The Reuse of Hammam Suq Al Ghezal; Towards a sustainable future

Dr. Foura Samir
Laboratory Villes et Patrimoine
School of Architecture & Town planning
Constantine, Algeria

Dr. Samira Debache Benzagouta
Laboratory Villes et Patrimoine
School of Architecture & Town planning
Constantine, Algeria
Email:debachesamira@gmail.com

Abstract

The hammam in Islamic countries still occupies a very important urban and social place in the heart of the inhabitants. Even though, it is not as much used as in the past, the hammam is still considered as a monument and a part of Islamic heritage.

People assume that "*the hammam will not disappear socially.* It also constitutes an intangible heritage; customs and traditions which still persist until today. It is still related to festivals and much more engraved and fixed in the residents' memory.

This traditional building used to be a central place for social life and cultural heritage with complex urban and societal relations. Besides its cultural heritage values, the hammam is an integrative part of the locals' life as well as an example of architectural inheritance. Nowadays, and although it still has a ''warm'' place in the heart of the inhabitants, the hammam seems to have lost its main function and activity.

This paper presents scenarios for the adaptive reuse of hammam Suq Al Ghezal as a public service centre in Constantine. It also outlines strategies for adapting the hammam features to contemporary Islamic life in North Africa.

1. Historical background of the city of Constantine

Often called Cirta, Constantine is a real window to Algerian history. Constantine is situated in the North-East of Algeria, slightly inland, at about 80 kilometers from the Mediterranean coast. This ancient city is spectacularly set upon a stone mountain at an altitude of 640 metres above sea level (Fig 1) and overlooking the Rhumel River some 200 meters below (Fig 2). Until today, the deep ravine runs right through the city, creating a dramatic effect and many beautiful sites.



Figure 1: Constantine set upon a “rocky mountain”, (Laboratoire LVP 2008)



Figure 2: Rhumel River running through the city, (Laboratoire LVP 2008)

Several bridges and a viaduct cross the ravine (Fig 1 & Fig 3). Founded by the Carthaginians, Constantine was originally settled by Phoenician migrants and renamed in the 4th century of the Roman Empire, who rebuilt the city to its

original splendour after it had been levied.

It was then conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century, receiving the name of Quasantinah. The coming of Arabs did not change the city structures very much, but Arabic houses and buildings were added, (Grangaud, 2004).



Figure 3: Longest stone bridge in the world, 1200m, Sidi Rached (Laboratoire LVP 2008)

Since 1529, it was discontinuously part of the Ottoman Empire and ruled by a Turkish Bey (Governor). Salah Bey who ruled the city between 1770-1792, greatly embellished it and built the majority of the Islamic buildings, still visible today (Fig 4 and Fig 5).

The old parts of the medina are dominated by narrow, winding thoroughfares and traditional buildings. It is surrounded by the modern city, with its French colonial style buildings, as well as newer quarters with modern Algerian buildings. The Casbah, a Roman fortress, the 18th century Mosque of Sidi el-Kattani and a19th century Bey Palace are Constantine's most important landmarks. And the city itself bears so many conflicting architectural and urbanistic indications. French buildings constitute the facades of main streets hiding the inner original traditional fabric and buildigs. The traditional Arab medina has narrow faceless unadorned streets with no windows on the street and only small doors that open into the most opulently ornamented courtyards.

The medina public spaces have been imprinted mainly during the colonial period and the main breaks which have introduced European urban style inside the medina created differentiated quarters, (Pagand, 1996) .

2. Description and historical analysis of hammam Suq Al Ghezal

Hammam Suq Al Ghezal is one of the most popular Turkish baths of

Constantine. It is located in an important historic area of the medina; the commercial Suq El Tadjar district.



Figure 4: Bey Palace, (Ottoman building) Constantine, (Author, 2008)



Figure 5: Bey Palace, Constantine, (Gallerie du Palais, 2008)

Hammam Suq al-Ghezal was built between 1827 and 1835, during the Ottoman period. It is a modest but relatively well maintained hammam. The

hammam is located on a back alley, in the heart of the medina, close to the main suq and the Ahmed Bey Palace, which is one of the major remaining Ottoman buildings in Constantine (Fig 6).

The hammam is also adjacent to a large trade alley which is famous with the jewellers' workshops; known as the Rassif area. Nowadays, the Suq El Tadjar neighbourhood represents the heart of the Medina in specific and the Rock of Constantine in general. It provides several urban functions to the medina from being a cultural and tourist attraction, an industrial and services activities pole, a residential area and a spiritual centre.

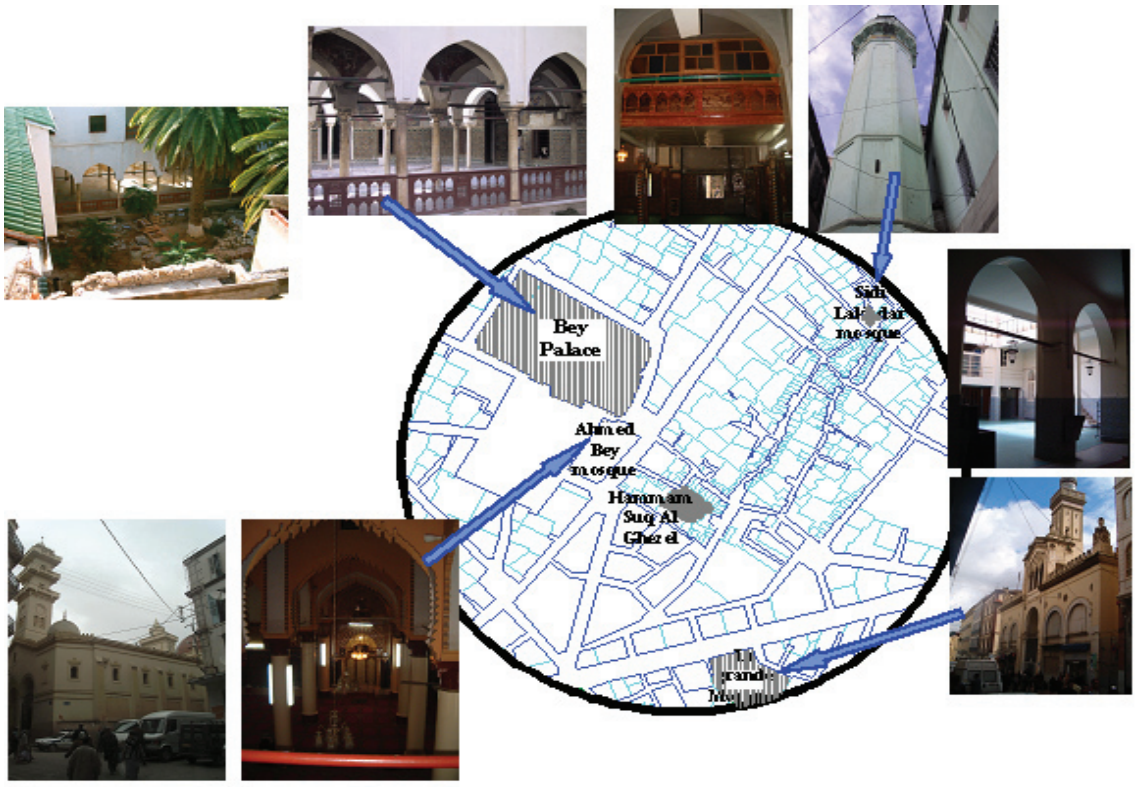


Figure 6: Localization of Hammam Suq Al Ghezal near the Bey Palace, the Big Mosque and other monuments in the Medina (Laboratoire LVP, 2006)

Similarly to other hammams in the Maghreb region, in North Africa, and the Western countries, the spatial organization of the bathing spaces of hammam Suq Al Ghezal is not as complex as it is the case in the hammams of the Mashreq (Middle-East) countries. It has a simple organization based on a linear progression of rooms (Fig 7) with varying temperatures; the sitting or rest room (Fig 8 and Fig 9), the cold room (Fig 10), the warm room and the hot room (Fig 11).

The modest entrance of the hammam discreetly overlooks a dead end street. Together with the furnace entrance, they are the only visible parts of the

hammam facade.

Besides these main spaces, other such as the mezzanine floor, consists of annexes for sleeping and storage areas.

The heating system operates with gas, which replaces the traditional method consisting in burning wood and wood chips. It was a way of recycling by-pass products from local small workshops.

The hammam combines functional and structural elements of its Roman, Byzantine and Turkish predecessors, (Laboratoire Villes et Patrimoine, 2007). Suq Al Ghezal, like other hammams in the Ottoman culture developed as a structural element serving as an annexe to Suq Al Ghezal mosque. Suq Al Ghezal was as other hammams, built of stones, brick covered in plaster, wood, marble, lime, ceramic etc…. The windowless walls are far thicker than just normal supporting structures. This was meant to provide the building with high heat insulation. The local architecture which uses domed roofs, brick and stone walls, small wooden doors gives the building a special Islamic style, well-appreciated and highly regarded by the visitors.

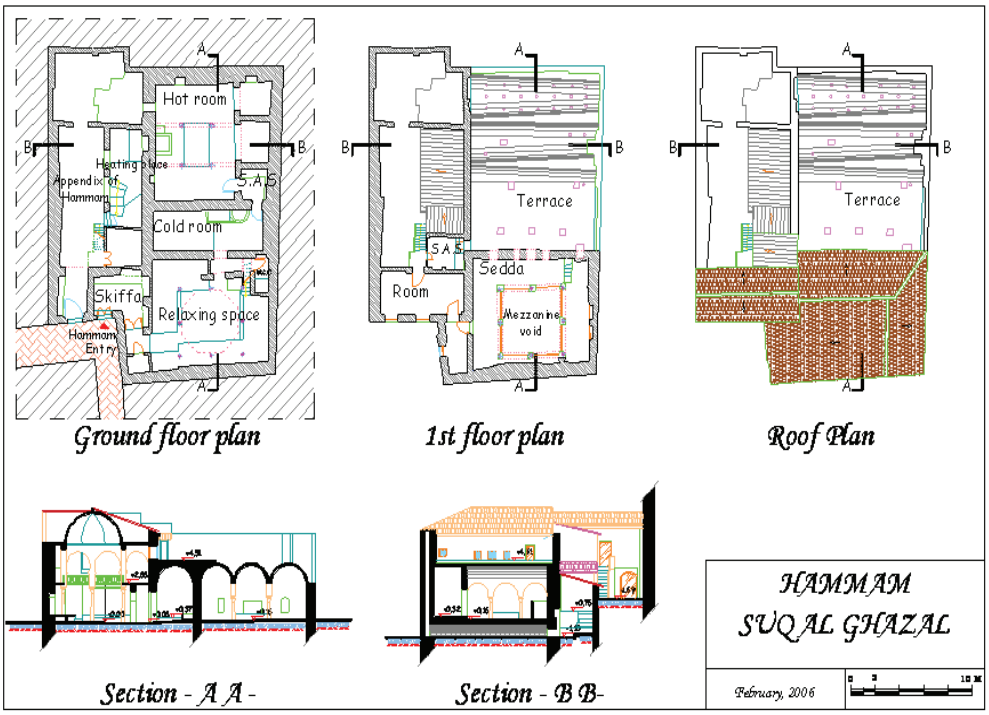
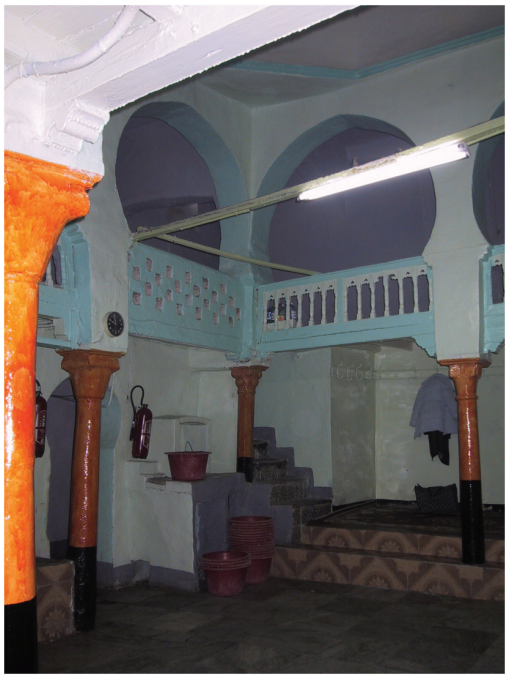


Figure 7 : Plans and sections of Hammam Suq Al Ghezal (Laboratoire LVP 2006)

3. Hammam Suq Al Ghezal today

It became obvious to the researcher that the traditional hammams in the medina are still very important; the residents perceive them as landmarks. Some

of them are still being used, for health, hygiene and beautification reasons. They have also become an important traditional act which constitutes the intangible heritage. These reasons emphasize the socio-cultural meaning and role of the hammam as an important sign of the users' culture. It is a monument at both tangible and intangible dimensions.





Figures 8 and 9: Hammam Suq Al Ghezal, undressing room, (author, 2006)





Fig 10 and 11: Hammam Suq Al Ghezal Hot and cold room (N.Refay. Hammam project, 2007)

The hammam operates seven days a week throughout the year. The women time slots are during the morning from 08.00 to 13.00, while the men time

slots are from 14.00 to 18.00. However, it is facing a multitude of difficulties and is struggling to keep its importance in the medina. The residents aspire to reactivate it, reinvent former offers such as marriage celebration, 40th day after giving birth etc.. which have disappeared and invent new ones. They also seek reinforcing its former meanings; such as to consider the hammam as the center or the symbol of solidarity, collectiveness, and a mutual neighbourhood helpness. It has also acted as an informal information local platform.

However, the habits have changed; the hammam is not anymore considered as an important social meeting place, as people have other places to meet. They have less time, so new hammam practices are appearing, not to spend too much time, but to take a quick bath while going shopping in the Medina. The hammam in its traditional meaning and form is under the threat of disappearance, as it will be replaced by modern smaller baths called "douches". Another problem is threatening the surviving of traditional hammams is the lack of control in hygiene and cleanliness. In addition to the influence of the contemporary practice of more private personal hygiene, sauna and new sporty activities, this is pressuring the traditional use of the hammam.

One of the main problems is that hammam activities are no longer seen as profitable. Therefore hammams managers do not invest in the maintenance and renovation of these structures... Due to this neglect, the buildings themselves are under the threat of collapse. Among all the reasons listed above (eg hygiene, non adequate opening hours especially for women, the appearance of new modern hammams with more facilities) another reason concerns the change in the perception of the human body. According to some viewpoints (social field work on hammam Suq Al Ghezal, laboratoire LVP, 2007) and the increasing meaning of religious practice, some people believe that the use of hammams is forbidden by religion. It was argued that religious law required that women be covered from navel to knee when among other women; Eventually that was the only condition where they were permitted to the pleasures of the hammam.

The Hammam confronted the ''Ulemas'' with the vexed question of physical nakedness. While limiting access for women, who could go only for valid purposes (birth, sickness), it was also necessary to ensure the sexes were strictly segregated: male and females bathers had to wear full-length loincloths. The doctrine, established by the 3rd/9th century, was hammered home in later centuries by jurists of all schools, for it enabled them to speak out on believers' sexuality and to define moral order in keeping with the Shariaa. (Benkheira, 2007).

But things are changing and the hammam is gaining a new significance. It represents the elements of the Islamo-Arabic tradition that needs to be

rediscovered and re-appropriated. Furthermore, the hammam is considered as a necessary supporting residential amenity, as it acts as a set-up for different and varied activities. It is used as a "social club" by women especially in the weekends and as a sleeping place for some seasonal workers. It is also seen as a potential for the social coherence, though as a major central space/building in the neighbourhood.

The necessity to safeguard this historic traditional building in its urban context becomes essential. Hence, to provide a sustainable future development for the hammam, it is very important to activate and launch the restoration process of this building. It is essential to revive the traditional social activities which used to take place in every space –outside and inside- of the hammam. People are curious about their past and tradition, and clean baths would attract as much local people, men and women, as they would attract tourists and foreigners (Atassi, 2007).

Different methods should be applied to revitalize the hammam to its former practices for hygiene and health. Additional services could be introduced, as is the case in newly built hammams, but it is essential to keep prices at reach for the local users, so that will help sustain its socio-cultural and economic activities. This improvement must be at the request of the local community and not only for an investment in touristic development.

Economic diversity is very important to preserve this massive use of the hammam by a wide spectrum of population in the Medina. The privileged location of Hammam Suq Al Ghezal in the heart of the Medina, could enhance the visibility and the accessibility of the hammam.

The old historical medina that had the chance to preserve its original dense fabric through centuries, should respect also the traditions and rituals surrounding the surviving monuments and houses, and it is important to keep the social and economic structure of these quarters that are facing gentrification at many levels (Atassi, 2007, p15).

It became evident that the hammam is not only a space with architectural features, but a microcosm with its own typical social life, including norms, values and social rules that are typical for this space (Dumreicher, 2007). This reflects partly the social importance in the neighbourhood, but it is also a place demanding its specific social rules. You come to the hammam as a person with your own societal background, and how to use this space has its specific rules that generate social practices.

It is a space with inherent contradictions: a semi public space with many very discrete and hidden characteristics. A place where the "secret, the "not

outspoken" has its stake – but the rule of the hammam, on the other hand, is publicly known, so that people are able to deal with this very specific societal institution. Also the reputation of the hammam is continuously under discussion and the rumours of the place and the ongoing life in the hammam narrated between clients and non clients (Dumreicher, 2007).

It shows that the hammam is a place where the transition from traditional settings towards modernity and contemporary can be observed: the tradition of a religious place for cleanliness, social coherence is still visible in hammam Suq Al Ghezal (Dumreicher, 2007).

For all these reasons, it appears evident and necessary to open up different perspectives for the future of this traditional historic building for a sustainable use with contemporary standards and modern facilities. We are aiming to reach an idealistic hammam type according to the parameters of strong sustainability.

Previous sociological research on hammams of Constantine (Dumreicher, 2007) perceived the future of the city of the Rock and the hammam as an establishment of an ongoing multiple, alternative, and sustainable scenario-building process. It proposes and investigates a variety of "what-if" options. These options would range from business as usual, to various preservation options, to preservation plus sustainability, to the more radical unsustainable proposals, but always with an accompanying analysis or systems-modelling. This will help indicate, in the case of the latter, what the direct consequences would be in the implementation of such a radical approach, (Dumreicher, 2007).

4. Hammam future concepts

The hammam still has a meaning for the culture and tradition; some rituals have been kept and still are celebrated. However, the majority of them are simply preserved by nostalgy. People highlight the socio-cultural meaning of the hammam, as a social anchor within the neighbourhood and its positive impact on health, but its use is really decreasing. Although they want to keep the traditional "historic" hammam, they look for new hammams with more features and better hygienic conditions. Using a historic hammam has a certain attitude and an expressive behaviour. Going to bath in the historic hammam relates to the social class or appreciating its culture and sanitary value.

The hammam and its neighbourhood could not be disconnected. The synthesis obtained through this study, suggests that emphasis should be focused on behavioural studies of Suq Al Ghezal users and local residents. As seen previously, the hammam is a very specific building with special comfort and

hygiene norms. The first step should therefore be to ensure the minimum requirements for a safer environment. Even though there are no emergence of general rules about human spatial behaviour to help draw up guidelines for designing new hammams and restoring the old ones, behavioural studies have signalled a whole series of problems which could not be neglected and ignored if we want to re-use the hammam properly and to have a better picture of it, as a dynamic setting. It also provided some methods, which can be summarized are as follow:

- Observation of people behaviours in places,
- Questionnaires, and interviews of people about their impressions and feelings,
- Observation of the 'traces' of activities, signs and other subtle points which constitute significant indices about the manner people really use and evaluate places.
- Analysis of written and pictorial material that has not been produced consciously to evaluate environments, for example travel descriptions, newspaper reports, etc. Such material tend to show how people use environments and how they feel about them.

Indeed, by having a full picture of people's interaction with their environments, the designer will be better equipped for his contribution in the making of a more sustainable environment.

As discussed above, the aim for specific suggestions for a living traditional hammam with contemporary standards (i.e. Suq Al Ghezal) is to trans-pass the present and go from past to future, because the hammam had a very important and privileged place in the heart of users in the past. At the present time, things and habits changed, people are not using the hammam as they were, it is why this actual period has to be trans-placed straight to the future but with contemporary standards, to fulfil people's needs.

Nowadays, hammam Suq Al Ghezal has to be considered as a precursor for reversal of faith in belonging to the neighbourhood, since it is seen as a right (Oikodrom, 2007). People in Constantine are very much related to the hammam as in other cities of the Mediterranean countries. Injecting sustainability elements (solar water heating, reduce heat loss and consumption, easy accessibility by tram loop etc...) will help this hammam attract people and be an Oasis of space, a recreation in a very dense urban fabric, it will be as an acupuncture and a starting point for the whole medina enhancing (Levine, 2007). Combining traditional and craft man-ship with scientific knowledge, successful conservation can be

achieved. This will lead to a sustainable hammam activity. We are sticking to the proto-sustainable (the whole Rock works 100% on renewable energies) historic medina system (Levine 2007). Promote Constantine as an endangered specimen of cities and a world heritage site is the aim and target to raise the new image of both the hammam Suq Al Ghezal and its neighbourhood; an ideal hammam and an attractive place, a participating element in the urban development plan using adequate tools to reach people's concepts.

5. Conclusion

The hammam is part of a set of places that have evolved over time and guarantee the liveability of the Islamic Mediterranean city: the public fountain, the public bakery, the coranic-school, the library, the hammam. The hammam has to be looked at as a place for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It is a carrier of a collective memory and a part of the common Islamo-Arabic "story telling" about this historical institution.

In order to keep public interest for the hammam; a dialogue must be kept open by multiplying conferences, expositions, presentations, and "sensibilisation campaigns". Experts and general public have to increase their awareness of the importance of the hammam.

Among further research questions is how to make hammam Suq Al Ghezal a pioneer for other hammams in the Medina? More attention and new actions are dealt with such as:

- Putting in a new project called ''Plan permanent de sauvegarde'' (Plan of Permanent Safeguard) of the Medina, where buildings and functions are preserved and rehabilitated. These actions are included into a long list of projects called: Projets de Metropolisation de la ville (City Metropolisation Projects), which again enhance participatory system, involve the Medina inhabitants in decision-making and the expansion of protected perimeter.
- Working towards a sustainable hammam with zero emission, local re-sourcing, no toxic material and renewable energy and hygiene according to international standards. Some actions are dealt with in this sense such as installing solar water heating panels on the roof of the hammam or adjacent buildings for water heating (Fig 12). There is some potential for solar assistance to pre-heat water which can then be fed as warm water into the main hot tank inside the hammam, instead of the existing cold feed.
- Insuring a better gradual thermo-hygrometry sequence inside different

spaces by using buffer spaces;

- The need to adapt the place to the user's contemporary needs; the idea is to:
  - Save energy and use an alternative heating systems;
  - minimise energy loss;
  - introduce better isolating materials;
  - Create different levels/types of transitional spaces to reduce heat and steam losses;
  - Reuse the hammam's water;
  - Improve the quality of natural lighting;
  - Enhance the insulation performances of the different horizontal and vertical partitions;
  - Ensure natural aeration system;
  - Plant some vegetation on the terrace (vertical green walls)

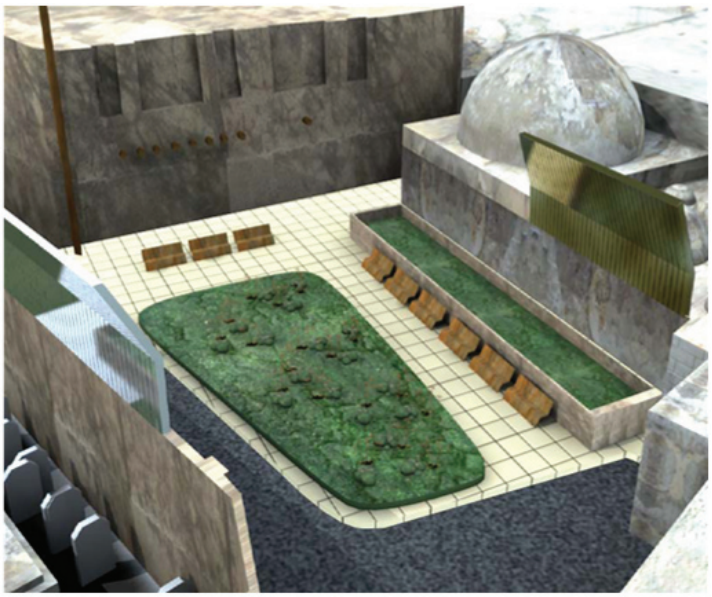


Figure 12: Water heating panels and plants on the terrace (Yasser Mamoun, 2007)

The future of the Medina and the hammam is in their history but strategies for adapting the hammam features to contemporary Islamic life and towards a sustainable future should be adopted and much more developed (Raymond,2002).

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نحو مستقبل مستدام لحمام سوق الغزال
إعادة استخدامه كمقر عمومي

د. سميرة دباش بن زقوطة

د. فور سمير

كلية الهندسة المعمارية وتخطيط المدن

جامعة قسنطينة ، الجزائر

Email: debachesamira@gmail.com

ملخص

رغم مرور العصور، مازال الحمام من المعالم الإسلامية الأكثر استعمالا، فهو يشارك بصفة دائمة في حياة الفرد العربي، في حياته اليومية، في أفراحه الشخصية وتجمعاته العائلية.

يمكننا أن نشعر بمكانة الحمام في الدول العربية بالنظر إلى مدى ارتباط مجتمعات هده الدول به

فهـي لا تعتـبر تـراث متوارث عن أجدادهم السابقين، أو مـكان تقليديا، أو شيء من هدا القبيل بـل تعي حق الوعي، بان هدا المكان الذي تتوافد عليه أسبوعيا هو احد مقومات حضارتهم فهو، يعبر بكل بساطة عن جانب من جوانب شخصيتهم.

مـن خـلال هده المقالة، نرجو أن يتخذ الفـرد العربي مبادئ من خلال هده الأماكن، و إعطائهـا حقها من الاحترام، لأنها لا تعتبر أماكن مهمة للمجتمع العربي فقط، بل هي تصنف من الأماكن المقدسة .