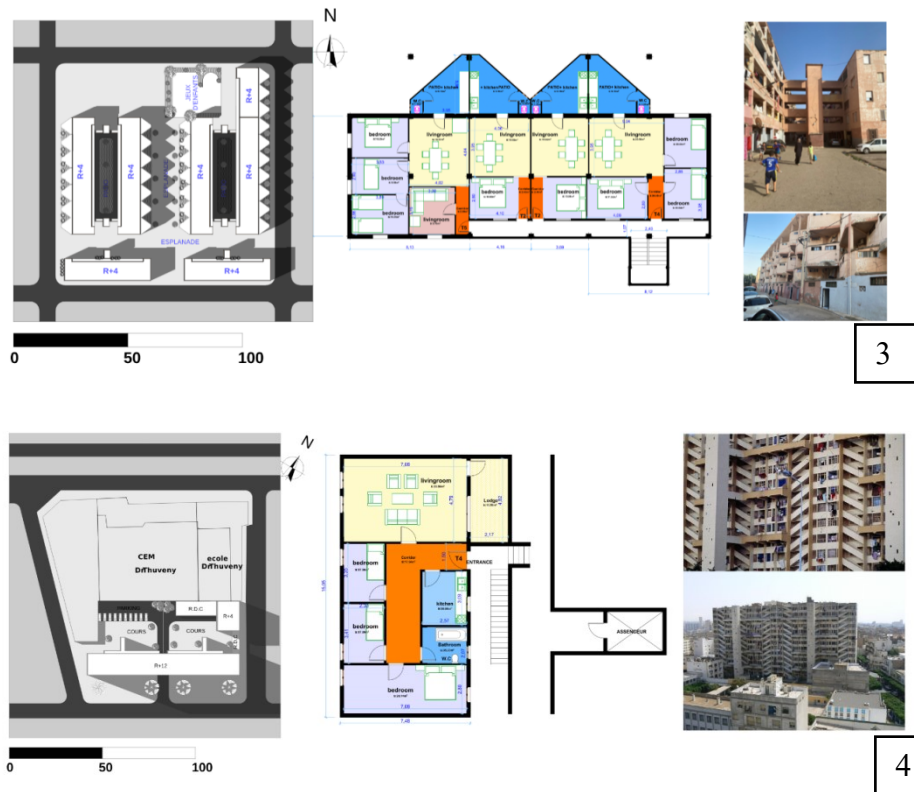


Figure 4: LHEM plans, dwelling models and photos. From top to bottom: 1. El hanaa1955.1956, 2. the Co-owned building on the Mirauchaux plateau 1958. Masse layout and photos of houses and plans made by the Authors.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Construction of the assessment criteria in the field

Criteria provide an objective basis for assessing heritage values (Brunel, 2015), contributing to the promotion of twentieth-century architectural heritage (Kahrovic Handzic, 2024). For large housing estates, this fragile social heritage requires specific and consistent criteria, as outlined in (Table 4).

The comparative assessment of heritage values

The following table summarizes the comparative assessment of values previously developed. It is composed of a set of criteria identified from a field survey and complemented by a questionnaire distributed to both populations, in order to determine the positioning of each large housing estate within the heritage approach. The results were processed using the Atlas.Ti tool and then transferred

to Microsoft Excel to generate graphical series, with the objective of outlining the profile of the heritage approach. The first questionnaire, covering 5 out of 9 values, was completed by the inhabitants of each large complex, while the second questionnaire, relating to 4 out of 9 values, was completed by various stakeholders. To evaluate the state of each criterion, we applied our own weighting method to the results processed with Atlas.Ti, producing an overall score expressed in number of responses. We then established five scoring groups, each corresponding to a numerical rating (4, 3, 2, 1, and 0), structured as follows:

- 161 to 200: Exceptional = 4
- 121 to 160: Superior = 3
- 81 to 120: Strong = 2
- 41 to 80: Medium = 1
- 1 to 40: Weak = 0

Finally, all ratings were converted into numerical values (Table 4).

Table 4: Comparative assessment of the heritage values of the large housing estate in the case studies.

	Values Assessment criteria	L.H.E.E 1	L.H.E.E 2	L.H.E.M 3	L.H.E.M 4
Co ld hé rit ag e va lu es	1. Historical value	1.66	2.66	0.33	1
	1.1 Notable personalities.	0	2	0	0
	1.2 Significant events.	2	3	1	3
	1.3 Structure as historical evidence	3	3	0	0
	2. Architectural value	2.33	3.16	2.33	2.66
	2.1 Innovative techniques	2	2	4	4
	2.2 Unique materials.	1	3	1	2
	2.3 Renowned designer.	3	4	1	3
	2.4 Adequate lodging capacity.	3	4	1	1
	2.5 Adaptation to local needs	2	3	4	3
	2.6 Rarity & Integrity	3	3	3	3
	3. Urban value	3.33	4.00	2.66	3.5
	3.1 Optimum sunlight & Orientation.	3	4	3	3
	3.2 Wind protection. & Natural ventilation.	3	4	3	3.5
	3.3 Influence of architectural culture	4	4	2	4
	4. Proximity value	2.50	2.50	3.00	2.00
	4.1 Public facilities availability.	3	2	3	4
	4.2 Ecological/environmental sites	2	3	3	0
	5. Reputational value	positive	positive	négative	négative

	Values Assessment criteria	L.H.E.E 1	L.H.E.E 2	L.H.E.M 3	L.H.E.M 4
	5.1 Educated households (rate)	2	3	1	1
	5.2 Crime rate	0	0	2(0.06)	2(0.034)
W a r m h é r i t a g e v a l u s	6. Use value	1.66	3	2.33	3
	6.1 Shared spaces (identity & security)	3	3	3	4
	6.2 Private units (identity & comfort)	1	4	2	2
	6.3 Public facilities (attachment & affection)	1	2	2	3
	7. Memory Value	2	2	2	2
	7.1 Degree of ethnicity	0	0	2	2
	7.2 Positive personal representation	4	4	2	2
	8. Artistic value	2.33	2	3	3.66
	8.1 Original appearance	3	2	4	4
	8.2 Novel artistic expression	2	2	2	4
	8.3 Meaning interpretation	2	2	3	3
	9. Internal and external aesthetic value	2.5	3.25	3	3.5
	9.1 Visual/aural perception & enjoyment	3	2.5	3	4
	9.2 Cognition, creativity & sentiment	2	4	3	3

Source: Authors.

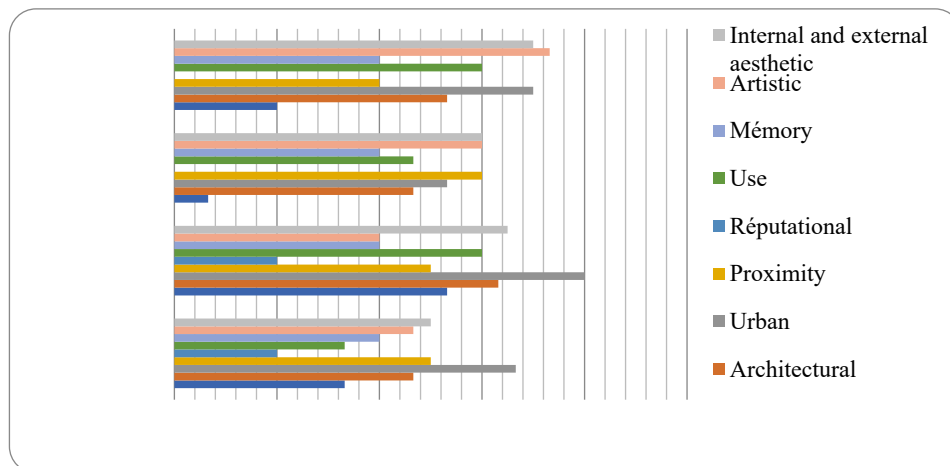


Figure 5: Profile of heritage values attributed to the large groups analysed. Source: Authors.

The evaluation of values revealed a strong connection between the heritage approach and the characteristics of the large housing estates. However, in order to understand the challenges and limitations of this approach, the values

were assessed using specific criteria applied to the four large housing estates (Figure 6).

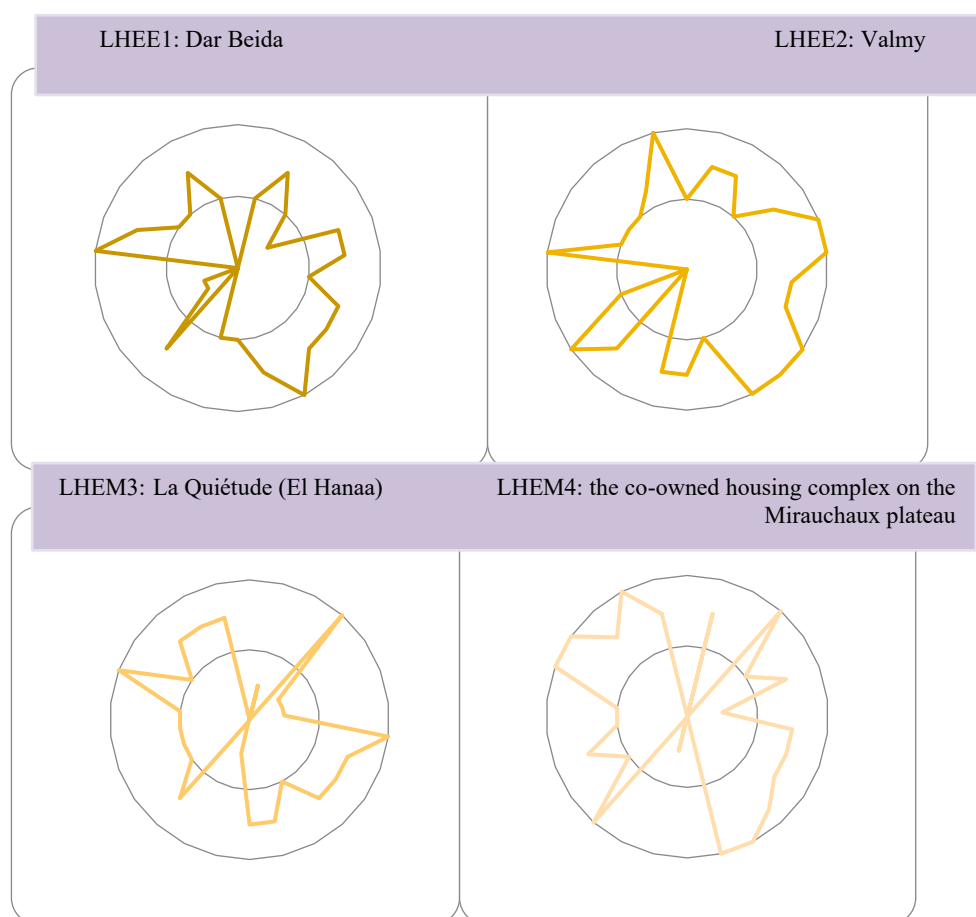


Figure 6: Heritage profiles for each large housing estate. Source: Authors.

Using the MMR methodology (Matović, 2023), the study highlights the Valmy estate and the co-owned housing complex on the Mirauchaux plateau as the most remarkable large housing complexes in Oran (Table 4; Figure 5). Valmy is recognized for its coherent layout, while Mirauchaux stands out as a unique artistic work (score 4), maintaining social identity (score 3) and authenticity through technical solidity and the absence of alterations (Figure 6). Both demonstrate rarity, local adaptation, and historical significance, confirming that heritage values are shaped by context and community expression (Courbebaisse, 2022).

As for the Dar Beida housing estate located near the co-owned building on the Mirauchaux plateau, it has a deficit (figure 6) in terms of the degree of autochthony and characters and idols worthy of remembrance score 0.2 Authentic and singular appropriation at the level of the cell and facilities is low score 1 and this is due to the perpetual departure and arrival of families given its military status, its curvilinear shape gives a visual pleasure whose two scores are identical by 3 a specificity and a principle that the architect pierre-Jean Guth uses for his projects who is considered to be a renowned architect (score 3) (figure 6) its strategic location has favoured its visibility.

On the other hand, La Quietude (El Hanaa) represents a new artistic form (score 3) that the architect has combined between the audacity of having a modern form adapted to local requirements (score 4) and a remarkable technical demonstration by the individual and collective patio (score 4) which has given an architectural rarity in the Oranese landscape (score 4) (figure 6). However, this large housing estate has a high proportion of uneducated families originating from shantytowns, which has negatively influenced its reputational value and resulted in the absence of memory-related features or cultural activity (score 0). This considerable imbalance has led to behaviors that may harm the estate itself, as well as to its destruction and mismanagement.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify and evaluate the heritage values of two dominant forms of housing production that have shaped Oran as a modern city: the large housing estates for Muslims (LHEM) and the large housing estates for Europeans (LHEE), and their relationship with the “sense of place” (Rahil et al., 2020). To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach (MMR) was adopted, considering large housing estates as built heritage in which several key actors intervene, through semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. The results of the systematic analysis of the state of the art made it possible to identify different strategies for determining heritage values, aligned with the evaluation criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage List and the Docomomo framework. Whether classified as “cold” or “warm,” the results highlight that the heritage process functions as a flexible and dynamic approach based on an effective typology of values (Brunel, 2015). Cultural, social, and technical values are appreciated and debated by inhabitants who emerge as the key determinant in the effectiveness of heritage preservation efforts (Ariffin et al., 2023) as well as by other stakeholders. This complementarily helps simplify the complexity of the notion of values by breaking down the criteria and distinguishing architectural objects as remarkable, exceptional, or ordinary. According to the study, certain criteria appear to take precedence, whether tangible or intangible, such as the reputation of the architect, the consideration of local architectural traditions, and the sense of attachment.

The findings show that heritage values vary from one housing estate to another, depending on their identity, the lived experiences of inhabitants reflected in use and appropriation the creator, and historical context, which all serve as resources with significant implications for their future as heritage in the making. Finally, the results support the attribution of an overall heritage status, given the diversity and richness of the values identified, while also taking into account the historical and social context of the property in question.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank the inhabitants of the large housing estates for their generous and valuable contributions to this research. Special thanks are also extended to the Bendjima Top-Building Design Office for their support in redrawing the plans and in analyzing the orientation of the large housing estates serving as case studies.

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Received: 2nd May 2025. Accepted: 10th September 2025