

# THE DIALOGUE FRIENDLINESS OF ARCHITECTURE OF PLACES OF POWER IN INDEPENDENT TUNISIA

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## **Abstract**

*This study demonstrates that the architecture of places of power in independent Tunisia is continuing the colonial configurations; matching a dominative and exclusive conception of power; that is inconsistent with the equity and sharing based conception of the value of independence. The analysis of the legislative, executive and civil powers' buildings establishes paradigmatic identity between Roman, Turkish, French, American and Tunisian configuration for the topological and morphological syntagms.*

**Keywords:** *Tunisia; architecture; power; continuity; domination; reference; consistency; equity; dialogue; Independence.*

## **Theoretical framework**

From the Antiquity to the 18th century, architecture was defined according to the three vitruvian values: *firmitas, utilitas, venustas*<sup>8</sup>. Accordingly, the esthetical historicism values are: shape, structure and reliability<sup>9</sup>. At the beginning of the 20th century, the expectations became technical and social. In the second half of the century structuralism has attempted to explain the universal and singular interaction by semiotics. It considers that the configuration of space allows the exercise of activities, a system of signs, a chain of *syntagms*, summoning natural, human and spiritual registers of objects or paradigms for a specific *interpretant*<sup>10</sup>.

Other approaches provided anthropogenic and cognitivist definitions of architecture, seeing it as a surrounding shape whose construction is manifested in destination<sup>11</sup> or the computation of the levels of sustainability of settlement<sup>12</sup>.

Power refers to ability and authorization<sup>13</sup>. Its function is to manage the public interest<sup>14</sup>. Since Antiquity, the types of power have depended on the number of its holders and beneficiaries: tyranny, monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy, democracy, or isonomy<sup>15</sup>. Modern powers claim to be different versions of democracy based on concepts of nation, federation, community, collectivity, capital, environment, and

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<sup>8</sup> Evers Bernd, Théorie de l'architecture, Taschen, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Böckler Georg Andreas, Baumeisterin Pallas, Endter Söhne Edition, 1698.

<sup>10</sup> Rénier Alain, Espace : construction et signification, Laboratoire d'architecture La Villette, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> Van Lier Henri, Anthropogénie, un darwinisme des sciences humaines, Les Impressions nouvelles, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff Francis, Notre humanité. D'Aristote aux neurosciences, Fayard, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Spector Céline, Le pouvoir, Flammarion, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Platon, La République, Flammarion, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Aristote, La politique, Librairie Philosophique Vrin, 1995.

so on. Hannah Arendt<sup>16</sup> and Francis Wolff<sup>17</sup> remind us that democracy is the collective participation to the centralization of wealth, while isonomy is the collective participation to the inclusive redistribution of wealth.

As a dimension of *modus vivendi*, architecture expresses the specificities of the types of power. What are the activities of power? What are their spatial manifestations? How are the manifestations specific to the types of power? Which type of power is expressed in the architecture of independent Tunisia? How consistent is it with political speech? How dialogue friendly is the architecture of power in independent Tunisia?

The first activity of power is representation. As the action of bringing something in front of the eyes<sup>18</sup>, representation is the stimulation of sensitivity in general and that of sight in particular. Power is thus expected to use the tools of visual perception to manifest its identity. Perception theory defines matching, contrasting, proximity, similitude, simplicity and harmony<sup>19</sup> as the laws of interpretation of identifications; and so is the power seeking the representative configurations of its identity. It appropriates the spaces that admit the visibility that matches its conception of socialization. For example, high contrasting would express more singularity. Consequently, a domination based conception of socialization and power would choose highest spaces: military barracks, churches' bells and mosques' minaret, corporations' skyscrapers; and/or fronts' excrescences: pope's, English royalty's and French socialist party headquarters' balconies to express itself.

The second activity of power is influence. As the action of the stars on men's destiny<sup>20</sup>, the influence is the interference in behavior for interest. Power is thus expected to use the tools of ethology to manifest itself. The ethological theory defines the proximal causes, the ultimate causes, the ontogenesis and the phylogeny<sup>21</sup> as the laws of behavior production, and so is the power seeking incentive configurations of its identity. It appropriates the spaces that admit the exemplarity that matches its conception of socialization. As the ultimate function is the defense of territories and the attraction of partners, a domination based power would choose the rarest materials like marble coating, painted ceramics, wooden openings' frames, precious metals made equipment, and the most worked crafts like sculpted plasters, carved walls, wood and metal embossing to express itself.

The third activity of power is conservation. As the action of maintaining unspoiled or in the same status<sup>22</sup>, conservation is sustaining the legacy. Power is thus expected to use the tools of ergonomics to manifest itself. The space appropriation theory defines the least accessible positions as the most out of range, thus lasting the longest<sup>23</sup>. In this case, power is seeking the distancing configurations for its identity; setting out of reach for sight, hearing, touching or criticizing; the most withdrawn implanting alignment. It refers to the separating limits from the public space, such as in Château de Versailles or in the Palais de l'Elysée, and the most isolating limits: high and thick fences topped by spikes and barbed wire, deaf doors of direction's offices.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt Hannah, *Les Origines du totalitarisme*, Gallimard, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Wolff Francis, *Aristote et la politique*, PUF, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> *Représentation*, Dictionnaire étymologique, Centre National des Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Saint-Martin Fernande, *La théorie de la gestalt et l'art visuel*, Presses Universitaires du Québec, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Influence*, Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, Tome 2, Imprimerie nationale / Fayard, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Amy Mathieu, *Les quatre questions de Tinbergen*, , Revue des linguistes de l'Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense n°54, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> *Conservation*, Dictionnaire Le Littré, Redon, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Saint-Martin, *La théorie de la gestalt et l'art visuel*, Presses Universitaires du Québec, 2005.

According to Charles Sanders Peirce in his philosophical treaty *The Rule of Reason*<sup>24</sup>, semiotic analysis is based on the interpretation of the signs of the *cosmosphere*, the material world, as a chain of syntagms meaning an object, a paradigm of the *noosphere*. The sign-object couple is relative to an *interpretant*, a cultural context, a *psychosphere*. The semiotic system of observation defines the syntagm as a structural element of complex entities, such as living beings, sentences, or any literally material things. The paradigm is the chosen version among the set of possible ones for a syntagm. Architectural syntagms are topology and morphology. Topology is situation, program and organization. Morphology is compactness, porosity and chromaticity.

Visibility of domination based power expresses in high and far situations, exclusive program, selective organization. Equity based power expresses in common and melted situations, inclusive program, and pedagogic organization. Exemplarity of domination based power expresses in masters' situation, over-dimensioned program, deep organization. Equity based power expresses in collective needs' situation, parsimonious program, shallow organization. Distanciation of domination based power expresses in snoopy situation, defensive program, and radial organization. Equity based power expresses in popular gathering situation, welcoming program, linear organization.

### Case study

The studied places will be the legislative assemblies of 1956 and 1994; the presidential Carthage palace and the municipality of Tunis, and the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD) and Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) headquarters.

The topology of the Parliament of 1956 is the beylical Palace of Bardo; the program of offices, lounges and meeting rooms; and the organization of setting the entrance far from the gardens' gate. Its morphology is characterized by traditional moorish style of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (construction system, atmospheres) except for the Republic's flags. It represents hidden visibility, exclusive exemplarity and isolating distanciation.

The topology of the Parliament of 1994 is the beylical Palace of Bardo as an extension of the first; the program of offices, lounges and meeting rooms including media; and the organization of public access at floor of hemicyclic assembly. Its morphology is characterized by contemporary post-moorish style of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (more cubic, small porch less voids, more and bigger windows, centralized air conditioning, golden marquees). It represents hidden visibility, exclusive exemplarity and isolating distanciation.

The topology of the presidential Palace of Carthage is the situation at the periphery of the city, former French officer's residence; the program of pageantry plaza, offices, lounges and meeting rooms; and the organization of setting the entrance 500 meters far from the gardens' gate. Its morphology is characterized by contemporary moorish style of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (linear with magnified special spots, no voids, few windows, indirect and linear lighting of ceilings, golden lounge). It represents hidden visibility, exclusive exemplarity and isolating distanciation.

The topology of the municipality of Tunis is the situation at the top of the hill at the periphery of city, near the government's headquarters; the program of offices, lounges and meeting rooms including public celebrations space; and the organization of setting the activities on the half of the field, on three floors with the director at top, behind deaf doors. Its morphology is characterized by contemporary post-moorish style

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<sup>24</sup> Peirce Charles Sanders, *The Rule of Reason*, University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 1997.

of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (monumental entrance, emphasized claustra, big windows, marble coating). It represents universal visibility, exclusive exemplarity and intimidating distanciation.

The topology of the PSD headquarters is the situation on the top of the hill over the whole city, aligned with the axis of the main avenue of Tunis; the program of offices, lounges and meeting rooms; and the organization of setting the director behind deaf doors, at the top of a two and three floor building, leaving a quarter of the field as front yard. Its morphology is characterized by contemporary modernist style of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (high bar on large base, no voids, large windows, simple weft and materials). It represents universal visibility, neutral exemplarity and hegemonic distanciation.

The topology of RCD headquarters is the situation in the middle of the finance district; the program of offices, lounges and meeting rooms, including public auditorium; and the organization of setting the activities in a tower, standing withdrawn from the spiky fence and director at top floor behind deaf doors. Its morphology is characterized by contemporary post-modernist style of compactness, porosity and chromaticity (vertical bar on low horizontal base, no void, large windows, crescent and star's flag shaped garden, marble coating). It represents selective visibility, exclusive exemplarity and hegemonic distanciation.

Before 1956, the political speech was based on the gradual obtaining of Independence. The strategic positioning of the political leader Habib Bourguiba was nationalism without anti-occidentalism or panarabism. The main illustration of this conception of power is the picture of the leader standing above the crowd at Bizerte in 1952, mobilizing them to claim their sovereignty. After 1956, the political speech of the president Bourguiba turned to complete French evacuation and territorial control in order to begin the setting of the economic, social and cultural modernization. The main illustrations of this conception of power are the pictures of the president in the middle of the crowd, unveiling a woman; and his radio speech asking for the workers not to fast ramadan at summer in order to be productive and drink fruit juice glass, in 1962. The president Ben Ali had to continue the economic modernization and to struggle against the political Islam threat and the repression of the civil society expression. The main illustration of this conception of power is the picture of the president promising behind his speech desk, justice, labour and freedom, to try, in vain, to shut civil riot in 2011.

In independent Tunisia, the beylical situation of the legislative assembly, the French situation of the presidential Palace of Carthage (and its moorish style), and the beylical situation of the PSD headquarters, are in poor consistency with the cultural modernization's speech of the president. The equity based type of power advent with the Independence paradigm shift. The beylical situation of the new legislative assembly, the beylical situation of the municipality of Tunis, and the French situation of the RCD headquarters, are in poor consistency with the political modernization's speech of the president; the equity based type of power advent with the Republican Pact paradigm shift. The expression of a colonial, exclusive decision making and wealth redistribution dominating power would be irrelevant to the vulnerable, friendly expected power of Independence.

## **Conclusion**

This academic work notably shows that the hemicyclic shape of legislative assemblies is particularly obsolete (Roman senate paradigm after Greek symposium) because it transforms democracy into a tyranny of the majority and tears societies in a left-right cleavage which makes them hemiplegic; it also asks which shape would better represent the popular will of state of Right. What would better represent the duty of the

legislative assembly which is programming the fair redistribution of public resources, realizing the social and territorial perpetuation? What about the dialogue friendliness of the state?

Through associative activities, I advocate for the "understandable by all" (cognitively inclusive) representation of the duties and results of the institutions; which are the six basic services (the economic and social right) and their rates of realization in each territory. At each territorial scale, I envision a ten article based Constitution; a panoptic comparative monitoring of the situation of the development, and a powers and rights based urbanism. Another objective is to strengthen the collective knowledge of stakes, the collective capacities to make evidence based decisions, including in the evaluation of public policies. Beyond the guideline at the address of the representatives (to advocate for more ergonomic public institutions), this approach would also strengthen the citizens' understanding of political stakes, the transparency and participation to the social dialogue and the installation of the territorial equity and social justice values, indicators of Independence and popular sovereignty.

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