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# FEMMEDINA TUNIS IMPACT REPORT 2024





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WOMEN IN THE HEART OF TUNIS' HISTORIC MEDINA FACE SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING AND UTILISING PUBLIC SPACES DUE TO SAFETY CONCERNS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS. THE FEMMEDINA PROJECT UNDERTAKEN BY THE MUNICIPALITY OF TUNIS AND CITIES ALLIANCE AIMED TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES BY CREATING SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTS TAILORED TO WOMEN'S NEEDS. FEMMEDINA AIMED TO ENHANCE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION THROUGH TARGETED INTERVENTIONS IN THE DISTRICTS OF HAFSIA, BAB SOUIKA, BAB BHAR, AND SIDI BÉCHIR.

THIS REPORT PROVIDES A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF FEMMEDINA'S IMPACT ON THE WOMEN OF THE MEDINA, AIMING TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES AND POLICIES RELATED TO GENDER-SENSITIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT. IT GATHERS INSIGHTS FROM 20 WOMEN USING A METHODOLOGY CENTRED ON INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS LED BY LEILA BEN GACEM.

THE FEMMEDINA PROJECT ENCOUNTERED SEVERAL CHALLENGES DIRECTLY AFFECTING THE WOMEN OF THE MEDINA. SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS AND LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES POSED SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES FOR WOMEN IN ENGAGING IN POLITICAL LIFE AND THE ECONOMIC CYCLE. SAFETY AND SECURITY IN PUBLIC SPACES WERE PERSISTENT ISSUES, WITH MANY WOMEN EXPRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT HARASSMENT AND INADEQUATE LIGHTING. THESE CHALLENGES WERE COMPOUNDED BY THE MUNICIPALITY'S STRUGGLE TO ALLOCATE THE NECESSARY HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN THE INTERVENTIONS, FURTHER IMPACTING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC SPACES.

KEY SUCCESSSES OF FEMMEDINA INCLUDE REVITALISING PUBLIC SPACES, SUCH AS THE HAFSIA GARDEN, AND ESTABLISHING THE WOMEN'S TRAINING CENTRE, WHICH, DESPITE INITIAL CHALLENGES, LATER FLOURISHED UNDER COMMUNITY-DRIVEN MANAGEMENT. THESE INITIATIVES ILLUSTRATE THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS THAT ENGAGE MUNICIPALITIES, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND RESIDENTS IN DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES. THE PROJECT'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE RESHAPED URBAN GOVERNANCE IN TUNIS, PROMOTING DECENTRALISATION AND INCLUSIVE CITY MANAGEMENT. THIS SHIFT IS EVIDENT AFTER THE 2018 LOCAL GOVERNANCE MODEL CONTEXT WHERE MUNICIPALITIES NOW COLLABORATE MORE CLOSELY WITH STAKEHOLDERS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVED PUBLIC SAFETY.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM FEMMEDINA UNDERSCORE THE NECESSITY OF INTEGRATING URBAN PLANNING WITH EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND CONTINUOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. THIS APPROACH ENHANCES THE RESILIENCE OF URBAN INTERVENTIONS AND FOSTERS A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND SAFETY AMONG WOMEN AND GIRLS USING PUBLIC SPACES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE INTERVENTION IN HAFSIA GARDEN HIGHLIGHTED THE SIGNIFICANT NEED FOR SHADED AREAS IN PUBLIC SPACES. BENCHES NOT PLACED IN THE SHADE WERE PRIMARILY USED AFTER SUNDOWN, WHEN IT IS COOLER AND DARKER, AND THEREFORE LESS FREQUENTED BY WOMEN WHO PREDOMINANTLY USE PUBLIC SPACES DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS. THIS UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING USER COMFORT AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION IN URBAN DESIGN.

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ARTISAN SOUK AT BEB SOUIKA MUNICIPALITY IS ASSURED THROUGH ITS ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER FEMMEDINA INTERVENTIONS, FORMING A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC CYCLE. BY SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATING TRAINING AT THE WOMEN'S TRAINING CENTRE, EXHIBITION OPPORTUNITIES, AND SALES THROUGH THE ARTISANAL MARKET, THE INTERVENTION ENHANCES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND FOSTERS LONG-TERM ECONOMIC STABILITY. THE CENTRAL LOCATION AND CONNECTION TO THE CULTURAL HERITAGE TRAIL ENSURES CONTINUOUS FOOT TRAFFIC, SUPPORTING ONGOING ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT. A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE START OF TRAINING OPERATIONS AT SIDI EL BECHIR, THE LOCATION PROVED TO BE IMPRACTICAL FOR TWO REASONS: NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY, AND AN UNRESOLVED SEWERAGE EVACUATION ISSUE IN THE BUILDING THAT CAUSED GREAT DISCOMFORT TO PARTICIPANTS.

THE OLD CENTRE REMAINS CLOSED AND ABANDONED FOR THE MOMENT. THIS IS MAINLY DUE TO THE IMPORTANT PARTICIPATION OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND LOCAL YOUTH-LED ASSOCIATIONS. THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES OF THE SIDI EL BECHIR TRAINING CENTRE UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF MUNICIPAL AGILITY AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS.

BUILDING ON FEMMEDINA'S SUCCESS, THE MUNICIPALITY OF TUNIS HAS EXPANDED ITS COMMITMENT BY JOINING UN WOMEN'S SAFE CITIES PROGRAMME, APPLYING FEMMEDINA'S METHODOLOGIES CITYWIDE. THIS INITIATIVE INCLUDES FOCUSED DIALOGUES WITH DIVERSE GROUPS SUCH AS YOUNG GIRLS, WOMEN EMPLOYEES, AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO SHAPE URBAN SPACES THAT MEET THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS.

IN CONCLUSION, FEMMEDINA SETS A BENCHMARK FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE URBAN PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE IN TUNISIA, DEMONSTRATING HOW COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS CAN CREATE MORE RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE CITIES. THE INTEGRATION OF TRAINING CENTRES, EXHIBITION OPPORTUNITIES, AND SALES MARKETS FORMS A COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC CYCLE THAT ENHANCES WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND FOSTERS LONG-TERM ECONOMIC STABILITY. THROUGH COLLABORATION WITH ACTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY AND CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMMES, FEMMEDINA EXEMPLIFIES A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING, ASSESSING, AND ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC SPACES INCLUDES TANGIBLE LESSONS THAT SHOULD BE NOTED. THE TRAINING CENTRE, WHICH WAS INITIALLY LOCATED IN AN AREA WITH UNRESOLVED MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY ISSUES, SHOULD HAVE BEEN FULLY ASSESSED BEFORE ITS ESTABLISHMENT. BENCHES THAT WERE NOT PLACED IN THE SHADE REVEALED THE NECESSITY OF CONSIDERING USER COMFORT, PRACTICAL NEEDS, AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION IN URBAN DESIGN. KIOSKS THAT WERE NOT SUFFICIENTLY PLANNED AS LONG-TERM SPACES HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF ENSURING THAT TEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS ARE ALSO SUSTAINABLE AND EFFECTIVE IN THE LONG RUN. THESE LESSONS UNDERSCORE THE NEED FOR THOROUGH PLANNING AND CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT TO ADAPT AND IMPROVE URBAN INTERVENTIONS.





**FEMMEDINA TUNIS**  
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# INTRO.

## OVERVIEW OF FEMMEDINA

In the Medina of Tunis, the historical district of Tunisia's capital, women's participation in daily urban life is severely restricted due to limited freedom of movement. This restriction affects their overall safety, mobility, and economic well-being. The Medina's urban design is primarily pedestrian-friendly, with residents commuting by foot. However, women often feel unsafe on the streets during evenings, weekends, and holidays due to poor lighting and hence fear sexual harassment and theft. FEMMEDINA, launched by the municipality of Tunis and Cities Alliance with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aimed to create safer public spaces tailored to women's needs. This initiative aimed at enhancing women's economic, political, social, and cultural participation in the city's public life, particularly in the districts of Medina Centrale, Bab Souika, Bab Bhar, and Sidi Béchir.

The first phase of FEMMEDINA involved a participatory evaluation of women's involvement in social, cultural, economic, political, and institutional activities within the Medina. This evaluation included a consultancy of 100 women and 20 men from the Medina. It led to recommendations for policy, city planning, and programmatic changes to boost women's engagement. Additionally, it proposed spatial and programmatic interventions in selected public spaces to empower women as active participants and architects of the Medina's rehabilitated public areas. Between December 2020 and May 2022, Cities Alliance and the Municipality of Tunis, with support from USAID, implemented an 18-month FEMMEDINA pilot project. The pilot's core objectives were to address the economic, political, social, and cultural needs of women, particularly in Medina Centrale, Bab Bhar, Sidi el Bechir, and Bab Souika. It also aimed to institutionalise gender-sensitive urban development in Tunis and other cities, mainly through urban interventions that empowered women's autonomy.

The report FEMMEDINA Inclusive City Programme in Tunis assesses women's participation in the Medina of Tunis, highlights testimonies from survey participants, and outlines future steps at municipal and national levels to promote gender-sensitive planning of public spaces that could amplify women's social, cultural, political and economic participation. The report also suggests urban programmes that could make public spaces more accessible for women and encourage them to engage with their communities.

Regular collection of data on women's use and perceptions of these interventions helps adapt urban equipment, space management models, and activities to meet emerging needs. After the launch of the Bab Souika Souk, it became a vibrant hub for homemade, handmade, and artisanal women's products.

However, after a few months, the municipality faced significant governance challenges in managing the space, which ultimately led to its closure. The municipality struggled with the allocation of sufficient human resources, financial constraints, and bureaucratic hurdles, making it difficult to sustain the project's momentum. These issues underscored the need for more efficient resource allocation, streamlined administrative processes, and enhanced financial support to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of urban development initiatives.

The project was later replicated in other Tunisian cities, and its outcomes were used to build municipal capacities to integrate gender considerations into budgeting, urban planning, and project management.

(1) Cities Alliance. 2021. FEMMEDINA Inclusive City Programme in Tunis: An assessment of women's participation in the Medina of Tunis. Cities Alliance: Brussels. <https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/08-2021/Femmedina20%Assessment20%Report20%EN-compressed.pdf>.

## POST ACTION REVIEW

This report offers a post activity review of FEMMEDINA's impact as of mid2024-. It is based on observations of public spaces and their use, individual interviews with 20 women who participated in the project, women and community members who use the spaces, civil society organisations (CSOs) managing the spaces, and municipal officials.

The primary aim of FEMMEDINA was to create more inclusive urban areas and policies that address the needs of women in the city of Tunis. This report describes the impact of FEMMEDINA two years after implementation, with a summary of the project, lessons learned, short- and medium-term results on women's use of public spaces, and the impact on the daily lives of women living in the Medina.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE REPORT

The post action review of FEMMEDINA's impact employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive assessment. The methodology includes desk reviews, field visits, interviews, and assessments of interventions.

**Desk Review:** A comprehensive desk review was conducted to gather background information and contextual data on FEMMEDINA. This involved reviewing project documents, reports, official records, and relevant policies and local governance laws. Previous evaluations and studies related to women's participation in the Medina were also examined.

**Field Visits and Assessment of Interventions:** Field visits were crucial to evaluating the FEMMEDINA urban interventions, including Parc du Passage, the Artisan Souk at Bab-Souika Municipality, the Women's Training Centre in Sidi el Bechir, Hafsia public garden, and Beb Souika's public infrastructures. These visits involved inspecting the improved or newly created public spaces and observing their usage, particularly by women. The review focused on the effectiveness of these urban interventions in enhancing safety and accessibility for women; evaluating programmatic efforts to boost women's economic, political, social, and cultural participation; and reviewing the participatory mechanisms established for women's involvement in decision-making processes.

**Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to gain insights into the project's impact. This involved semi-structured interviews with five women municipality staff to understand their perspectives on the project's implementation and outcomes. In addition, interviews were conducted with 12 women living in the Medina to gather personal experiences and feedback on the project's impact on their daily lives. Additionally, interviews were conducted with community members and civil society organisations involved in managing the public spaces.

**Data Analysis and Reporting:** Collected data was analysed to draw evidence-based conclusions, with qualitative analysis of interview transcripts revealing common themes and insights. The findings were compiled into this impact report summarising the Femmedina project, its objectives, lessons learned, and results on women's use of public spaces. The report also provides policy, city planning, and programmatic recommendations to enhance women's engagement.

# CONTEXT OVERVIEW.

## CONTEXT OVERVIEW

The Medina of Tunis, founded during the Muslim Arab conquest in the 7th century, evolved into a vibrant urban centre in northeastern Tunisia. Spanning 299 hectares, it is one of the earliest Arab-Muslim cities in the Maghreb and served as a capital for influential dynasties. From the 12th to the 16th centuries, the Medina was a major hub during the Almohad and Hafsid periods, and there are numerous historical artifacts from these times. Later, the period from the 16th to the 19th centuries saw new powers building palaces, mosques, zaouias, and madrasas. Its narrow alleyways and historic buildings reflect a rich architectural and cultural heritage influenced by Arabic, Andalusian, Ottoman, Italian, and Mediterranean styles. The Medina, now a UNESCO World Heritage site with 700 historic monuments distributed in seven areas, hosts traditional festivals and religious events. It is protected by national regulations and managed by the National Heritage Institute and the Association for the Safeguarding of the Medina of Tunis (ASM).

According to the National Institute for Statistics 2014 census, the Medina Centrale, Bab Bhar, Bab Souika, and Sidi el Bechir districts account for 10 per cent of the population of Tunis, making it one of the city's most densely populated areas. The Medina's urban structure has changed due to migration, societal shifts, and economic challenges. Currently, 82 per cent of its buildings are in use, 10 per cent are vacant, and 2.2 per cent abandoned. Of the occupied structures, 10.7 per cent are in poor condition, significantly higher than the national average of 0.6 per cent.

## POLITICAL CONTEXT AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN THE MEDINA OF TUNIS

### POST-REVOLUTION DECENTRALISATION IN TUNISIA

Following the 2011 revolution, Tunisia embarked on a significant transformation from a highly centralised state towards decentralisation, increased participation, and representative democracy. This shift is prominently reflected in the 2014 Constitution, which emphasises decentralisation. A dedicated Local Authorities Code expanded the mandate of local authorities, such as municipal councils, to plan and decide on development programmes, projects, and budgets. Article 139 of the 2014 Constitution mandates practices of participation and open governance, granting local communities and civil society a role in planning processes and development strategies. The emphasis on decentralisation was seen as a way to bring governance closer to the people, ensuring that local needs and priorities were better addressed.

### REGIME CHANGES IN JULY 2021

After 25 July 2021, Tunisia experienced political changes under President Kais Saied. This period saw the suspension of parliament and the assumption of executive powers by the president, which led to debates about the balance of power and the future of Tunisia's democratic transition. These changes impacted the country's governance structure, including the municipalities. The focus shifted towards ensuring more robust oversight and control over local governance, emphasising transparency and accountability.

On 8 March 2023, President Saied dissolved all the municipalities and assigned "special delegations" to manage them under the supervision of governors. The decree did not specify when the municipal councils would be replaced by the "special delegations."

"All municipal councils are dissolved until new municipal councils are elected."

– Article 1 of the Presidential Decree no. 9 of 2023.

Tunisia chose a new local governance model and organised local elections on 24 December 2023 and 4 February 2024 to elect the representatives of the local and regional councils (representing several local councils), comprising the regional councils, the district councils, and the National Council of Regions and Districts. The election had a very low participation rate of about 12 per cent.

(2) UNESCO. Medina of Tunis, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/36/>.

(3) Law on the Issuance of the Code of the Protection of Archaeological and Historical Heritage and Traditional Arts (Law No. 35 of February 1994). (24. <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/202292>.

(4) INS (National Institute of Statistics). 2014. National Census. <https://www.ins.tn/en/enquetes/census2014->

(5) Local Authorities Code of Tunisia. 2018. <https://www.jurisitetunisie.com/tunisie/codes/ccl/menua.html>

(6) Constitution of Tunisia. 2014. <https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/constitution-de-la-republique-tunisienne-du-27-janvier2014/>.





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## CHANGES IN GOVERNANCE MODEL

The governance model in Tunisia has evolved through three main phases:

**Post-Revolution (2011.2018):** This phase marked the beginning of decentralisation and the establishment of legal frameworks promoting local governance and participation. The 2014 Constitution and the 2018 Local Governance Law were key milestones.

**Post 2018 Municipal Elections:** These elections were the first held under the new governance laws, setting a precedent for municipal councils to have a more significant role in planning and decision-making. The emphasis was on participatory governance, with local councils becoming more responsive to citizen needs.

**Post 2023.2024 Local Council Elections:** These elections under the new regime focused on reinforcing the gains of decentralisation while ensuring alignment with national policies set by the presidency. These councils will not replace the municipalities; rather, their primary role will be to advise on matters related to city development. As of the writing of this report, there is no specific regulatory framework governing the councils' operations, and they have not yet started their functions. In the interim, following the dissolution of the municipalities, governance is being overseen by the governorates in collaboration with the general secretaries of each municipality. These general secretaries are appointed by the government and serve as public officials to ensure continuity in municipal administration.

## CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS

Women in politics face resistance and criticism, which requires considerable resilience to remain in the political field. Opportunities, education, and societal norms often push women away from politics, especially when economic conditions force them to shift their priorities towards securing their livelihoods. This shift in focus is a critical factor limiting their political engagement, as they have to balance immediate economic needs with long-term political aspirations. The diversion is evident as women tend to have more chances to occupy leadership roles in civil society than in institutional and formal politics.

Furthermore, following Decree no. 10 of 8 March 2023, which governs the organisation of elections to local councils and the composition of district and provincial councils, several key restrictions have been implemented. Chairpersons and members of municipal councils, as well as heads of sports structures and associations, are prohibited from representing candidates. Additionally, each candidate must secure 50 recommendations/nominations from voters registered in the relevant constituency.

Local elections are now based on personal candidatures, a change from the 2018 municipal elections in which lists for the candidatures were required to be 50 per cent women – a change in the legal framework that represented a significant step for women's representation in local governance and highlighted the importance of legal mandates in ensuring gender parity in political representation. The new measures present significant challenges for women, particularly concerning the recommendation/nomination requirement and the broader political climate in the country, complicating their ability to stand as candidates.

However, women are more likely to hold leadership roles in civil society organisations than in formal political institutions. Civil society often provides a more accessible platform for women to engage in leadership and advocacy roles, as these organisations tend to be more flexible and supportive of women's participation compared to the rigid structures of formal political institutions.

(7) Municipalities' day-to-day management assigned to secretaries general. Agence Tunis Afrique Presse <https://www.tap.info.tn/en/Portal-Politics/-16077514municipalities>

(8) Independent High Authority for Elections (Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections). Élections Locales 2023. <https://www.isie.tn/elections-locales2023/>

(9) Presidential Decree no. 8 ,10 March 2023 (Arabic). The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF).

<https://legislation-securite.tn/latest-laws/decret-loi-n-10-2023du-8-mars2023->

## ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

The Medina of Tunis has historically been a hub of economic activity centred around its vibrant souks that attract both tourists and locals. Artisans and merchants in the Medina sell a wide range of traditional products, including textiles, ceramics, spices, and jewelry. Traditional crafts, such as pottery, carpet weaving, and leatherwork, play a significant role in the local economy. With its 3,000 stores, the Medina of Tunis represented a quarter of the turnover of Tunis's commercial activity in 1973, far ahead of production activities, according to the Safeguarding Association for the Medina. For decades, it has been a major tourist attraction, drawing visitors from around the world who come to explore its historical and cultural treasures. Tourists are captivated by the unique atmosphere, architectural beauty, and the opportunity to experience the traditions and crafts of Tunisia.

However, economic challenges have emerged due to changes in consumer behaviour, modernisation, and shifts in economic activities to other parts of the city. Unemployment and poverty rates are significant concerns, especially among youth. Artisans sometimes spend whole days without selling any items, as tourists often look for very low-priced products, leading artisans to cater primarily to the local population with declining client bases. Traders also face dissatisfaction due to problems of hygiene, dirt, disorder, and insecurity, which affect tourists' experiences in the Medina.

## ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Women in the Medina face unique economic challenges and opportunities influenced by socio-cultural and structural factors. Despite these challenges, a modest number of women participate in the local economy, particularly through informal and small-scale activities or home-based food and handicraft products.

However, their economic activities are often limited by safety concerns, mobility restrictions, and a lack of access to formal employment opportunities. Safety issues, particularly in poorly lit areas, restrict women's mobility and economic participation. Despite these challenges, efforts to increase women's economic participation have been ongoing from many CSOs, with various initiatives aimed at enhancing their skills and providing safer working conditions.

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE MEDINA

Women in the Medina of Tunis face numerous economic and social challenges that impede their professional and personal growth. Despite the Medina's rich cultural and economic history, gender-based discrimination and societal norms continue to limit women's opportunities. In addition to the scarcity of jobs in the Medina, working women face gender-based discrimination that restricts their professional development. Some shop owners prefer to hire women because they perceive them as less costly and easier to manage than men. This preference, while providing job opportunities for women, often comes with lower wages and fewer advancement opportunities, perpetuating economic inequality. Also, women in the Medina struggle to save money for personal spending because their families often claim their savings. To create safety nets for themselves, many women hide their money at friends' places. This practice highlights the lack of financial autonomy and the ongoing struggle for economic independence faced by women in the community.

Entrepreneurship is crucial for women's economic engagement, but several barriers hinder their ability to start and grow businesses. The male-dominated market and cultural perceptions are often obstacles. Training programmes and business support services are essential for empowering women economically. However, these opportunities are limited and often do not address the specific needs of women in the Medina. More tailored programmes are necessary to help women develop the skills and knowledge required to thrive in the business world.

(10) ASM. <https://www.asmtunis.com/>.

(11) Trabelsi, M. 2018. La medina de Tunis : Tourisme, Patrimoine et Gentrification. Doctoral dissertation, Paris 1 University Panthéon-Sorbonne.

<http://www.abhatoo.net.ma/content/download/639689/296111/version/1/file/LA+MEDINA+DE+TUNIS+.+Tourisme2%C+Patrimoine+et+Gentrification.pdf>



## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS

The Medina of Tunis is a densely populated area within the capital city, housing approximately 10 per cent of Tunis's total population. This historic place comprises four main districts: Medina Centrale, Bab Bhar, Bab Souika, and Sidi el Bechir. The diverse population includes long-standing residents, artisans, traders, and more recently, migrants from rural areas seeking economic opportunities.

## SOCIAL CHALLENGES

The Medina has seen significant social changes over time, affecting housing patterns, population demographics, and traditional social structures. While the community spirit remains strong, various challenges persist, including inadequate infrastructure, poor housing conditions, and limited access to social services. Social issues such as unemployment and gender disparities further exacerbate these challenges.

Women in the Medina face significant obstacles in achieving economic independence. The marketplace is predominantly male, and gender-based discrimination, coupled with insufficient opportunities for training and support, severely limit women's economic participation. Moreover, safety concerns remain a critical barrier to women's social participation. Incidents of violence and crime, particularly at night, make women feel unsafe, driving them to meet in private rather than public spaces despite efforts to rehabilitate certain neighbourhoods.

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEDINA

Women in the Medina often feel more comfortable meeting in enclosed spaces rather than public ones. This preference stems from a desire for safety and privacy, as public spaces can sometimes be intimidating or unsafe for women. The social dynamics and the layout of the Medina's public spaces do not always provide a welcoming environment for women, which limits their ability to engage in community life openly and freely.

Opportunities for women to participate in social events and create their own support networks vary significantly based on their social status and family background. Women from more conservative families or lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face more restrictions, reducing their ability to engage in public life. On the other hand, women from more liberal families or higher socioeconomic statuses might have more freedom to participate in social activities and form support networks outside their families.

Safety in public places is arguably the biggest challenge facing the Medina, and ensuring the safety and security of residents and visitors is a priority. Like many historic urban areas, the Medina has faced challenges related to urban decay, crime, and preservation. The area is often viewed as unsafe and unclean, with its convoluted streets making it difficult to navigate. This perception deters both residents and visitors, particularly at night. To address these issues, there are five police stations distributed throughout the Medina.

Safety concerns in public spaces are a major issue for women in the Medina. Instances of harassment and threats, such as the experience of a group of schoolgirls who were threatened by a man in the Parc du Passage, discourage women from using these spaces. Ensuring the safety and security of women in public spaces is crucial for their participation in community life. Measures such as increased police presence, better lighting, and community awareness programmes can help create safer environments for women.

On a cultural level, events in the Medina provide women with a sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. However, these events are not always tailored to the local context, which can limit their effectiveness in fostering community spirit and engagement. Tailoring cultural events to reflect the specific needs and interests of the local community can enhance their impact and encourage broader participation from women.

(12) INS, <https://www.ins.tn/enquetes/recensement-general-de-la-population-et-de-lhabitat-2014>.

In recent years, there has been a focus on preserving the authenticity and heritage of the Medina while addressing the needs of the local community and tourists. Measures to mitigate the impact of tourism on residents' daily lives have been implemented, contributing to the area's revival. Tunisia has managed to rebuild its reputation as a safe and attractive tourist destination, with international visitors returning and domestic tourism rebounding. Efforts to enhance safety and promote the Medina's cultural heritage have been instrumental in its preservation and continued relevance. These initiatives ensure that the Medina remains a vital part of Tunisia's cultural landscape for future generations.

However, the policies and funding targeting cultural participation have not necessarily been conducive for women's engagement. Women find it difficult to access and use the cultural spaces available in the Medina. This difficulty is exacerbated by cultural norms, safety concerns, and logistical barriers such as timing and location of events.





# FEMMEDINA URBAN INTERVENTIONS

## FEMMEDINA URBAN INTERVENTIONS

FEMMEDINA implemented urban interventions in the Medina of Tunis, based on the co-created recommendations. These interventions aimed to enhance women's cultural, social, economic, and political participation in urban life within the Medina of Tunis. All spaces were inaugurated in March 2022, and revisited in May 2024 to measure impact, through users' feedback and operational success, or lessons learnt when goals are not met. There were five urban interventions:

## ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE MEDINA

### 1. PARC DU PASSAGE

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

During the FEMMEDINA survey, the project team walked with women who live and work in the Medina to understand how they use public space and discuss their urban needs. All of the women's groups who participated in the urban walk analysis expressed a wish to use Parc du Passage, since it is in walking distance and one of the few green, open urban parks in the capital. The park's location makes it convenient for Medina residents who are looking for a green space to walk, enjoy nature, meet with family and friends, allow children to run and play safely, or just sit on a bench and read a book. Nevertheless, the women who participated in the co-creation process of FEMMEDINA felt the park was male dominated and a meeting place for alcohol drinkers and the homeless. Young women who wanted to meet and study at the park were often discouraged or asked to leave by the park's guard or administrator to avoid harassment situations.

Careful observations of the use and trends of Parc du Passage, and discussions with the municipal administrator, revealed that the park's use had been transformed when a playground for children was built in one corner. This encouraged families to bring their children, causing a modest change in the type of park users, mainly at the playground area. This urban transformation led to the idea of creating a public open library near the playground to expand the women-safe area of the park, with new services that could provide a safe space for young girls.

A dedicated area inside the park was converted into an open library, with a wooden structure that houses shelved books and some toys. The wooden hexagonal library was surrounded by wooden benches under big park trees, for readers to use and enjoy the large area with much-needed shade.

Today, all of the installed urban equipment is still at Parc du Passage. However, the municipality was not able to allocate the needed human resources to manage and maintain the public open-air library. Recently, the municipality decided to physically transfer the library's complete structure to another public park in the city (the Japanese Park), with dedicated municipal human resources to oversee its use, maintenance, and operations.

#### OUTPUTS AND LEARNING

The Medina of Tunis is a densely populated area within the capital city, housing approximately 10 per cent of Tunis's total population. This historic place comprises four main districts: Medina Centrale, Bab Bhar, Bab Souika, and Sidi el Bechir. The diverse population includes long-standing residents, artisans, traders, and more recently, migrants from rural areas seeking economic opportunities.

The Parc du Passage public open library is probably the first of its kind in Tunisia. It began with the municipality of Tunis, one of the rare municipalities with a public library in its medina. Located in Dar Ben Achour, the library is an active place with a helpful librarian. It offers well referenced, important historical documents about city management, with spaces for researchers, university students, and teenagers in the community to meet and study.





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Dar Ben Achour demonstrates that the municipality of Tunis has a well-functioning, mature governance model for a municipal library. Nevertheless, adapting the model to the Parc du Passage required adapting human resource roles, responsibilities, and work schedules to accommodate differences in the target groups, needs, and environment. This needed resource allocation and adaptation of the management process was not part of intervention planning. For this reason, the Parc du Passage library functioned well for a short time after its launch, and then the process was stopped in search for the ideal operating model.

The municipality of Tunis is well aware that the city needs more libraries, and any project for a public library is always supported by municipal staff and elected officials. The municipality's decision to move the existing public library structure from Parc du Passage to the Japanese Park is based on the belief that the library will be more secure with less risk of theft because there are more employees to take care of it in the new location. This development emphasises the need for continuous reevaluation of aspired intervention objectives.

## 2. ARTISAN SOUK AT BAB SOUIKA

### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

During the FEMMEDINA survey, women shared economic participation challenges in the Medina of Tunis. These were mainly related to trade activities that were culturally and historically male dominated, as well as urban insecurity thanks to the Medina's many dark, narrow alleys. Some of the women who participated in the co-creation process suggested an souk-like space for women where home-based businesses could display and sell their products. As a result, an unused open space adjacent to a municipal building that housed the Bab Souika district offices was selected for repurposing into a permanent trading space for women-owned businesses.

The urban intervention included maintaining the garden and installing wooden kiosks dedicated to women artisans to display and sell their products. Adjacent to the kiosks, a playground was built as a space for children to play while women vendors sold their products.

After the launch of the space, it became a vibrant location for women selling handmade, and artisanal products. Nevertheless, after a few months, the municipality faced governance challenges in managing the space, which forced it to close. This was mainly due to a lack of clear instructions related to the selection process – who is entitled to use a kiosk and for how long, do's and don'ts of the space, whether to charge rental fees, and how the common spaces should be managed. The space is currently closed and awaiting a municipal decision on a better management model.

### OUTPUTS AND LEARNING

The intervention was strategically designed to transform the space into a hub that empowers women through an artisanal market dedicated to showcasing their work and complemented the other FEMMEDINA interventions. The approach underscores the pivotal role of meticulous planning and targeted interventions in the project's success. By carefully selecting a central, culturally rich location and designing the space to meet the multifaceted needs of women, the intervention aimed to foster a supportive environment that promotes women's economic and social empowerment while also enhancing the cultural landscape of the Medina.

Right after the inauguration of the space, the municipality of Tunis handed the management of the installed kiosks over to its cultural department. As a consequence, requests by women home-based business owners to use the kiosks were received at the municipality. Many women who might otherwise not have established their own home-based business were attracted by the fact that kiosks were rental free, safely located, exclusively for women, and offered a children's playground nearby. This required managing the use of the kiosks, planning rentals, controlling do's and don'ts, and regular maintenance.

Managing an ongoing exhibition is no simple task; it requires dedication and demands intense people management. This responsibility was challenging for the under-staffed municipal employees. Since the space was owned by the municipality, it was also challenging to keep it open after office hours and weekends. High commercial demand timing was not in harmony with administration timing.

The municipality of Tunis is aware of the importance of such a space and is committed to keeping it available to women-owned businesses in the Medina, which is why alternative governance solutions are being discussed. The Bab Souika kiosks demonstrate the importance of urban economic interventions to achieve urban sustainability.

In conclusion, the sustainability of the Artisan Souk at Bab Souika Municipality is assured through its alignment with other interventions in this project, which together form a comprehensive economic cycle that seamlessly integrates training at the women's training centre, exhibition opportunities, and sales through the artisanal market. The intervention not only enhances women's economic participation but also fosters long-term economic stability. The central location and connection to the cultural heritage trail ensure continuous foot traffic, supporting ongoing economic activity and cultural engagement.

## 3. WOMEN'S TRAINING CENTRE

### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

Sidi el Bechir is considered to be the most unsafe district in the Medina, as determined by FEMMEDINA's city safety mapping. Nonetheless, women from the district feel comfortable and safe in the area because they know its residents well and are considered as Bent El Houma; they belong to the families, residents, and neighbours so they are safe. Women residing in Sidi el Bechir were mostly dissatisfied with their neighbourhood's cleanliness, infrastructure, and public spaces. They also were unaware, or dissatisfied, with the cultural activities in the neighbourhood. The women were especially keen to develop their skills and improving their economic autonomy. After a dynamic meeting with municipal staff and municipal board members, and after visiting some unused municipal spaces in the district, a ground floor space in a residential building on a busy street in Sidi el Bechir district was selected as the site of the city's first women training centre.

The selected location was adequate for the kind of requested trainings, such as tailoring, nail treatments, craft products, and digital marketing for home-based businesses. The space required substantial maintenance since it had been unoccupied for a few years. After undergoing all necessary renovations, tables, chairs, and equipment for training were installed to make the centre ready to welcome women. Equipment provided included sewing machines, nail care equipment, projectors, and computers.

The municipality invited ADAM, a local association dedicated to women economic empowerment, to manage the training centre. ADAM collaborates with a network of skilled women trainers and needed a suitable space for its operations where women could meet and receive training. It also has an important network of women members, who actively registered and attended training following a detailed training programme by ADAM. The workshops were always full and satisfactory to low-income women in the community.

***“We are very satisfied with the Sidi el Bechir training centre. A group of women who received training were able to produce a collection of products and participated for the first time at the yearly national handicrafts' exhibition.”***

*– Sonia Saad, Municipality of Tunis*





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A few months after training operations started at Sidi el Bechir, the location proved to be impractical for two reasons: neighbourhood safety and an unresolved sewerage evacuation issue in the building, which caused great discomfort to participants. The original location was closed and the municipality moved the training centre with all its equipment, to a newly restored cultural centre close to Kasbah.

The facility is well managed, with an active director and operating team, which makes women feel much safer. In interviews, municipal staff and the director of ADAM expressed satisfaction with the training centre operations. They noted that it has had a clear positive impact on women, who were able to start commercial activities after receiving training. Some trained women were able to book a stand at the national handicraft exhibition thanks to products they learned how to make at the centre.

***“It’s not easy to work on a piece with all your heart and soul, but it becomes beautiful in your eyes and touches people through the feelings it conveys because everything it made with love. It’s very nice when someone tells you that your work is magnificent and sells it with enthusiasm, it makes you happy in the end.”***

– Hanene Werfeli

## OUTPUTS AND LEARNING

The successful outcomes of the Sidi el Bechir training centre underscore the importance of municipal agility and effective partnerships. The Municipality of Tunis demonstrated a proactive approach by partnering with ADAM, a local association that could effectively recruit and manage trainers, attract trainees, and follow up with their economic integration. When faced with maintenance and security challenges, the municipality promptly relocated the centre, preserving the training programme’s continuity and growth. The centre’s journey from inception to relocation demonstrates the vital need for safe, well-maintained spaces and the power of effective collaboration in achieving meaningful social and economic outcomes for women in the Medina.

## 4. HAFSIA PUBLIC GARDEN

### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

FEMMEDINA survey participants demonstrated that women and girls are passersby in public space, only using it to go from point A to point B. On the other hand, men and boys use public space with great comfort as an extension of their home and to meet friends, play, network, exchange, share and learn – all things that help them progress socially, economically and politically.

One of the recommendations for a FEMMEDINA intervention was to design public spaces in local neighbourhoods for women and girls, and Hafsia was a focus neighbourhood of FEMMEDINA.

After some research with the Department of Municipal Properties, Sidi Mfarej, a collapsed historical shrine, was found. Most significantly, the municipality had well documented ownership of the site, a critical condition for executing any urban intervention. The location was ideal for a rare, much needed, safe public space.

Collapsed historical buildings are a common in the Medina of Tunis; according to a 2019 municipal survey, there are about 127 collapsed buildings within the Medina’s 270 hectares. A collapsed building is a perfect space for illicit trade as well as informal parking, toilets, and waste dumps. This renders the whole neighbourhood unsafe for women, who need to choose a longer route to avoid passing near a space with harassment potential.

***“When I was a little girl, I remember ‘Side Mfarej’ was a house, then an abandoned building that collapsed. Then it was transformed into an informal waste dump. Then, FEMMEDINA, converted the space into a public space for women, children, and everyone. There was a time when it was believed that it would become a parking lot for cars.”***

– Abir Saidi, Resident of Hafsia

The intervention site is on the side road that links Rue Pacha to the Hafsia neighbourhood. The surrounding area is a cultural quarter that hosts Dar Larsam, the Kheireddine palace, and the Bir El Hajjar cultural centre. Its location is close to the Hafsia market, which welcomes shoppers from all over the city of Tunis, as well as Hafsia middle school and a high school on Rue du Pacha. Women consider this neighbourhood to be safe, and some even confirmed feeling comfortable walking around the area at night because Hafsia Street is and wide and well lit. The site is enclosed within a few residential buildings and close to commercial and cultural areas, making it accessible to both residents and outside visitors.

The Sidi Mfarej intervention created a space that encourages women to spend time in a public space, organise cultural activities, study during school breaks, or rest while shopping at the nearby market. The intervention included a recreational garden with vegetation, shade, seating benches, and urban equipment for children.

***“JCI El Médina used Sidi Mfarej space in Hafsia to launch ‘Jinet el Hafsia’, an initiative for a community garden and urban farm.”***

– Sarra Rhouma, President of JCI El Médina, a nonprofit organisation for young leaders

## OUTPUTS AND LEARNING

Sidi Mfarej is the most successful FEMMEDINA intervention to date, mainly due to the participation of local community and youth-led associations. Now called the Hafsia Garden, the space underwent an important learning journey.

After the inauguration of Hafsia Garden, individuals from outside the neighbourhood began frequenting the space and took the installed urban equipment. Local businesses made several attempts at planting more flowers and trees, but they also disappeared within days. The community and neighbouring businesses submitted many official letters to the municipality asking for improved garden security, underscoring the need to consider ongoing security measures at the design stage of public spaces. Some women asked that the garden be gated and locked at night, with a guard to monitor who can use the space out of security concerns. However, the municipality lacked the resources to fulfill these requests, highlighting the need for public space interventions to be sustainable within the context of locally available resources.

In the meantime, JCI El Médina, a local youth association, and Mdinti, a local economic interest group, started planning activities at the public garden. This made the space appealing for women and children in the community and opened doors for more activities, such as an open-air cinema, teen band performances, urban gardening, and climate change awareness workshops. The garden remains safer than ever through the activities held by the different actors (JCI El Médina, Mdinti, and Dar Ben Gacem). This is another example of the need for evolving management of public spaces and capacity building using successful management examples for municipalities at the outset of the intervention.

The journey from Sidi Mfarej informal dump to Hafsia garden has allowed the community to take ownership of what they now view as their own garden. It is an important space where their children can play, women can interact, and youth can design and implement their cultural, environmental, and social events. The current operating model is an informal private public collaboration organically driven by the needs of the community.

***“We took advantage of the Sidi Mfarej space after FEMMEDINA project to organise activities, workshops with artisans, and film screenings in the area for the benefit of the Hafsia community. This initiative aims to encourage women to go out and utilise the space.”***

– Imen Wannan, Coordinator for Mdinti

(13) About two thirds of those buildings are private properties that accumulated a large number of heirs over their hundreds of years of existence and have become unsellable. The remaining one third of collapsed buildings are public owned, with ownership transferred from private to public, but the transfer process is incomplete and the government cannot claim full ownership. Hence Sidi Mfarej was a rare urban location whose ownership was well documented.





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## 5. BAB SOUIKA PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

### DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

In 1985, the Bab Souika neighbourhood of the Medina witnessed a significant urban transformation as a result of an initiative implemented by ASM Tunis with funding from Agha Khan. The initiative rehabilitated the entire quarter, including creating public space along an existing traffic artery, conserving and upgrading existing structures and infrastructure, and creating new housing. The rare open public spaces in the heart of Bab Souika between residential homes, small businesses, and the nearby Sidi Mehrez shrine are indispensable and busy with people every day.

Women mostly use Bab Souika's public spaces to go somewhere or to shop. They rarely meet and spend time in neighbourhood streets, while male-dominated cafés are abundant. In interviews, women from the Bab Souika neighbourhood expressed a desire for green public spaces where they can spend time and take their kids out. While women residents indicated that they generally feel safe in Bab Souika, some feared security incidents such as thefts, drug dealing, and drug use in a few streets. These security concerns limited women's movement, especially at night.

The nearby Sidi Mehrez shrine, adjacent to the public space, is often full of women. This is not for religious reasons, but because women view the shrine a safe resting place where they can secretly eat, sit and chill during a work break, or looking for shade during the summer months.

Now, the open public space at Bab Souika is equipped with a small play area and seating, some under a big tree with good shade where women and girls can sit and rest in the daytime.

***“Before FEMMEDINA ‘Place Bab Souika’ was not an area where women and children could stay or use. It was poorly maintained and unsafe, and parents did not want their children to hang around or play there. Today, women and passersby use the benches at the square. Children play as their parents sit in the shade and watch them, and women often sit and chat freely.”***

*– Hajer Riahi, Resident of Bab Souika*

### OUTPUTS AND LEARNING

The transformation of Bab Souika has yielded several critical insights. The intervention highlighted the significant need for shaded areas in public spaces. Benches, while welcome, are mainly used after sundown when it is cooler and darker, limiting their use by women who predominantly frequent these spaces during daylight hours.

A crucial lesson learned is the importance of integrating climate adaptation and heat mitigation strategies in public space projects. Ensuring benches and seating areas are placed under large trees or canopies can enhance usability throughout the day, providing relief from the sun and making public spaces more accessible and comfortable for all, particularly women and children. Incorporating urban green spaces not only provides shade, but it also contributes to climate adaptation by reducing heat, improving air quality, and creating more pleasant environments. This focus on climate-sensitive urban design demonstrates a commitment to creating inclusive, safe, and comfortable public spaces for the community.

The intervention has markedly improved the usability and safety of Bab Souika. Before the FEMMEDINA project, Place Bab Souika was not conducive to women and children. It was poorly maintained and deemed unsafe, deterring parents from allowing their children to play there. Today, the area has been revitalised. Women and passersby utilise the benches, children play under the watchful eyes of their parents, and women freely sit and chat. This transformation underscores the importance of well-maintained, safe, and shaded public spaces to enhancing urban life for women and children.

The intervention site is on the side road that links Rue Pacha to the Hafsia neighbourhood. The surrounding area is a cultural quarter that hosts Dar Larsam, the Kheireddine palace, and the Bir El Hajjar cultural centre. Its location is close to the Hafsia market, which welcomes shoppers from all over the city of Tunis, as well as Hafsia middle school and a high school on Rue du Pacha. Women consider this neighbourhood to be safe, and some even confirmed feeling comfortable walking around the area at night because Hafsia Street is wide and well lit. The site is enclosed within a few residential buildings and close to commercial and cultural areas, making it accessible to both residents and outside visitors.

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# IMPACT OF FEMMEDINA'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## IMPACT OF FEMMEDINA'S POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FEMMEDINA enabled the city of Tunis to position itself internationally as a city that prioritises women partaking in social, cultural, economic and political participation. The city of Tunis used and reused the FEMMEDINA analysis and policy report to demonstrate Tunis's commitment to providing equal urban opportunities for women. The policy recommendations from FEMMEDINA prompted the city to reconsider its approach to urban planning and governance, specifically focusing on enhancing the quality of life for women. This reassessment encompassed both the design of urban spaces and the frameworks governing their use, aiming to prioritise the wellbeing and safety of women within city environments.

To analyse the impact of FEMMEDINA's policy recommendations, Municipality of Tunis staff were interviewed. The main policy recommendation impacts are shared below.

### URBAN POLICY DESIGN FINDINGS

In pre-revolution Tunisia, urban public spaces and public matters were under the strict control of the state, with minimal participation from other stakeholders. The state's main role was to enforce the rule of law, often at the expense of inclusiveness and city accountability. Decision-making processes were highly centralised and primarily governed by the Ministry of Interior, with municipalities merely executing orders without substantial autonomy.

Post-revolution, Tunisia has embarked on a journey towards decentralisation and more inclusive city management. This process is still ongoing and evolving. The 2018 municipal elections marked a significant shift in the governance model, assigning new roles, responsibilities, and independence to municipalities. Tunisian cities are now striving to design governance processes that ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity, inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation of all stakeholders.

The recent 2024–2023 local elections have introduced a new phase in this ongoing transformation, and there is still uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of the current governance model at the local level. A noticeable gap exists between the elected local councils and various stakeholders, including residents and associations. This gap poses challenges in achieving truly inclusive and participatory urban governance.

The transition has impacted the governance systems under which management and administrative systems operate. Elected officials are under pressure to perform, and a new outspoken civil society is demanding its role in urban management. FEMMEDINA was an extremely important project and considered as a pilot approach to rethinking how power could be distributed and shared, policies could be formulated, priorities set, and how all stakeholders can have their share of accountability.

Throughout the implementation of FEMMEDINA, every policy recommendation and urban intervention needed approval from the city board, which only approved what had already been shared with civil society, residents, district elected officials, and the municipal administration team. Each stakeholder had different objectives and challenges, and the process required going back and forth between stakeholders. The process might seem lengthier than usual, but what is essential to this exercise is reaching a stakeholder agreement that takes into account all aspects of the policy or urban intervention before reaching the city board. This approach makes urban policy design more resilient and city planning more efficient.

### URBAN GOVERNANCE FINDINGS

One of the key learnings from the FEMMEDINA process is the importance of integrating urban governance solutions with urban interventions to ensure ongoing use and sustainability. Effective urban governance requires a dynamic and adaptive approach, with the municipality's capacity to evolve playing a crucial role.





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In post-revolution Tunisia, urban governance is a shared responsibility with the intervention of CSOs, the private sector, and citizens throughout the process to achieve a sustainable solution. FEMMEDINA provided an invaluable learning opportunity by demonstrating that sustainable and positive systemic change for women can only be achieved when all stakeholders – municipalities, civil society, and residents – are involved in decision-making, implementation, and use.

The post-project maintenance and management of FEMMEDINA's urban interventions underscored the necessity of a shared governance model. This model should ideally involve formal collaboration between municipalities and civil society entities. Notably, the most successful FEMMEDINA urban interventions, such as the Hafsia public garden and the women's training centre at Sidi el Bechir (later relocated to Kasbah), exemplify the benefits of this collaborative approach. These interventions highlight how shared governance can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of urban projects, ensuring they meet the community's needs and continue to provide value over time.

Today, the Hafsia public garden is safe for girls and women, mainly due to an informal governance model shared between the municipality of Tunis, the Mdinti economic interest group, and the JCI El Médina youth association. The three parties share the responsibility of designing inclusive community and urban activities at the garden on a regular basis. This initiated a systemic change in public urban space ownership and use, as women and girls feel safe to use the garden or participate in the various activities without any social or cultural discomfort.

The training centre of Sidi el Bechir responded to the demand of many interviewed women, who requested hard skills training that could help them gain economic independence. The centre closed after its inauguration because it lacked a clear vision, future plan, and governance model to ensure the efficiency and sustainability of the intervention. However, after a few months, the Municipality of Tunis partnered with the ADAM association for women's empowerment, which took over the planning and management of the training centre. This partnership nurtured an important dynamic at the centre and successful outcomes for women, who were able to start their home-based businesses after attending training.

These examples illustrate the municipality's evolving capacity to manage public spaces effectively. By being responsive to the community's needs and working in partnership with local organisations, the municipality can ensure that urban interventions remain sustainable and beneficial in the long term.

The design and implementation of physical spaces is not enough to create inclusive urban public spaces. A sustainable, systemic change in the use of public space requires a larger picture that needs to be taken into consideration, a broader perspective that encompasses a shared vision of the common good, inclusive policies, and active urban practices that engage all stakeholders.

***“Inclusive urban planning and urban governance need to go hand-in-hand to ensure urban interventions resilience and achieve aspired systemic inclusive urban use change.”***

*– Narjes Riahi, lead architect for the Municipality of Tunis*

## **RETHINKING PUBLIC SPACE**

As the demographic and socio-economic realities change, so do the use, meaning, and need of urban space. A significant urban transformation in the post-revolution Medina of Tunis is the concept of public space, which migrated from private, safe, intimate courtyards to public open space. Historically the family ecosystem used traditional home courtyards to network, produce, relax and enjoy the open space. Today, the Medina's ecosystem is mainly composed of internal migrants who travel to the capital to find jobs and better quality of life. Most residents today live in small homes, and there is a burgeoning need for public spaces to network, exchange, and integrate the community social support system.

This urban transformation has posed a social challenge for women, who lost the intimacy of their courtyard spaces, while men transitioned from courtyard activities to dominating the souks. The situation underscores the critical importance of projects like FEMMEDINA, which aim to rethink the Medina's public spaces to better accommodate and support the evolving socio-economic needs and well-being of women.

The FEMMEDINA survey outcomes also highlight the changing nature of the nuclear family, such as single old women, single mothers, and other non-traditional families who choose the Medina as a home. This further demonstrates the importance of reviewing social assistance schemes by redefining what a family is as well as rethinking public spaces and their new social use needs. It also reveals that urban solutions must follow the foundational processes of urban design, inclusive policies, and innovative governance models.

## **URBAN SAFETY FINDINGS**

Successful FEMMEDINA urban interventions enabled the city to develop a collaborative process in which all stakeholders collectively decided how to plan and manage urban areas. Positive urban governance is a sum of various methods by which individuals and institutions, both public and private, plan and manage the city's common affairs to create safe and positive communities. To ensure lasting safe spaces, the process needs to be continuous; conflicting or diverse interests arise with changing realities, challenges, and demographics. This was an important lesson of the FEMMEDINA project.

Following the FEMMEDINA assessment of women's participation in the Medina of Tunis report and the highlighted need for safer, more inclusive public space, the Municipality of Tunis joined the UN Women Safe Cities programme. Based on FEMMEDINA's methodology, the programme is being implemented in all Tunis city districts. Safe Cities focus groups were planned for young girls, women employees in government offices, and women university students to understand their specific needs in public space. The data collected will be used to design urban spaces in Tunis that take women's needs into consideration. It is important that the open dialogues continue and inclusive urban solutions become an integral part of urban policies and interventions.

***“We organised focus groups, with women from all districts of Tunis to understand how they imagine a safer city.”***

*– Sonia Saad, Municipality of Tunis*





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# CONCLUSIONS.

Urban governance systems contribute to sustainable and inclusive urban development when they unite urban policies and practices with urban interventions. Often, institutional frameworks prevent local governments from fully delivering on their responsibilities because governing practices are dissociated from urban interventions. Weak frameworks for engagement with residents, civil society, and other key stakeholders impact gender-sensitive urban planning due to the inefficient distribution of responsibilities between different stakeholders. This leads to execution gaps and negatively impacts urban intervention results.

While public space is important to everyone's physical and mental well-being, young girls in particular need a safe public space to practice autonomy. FEMMEDINA achieved this at the Hafsia garden, where youth associations led by active young women designed, fundraised, and implemented projects. By doing so, they inspire other young women to challenge and break the social perception of women as simply passers-by in public space. Girls should freely use public spaces without changing who they are; no one should have to take a longer route for safety or rush by while making oneself as invisible as possible to avoid harassment. Urban design and governance planning should take the needs of women and girls into account, and public space should be designed to embrace its use by everyone.

To amplify and sustain FEMMEDINA interventions, there is a need for continuous development of social, cultural, and economic programmes and activities that encourage women to participate in public spaces and engage the community, including both men and women, to promote the importance of public spaces for all. To maintain such a dynamic, it is crucial to collaborate with active civil society, both formally and informally. The economic challenges of public funding make public-private partnerships key to inclusive urban development and the maintenance of urban initiatives.

Youth are rarely part of the city's decision-making process. When analysing the impact of FEMMEDINA interventions two years later, however, youth, girls and boys proved to be more motivated, innovative, and persistent in positive public space governance. Girls are often designed out of urban planning, but spaces such as the Hafsia garden and Bab Souika give them hope, a sense of belonging, and a positive outlook.

Today, a few women-run micro businesses have opened along Pasha Street by renting small garages. Other streets perceived as safe for women are also seeing more and more women vendors and small business owners, mostly sandwich stands and traditional sweets. While a souk dedicated to women would be an important asset to the city, making the whole Medina safe and secure with lights at night will create the needed dynamic to allow women business owners to find their space within the Medina's traditional souks.

The FEMMEDINA process, maps, and report constitute an important exercise in gender-sensitive urban planning. The report demonstrates the gender impact on urban use, perception, and needs. The learning process benefitted municipal decision makers and served as a learning exercise for women in the Medina, who were able to see their own community limitations and how their ideas were transformed into solutions. Some worked and some did not. Nevertheless, even the interventions that did not achieve their objectives demonstrated the limitations of the city and the community and highlighted the impact of policy recommendations on urban intervention outcomes.

The process of identifying, assessing, and ensuring the sustainability of public spaces includes tangible lessons that should be noted. The training centre, which was initially located in an area with unresolved maintenance and security issues, should have been fully assessed before its establishment. Benches that were not placed in the shade revealed the necessity of considering user comfort, practical needs, and climate adaptation in urban design. Kiosks that were not sufficiently planned as long-term spaces highlighted the importance of ensuring that temporary interventions are also sustainable and effective in the long run. These lessons underscore the need for thorough planning and continuous assessment to adapt and improve urban interventions.

FEMMEDINA has set a benchmark for how to create gender-neutral urban opportunities based on honest exchange between the community, public and private sectors, and civil society. Each one has part of the solution, and together they can build a complete, more resilient city.



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