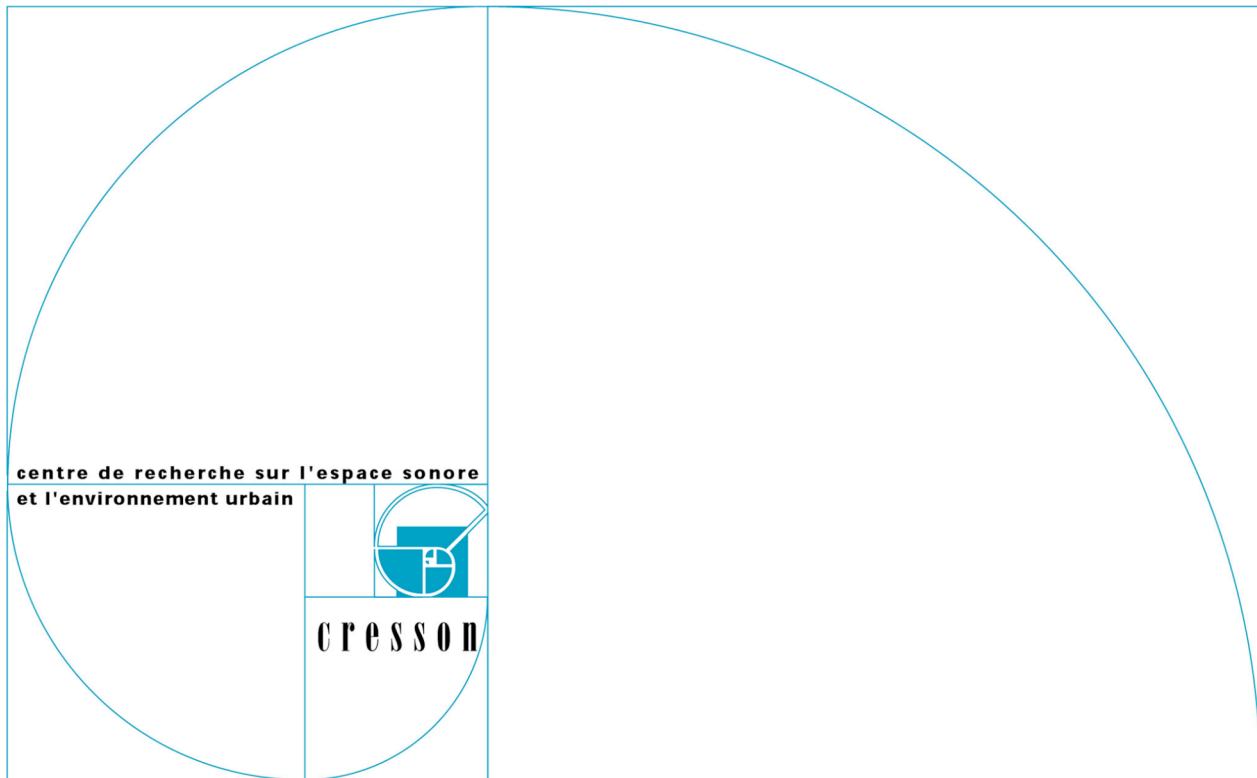


## Annexe 1



Unité Mixte de  
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### **A Regional Identity through a Railway Line : Tunis North Suburb and the TGM**

Mohsen Ben hadj salem - 2007



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Pour citer ce document :

BEN HADJ SALEM, Mohsen. **A Regional Identity Through a Railway Line : Tunis North suburb and the TGM**. In : Regional Architecture and Identity in the Age of Globalization, The Second International Conference of the Center for the study of architecture in the Arab Region, edited by Jamal Al Qawasmî, Abdesslem mahmoud, Ali Djerbi, 13-14-15 november 2007. Tunis, 2007, pp. 203-216.

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Dernière mise à jour : 2007

# **A Regional Identity Through a Railway Line: Tunis North Suburb and the TGM**

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## **Abstract**

The TGM (Tunis-Goulette-Marsa) is a railway line, which connects Tunis with Marsa and crosses Goulette district. TGM was at the origin of Tunis north extension creating the most attractive sea front suburbs of the capital. Today, a harmony loss with surrounding urban fabric is clearly perceptible. This research is an examination of railway line characteristics and the architectural specificities of its stations, from historical and contemporary points of view. More precisely, we think that Railway stations are urban entities, which knew how to generate their own temporal culture, and where it is urgent to study the “lifespan” of its identity markers. To overcome incontrollable urban development, urban designers must find new approaches to understand regional identity. On a methodological level, it is a question to sketch an identifying monograph of a space, on the one hand, by exploring its endogenous memory, and on the other hand, by focusing on contemporary uses and practical. It is a new glance on urban, architectural, and social potentialities of TGM line and stations. We emphasize the permanence or evolution of historical indices, which are continuously secreted. It is a transverse reading, which allowed creating three models categories. Their lexicon is inspired by traveller’s social imaginary and stations architectural form. This research does not only try to direct Tunisian urban developers towards the interests of railway heritage, the results sought by this investigation are supposed to instigate developers, architects and town planner’s thoughts. The goal is to propose new elements to understand the relationship between a historical architectural form, its social reception and the resulting identity.

**Keywords:** *history, identity, imaginary, railway station, suburb, traveller.*

## **1 Analyzing the City While Waiting for a Train**

Today, various scientific, cultural and political actors in all Maghreb area question the concept of regional identity. Architecture and urban planning are integrated in a global thought about areas becoming. Several scales, architectural and urban typologies are approached according to various methodologies, which translate a bulk heading of the committed disciplines. Instead of getting lost in a global and general definition of “regional identity” concept, we will focus on railway identity place in a total area identity. Indeed, following suburban railroad evolution can energize our cities representations. Geography and economy dominates the scientific researches about urban transport in all Maghreb cities. However, to consider an analysis of the scientific production relating to the city and its public transport system by disciplinary field is not very relevant. The researches concern city morphologies, or grid systems layouts, seldom the user appreciation of a service, which is intended to him. To answer to this social unconcern, urban managers are moving towards individualistic modernity, but the city cannot be analyzed by separate disciplinary layer, this is why we choose an interdisciplinary city approach.

When maritime and railway transports appeared in the colonised Maghreb area, they were mentioned only in law studies. 1910's was a period of “stations areas” multiplication, a kind of railhead places. Song-Jabeur (1996) observes that the term of “station area” evolve and evokes a complicated unit both functional and social unit in a utilitarian morphology: cart parking (quickly relayed by cars), surrounding trades, and few strangers' houses. Today, in modern cities equipped with a railway infrastructure, many public transport stations appear without any harmony with urban fabric, and others are abandoned. The capital Tunis illustrates this situation: stations, bus shelter, hiring park, etc., are not yet subject of thorough and widened thought, concerning urban and landscape management or pedestrians comfort. Therefore, the raised question concerns an urban crisis whose principal reason would be the urban traveller rejection of temporary-habitat, which is intended to him, i.e. bus shelter or railway stations. This investigation tries to develop an analytical reading of railway stations considered like a place for transition, and more particularly Tunis-Goulette-Marsa railway. The aim is to renew the one-disciplinary approaches of Tunisian public space by crossing an architectural and urban approach, a sensory approach (sound environment) and an anthropological approach, but before clarifying the crossing of these approaches, we will present the investigation area Characteristics.

## **2 The TGM: a Train “Under House Arrest” Since 1872**

The TGM (Tunis - Goulette - Marsa) is the first electrified suburban line of African continent, resulting from Tunisia colonization fights in 1870 (Information collected at National Company of Transport, SNT). Tunisian railroad goes back to 1872 (Figure 1). The first line built by English engineer

Pickering and connecting Tunis to Goulette and Marsa was inaugurated by Mohamed Sadok Bey in 1872.

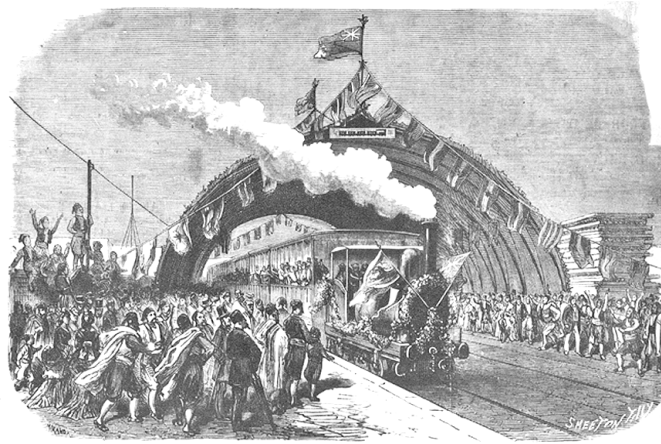


Figure 1: TGM inauguration in 1872. Smeeton-Tilly and Miranda engraving.

The researches of Lazhar-Garbi (1991) show that in 1905, T.G.M knows two great changes: line electrification, which replaces the steamy train, and the inauguration of the first direct layout through Tunis Lake. This line will bear from now on the name of TGM: Tunis-Goulette-Marsa. The direct line “Tunis-La Goulette” is built on a dam skirting the channel, which crosses Tunis Lake. It reduces Tunis-Goulette trip time from 30 to 16 minutes and that of Tunis to Carthage from 45 to 26 minutes (thanks to nearly 65 daily trains in each direction).

In fact, TGM was at the origin of Tunis north extension thus creating the best sea front suburb, but to traverse suburbs is not a trivial matter. First, at the twentieth century beginning, moving away from Tunis urban environment was a way to show richness. Second, suburbs were open spaces full of quiet gardens. Its Mediterranean sights appeared more resting. The romantic theories of the XVIIIe century were at the origin of suburbs charms: purer air, freedom of movement, less exposure to others, intimate relation to nature.

To live in an autonomy compared to city way of life, to escape from a constraining environment, from social codes, were the first suburbs resident's wishes. Today, a simple observation cancels all this reports. This aristocratic distance in suburbs is intended to who could beneficiate of a more comfortable transport such as cars. As soon as railways started to furrow suburbs (Figure 2), its refuge function is modified.



Figure 2: Actual TGM railway line layout (Google Earth image).

Chelkoff (1996) demonstrates that rail-bound transport accentuates suburbs development but marks a territory by its specific noise prints: engine whistles and steam. The sound sources calendar grows rich by new markers being added to the regular cycle of prayers calls, so commuter universe becomes exclusive to his means of transport: by stations exposure (related to visual and sound phenomena) wedged half-closed space, bearings sounds, conversations between travellers, etc.

If living out of the city was a mean to find rural environment charms, gradually, city catches up with suburban landscape and all transport connections are reconsidered. It seems that many economic and urban developers give a specific answer: the car, symbol of modernity and emancipation. In 1935, train tends to leave his place to roads and freedom feeling given by car. We notice that bus disappears since 1937 and reappears gradually in 1948 to dominate entire public transport offer in 1970 (Subway Company information's).

It is important to focus on city history, especially on the succession of the means of transports. That shows city framework elasticity, urban density changes, and inform about the possible sound environments and landscapes which followed one another.

In all Tunis territory, distances increases and pedestrian displacement become harder, suburbs become perforated; a succession of landscapes rather than a unified landscape around TGM stations (Figure 3), whose stations preserved neo-Moorish origin style with only one repair in 1979.



Figure 3: A postcard of “La Goulette” station, 1920. Victor Sarfati Ed.

In suburbs territories, urban planning becomes very dependent of massive car use. The traffic conditions, as well as the place of the train in Tunis-north society, changed well. The temporal system associated to the car is thus completely opposed to train. The departure time is not important, and car users are attentive to rush hour. Based on traffic density, Bonvalet (2001) thinks that trip duration dilates or retracts. The road refers to a softer time than rail, an elastic and irregular rhythm.

Moreover, urbanization of northern suburbs districts: Goulette, El Kram, Carthage and Marsa, result in an acclimatization to new roads networks what led to continuous additions of popular and commercial districts. The eyes and ears of suburban dwellers move away from their centenary line, and according to a railwayman testimony : “TGM myth does not exist any more but only in books, those which still take it are stripped and do not have any idea of its history”. Almost all stations were and still a crossing point created by railway and perpendicular roads. The resulting visual horizon was an open sea vista. These open vistas were also possible for travellers inside trains, but actual urban density stopped this perception.

Therefore, to carry on this investigation, we can add other arguments: urban density, landscape diversity and fast evolution, sound environment changes (bikes, popular trade, etc.), and architectural form repetition for more commercial efficiency. The following table (Table 1) presents two linked levels of historical evolution signs: atmospheres and social factors.

Table 1: Historical evolution synthesis

<b>Historical Evolution signs</b>		
<b>Atmospheres aspects</b>	-Stations exposure (wedged half-closed architectural form). -Low urban density of surrounding environment.	- Surrounding environments Narrowness. -Neighbourhood's high density because of trades.
	-Open space integrated in residential district and roads network. This open architectural form concerns also sound perception. -Hooves and carts sound predominance. -Specific train noise prints in a large territory scale. -Scarcity of others mechanical sound sources. Slow sound atmospheres rhythms.	-Suburban dwellers are not enough in contact (eyes and ears) with railway infrastructure. New urban planning disturbs visual and sound relation between dwellers and railway. -Cars noise compete with trains noise prints and are more present because it is reverberated and reflected on surrounding buildings frontages. -Sound atmospheres monotony. Mechanical sounds (bikes, cars) are continuous and mask the train except early morning.
<b>Social aspects</b>	-To escape from a constraining environment (like the capital Tunis), from social codes, were first suburbs residents wishes.	-Today, escaping the city is limited to a short time, the aim is no more to become a suburb dweller, but trains frequency imposes a return to capital social reality more quickly.

Based on this summary table, we approached more and more practices around TGM stations, so the question is how do suburban travellers perceive TGM stations? How do they appropriate these places? If the hypothesis is that social and sensory factors (only sound atmospheres perceptions are treated in this reserach) contribute to urban identities construction, it is legitimate to lean on TGM atmospheres to approach Tunis northern suburbs identity. In this direction, we carried out an urban reading of the line in order to understand its place in suburban movements, and a sensory reading to decipher the stations as a temporary-habitat. TGM stations are posed here like an architectural, social and sensory analyzer. Indeed, urban spaces considered here are architectural forms, which authorize particular perceptions that urban developer must peel if his ambition is to seize the identity of considered suburbs. To deepen these reports, we will change scale and will live close to travellers. The methodological rigour is guaranteed only by immersion in the place. However, researcher rigour does not only relate to information collection, but also to their treatment:

-Urban analysis: railway station in a total urban morphology.

-Sensory analysis: the station as producer of sound environments.

-Anthropologic analysis: the station like bond between a human being, his imaginary, culture, and his inhabited space.

### **3 Waiting at Seaside: TGM Stations Seaboard Imaginary**

The eighteen TGM trip stations are visible in the global urban space like minimal architectural shelters, delimited by grids and wire fences. This delimitation reinforces their wedged configuration and devalues their Transit function. Transit, deceleration, are like a rest in a movement ("Mahatta in Arab language"). Transition quality depends on architectural accessibility, practicing, comfort and discomfort. In order to demystify and qualify transit function, we observed and listened to TGM stations environments. On the one hand, exposure related to sound phenomena, , vistas and prospects on both sides' stations constitute supports to be contemplated or "invite to more contemplation", and on the other hand, outside activities become spectacles, screens where social and economic life scenes are projected like a mirror, or a magnet. Listening to surrounding environment can inform us about market products, without seeing them. Generally, when architect observes (he do not listen often) and analyzes such social scenes, he is diverted by its dumbness. This shelter "which does not say anything to us "would be nothing without people who use it and occupy it. In this case, we questioned travellers to collect complementary testimonies. The methodological hypothesis is that traveller's perception reflects their memory.

Suburban traveller is an inhabitant of these architectural forms whose principal function is to wait for a train. He considers them like a transit space, in which he is wrapped by sound related phenomena, but also by other travellers. Crowd is a malleable body, which adapts, compresses and organizes itself in repetitive and interchangeable space configurations. TGM stations seem like hoppers and thresholds successions. They are transitions spaces where travellers prepare to endorse new attitudes (steps deceleration, body posture, research of shade, etc.). The architectural space devices of the stations preserve traces of our practices, bodies' dilatation and frictions. Repeated observations of material traces (benches damages, footprints, scraped tree bark, etc.) generally unknown by analysts, gives sense to space independently of actors presence, i.e. inform traces about specific modes of anchoring (wear of painting on the ground by trampling, cigarette delimiting a space, etc). Rare objects distributed in the station space invite traveller to carry out a particular action (to lean on a dustbin, a bench to sit down, etc.).

In these architectural forms saturated with signs, images, sounds, Dubuisson (1997) observes that travellers suffer from confusion related to the overload of informational flows. Paradoxically, TGM stations show an opposite diagram. Absence of information other than advertising posters, reinforce the transitional dimension of the place. A desire of escape lives traveller; he acts to leave the station as soon as possible to avoid discomforts. Pezeu-Massabuau (2004) explores four discomfort levels: physical, aesthetics, sensory and social. This discomfort is initially physical: place exiguity, absence of ergonomic furniture,



constant invasion of bad weather conditions and matters disappointment. Forms and colours are simple and harmonious but too distant from traveller's aesthetic comfort. Moreover, noise invasion seems to break peace feelings. Finally, being unaware of social proximity rules ordered by such a place, commuter could not taste the joy of its hospitality. The gesture do not adapt to a space where bodies become a continuous embarrassment. In conclusion, he does not find here the dwelling place beacons that must guide its natural occupant. Therefore, for the user, it is only a provisional shelter, not a living place.

However, other forms of discomforts can explain this avoidance mechanism. Any inhabited space confers an order to social practices, which organize it in return. However, this reciprocity exerts different ways according to prevailed appropriation mode. In our case, railway stations are passages; they do not identify their users, who remain passengers. Augé (1992) develops these properties and speaks about "no-dwelling places". Temporary-habitat place or no-dwelling place, the two concepts are both present in TGM stations. Indeed, in spite of a framework felt like hostile, some travellers consider the stations their territory; they identify them as home extensions.

It is rare that traveller (accustomed or not accustomed) knows exactly the train's traffic calendar. The situation evacuates temporal problems, the statute of the station as temporary-habitat intensifies for traveller who cannot control delays. Thus, traveller made habits and repeated rites of this daily discomfort. Everyday life seems much devaluated, varied uses in a repetitive space framework. It seems that traveller is at the disposal of the station architectural form, which fails in its temporal regulating function.

To seize the setting of everyday life scenes, it is necessary to shift from classic categories. Metaphors have this heuristic virtue. They make possible the observation of a familiar universe, an exotic character through a common language. The crossing of an expert glance (architect analysis) and of an ordinary glance (ordinary testimonies) led us to highlight some ideal types. We reduced this diversity to three ideal-types, which constitute pure forms, i.e. the lock, the oasis island and the deserted island. Thus, architectural space apprehension is the result of an imaginary construction, which implies a varied cultural lexicon. The metaphors allow building ideal-types to decline different social and architectural environments.

The metaphors used concern seaboard or maritime imaginary, which emerged in all testimonies collected. We took significant fragments, which represent specific context, like for example: "[...] Each Friday evening, i wait a long time to have a ticket. In front of me, people ask for things undoubtedly complicated, or the counter clerk does not have a currency. It is a general breakdown situation, nothing happens like when I go fishing in la Goulette [...] ". Or, "[...] Even if there are many ruins in this part of the suburbs, Carthage history and Roman vestiges, but for us, suburbs inhabitants, it is only the sea which embellishes the area [...] For me TGM is the blue of the sea [...] When we leave Tunis and cross a lake, we are already at a beach [...] after, TGM crosses the suburbs and arrives

at Marsa-Beach, and it is still a seafront district [...]". The change in social perception relates to train significance. It is not only for poor people to move to rich places, but also to move from a heavy built architecture towards its natural blue-coloured suburbs environment. The metaphors chosen in a maritime lexicon: the lock, the oasis island and the deserted island, allow the construction of a divided universe. By their common membership to a marine universe, these metaphors can dialogue.

The lock station is a place of meeting, a dynamic place, dense and noisy. It is a crossroads place where intense sound, even light (day and night-time visual experience), and olfactive phenomena stimulate customer. Trade are present in this environment structure, maintain a proximity place, networks of urban sociability. The "Kram" station illustrates this category. In the three metaphorical models developed in this investigation, movement pattern corresponds to four levels of analysis: sociability models, density, time management, and occupied surface. The purpose is to illustrate and represent space-sharing manners.

In this first case (Figure 4), pattern is a delimited form, which suggests an exclusion or inclusion decided unconsciously by travellers. The movement defines at the same time a place and a collective act. The particular dialogue between architectural form and the social action, which it generates, defines the identity.

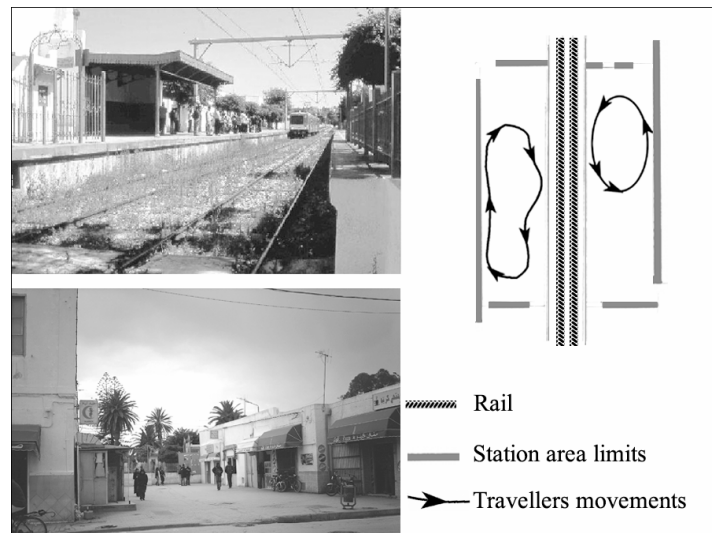


Figure 4: "El Kram" station. (Author's photographs).

The lock stations have a nostalgic thing in their definition, they return to a hot and emotional community. They constitute a criticism of modernity and techniques, which dehumanize social relations. Even if built limits are permeable, human occupation is unaware of this characteristic. The lock is a small centred community. This category shows an urban fragment in harmony with its occupants; a city where habitant would not be cleaved any more, parcelled out in its identity by a space which would bring simply a functional response to its needs ; a public space which would give him a place to live and would be built especially for him.

The stations are integrated as a urban whole, and continue to evolve on themselves. Travellers do not perceive them as functional spaces delimited by clearly marked borders with urban or residential contiguous spaces.

The oasis island is rich in services and peddlers, a virgin environment away from density, well illustrated by “Carthage Salammbô” station (Figure 5). Inside the oasis, traveller finds a quite place, a place where he can put down his bags and breath. The oasis marks a border with outside, a bubble form.

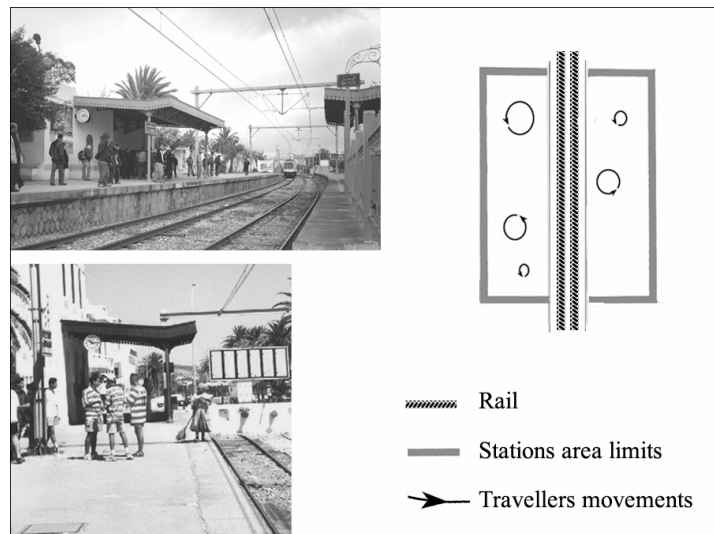


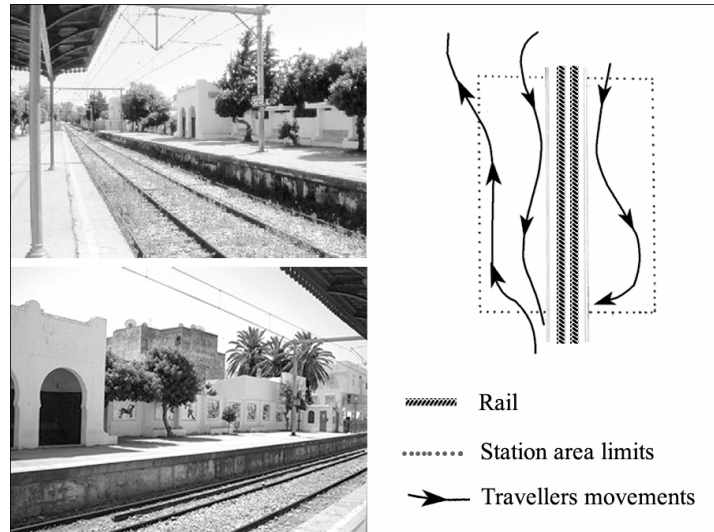
Figure 5: “Carthage Salammbô” station. (Author’s photographs).

The oasis is one-second skin, which wraps traveller. The differences between the oasis and the lock stations are borders permeability and the absence of membership feeling in the oasis island, so it cannot federate a local community. In this case, the pattern shows another way of occupying the station. The groups of travellers are not compact any more. They remain grouped until train arrival

(generally schoolchildren from the same district), and they do not wait a long time.

The deserted island is a disqualified environment, low in services and isolated from urban services. The stations, which belong to this category, are the first in TGM trip, like for example “Tunis marine”, “Le bac”, “Khereddine” or “Aéroport” (Figure 6). Here, uses and practical show a collective abandon a full overflowing dustbin, an uprooted tree for more than a week, vats arranged to embellish the stations invaded by grasses. The city gleam reinforces insecurity feelings. Abandon is also perceptible in traveller’s body postures, in their isolation.

Compared to the oasis, the deserted island has no interior. It is completely open and exposed to weather conditions: rain, wind, and heat. Sound atmosphere is rhythmic and foreseeable (low density of sound sources). The movement pattern introduces continuity and fluidity. Here, there are no more limits, no more exclusion or inclusion feeling; travellers must fill environment interstices because the deserted island cannot draw protective borders. The nocturne atmosphere of the deserted island increases traveller’s vulnerability feeling who are not sheltered anymore. In general, unconscious practices guide travellers independently of architectural layout. These categories show the links between space framework, its limits, proportions, architectural atmospheres, and user’s social practice.



Therefore, the three image-types attributed to the stations sketch the crossed suburbs identity. The main idea concerns the bond found between two scales: the reflection of maritime images of outside the stations (coastal landscape) in their inside (blue colours, palm-trees, and travellers social culture).

#### **4 TGM Stations Units: Regional Identity Relay**

The investigations carried out tries to give an original view of TGM railway line in a regional identity which seems to be conditioned by social and cultural traveller's characteristics. We notice also a complicated urbanity model linked to suburbs geographical particularities: seafront districts. The TGM stations are a part in the suburbs geography of which they reflect a specific aspect: coastal suburbs traversed by a railway line. They are active in regional identity production by constituting another imaginary universe far away from Western European railway imaginary (high speed trains, technological supremacy), even from the Middle East one, i.e. religious imaginary such as the Hedjaz Line connecting Damas to Medina (since 1908), whose objective was to reduce Moslem pilgrims trip duration.

TGM stations here obey to models extremely far away from traditional station sense: starting point for movements from residential district to other districts. On the contrary, their current statute shows that they are usual, regular, central, dense, integrated into urban rhythms, inserted in a generalized traffic space, which blurred their cultural and historical value. The historical evolution transformed stations to simple crossing points, immobilized in a slow adaptation. Even if travellers and suburban districts urban planning have changed, TGM and its stations are still there. The identity was grounded according to a maritime imaginary which is still present: train that allows escaping city to go to the sea. Today, TGM railway line suffers from arbitrary urban development stifling impact, it makes its identity more fragile, and it is due only to blue colour and some palm trees.

In addition, we notice that TGM railway line and its stations are part of a large colonial architectural heritage, but contrary to other buildings of this heritage, we can qualify them as "no-heritage". Hartog (2003) describes this heritage "on standby of recognition" as a hypertrophied conscience of the past. However, in our case, imaginary dimension in our city apprehension can make TGM a part of our heritage. Indeed, it is pretext to original design in which new interdisciplinary knowledge will be requested. Therefore, the social imaginary is an index to approach urban memories. Currently, even if there are no inciting policy for heritage management, concerned urban developers should exceed economic durability point of view. It is urgent to intervene simultaneously on four dimensions: cultural, aesthetic, technical, and particularly on their layout clarity. The anthropological approach identifies specific practices and atmospheres within an inherited architectural framework. It reveals a retentive social imaginary represented by the coastal environment and obviously, stations that keep the traces. Moreover, Railway infrastructure is a natural size laboratory

where we observe different social reactions to architectural environment, and submissive to a long methodological tradition: urban ecology, anthropology, social imaginary, sociology, semiology, many approaches were applied and invented. Methods' crossing tested here engages original cuttings of the research object and allows the development of new categories analysis. From this point of view, urban space is not an evident and autonomic research object, but it gives a diversity of approaches, which define it in return. Beyond a space anthropology discipline which confined in its "human" territory, immersed research engages a fundamental resumption of interdisciplinary architectural theory and practice characters, it facilitate the recognition of interdependences between built form, perceived form, and represented form. A negotiation between several actors could define it as the privileged place for the transition between multiple temporalities and mobilities, respecting a common and shared identity. It is not relevant to renew railroad stations quality if we neglect their social impact on a regional scale. An essential question is to choose the right railway station architectural model that reinforces contemporary ideology. Sound atmospheres can help architects to propose more comfortable stations but also more coherent with their architectural and social identity. To control sound atmosphere make more harmonious the links between an architectural form and its occupants: it is the fundamental role of the architect. The relation between railway traveller and architect concerns the use by one of the space organized by the other. Therefore, good quality railway stations could exalt asserted metropolitan modernity.

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