

Towards The Integration Of Landscape Quality In Urban Programming And Design: The Case Of The Sablettes Coastal Promenade In Algiers

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Abstract

This article examines how landscape quality can be effectively integrated into urban programming and design processes. It argues that ensuring continuity between these two phases (through collaborative and cross-disciplinary work among project stakeholders) is essential for achieving sustainable urban and landscape quality.

The research develops an operational evaluation grid that translates landscape quality into a set of criteria applicable to urban project practice. The methodology is based on semi-structured photo-elicitation interviews conducted with key institutional actors (project owners and project designers). This approach makes it possible to analyse programming and design logics while assessing the degree to which landscape quality is incorporated into each phase.

Applied to the Sablettes coastal promenade in Algiers, the method highlights gaps and tensions between programming and design, as well as opportunities for improved coordination. The study ultimately proposes a reflective and operational framework that strengthens dialogue between actors and disciplines, contributing to renewed urban project practices centred on landscape quality.

Keywords: *Landscape Quality; Urban Programming; Urban Design; Coastal Urban landscapes; Sablettes Promenade (Algiers); Multicriteria Evaluation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General Context

Contemporary transformations of coastal urban territories highlight the growing importance of landscape as a lever for urban development. Long regarded as an essentially aesthetic dimension, landscape is now recognized as a vector of coherence, sustainability and quality of life (Corner, 1999; Waldheim, 2016). In this perspective, the quality of coastal urban landscapes has emerged as a central issue for articulating territorial attractiveness, resilience and identity.

Yet, its integration into the concrete processes of urban programming and design remains insufficiently explored. Scientific literature reveals a persistent disconnect between programmatic intentions (reflecting strategic and regulatory objectives) and design choices, which carry uses, forms and sensitive values (Carmona, 2019; Davodeau, 2020). This separation weakens the continuity of the urban project and undermines the operationalization of landscape ambitions.

Several authors have theorized the integrated logic of urban projects, emphasizing the importance of linking all phases of spatial production. Raynaud and Wolff (2009) describe urban design as resting on three complementary dimensions: the intentional act of programming, which defines the project's initial intent and strategic orientations; the intentional act of spatial development, which transforms these intentions into concrete forms, uses and spatial arrangements; and the intentional act of reception, reflected in how users appropriate the project through their practices, perceptions and satisfaction.

Similarly, Avitabile (2005) identifies three inseparable components of the urban project: the programme, which sets strategic content and expected outcomes; the prefiguration phase, which encompasses functional, landscape and technical design; and the implementation process, during which initial ambitions take shape through coordinated actions and timelines.

Despite their distinct theoretical frameworks, both perspectives converge on one principle: the need for interdisciplinary and process-based coherence throughout the project. Together, they highlight that the quality of the urban living environment emerges from continuous alignment between programmatic intentions, spatial design and the social reception of the project.

1.2. The Algerian Context: Emerging Interest but Still Limited Tools

In Algeria, the issue of landscape is gradually gaining importance within planning and urban development policies, notably through emblematic projects such as the redevelopment of Algiers Bay and the recent sustainable urban development strategies. These initiatives reflect an effort to integrate the landscape dimension into planning practices, primarily through landscape insertion, the creation of green spaces, and the enhancement of urban vegetation.

However, these approaches remain partial and weakly structured. The methodological and regulatory tools needed to ensure effective and lasting consideration of landscape issues are still limited. The absence of an operational definition of landscape and urban landscape, as well as the lack of landscape evaluation indicators, significantly reduces the effectiveness of public policies (Azzouzi & Harkat, 2019). Likewise, Law No. 90-29 of December 1, 1990 (1), relating to planning and urban development, grants landscape only a secondary role, often reduced to an aesthetic function.

Trodi and Donadieu (2024) emphasize that urban projects in Algiers have long prioritized functional imperatives to the detriment of landscape considerations, reflecting a weak landscape culture within urban planning practices.

The reflection on landscape quality in Algiers thus unfolds within a context of rapid urban growth and profound territorial transformations, intensified by recent coastal development projects. These changes, combined with ecological and social challenges, highlight the need for a more sensitive and sustainable approach to urban planning; one that goes beyond global aesthetic considerations to construct a typological understanding of urban landscape quality.

1.3. Research Problem

Despite growing recognition of landscape as a key component of contemporary urban production, the tools intended to guide and regulate its integration (such as landscape charters, design guidelines or evaluation frameworks) remain largely absent, fragmented or insufficiently operationalized. This institutional and methodological gap restricts the effective incorporation of landscape quality into urban policies, particularly in coastal projects where ecological, social and aesthetic issues intersect with high levels of complexity.

In Algeria, these challenges are particularly evident in Algiers Bay, an emblematic territory shaped by successive transformations, rapid urbanisation and a recent reconquest of its waterfront. The Sablettes coastal promenade, developed within the broader programme for the redevelopment of Algiers Bay, offers a privileged site for examining these issues. It constitutes a concrete laboratory for observing how urban landscape quality may emerge (or, conversely, become diluted) depending on the tools employed, the professional cultures mobilised and the interactions among actors.

Although Algiers Bay and the Sablettes promenade have been extensively studied from urban, landscape, ecological and architectural perspectives, the question of urban landscape quality, understood as a structuring component of programming and design processes, remains insufficiently explored.

This research therefore seeks to address this gap by examining how landscape quality is integrated (or overlooked) throughout the different phases of the urban project, from programmatic intentions to their spatial and perceptual translation.

1.4. Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this research is to understand and evaluate the conditions under which landscape quality can be integrated into the urban project process, using the Sablettes coastal promenade in Algiers as a case study. More specifically, the study seeks to identify the logics, tools and practices used by project owners and project managers; assess the degree to which landscape quality criteria are incorporated into programming and design; and propose an operational analytical method to enhance future project practices.

Two central questions guide the investigation: to what extent can landscape quality be effectively integrated into urban programming and design processes, and how can this integration be translated and assessed through criteria shared among project stakeholders?

These questions reflect a process-oriented understanding of the urban project, conceived not as a linear sequence of technical steps but as an evolving dynamic of collective construction. The project operates as a system in motion, shaped by continual back-and-forth interactions between intention and action, design and experimentation. As Le Pessec (2014) argues, the process is a *movement toward*, constantly questioning *what to do?* and *how to do it?* while adjusting intentions and practices.

In this perspective, the article proposes a renewed view of urban project processes by placing landscape quality at the core, treating it as a structuring lever for action and sustainability. Landscape quality is understood not as a purely aesthetic indicator but as an integrating principle capable of articulating the ecological, social and symbolic dimensions of the project. The method developed operationalizes this notion by translating it into concrete analytical and evaluative tools. It relies on a multicriteria framework designed to measure coherence between initial intentions (programmatic, strategic or conceptual) and their tangible translation into urban form, spatial composition and landscape design. In doing so, the approach aims to bridge the gap often observed between discourses on quality and its effective implementation, offering a method that is both analytical and operational.

1.5. Research Hypotheses

We formulate the hypothesis that the effective integration of landscape quality into the urban project depends on three essential and complementary factors:

- *Condition 1:* Equipping local actors with appropriate tools (landscape charters, criteria grids, methodological guidelines) in order to structure and harmonize evaluation and design approaches.
- *Condition 2:* Strengthening project culture around landscape quality at all scales of intervention (from urban planning to urban design).
- *Condition 3:* Ensuring continuous articulation between the programming and design phases so that landscape quality becomes embedded throughout the project process, rather than remaining a punctual objective or a purely formal intention.

These hypotheses express a desire to move beyond a sectoral vision of planning and instead promote an integrated project culture based on dialogue between disciplines and on coherence between strategic vision and spatial materialization.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Quality of the Coastal Urban Landscape: A Rich, Complex and Evolving Concept

The urban landscape is a multidimensional object situated at the intersection of what is perceived, lived and designed. It can be understood through the legibility and imageability of the city (Lynch, 1960), through the existential and phenomenological experience of places (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976), and through its social and cultural construction shaped by representations, uses and everyday practices (Berque, 1995; Corajoud, 2010; Donadieu, 1998). In other words, the urban landscape is not reducible to a visual composition: it constitutes a dynamic system of interactions between the materiality of the built environment, sensory experience, and project intentions (Clément, 2004; Paquot, 2015), bringing together aesthetic, ecological and social dimensions at the heart of the contemporary city (Bertrand, 2002; Luginbühl, 2012).

From this perspective, landscape quality does not stem solely from form or design but from a lived and shared experience. As Roncayolo (1983) notes, *landscape is a matter of the relationship between a gaze and an object*; its quality depends above all on the way the environment is perceived; a perception shaped by cultural, social and historical frameworks (Berque, 1995; Luginbühl, 2012; Donadieu, 1998). It results from a dynamic interplay between forms, uses and representations, rather than from any universal aesthetic standard.

Davodeau (2020) emphasizes that landscape quality emerges from a continuous and collective learning process: programming defines values and intentions; design translates them into spatial arrangements and atmospheres; and reception (through residents' practices and perceptions) confirms, adjusts or reinterprets these choices.

2.2. Simplifying the Complexity of the Notion of Landscape Quality

The notion of coastal urban landscape quality relies on a rich set of theoretical foundations. Corajoud (2010) describes the coastline as a nature–culture interface where sensory perception plays a key role in shaping projects. Donadieu (2006) highlights the interplay of ecological, social and symbolic values that collectively generate meaning and well-being, while Berque (2000), through the concept of *médiance*, explains the co-construction between humans and their environment. Davodeau (2021) views landscape quality as a collective and reflexive process, and Luginbühl (2022), drawing on his contribution to the European Landscape Convention (Council of Europe, 2000), frames landscape as a complex system linking physical forms, perceptions and social responsibility. Together, these perspectives provide the theoretical basis for transforming landscape complexity into observable and assessable dimensions.

Building on this foundation, several authors have worked to operationalize landscape quality through analytical tools. Luginbühl (2012) associates quality with measurable objectives derived from perception, use and social value; Poullaouec-Gonidec (2013) proposes an integrated approach connecting aesthetic, ecological and cultural aspects; and CERTU (2007) along with CEREMA (2010) have developed multicriteria frameworks combining typomorphological, socio-functional and techno-environmental dimensions, as well as criteria related to ambience, legibility and appropriation. These contributions resonate with international references such as the Landscape Character Assessment (Countryside Agency & Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002), the Project for Public Spaces (2000; 2005), and CABE's Place Quality Framework (2003). Together, they seek to link sensory experience, morphological coherence, environmental performance and social vitality within actionable tools for design and management.

Building on this body of work, the research develops a synthesis grid tailored to coastal urban landscapes. Designed to maintain the richness of the concept while making it operational, the grid is structured around five complementary dimensions: (1) morphological, spatial and urban; (2) aesthetic and perceptual; (3) ecological and environmental; (4) social, identity-related and functional; and (5) governance and sustainability. Each criterion is tied to observable and evaluable elements. Used both qualitatively and quantitatively, the grid serves as the methodological basis for analysing the Sablettes Promenade, assessing the degree to which landscape quality criteria were integrated into programming and design, and testing its relevance as a diagnostic and decision-support tool.

Table 01: Summary: Criteria for Analysing Coastal Urban Landscape Quality, Source: CHATER.H

Analysis Dimension	Landscape Quality Criterion
1. Morphological, Spatial and Urban Dimension	C1. Integration into the urban context
	C2. Connectivity and continuity
	C3. Architectural typology and formal coherence
	C4. Typology of spaces (private/public)
	C5. Spatial organization (calm, active)
	C6. Coherence of the layout and interventions
	C7. Built/void ratio (urban breathing/porosity)
	C8. Legibility and fluidity of the layout
	C9. Legibility of entrances
	C10. Human scale
2. Aesthetic and Perceptual Dimension	C11. Landscape composition
	C12. Visual openness
	C13. Landscape landmarks
	C14. Quality of ambiances
	C15. Temporality and animation
	C16. Sense of place / place identity
3. Ecological and Environmental Dimension	C17. Integration of nature (landscape insertion: sea, mountains, etc.)
	C18. Climate change adaptation
	C19. Biodiversity and vegetation cover
	C20. Sustainable management (waste, water, energy...)
4. Social, Identity-Based and Functional Dimension	C21. Accessibility
	C22. Social mix
	C23. Diversity of uses and functional mix
	C24. Heritage enhancement
	C25. Walkability and soft mobility
	C26. Safety and user comfort
5. Governance and Sustainability Dimension	C27. Evolvability / adaptability
	C28. Technical and technological innovation
	C29. Governance and citizen participation
	C30. Economic development and tourist attractiveness

By transforming a notion that is often abstract and multifaceted into a concrete tool for reading and interpreting projects, this approach aims to guide actors toward a better integration of landscape quality

within project processes, while simultaneously strengthening landscape culture within contemporary urban production.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overall Methodological Framework

This research adopts a *qualitative and inductive* approach aimed at understanding how the notion of landscape quality is conceived, translated and integrated within urban programming and design processes. This epistemological stance is rooted in the tradition of qualitative inquiry as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), who describe qualitative research as an interpretive framework through which the meanings actors attribute to their practices can be grasped. It also draws on the inductive logic outlined by Paillé and Mucchielli (2012), in which analytical categories emerge progressively through engagement with the field.

Adopting a *comprehensive and interpretative* perspective, the study privileges the analysis of actors' discourses, representations and professional practices rather than the quantification of phenomena. This orientation builds on Schutz's (1970) emphasis on understanding subjective meanings, as well as Kaufmann's (1996) methodological contributions to the comprehensive interview, which provides privileged access to the internal logics of actors. In line with this stance, *semi-structured interviews* were selected as the primary method of investigation, as they make it possible to explore the rationalities, intentions, constraints and decision-making mechanisms shaping both programming and design phases.

The analytical framework relies on a *multicriteria interpretative grid* developed from the theoretical foundations of the research, including the literature review, international case studies and professional references. This grid is adapted to the specific context of the case study and operationalized through a rating scale that assesses the degree to which each criterion is integrated into the project processes by the actors involved. Within this methodological perspective, *photo-elicitation* was incorporated as a complementary investigative tool, as it enables the articulation of visual observation with reflective expression, thereby enriching the dialogue between the researcher and the actors and deepening the understanding of the project process.

The overall objective is to qualitatively assess the coherence between programmatic intentions and their spatial translation, drawing on the perspectives and experiential insights of the actors who contributed to shaping the project. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how landscape quality is mobilised, interpreted and integrated (or, in some cases, overlooked) throughout the unfolding of the urban project process.

3.2. Selection and Justification of the Case Study

Figure 01 situates the study area by showing the geographical location of Algeria, its capital Algiers, Algiers Bay and the Sablettes Promenade. Algeria lies in North Africa, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Tunisia and Libya to the east, Niger and Mali to the south, and Morocco to the west. Algiers occupies a coastal position on the southern Mediterranean shore. Algiers Bay forms an emblematic corridor where urban, port and landscape dynamics intersect, while the Sablettes Promenade, located on the bay's eastern side, constitutes a key site for analysing coastal urban landscape quality.



Figure 01: Location of Algeria, the capital Algiers, and Algiers Bay. Source: Map compilation and processing by the author

3.2.1. Historical Genesis of Algiers Bay

The evolution of Algiers Bay reflects the continuous transformation of a coastal territory shaped by successive political, cultural and economic layers. Each historical period has left its imprint on the city's morphology, its relationship with the shoreline, and the development dynamics of the capital.

From the fortified Ottoman city to the contemporary metropolis, the bay appears as an urban palimpsest, revealing both the mutations of national urbanization and the successive reconfigurations of the relationship between the city and the sea.

As Hakimi (2011) notes, *to understand Algiers is to read the layers of its urban history, where the sea remains both a constraint and the horizon of the metropolitan project.*

In this perspective, Algiers Bay constitutes an emblematic space where the different temporalities of urban production can be read in both hollow and relief.

The table below provides a synthetic and diachronic overview of the main stages in the formation of Algiers Bay, highlighting the planning logics, spatial transformations and their effects on the coastal landscape.

Table 02: Diachronic Synthesis of the Urban Genesis of Algiers Bay, Source: CHATER.H

Historical Period	Political and Socio-Economic Context	Dominant Urban Logics	Major Spatial Transformations	Effects on the Coastal Landscape	Key References
Ottoman period (before 1830)	Capital of the Regency of Algiers; military port and commercial centre oriented toward the Mediterranean.	Defensive and port-based logic; organic urbanization around the Casbah.	Dense and fortified city; narrow streets; self-built fabric.	Coastline perceived as a strategic area, not accessible to the public.	Bensalem (2002), Ben Hamida (2015), Chérif (2010).
Colonial period (1830–1962)	French domination; desire to modernize and Westernize the waterfront.	Expansion logic and staging of colonial power.	Partial demolition of the lower Casbah; creation of a Haussmann-style waterfront and modern infrastructures.	Transformation of the maritime landscape into an urban showcase; spatial segregation between the European city and the indigenous medina.	Hakimi (2011), Çelik (1997).
Post-independence (1962–1980)	National reconstruction and state-led industrialization under centralized governance.	Functional planning logic and peripheral development.	Implementation of the SDAU (1975–1985); creation of industrial hubs.	Imbalance between the waterfront and the hinterland; limited attention to the coastal landscape.	Soualah (1983), Kessal (2001).
Contemporary metropolitan era (1980–present)	Rapid and diffuse urbanization; economic liberalization; new metropolitan projects.	Logic of sustainability and waterfront redevelopment.	Disorderly urban expansion followed by waterfront requalification.	Attempts at urban and ecological reconnection: Sablettes Promenade project and enhancement of the bay.	Mokhtari (2012), Hadjri (2020).

3.2.2. Recent Urban Policies and Sustainability Challenges in Algiers

Since the 2000s, urban policies in Algeria have expressed a clear ambition to reconnect Algiers with its coastline and to restore the historical relationship between the city and its bay. Building on the PDAU and the PDUA, the Strategic Development Plan 2035 proposes an integrated vision aimed at making Algiers a sustainable, attractive and resilient metropolis by reconciling urban growth, environmental preservation and landscape enhancement.

Within this framework, several major projects have been undertaken to redevelop the waterfront: the Sablettes Promenade, the renovation of the western corniche, the requalification of the port area, and the development of the Oued El Harrach. These interventions embody the objectives of the PSDA by linking urban modernization, ecological restoration and coastal enhancement.

The overall redevelopment project for Algiers Bay, designed by the Arte Charpentier agency in 2007, represents a major milestone in this dynamic. Organized according to the *string of pearls* principle, it envisions the bay as a sequence of continuous public spaces connecting various hubs of attraction, each endowed with significant symbolic value in the recomposition of the waterfront (Figure 02).



Figure 02: Redevelopment Concept for Algiers Bay, *String of Pearls* Principle. Source: contracting company MEDITRAM.

3.2.3. The Sablettes Promenade Project within the Redevelopment of Algiers Bay

Located at the heart of the bay, the Sablettes Promenade occupies a strategic and pivotal position in the structuring and development of Algiers' waterfront. It represents one of the key components of the broader coastal reconquest project, aimed at reconnecting the city with the sea and providing new public spaces with ecological, recreational and cultural functions (Figure 03).



Figure 03: Coherence diagram of the Algiers Bay development project. Source: Vies de Villes, 2012.

The Sablettes Promenade is the first section to have been developed and opened to the public between 2014 and 2015. It unfolds along a strategic coastal corridor, bounded to the south by Highway No. 11, to

the north by the Mediterranean Sea, to the west by the seawater desalination plant, and to the east by the mouth of the Oued El Harrach (Figure 04).



Figure 04: Delimitation and Spatial Context of the Study Area, Sablettes Promenade. Source: Photo/map compilation Chater.H

Before its development, the Sablettes area appeared as a severely degraded coastal wasteland. Interviews with key project stakeholders confirm an initial state characterized by the accumulation of waste, the presence of wastewater, abandoned industrial and military sites, and a deep physical and visual rupture between Algiers and its coastline. This site illustrated the historical discontinuity between the city and its waterfront, inherited from the colonial period and further accentuated by the uncontrolled urbanization that followed independence.

The redevelopment of the Sablettes constitutes a pilot project within a national strategy for coastal reconquest. It aims to restore urban and landscape continuity between the city and the sea, provide new public spaces for leisure and recreation, and reinforce the ecological and identity value of Algiers' waterfront.

Thus, a formerly isolated, polluted and underused area (yet endowed with significant coastal potential) has been transformed into an open, welcoming and accessible promenade, reaffirming the centrality of the coastline within the metropolitan fabric.

3.3. Research Methods: A Qualitative Approach Based on Semi-Structured Interviews and Photo-Elicitation

This research adopts a qualitative and inductive approach aimed at understanding how landscape quality is conceived, interpreted and integrated within urban programming and design processes. Semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation were combined to explore the intentions, values and decision-making logics mobilised by the stakeholders of the Sablettes Promenade project.

3.3.1. Rationale for Using Semi-Structured Interviews and Photo-Elicitation

Semi-structured interviews offer a flexible yet rigorous framework for examining the implicit dimensions that guide programming and design—such as institutional rationalities, technical constraints and the translation of landscape values into spatial choices. They allow actors to explain their intentions, justify their decisions and reflect on the negotiations and trade-offs involved in the project.

Photo-elicitation, originally developed in ethnography (Harper, 2002), complements the interviews by using images as cognitive and sensory mediators. In this research, it stimulates reflection, supports the verbalisation of landscape perceptions, and reveals symbolic, operational and decision-making dynamics that often remain implicit in verbal discourse alone (Luginbühl, 2012; Donadieu, 2009). Together, these two methods enrich the dialogue with actors and deepen the understanding of the project process.

3.3.2. Relevance for Urban and Landscape Design Research

In the context of urban and landscape design, the combined use of interviews and photo-elicitation makes it possible to analyse the project both as a spatial artefact and as the product of institutional, technical and procedural dynamics. This approach helps identify:

- The rationales driving the programming phase,
- The conceptual and operational references informing design choices,
- And the ways ecological, aesthetic and social considerations are negotiated throughout the project.

By providing a space for reflexive and visually supported discussion, these methods clarify how project values are translated (or diluted) in the spatial outcome, and how landscape quality criteria are integrated within the overall process.

3.3.3. Application to the Case Study: Interview Protocol and Analytical Framework

The empirical investigation is based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders of the Sablettes Promenade project: the project owner and the project designer/manager. Interviews were conducted in their respective institutions on *13 April, 29 May and 2 July 2025*. Each interview followed two complementary stages:

1. **Open discussion:** Participants described the project intentions, the programming and design phases, the constraints they faced, and the negotiations and decisions that shaped the development of the coastal promenade.
2. **Evaluation of landscape quality criteria within the two processes:** Actors were invited to assess the degree to which each landscape quality criterion (C1–C30) was taken into account in:
 - the programming process (MOA perspective),
 - and the design process (MOE perspective).

This dual reading makes it possible to compare two complementary dimensions of landscape quality:

- **Programmed quality**, linked to the initial intentions, strategic orientations and requirements formulated by the project owner;
- **Designed quality**, corresponding to the spatial, aesthetic and technical choices made by the designers during project development.

The intersection of these two perspectives provides a nuanced understanding of how landscape quality was integrated throughout the project, from initial conceptualisation to spatial materialisation. This qualitative approach clarifies the coherence (or potential discrepancies) between programming intentions and design outcomes, offering an analytical framework that bridges theory and practice in landscape and urban project evaluation.

4. RESULTS: Understanding the Project Process of the Sablettes Coastal Urban Promenade

4.1. General Logic of the Project Programming

The interviews conducted with project owners (MOA) and project designers/managers (MOE) show that the Sablettes urban promenade is part of an integrated programming approach derived from the broader redevelopment project of Algiers Bay. Initiated in the early 2000s and reinforced by the 2006 revision of the PDAU, this dynamic affirms the need to reconnect the city with its coastline and enhance its coastal spaces.

The strategic planning phase, based on territorial diagnostics, defined three major axes: ensuring continuity along the coastal linear stretch, promoting soft mobility, and enhancing recreational and ecological spaces. These orientations laid the foundations for a comprehensive plan to enhance the waterfront, structured around several pilot projects, including the Sablettes promenade; an emblematic operation within the coastal reconquest strategy.

The project provides for the restructuring of the esplanade and the creation of various public facilities, complemented by commercial and tourist amenities designed to strengthen the attractiveness of the waterfront (Figure 05).



Figure 05: Redevelopment Plan of the Sablettes Promenade – Location of Facilities and Urban Spaces. Source: Construction company and photo montage by Chater.H

4.2. Institutional Actors and Operational Framework

The Sablettes Promenade project was initiated by the Wilaya of Algiers and implemented through a *gré à gré* contract. This procedure refers to a direct award mechanism in which the project owner selects the company without a public call for tenders; generally used for projects with strategic importance, urgent implementation needs, or specific technical requirements.

Project ownership (MOA) was ensured by the Directorate of Public Works (DTP) of the Wilaya of Algiers, while project management (MOE) was entrusted to the Maritime Studies Laboratory (LEM), responsible for technical coordination and the design of coastal developments.

Project execution was carried out by the Mediterranean Maritime Works Company (MEDITRAM), specialized in coastal and maritime engineering works.

The Arte Charpentier group, winner of the 2007 international competition, provided the overall urban vision for the broader redevelopment project of Algiers Bay.

4.3. Design Process: Spatial and Landscape Principles

Interviews conducted with project stakeholders indicate that the design of the Sablettes Promenade underwent numerous adjustments. These successive revisions (linked to the site's technical constraints, the requirements of Algerian coastal legislation, and the coordination among several consulting firms) explain why the process did not follow a linear trajectory nor fully align with the initial planning orientations. This insight from the interviews highlights the project's complexity and the need for continuous arbitration to ensure coherence and feasibility.

However, an interview with the architect who contributed to the drafting of the project's descriptive report provided a clearer and more coherent understanding of the overall design process. According to him, despite the diversity of actors involved and the successive adjustments, the conceptual structure of the project remained consistent with three complementary guiding axes (ecological, urban and socio-cultural) which informed all design decisions.

These three orientations served as the guiding framework, ensuring a degree of coherence between the initial programmatic intentions and their concrete translation into the materiality of the promenade's landscape.

Axis 1 –Ecological: Depollute, Renaturalize and Enhance the Coastline

The first axis of the project, with an ecological orientation, focused on the environmental requalification of the Sablettes site, formerly considered one of the most degraded sectors of the Algiers coastline. Previously occupied by industrial and military facilities, the site displayed polluted soil and a significant ecological rupture between the city and the sea.

The approach adopted sought to restore natural balances by integrating principles of urban sustainability. Interventions included soil depollution, shoreline stabilization against marine erosion, and the renaturalization of the surroundings through the planting of locally adapted species.

The project designers describe this approach as an *ecology applied to the city*, emphasizing its influence on technical and aesthetic choices. MEDITRAM, the company responsible for the works, even regards the Sablettes Promenade as a pioneering project in ecological requalification in Algeria. This experience marks a shift in coastal development practices, where nature becomes a genuine living infrastructure serving urban sustainability.



Figure 06: Photos of Ecological Depollution of the Site During Construction (Source: Project Construction Company MEDITRAM).

Axis 2 –Urban: Reconnecting the City and the Sea

The second axis of the project, with a predominantly urban focus, aims to restore the physical and visual continuity between Algiers and its coastline, a connection long disrupted by industrial, military and road

infrastructures. The Sablettes Promenade thus represents an operation of urban and landscape reconnection, giving the capital a structured and continuous access to the sea.

The design is based on the creation of a hierarchical coastal linear organized into three complementary zones.

In the east, Zone 1 forms the gateway to the site, structured around cultural and recreational facilities and facilitating the transition between the dense city and the shoreline.

In the centre, Zone 2 constitutes the heart of the promenade: a large esplanade open to the sea, punctuated by pedestrian and cycling paths, viewpoints, and planted areas.

In the west, Zone 3 extends the promenade toward the port areas, hosting leisure, commercial and tourist activities that enhance its attractiveness.

Together, these three sequences form a continuous and structuring public space designed to sustainably reconnect Algiers with its waterfront.



Figure 7: illustrates the spatial structure of the promenade, organized into three complementary zones. Source: map and plan montage produced by the author

From a morphological standpoint, the project's design established a clear hierarchy of circulation, prioritizing the pedestrian promenade, continuous cycling lanes, and limited automobile access in order to ensure safety and fluidity. Emphasis was also placed on enhancing panoramas and visual perspectives between the city and the sea, offering a continuous perception of the coastal landscape.

Thus, the Sablettes Promenade is not merely a linear development but a genuine strategic urban infrastructure, intended to reconnect Algiers with its bay and to reinforce the coherence of its public-space system, while restoring the sea to a central role in the metropolitan dynamic.

Axis 3 –Social and Cultural: Creating an Inclusive and Identity-Bearing Public Space

This axis aims to design a place of encounter and exchange, fostering social diversity and the collective reappropriation of the coastline. The objective is to strengthen the sense of belonging to the city while highlighting local cultural expressions.

These three axes (ecological, urban and social) reflect an integrated vision of landscape quality, in which the project becomes ecological in its foundations, urban in its structure, and cultural in its appropriation.



Figure 8: A selection of photographs of the Sablettes Promenade taken in 2025. Source :author and documentary video material

4.4. Cross-Analysis: Level of Integration of Landscape Quality Criteria

The cross-analysis of interviews and the evaluation grid makes it possible to assess, criterion by criterion, how landscape quality was integrated between the programming and design phases. The evaluation relies on an interpretative scale from 0 to 4, used not as a quantitative measure but as an indicator of coherence between the two processes.

This analysis reveals five major trends:

- **An ambitious but partially translated programming phase**, characterized by a strong strategic vision but limited development of certain dimensions such as temporality, adaptability, or participation.
- **A design phase that is more advanced in terms of uses and sensory experience**, offering better integration of ambience, user comfort, visual openness and walkability.
- **A gap between ecological ambitions and outcomes**, as technical constraints limited the implementation of biodiversity and coastal nature objectives.
- **Persistent limitations in governance and sustainability**, linked to the institutional framework and the absence of participatory approaches.
- **A notable convergence on social and functional dimensions**, which were largely considered in both phases, reflecting a shared intention to provide an accessible, inclusive and attractive public space.

4.5. Comparative Evaluation of Landscape Quality in the Two Processes

The evaluation highlights significant differences in the way landscape quality criteria are integrated into the Programming and Design processes. The results, synthesised in Table 3, reveal contrasting patterns of integration across the morphological, ecological, social and governance dimensions.

Table 3: Summary of the Evaluation of the Degree of Integration of Landscape Quality Criteria in Programming and Design

Analytical Grid		Evaluation by project stakeholder (1-5)	
Analysis dimension	Landscape quality criteria	Level of integration of the criteria in the Programming process	Level of integration of the criteria in the Design process
1. Morphological, Spatial and Urban Dimension	C1. Integration into the urban context	4	3
	C2. Connectivity and continuity	3	4
	C3. Architectural typology and formal coherence	2	3
	C4. Typology of spaces (private/public)	3	4
	C5. Spatial organization (calm, active)	3	3
	C6. Coherence of the layout and interventions	3	4
	C7. Built/void ratio (urban breathing/porosity)	2	3
	C8. Legibility and fluidity of the layout	4	5
	C9. Legibility of entrances	5	4
2. Aesthetic and Perceptual Dimension	C10. Human scale	2	5
	C11. Landscape composition	3	3
	C12. Visual openness	3	4
	C13. Landscape landmarks	2	3

	C14. Quality of ambiances	3	4
3. Ecological and Environmental Dimension	C15. Temporality and animation	4	4
	C16. Sense of place / place identity	3	2
	C17. Integration of nature (landscape insertion: sea, mountains, etc.)	4	5
	C18. Climate change adaptation	4	3
4. Social, Identity-Based and Functional Dimension	C19. Biodiversity and vegetation cover	2	3
	C20. Sustainable management (waste, water, energy...)	2	3
	C21. Accessibility	5	5
	C22. Social mix	3	3
	C23. Diversity of uses and functional mix	5	5
	C24. Heritage enhancement	1	1
	C25. Walkability and soft mobility	5	5
5. Governance and Sustainability Dimension	C26. Safety and user comfort	4	4
	C27. Evolvability / adaptability	2	4
	C28. Technical and technological innovation	2	3
	C29. Governance and citizen participation	1	1
	C30. Economic development and tourist attractiveness	4	3

- **Programming demonstrates stronger performance in strategic and organisational criteria**
The programming phase shows higher integration levels for criteria related to the overall structuring of the project, such as integration into the urban context (C1), legibility of entrances (C9) and climate change adaptation (C18). It also reaches high values for temporality and animation (C15) and for operational objectives linked to uses, including safety and user comfort (C26). Overall, this suggests that the project owner (MOA) established a clear strategic framework at the early stages, although some dimensions remain weakly formalised (e.g., governance and heritage).
- **The design process strengthens spatial experience, readability and perceptual quality**
The design phase achieves higher scores for criteria associated with spatial experience and perceptual quality, including connectivity and continuity (C2), coherence of layout and interventions (C6), built/void ratio and porosity (C7), and especially legibility and fluidity of the layout (C8). A similar tendency appears in the aesthetic-perceptual dimension, where human scale (C10), visual openness (C12), landscape landmarks (C13) and quality of ambiances (C14) score higher in design than in programming. These results indicate that the project designers (MOE) enhanced the lived and perceptual quality of the promenade, particularly through spatial organisation and experiential legibility.
- **Ecological and environmental criteria are only moderately integrated in both processes**
Ecological criteria do not show a strong “ambition gap” between the two processes in this updated

evaluation. Biodiversity and vegetation cover (C19) remains low in both programming and design (2/3), and sustainable management (C20) is limited in programming (2) and only moderately improved in design (3). In contrast, climate change adaptation (C18) is relatively strong in programming (4) but decreases in design (3), suggesting that adaptation intentions are not fully translated into concrete design solutions, or remain less visible in design outputs.

- **Governance, participation and heritage display the lowest levels of integration**
The lowest integration levels concern heritage enhancement (C24) and governance and citizen participation (C29), both rated 1 in programming and design. This points to a structural weakness of participatory and heritage-oriented approaches within the project's governance framework, consistent with a technically driven delivery process.
- **Strong convergence on inclusion, functionality and user-oriented performance**
Despite discrepancies in other dimensions, programming and design converge strongly on inclusive and functional objectives. Accessibility (C21) reaches the highest level in both phases (5/5), while diversity of uses and functional mix (C23) (5/5), walkability and soft mobility (C25) (5/5) and safety and user comfort (C26) (4/4) remain consistently high. This convergence reflects a shared priority on accessibility, functional richness and user safety in the development of the coastal promenade.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Sablettes case shows that although landscape quality occupies a central place in the initial intentions, it is not consistently integrated throughout the project process. The programming phase presents an ambitious vision of coastal reconquest and improvement of the living environment, yet certain dimensions (particularly ecological, adaptive and governance-related aspects) tend to weaken during the design phase. This situation highlights the lack of methodological and institutional tools capable of structuring the systematic consideration of landscape issues.

The study also reveals a project culture that remains largely sectorial, where interdisciplinary collaborations are limited to technical adjustments rather than genuine collective co-construction. Despite these limitations, the design phase manages to reinforce several essential aspects (such as ambiances, human scale and user comfort) demonstrating the designers' capacity to reinterpret and enrich the initial orientations.

Moreover, the case study underscores that landscape quality is an evolving process rather than a fixed result. Its consolidation depends on the capacity to strengthen methodological tools, broaden governance structures and promote more interdisciplinary approaches to coastal urban projects. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the development of a true landscape-oriented project culture requires sustained coordination across actors and a long-term commitment to integrating landscape quality throughout all phases of project development.

6. CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine the conditions that enable the effective integration of landscape quality into urban programming and design processes, using the Sablettes coastal promenade as a case study. Through a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews and a multi-criteria evaluation grid, the study analysed in detail how programmatic intentions are translated (or not) into the materiality of the project, revealing actors' logics, trade-offs and underlying constraints.

Overall, the results confirm the three initial hypotheses.

First, the study highlights the absence of sufficiently formalized methodological tools to guide the integration of landscape quality during the programming phase. The lack of clear frameworks, indicators or design charters largely explains the discrepancies observed between initial ambitions and their concrete implementation. Landscape quality remains an asserted objective, but one that is still difficult to operationalize without appropriate instruments.

Second, the findings show that the project culture related to landscape remains partially sectorial. Although stakeholders acknowledge its strategic importance, collaboration between disciplines (engineering, planning, architecture, landscape design) often remains limited to occasional technical coordination rather than true co-construction. This observation validates the second hypothesis: improving the integration of landscape issues requires strengthening institutional landscape culture and developing genuine interdisciplinary platforms for exchange.

Third, the study reveals an incomplete articulation between programming and design. While the initial ambitions constitute a strong foundation, their translation is largely shaped by technical constraints,

procurement mechanisms and iterative adjustments throughout the project. Nevertheless, the design team successfully reinterpreted certain orientations to deliver a coherent and appropriable public space, confirming the third hypothesis: continuity between programming and design is possible, but it relies on tools, dialogue mechanisms and process stability that still need to be consolidated.

Three key lessons emerge from this work.

First, landscape quality is not a spontaneous outcome; it results from a long, collective and adaptive process shaped by actors, governance structures and methodological tools.

Second, the Sablettes project marks an important milestone in the emergence of a landscape culture within Algerian urban planning practices, signalling a shift in the way coastal territories are perceived and developed.

Finally, the case shows that meaningful integration of landscape quality is achievable, even in contexts marked by fragmented governance, limited participation and partially operationalized ecological ambitions.

In sum, integrating landscape quality into coastal urban projects represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Despite current limitations, the Sablettes case demonstrates that landscape can become a genuine guiding thread of the project. The lessons drawn here invite practitioners to strengthen methodological tools, consolidate collaborative practices and ensure greater continuity between project phases. In this regard, the proposed approach may offer a relevant framework for guiding future coastal and metropolitan projects, positioning landscape quality as a lever for sustainability, attractiveness and innovation.

NOTE:

(1) Law No. 90-29 of 1 December 1990 is an Algerian law that establishes the general rules governing land development, the formation and transformation of the built environment, the organization of urbanizable production, and spatial management. Its aim is to promote efficient land use, ensure a balance between different functions (housing, agriculture, industry), and protect the environment. Its provisions notably concern building permits and urban planning certificates.

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