



Reviving the *Real* Morocco?: A Comparative Legal Analysis of Riad Restoration and Preservation in Fes and Marrakech

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Abstract

This paper examines the tensions between architectural preservation and urban progress by studying the role of the riad in the Moroccan tourism industry. Riads are houses built in the traditional Moroccan courtyard style and are often restored to be guesthouses. The option of staying at a riad guesthouse instead of a hotel is increasingly popular with tourists, creating a boom in the purchase and restoration of riads. Because riads can be historic buildings, transforming them into guesthouses presents conflicting goals: on the one hand saving their historic architecture, and on the other updating them to meet tourists' expectations. The paper considers how this problem has played out in two different cities, Fes and Marrakech.

Because the Fes city government enforces UNESCO World Heritage Site regulations in the Fes medina, significant restrictions exist on the restoration of historic buildings. ADER-Fes, a government organization, also has the goal of modernizing the medina while retaining its character. Consequently, a greater percentage of riads in Fes are operated by Moroccans and the architectural features of the buildings are better preserved. This paper proposes that the Moroccan government help to fund this often expensive preservationist approach by imposing a tourist surcharge.

In Marrakech, in contrast, no government restrictions on the restoration of riads exist and the market is dominated by foreign owners. The influx of foreign funds is



desirable because it creates jobs, and the Marrakech government has encouraged this trend by simplifying legal processes for foreigners. This paper suggests that Marrakech continue to support legal reforms that simplify riad ownership for foreigners, but also consider promoting preservation efforts through an organization similar to ADER-Fes.

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