



Heritage communication and tourist development of the urban heritage of the ancient city of Bejaia

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Received: 19/01/2025

Accepted: 25/06/2025

Published: 30/06/2025

DOI: 10.53284/2120-012-002-007

Abstract:

The initiatives undertaken by territorial actors focus on the optimal yet rational utilization of cultural and heritage assets, aiming to (re)build and (re)position the territory as a prominent tourist destination. This thoughtful approach is framed within a perspective that values the authenticity of the places and promotes a return to the local. (Laulan, 2018) To address local development challenges, it is necessary to focus on the willingness of the actors to initiate a process of communication and consultation on this heritage.

The interest of such an approach is to achieve sustainable tourism. From this perspective, we plan to focus on the triad urban heritage, communication and tourism by analyzing the communication process of the actors involved in this triad to address the valorization of urban heritage and the promotion of tourism in the city of Bejaia.

Keywords: heritage communication, urban heritage, tourism development, territorial attractiveness, old town of Bejaia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Algeria has a wealth of heritage² quite important; it has become an essential element in the enhancement and promotion of territories. Heritage in all its natural, material and immaterial can be considered as a resource, goods to be enhanced and potential to be fully utilized.

Our focus is on the role of heritage communication in the city of Bejaia as both a driver and a lever for territorial development. In this perspective, we plan to provide elements of response to our question, in this sense, the territorial marketing approach remains fundamental for the economic development of territories. For this reason, territorial actors strive to propose innovative and distinctive visions aimed at enhancing the city's appeal and overall interest. Today, urban heritage is mobilized and constitutes a real strategic issue for the city. Beyond its economic benefits, urban heritage also fosters social connections by encouraging the involvement of all stakeholders in its preservation, enhancement, and promotion.

To achieve this, we begin by problematizing our research topic, which focuses on the heritage communication strategies employed by territorial actors concerning the urban heritage of the city of Bejaia. In the second phase, we shift to the methodological approach, detailing the analysis tools, the sample presentation, and the theoretical framework adopted, which is grounded in the principles of heritage mediatization. In the third moment, we present some theoretical elements on heritage as well as its exploitation for the territory of the city. In the final phase, we present the results of our research, emphasizing the communication strategies of local actors, their commitment to tourism development in the city, and the active involvement of citizens in preserving urban heritage. Finally, we conclude with a synthesis of the results obtained.

2. Problematic

The heritage dimension in a territory constitutes one of the elements that push towards territorial and local development. Today, the safeguarding of heritage assets (tangible, intangible and natural) appears to be a major concern for territorial stakeholders who seek its sustainability. Urban heritage, which constitutes our object of study, is a legacy from previous generations that embodies multiple values, including historical, cultural, symbolic, and economic significance. This heritage, so that it is preserved and transmissible to future generations, requires a good restoration strategy and especially communication. Beyond its preservation and safeguarding, the use of other alternatives to ensure the continuity and reconstruction of the territory is necessary. As a result, heritage sources are important in the territorial development project. Indeed, after being confined to historical preservation, a new approach focused on rational utilization can enhance its tourist

² <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>



appeal, generating significant financial revenue to support economic development. The emergence of this exploitation approach has a double interest: the preservation and the enhancement of heritage. Moreover, the implementation of cultural and sustainable tourism in a territory generates restorations and new developments on sites in order to promote the territory as a tourist destination. Despite this pragmatic approach to optimally exploiting heritage assets, some territorial stakeholders recognize the necessity of protecting and preserving this heritage as an authentic artifact, maintaining its historical, cultural, and aesthetic value. Communication is therefore essential for gathering diverse perspectives. This serves two purposes: first, to understand how enhancement, promotion, and territorial development will contribute to implementing tourism in the region; and second, to strengthen identity anchoring for future generations. (Merah & Bendebili, 2016)

Bejaia or “*Bgayet*”, located in the northeast of Algeria has a history intrinsically linked to its ancient city and port. It is one of the ancient cities of the Mediterranean, it is full of several historical sites and monuments that constitute its urban identity and its cultural diversity. Bejaia, was crossed by various civilizations that left their mark on its urban construction, contains several heritage assets, which allowed it to have more than 14 cultural assets classified or registered on the supplementary inventory of the Ministry of Culture. It has a rich and diverse heritage that allows it to highlight its cultural and tourist potential which is complemented by its vocation as a seaside tourist city. Consequently, territorial stakeholders' activities extend beyond merely preserving this heritage through awareness campaigns; they also encompass tourism development and regional promotion, which inevitably generates remarkable profitability for the region. Moreover, it has a double dimension: natural, which allows continuity between the past, the present and the future thanks to its preservation and its enhancement. Economic, which requires combining its enhancement with a sustainable source of income. (Guerroudj, 2000) The author specified in his article that "heritage also represents an economic and financial value. The attractiveness of old town centers or the intensity of tourist numbers generate income and revenue, indicators of the economic and financial value of heritage."

A region's development potential is tied to its diverse assets. The territorial stakeholders of this region (including associations, institutions, and scientific researchers) have recognized that economic growth can be achieved through alternative means, particularly through heritage resources. Therefore, to (re)build the territory, the trip type of preservation, enhancement and promotion of heritage, generate impactful results on local development. In this sense, the involvement and participation of local inhabitants in the process of developing tourism in the region guarantees the appropriation of heritage which makes it possible to avoid the harmful effects due to its degradation. This mobilizing vision of the different actors, makes the emergence of cultural and sustainable tourism and this thanks to the introduction of elements of communication and territorial marketing.



Through this study, we intend to focus on the trinomial urban heritage, communication and tourism by analyzing the communication process of the actors involved in this trinomial for the management of the issue of the enhancement of architectural heritage and the development of tourism in the city. This leads us to our central research question: How do the territorial actors of the old city of Bejaia apply the heritage communication process for its development into tourism?

3. Elements of method

In order to carry out this research and arrive to explain the process of communication of territorial actors, we opted for the qualitative method, with a typical sample by quotas of territorial actors in charge of urban heritage issues in the city of Bejaia. For this, we contacted 08 actors including a local elected official, two institutional, four associative and a scientific researcher on the issue of urban heritage. The choice of this number of actors is due to their unavailability. This research is carried out with semi-directive interviews with non-participant observation because we do not participate in the activities observed. Furthermore, our interest focuses on the representations of the actors on heritage and its development in tourism, on heritage communication and the way of communicating on heritage. In order to explain the approach of the tourist development of urban heritage by these actors, we focused on the communicational approach of heritage creation of Jean Davallon, which is based on a different but complementary dimension, namely the communication and exploitation of urban heritage. (Davallon, 2006, p. 36) as well as the approach to engaging communication by Fabien Girandola and Robert-Vincent Joule (Girandola & Joule, 2012) which is based on the commitment of territorial actors and that of citizens for the preservation and safeguarding of urban heritage.

4. Elements of theory

4.1. Urban heritage at the service of local development

The territory is a geographical space that has harmonious characteristics that distinguish it from other territories and that constitute its own identity. This identity is built from several elements, namely heritage. The latter, through its different types, constitutes a major lever and vector of local development and social and territorial cohesion. To ensure its promotion, a strategy combining preservation and communication appears essential for territorial development.

The concept of urban heritage refers to all aspects related to the construction of buildings, alleys or anything that has a relationship to a certain era, which represents a territorial identity and a witness to the history of a city. (Aoudia & Merah, 2023). Beyond its historical and cultural value, it is considered an important resource and an opportunity offered to the territory. The approach of the exploitation of urban heritage by territorial actors becomes essential, it must go through several parts of actions to make the city touristic. This resource has a major role to play in this part, it not



only contributes to the economic development of the city but also strengthens social cohesion by engaging local residents and striving to enhance their living environment. Moreover “the approach also has the interest of making the population aware of the assets of its territory and, thereby, of arousing a sense of belonging. It is also an opportunity, by integrating more participatory approaches, to make the resident an actor in the life of his territory and contribute to creating social ties.” (Ceser, 2022, p. 35). Leveraging the advantages of urban heritage to enhance territorial attractiveness compels us to rethink preservation and communication strategies as inseparable elements, fostering both resident retention and more sustainable tourism development.

To paraphrase Pierre-Antoine Landel and Nicolas Senil Today, competition between territories is widespread, heritage, through its specific qualities, generates competition. Innovation in this resource is the only engine to guarantee the dynamics of a territory (Antoine Lande & Senil, 2021, p. 01). Therefore, the creation of new projects from this wealth helps ensure the continuity and development of a city in the long term.

4.2. The tourist development of urban heritage

Urban heritage is a major pillar for territorial development. If territorial stakeholders contribute to the use of its assets for a better transformation of the image of the territory, this will make it more attractive. According to François Bart, "urban heritage today constitutes an exceptional heritage that gives meaning to the territory and gives rise to new dynamics of renovation and enhancement." (Bart, 2018, p. 120) Therefore, this approach leads the authorities to invest in the tourism sector, contributing to the development of the territory, in this sense, the enhancement of urban heritage represents a strategic element to increase the attractiveness of a territory. For the authors Bridonneau, 2011; Despiney, 2011; Vernières, 2011, urban heritage can be associated with two trends, one that emphasizes the historical and symbolic value of the territory and the other that emphasizes the production of new projects within the framework of the enhancement and sustainable tourism development.

Heritage and tourism seem to be extremely linked since they promote very significant and interesting economic benefits in the region. (Ferreol, 2010). In this sense, urban heritage has become an essential component and a strategic tool in the construction of the territorial development project. Moreover, it plays a vital role as a central element in the local economy. Indeed, for the territory to be promoted, it is necessary for territorial actors and local inhabitants to adopt strategies focused on the preservation and conservation of heritage. The integration and citizen participation in heritage protection and enhancement projects generate positive repercussions for the territory. In this sense, it guarantees the appropriation of heritage which helps to avoid the harmful effects due to its degradation. On the one hand, the sense of belonging among individuals who lead them to the recognition of its shared value and its safeguarding. On the other hand, territorial actors seek to



involve these citizens from the beginning of the process until its enhancement is this through awareness-raising activities to reduce the risk of the degradation of this wealth as well as its environment. Indeed, mobilizing efforts to promote urban heritage can be an effective strategy for attracting more visitors. Therefore, consultation constitutes a central element in the success of this process, this is why the enhancement of these heritage potentials requires management for better rational exploitation.

5. Presentation of the field and the study data

In this study, we are interested in the wilaya of Bejaia in the Kabylie region of Algeria. Bejaia is located between the large massifs of Djurdjura, Bibans and Babors, it is one of the oldest cities of Algeria, founded in 26-27 BC by Emperor Augustus under the name of Saldae. In the Middle Ages, the city became one of the most prosperous cities in the Mediterranean, as well as a great intellectual center. The citadel, the most important historical monument of the city with its 20,000 m² of surface area, is the result of the interaction of different cultures: Roman, Hammadi, Spanish, Turkish, French and Arab-Muslim. It is representative of a disappeared cultural tradition and illustrates significant periods of history.³ Moreover, it represents the historical core having witnessed the succession of various civilizations over time. It has a very great diversity of rich and diversified heritage that allows it to highlight its cultural and tourist potential that is complemented by its vocation as a seaside tourist city (material, immaterial, sites and natural heritage). given this heritage, it was delimited and declared a protected sector by executive decree n ° 13-187 of May 6, 2013. It covers several places with tourist and especially ecological values, namely the Fort of Gouraya, the Fort of the Casbah, the Fort Borj Moussa, the old city, etc., which gives it the advantage of being a city with a tourist destination. The urban heritage of the old city of Bejaia is presented in a set of so-called colonial buildings still inhabited by the local population and exploited. These buildings of great historical and cultural value make it possible to characterize an era, a civilization and an art. In other words, they provide a territory of life and know-how to discover and revisit.

³ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/769/>

**Table No. 01: presentation of study data**

Interview	Age	Training	Function	Seniority	Date of interview and place
01	44 years old	Architect	Architect of cultural property and head of the office of historical monuments	15 years old	03/14/2024 Bejaia
02	39 years old	Tourism Law and Training	President of the tourist office	5 years	03/14/2024 Bejaia
03	44 years old	Hydraulic engineer	President of the association	9 years old	03/17/2024 Bejaia
04	38 years old	archaeologist in restoration and conservation of cultural property	Archaeologist	12 years old	03/21/2024 Bejaia
05	58 years old	Tour guide training	President of the association	10 years	03/28/2024 Bejaia
06	56 years old	Research teacher	Research teacher	29 years old	31/03/2024 Bejaia
07	68 years old	Mathematician	President of the association	32 years old	31/03/2024 Bejaia
08	36 years old	Civil servant at the APC	elected and President of the Tourism Commission	3 years	07/04/2024 Bejaia

Source: made by the author

Our work focused on several territorial actors of the city of Bejaia, namely institutional actors (the culture department, OGBEC, tourist office, elected official and President of the tourism commission) non-institutional actors (associations that are active in the protection and promotion of heritage) and scientific researchers (teachers) with whom we conducted our interviews. We note that our interviewees occupy positions that have a relationship with heritage as well as the development of tourism in the city of Bejaia. The importance of the heritage wealth of the city of Bejaia has pushed these different actors to give a large share of responsibility to the preservation of our heritage.



6. Data analysis and interpretation

6.1. Communication from local stakeholders on the urban heritage of the ancient city of Bejaia

Our work aims to analyze the communication practices, the valorization and the commitment of territorial actors for the development of the urban heritage of the city of Bejaia, while focusing on its tourism. Our information gathering efforts have revealed that, above all, Bejaia is a historic city.

Bejaia was colonized by several civilizations, it has enormous potential in the heritage side, it holds several riches, whether historical sites, natural sites.... Bejaia is fortunate to bring together all these potentialities which will attract tourists from all corners of the world. Territorial actors recognize the value of heritage, understanding that the preservation and conservation of these sites is essential to fostering the development of more sustainable tourism. The responses of our interviewees led us to deduce that the efforts of state institutions on the communication of the heritage of Bejaia must be multiplied in institutional initiatives aimed at the preservation and promotion of this heritage wealth. As the 39-year-old respondent no. 02 points out, "We notice that there is a lack of information disseminated on the heritage of Bejaia. To reach more visitors, we need more communication through several media to promote the Bejaia sites in particular."

In the same vein, respondent No. 02 pointed out to that "there is a lack of information with several languages, especially English, to reach foreign visitors. There is a lack of information on our heritage compared to other countries. Furthermore, we must encourage writing in several languages to receive several types of visitors, including international visitors." In this sense, but apart from information on the history of the city, the availability and popularization of new data that will allow its visibility will be the first vector for communicating Bejaia's heritage.

As part of strengthening communication on the urban heritage of the ancient city of Bejaia, we note, according to the survey data, that institutional actors are not very active in the means of communication to promote the city. Moreover, the information disseminated only concerns the history (the identity of the city) as well as awareness of the protection of heritage, according to respondent No. 01, aged 44, for him, communication from institutional actors "gives an idea about heritage only but to encourage people to come and visit or to encourage tourism, there must be more information, there must be a media frenzy. If we compare with other countries, namely those in Europe, they work on the development of their assets, and the communication of their sites to encourage tourism. At our level, there is a lack of communication and development for our heritage so that it is known and valued." Faced with the limits of the institutional approach, admitted by institutional actors, associative actors work to make this heritage visible, they try to use new



information and communication technologies, which is why they are often on digital social networks, on local and national media, organizing meetings, etc. to promote the city of Bejaia and make it known to the general public despite all the constraints they face. Moreover, respondent No. 03, aged 44, confirms that "the association was among the first to create frescoes in the city, quite a few paintings were exhibited in neighborhoods to see what this monument is about. We have created quite a few magazines and flayers, we use RSN to report our events, a bit of history, we also organize cultural meetings, conferences, and we invite speakers to popularize our heritage." It is essential to note that institutional actors seek to develop a well-structured communication approach and to integrate a variety of communication channels that will highlight the cultural diversity of the city, while using visuals and messages that will highlight this cultural wealth, but they face, according to them, the constraint of the absence of communication professionals who can help them in this perspective. Their communication must be proactive to reach a huge audience because they are the first responsible for the promotion and enhancement of the city's assets.

Therefore, for better heritage management, consultation and collaboration with non-institutional actors will foster exchanges and relationships between them, enabling the development of initiatives such as regional planning, preservation, and the sustainable exploitation of heritage to drive the economic development of the region. According to the responses of our participants, a reflection (at national and local level) was launched to find mechanisms allowing the different actors to get involved and then engage in a process that promotes bringing together visions to preserve and promote heritage. They explained that such an approach would enable the organization of joint events and activities to highlight the urban cultural heritage, create sustainable projects and initiatives, etc. These activities will make it possible to take collective decisions to strengthen territorial development and the attractiveness of the city.

6.2. The development of local tourism: for a regional economy

The urban heritage of Bejaia is the flagship element of the identity of a territory that contains several buildings and which have a very important value. In this sense, its valorization and promotion contribute to the emergence of sustainable tourism. Indeed, tourism constitutes a central lever for the development of the national economy, particularly local. To promote local tourism, the protection of heritage becomes the responsibility of all stakeholders; in this sense the exploitation of this wealth is based on the proposal of interesting tourist products and at competitive prices, alongside the promotion of crafts to add an exceptional value to the city. Moreover, interviewee No. 05, aged 58, told us "crafts are very important to add a unique value to the city of Bejaia. My project is to bring back craftsmen from Tunisia to provide training at the level of the wilaya of Bejaia to revive tourism at the local level." The use of this alternative will allow a more sustainable territorial development while creating places dedicated only to craft objects, to also exhibit them in the sites in order to have a benefit for this region. In the same sense, the respondent



n°06, aged 56, underlines that "the use of the exploitation of heritage will allow to increase the Algerian economy and which can consolidate very important values, so the specialists of the economy say that the heritage if we use it in a respectful way, we invest economically money for two things: on the one hand, to maintain and preserve it, on the other hand, to strengthen the economic values. "

According to the responses of our respondents, it appears that the institutional actors in the city of Bejaia lack a co-construction and co-coordination approach with other non-institutional actors, as well as an absence of a strategy for putting urban heritage tourism into practice. According to the speeches of our respondents, there is a considerable lack of tourists throughout the year, the city of Bejaia is frequented much more by mass seaside tourism and this only during the summer season, such tourism in reality is not totally profitable for the local economy, emphasizing that massive attendance - uncontrolled - considerably harms heritage.

Furthermore, we note that the associations have a strong desire to encourage tourism, several associative actors have confirmed through their remarks their commitment to the organization of events in order to promote the city. Their primary objective is to establish Bejaia as a leading tourist destination of excellence. Today the tourist approach has changed; the vision is moving towards more sustainable tourism, in fact, the implementation of a territorial marketing strategy will highlight the unique assets and opportunities offered by the old city. To strengthen and promote the attractiveness of the city of Bejaia, it is necessary to collaborate with other economic actors and local associations to invest in heritage trade for better promotion of the territory. A collaborative platform will allow actors to share specific information related to heritage to make it better known, to organize and make access for public consultations. As interviewee no. 09, aged 36, points out, "If all the stakeholders work in partnership and collaboration, this will enable the city's heritage to be enhanced and exploited."

According to the association members, from the covid-19 period to the present day, tourist operators (travel agencies) have leaned towards local tourism or they organize tourist circuits to discover the riches at the local and national level. From the words of interviewee no. 02, aged 39 during » the covid-19 period when there was a ban on going out in the territory, we noticed that travel agencies organize trips to visit and discover the beauty and heritage of other wilayas at the national level, they created a tourist product which is the visit of sites and monuments, but this is still insufficient for the profitability of the city. » The role of tourist and hotel operators is to create a tourist product adapted to the demand of visitors (making traditional objects at the hotel levels, offering tourist guides, etc.) these initiatives will help strengthen and promote the territory.

6.3. The commitment of local stakeholders in the preservation of the heritage of the city of Bejaia



Urban heritage is a source of exceptional wealth, the commitment of the state and the local population remains fundamental for the preservation of this potential. The appropriation of heritage plays a very important role on the local level, particularly in terms of its reconstruction and conservation. The territorial actors of the city of Bejaia are becoming aware of their urban heritage. The culture department clearly stated in its speech on their commitment to the restoration and preservation of this heritage. In fact, respondent No. 01, aged 44, stated "that in terms of restoration of sites, they are all taken care of and they are listed, there are those that are classified and those that are registered on the additional inventory of the wilaya and there are those that are listed, that is to say in the process of being classified. For the operations of the chief town in particular, all the monuments that exist in Bejaia are taken care of and they are currently in the restoration phase."

Multiple actors are taking actions and implementing concrete initiatives to preserve heritage for the benefit of the territory. In this sense, the associative actors organize circles of reflection saving around a theme whether on a monument or a site to speak on the architectural and heritage value of these, days on the identity of the city, on its customs. We also notice outings and events organized on the popularization which concerns the citizen in general on the history, protection and preservation of the heritage wealth of the city. In this sense, their objectives include engaging more with the younger generation, namely the students of the school through educational outings to the places, drawing workshops, methods which will make young people love heritage.

6.4. Citizen involvement in the preservation and promotion of Bejaia's urban heritage

The preservation and promotion of the urban heritage of the city of Bejaia by local citizens is a crucial issue for very specific purposes. Several initiatives and actions can be implemented to raise awareness and popularize the local population on the importance of this wealth and the impact of preserving the urban heritage which represents a culture and an identity for the territory of the city of Bejaia. To this end, the use of guided tours and the organization of community events constitute a main activity to further encourage local citizens to participate, preserve and promote their urban heritage. If territorial actors promote the participation and involvement of citizens in the preservation of local heritage, this is to ensure the transmission of the value of heritage in its diversity for future generations. In this sense, the integration of citizens in decisions and actions of territorial development will strengthen social cohesion between the actors and citizens of the city which will then allow the co-construction of trust. This is what emerges from the response of respondent No. 04, aged 38, "during the cleaning operations and weeding of the sites, we receive quite a few citizens who come to give us support to complete the operation." The sense of belonging is evident among local citizens, the majority of respondents demonstrated that local citizens (young and old) publish on new means of communication (DSN Youtube) interesting information - in images and text - (they show heritage sites, tourist spots, etc.) on the heritage of the city of Bejaia,



this approach contributes to highlighting the architectural beauty and heritage value of the city of Bejaia.

7. CONCLUSION

Communication is essential to promote a territory, the investigation of our field has demonstrated that the communication approach of the institutional actors of the city of Bejaia, represents limits in the face of the absence of a real desire for the preservation and promotion of the urban heritage of the city of Bejaia. Indeed, these institutions suffer from a lack of communication to promote its heritage and to encourage its development in tourism.

Furthermore, we were able to observe, through the analysis that the associative actors try to create, transmit and multiply their efforts of actions within the city to encourage territorial development. It should be noted, however, that the lack of coordination... collaboration and consultation between institutional and associative actors represents an obstacle to better management of heritage in terms of preservation and promotion and then exploitation.

The involvement and mobilization of local residents in the preservation and promotion of the city strengthens their sense of belonging to the territory. The latter encourages them to contribute to the preservation of this heritage and to contribute through new means of communication to demonstrate the heritage value that the territory of Bejaia has.

No doubt other research will focus on other variables, on a field of research which is little exploited by researchers; it would therefore be interesting to expand on the communication of national actors on the development of heritage tourism.



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