



FEMMEDINA - WOMEN IN THE CITY

An assessment of women's participation
in the Medina of Tunis



The **Femmedina** project, launched by the municipality of Tunis with the support of the Cities Alliance and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is an initiative aiming to create safer public spaces that respond to the needs of women in the city of Tunis, in order to enhance their economic, political, social and cultural participation in the public life of the city and, in particular, in the districts of **Medina Centrale, Bab Souika, Bab Bhar, and Sidi el Bechir**.



Perceptive boundaries

The maps produced in this report mainly focus on the perceptible boundaries as perceived by the women throughout the process. They do not necessarily reflect the actual administrative boundaries.

This publication is based on a full report accessible via this QR code



Consulting firms: Beyond Group and BlueFish

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“I love the Medina in its positive and negative aspects and will never forget my memories there. It is my family, and it is where everyone is welcoming and makes you feel safe and comfortable. Only if we work to make it better, safer, and more welcoming so all people, women, men, elderly, and children can enjoy it as our own without fear”
- Salma, 19 years old, resident of Medina Centrale

© Stephen Downes



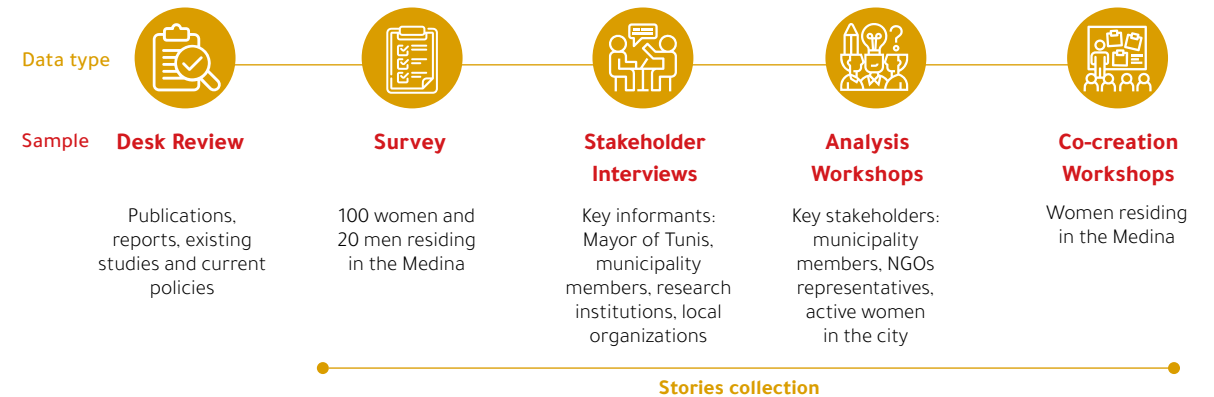
200
Women engaged



5
Co-design sessions

As part of Femmedina’s first phase, a participatory research looked into **key hindrances** and enablers of women’s participation in the Medina. The proposed recommendations were designed in collaboration with Women from the Medina, which explored long-term and medium-term **policy and planning recommendations**, as well as short-term **spatial and physical interventions** in public spaces that respond to current challenges.

FEMMEDINA METHODOLOGY



KEY HINDRANCES AND ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MEDINA

Despite the initiatives that the municipality of Tunis is working on, the Medina's women still face multiple challenges hindering their social, political, cultural, and economic participation. Enablers and challenges to women's effective engagement stem from the city's physical features, residents' cultural perceptions and social norms, local economic and social realities, and discriminatory legal frameworks and institutional practices. Below are the key identified factors that facilitate or hinders women's participation in communal life:



Women's participation in public service

55%

INS, National population and employment survey, 2007



Total number of firms that are either managed or co-owned by women

2%

World Bank, Enterprise Surveys database, 2016

Bab Souika



14,722

19.58%

Bab Bhar



16,982

13.43%

Medina Centrale



10.272

20%

Sidi el Bechir



14.060

19.59%

Number of women in Medina

% women unemployed



TUNIS: A travers le Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat 2014. (2014). Retrieved from http://www.ins.tn/sites/default/files/1_TUNIS-1_0.pdf



SOCIAL

- › Despite the municipality's effort to revitalize parts of the Medina, the street conditions and incidents of violence and crime remain a concern affecting women's sense of safety in the Medina.
- › Women do not feel safe in the Medina particularly at night.
- › Incidents of sexual harassment occur at times in the Medina, but they remain rare given the strong social ties connecting residents of the neighborhood.
- › Women feel more comfortable meeting in enclosed spaces, rather than in public ones.



CULTURAL

- › Funding and support for cultural programs and activities are not necessarily inclusive of women in the Medina.
- › Women find it difficult to access and use the cultural spaces available in the Medina.
- › Cultural events give women a sense of belonging to the neighborhood, but they are not always tailored to the local context.
- › Women's social status and family background play a key role in their ability to create support networks, and giving them access to opportunities



POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL

- › Despite the increase of women's presence in politics, women's participation in the political sphere remains limited and is often considered as a necessary formality to comply with legal quotas.
- › Women in politics face tremendous resistance and criticism, and need to have a lot of resilience to continue in this path.
- › Opportunities, education, and habit often push women away from politics, especially when dire economic conditions shift their priorities towards securing their livelihoods.
- › Women have more chances to occupy leadership roles in civil society than in institutional and formal politics.
- › Women reported a low level of trust in public authorities, and stated that their opinions and demands often remain unheard.



ECONOMIC

- › Women in the Medina are resourceful and hardworking. Yet, job opportunities are scarce, and they find difficulties in attaining economic independence.
- › Working women face gender-based discrimination limiting their professional development opportunities.
- › Women entrepreneurs face difficulties related to the men-dominated market, the inadequacy of support, and cultural perceptions, which hinder their ability to start and grow their businesses.
- › Training and business support opportunities are scarce and rarely meet women's needs.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed recommendations were designed in collaboration with women living and working in the Medina, which together with Steering Committee appointed by the Municipality of Tunis explored long, medium and short-term policy and planning recommendations, as well as spatial and physical interventions in public spaces that respond to current challenges. These recommendations are aimed at guiding and informing future investments to enhance women's social, cultural, political, institutional, and economic engagement in the area through a series of:

- › Policy Interventions on a national or local level including regulatory changes and reforms,
- › Programmatic Interventions including programs, activities, and events that could be implemented by local authorities, NGOs, and other institutions individually or through partnerships,
- › Spatial and urban Interventions in particular locations responding to the needs and interests of women in the Medina.

The proposed recommendations include:

- › Adopting a quota for women-led projects in public procurement.
- › Reviewing social assistance schemes to decenter the nuclear family as the basis for assistance.
- › Extending opening hours of cultural centers and public libraries in the Medina for women to use them in the afternoon and on weekends.
- › Enhancing and equipping public spaces to become safer for women and more enabling for their social engagement and participation.
- › Strengthening the role of cultural centers to better provide cultural opportunities for women through introducing new programs.
- › Establishing professional committees for women across different professions.
- › Offering adequate support services to women entrepreneurs, such as coaching, feasibility studies, and market linkages.
- › Mainstreaming municipal kindergartens offering reduced rates and on-site childcare services for employees.
- › Establishing a legal facility and support services for women to identify, document, and report discrimination in employment and workplace harassment, and to receive the necessary psychological support.

The spatial interventions focus on reconfiguring and designing available public spaces within the Medina to account for women's identified needs. Each intervention is designed to match women's interests, and account for the suggestions co-designed with women in the Medina and the municipality of Tunis, while connecting the intervention location to its surroundings.

- › Introducing spaces and functions for women to spend time in open green spaces through designating areas that cater to their interests.
- › Conceiving spaces that encourage women to conduct multiple activities whether work-related or recreational within a safe environment.
- › Creating a space that empowers women through artisanal market dedicated to display their work



Before



After

The following proposed interventions will be implemented as part of the Femmedina project in the coming months.

The Hive, off Rue de la Hafsia in Medina Centrale, aims to create a work and leisure hub for young women to have their own space to work, study, socialize, and relax in a quiet environment. The intervention is also designed to engage women through cultural activities and events to be organized in the space.

A **Hidden Park** will be installed near Rue de Tresor and Rue Troubet el Bey. The proposed intervention encourages women living in the neighborhood to use this micro green space as a resting area, and a space for recreational activities.

Women's safe haven is a spatial intervention to be implemented right off Rue Bab Saadoun, next to the Bab Souika municipal building. This intervention will create a women-only green open space that allows women to meet, do sports, work on projects together, and take their children out to play.



Before



After



Before



After

Place Bab Souika will host **The Hub**, a spatial intervention complimenting the municipality's current renovation project, to make the space more inclusive for women, and more conducive to their economic, social, and cultural participation. The intervention will allow women to display and sell their work, and to participate in the public square's social and cultural events.



Before

After

The **Green Escape** intervention will be implemented in the Parc du Passage, to encourage women to make use of the space, by introducing women-designated recreational gardens, a shaded working space, an outdoor library, a workout space, and additional children's playgrounds.



Before

After

Rue Sidi El Bechir will host the **Learning Hub**, a training center providing women with opportunities to socialize, develop new skills, improve their employability prospects, and produce and sell artisanal work.



Before

After





Cultural Heritage Trail

This cultural heritage trail is one of the proposed spatial interventions that highlights not only the existing cultural and historic structures that the Medina is known for, but also the contribution of women to the Medina's history, its current cultural life, and its economy.

Women in the Medina's history and culture

- 1 Princess Atf, founder of the Al Haoua Mosque
- 2 Aziza Othmana, the Medina's first social entrepreneur
- 3 Saida Mannoubia, an early feminist icon
- 4 Lalla Kalthoum, the fierce princess
- 5 Sayyida Aajooula, the Sufi Saint
- 6 Women in the chachia trade
- 7 Bab Bnet
- 8 Souk el Nisa

To read the stories of women in the Medina's history, turn the page

Women-Owned business



Scan this QR code for a list of women's business in the Medina

Women Friendly Spaces

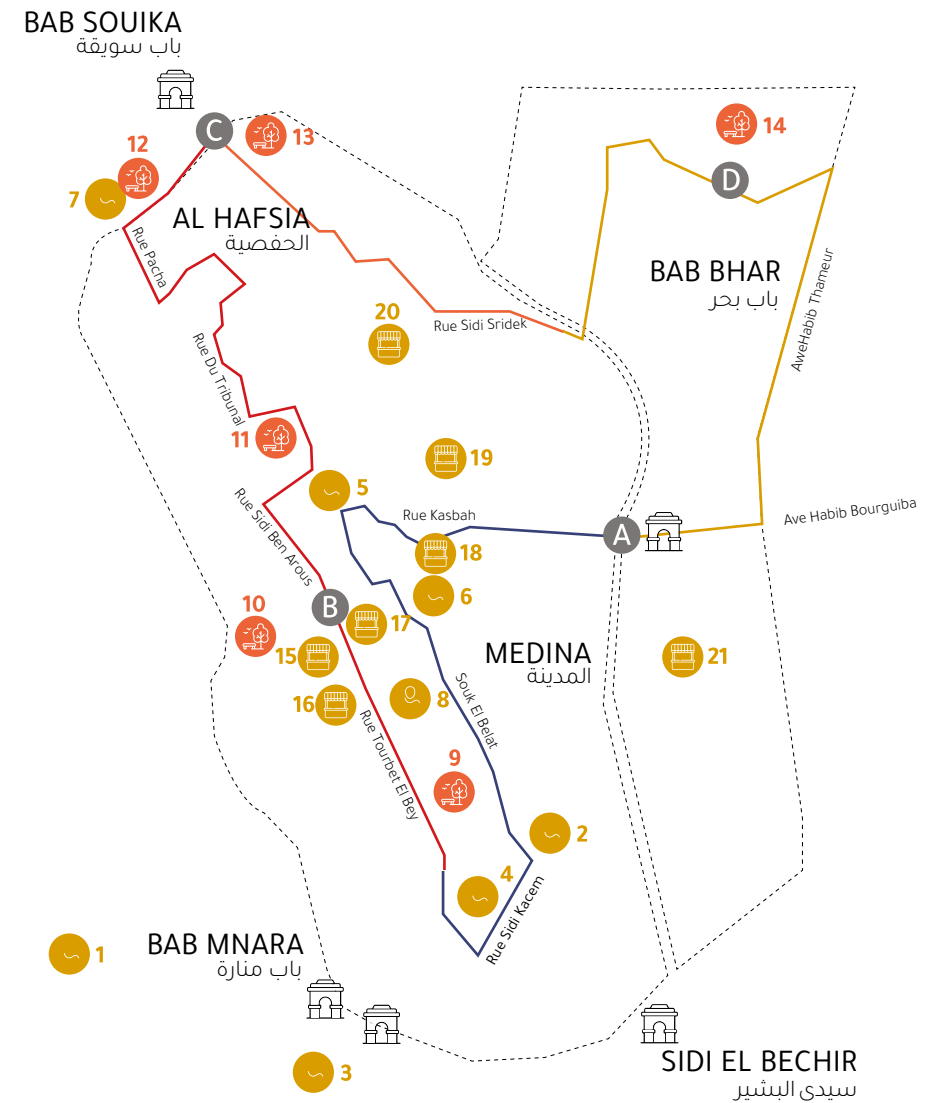
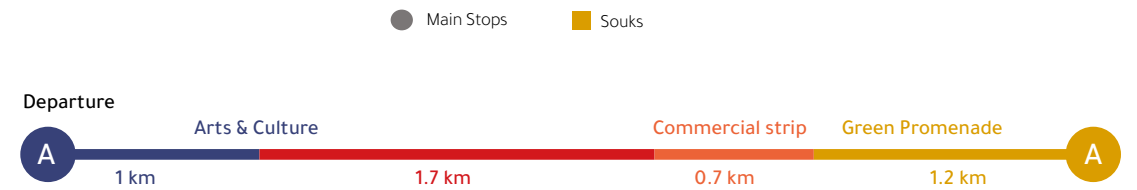
- 9 Hidden Park
- 10 Place du Gouvernement
- 11 «The Hive»: Work Hub for Women
- 12 «The Co-hive»: Women and Student Park
- 13 «The Hub»: Cultural and Commercial Park
- 14 Green Escape: Parc de Passage HabibThameur

Kiosks

Souks

- 15 Souk El Shaweshin
- 16 Souk El Berka
- 17 Souk El Attarine
- 18 Souk Turc
- 19 Souk El Grana
- 20 Hafs'a Flea Market
- 21 Bab Bhar Central Market

Main points of attraction along the trail



Women in the Medina's History and Culture

1 Princess Atf, founder of the Al Haoua Mosque

Born in the city of Galida in Spain, Princess Atf was brought to Tunis as a prisoner, and offered to the Hafsid Sultan Aby Zakariya Yahya as a gift. She converted to Islam and married the Sultan who had founded Hafsid dynasty that ruled Tunisia, Western Libya, and Eastern Algeria between 1229 and 1574.

The Haisids first princess played a crucial role in developing the Medina's urban character, as she built Al Haoua Mosque (for mosque of the wind) along with its El Medrase el Tawfikia in 1252. The mosque as named for its cool weather given its elevated position on a hill. Al Haoua mosque, which exemplifies the architecture of the 13th century Medina was renovated in the 18th and 20th century and is currently open to visitors in Maakal el Zaim Square.



2 Aziza Othmana, the Medina's first social entrepreneur

Aziza Othmana was a Tunisian princess born in 1606 in a family of military leaders. She was privileged compared to Tunisia women of the time, to receive formal education in humanities, civics and the Quran. Othmana was socially engaged and known for being a compassionate and generous princess. At a young age, Othmana challenged social norms especially when she freed her slaves and later established a fund to support them. Throughout her life, she funded charitable projects, such as bailing prisoners, and buying slaves only to free them. She also contributed to improving the urban space, as she installed lighting in the Medina's streets. Aziza Othmana dedicated her wealth in her will to the Medina's residents, whereby she allocated all revenues from her properties to benefit the community. Her most celebrated deed remains financing a hospital serving the Medina, which was later renamed Aziza Othmana Hospital in 1960. Some would argue that she was Tunisia's first social entrepreneur. Dar Othman, the palace in which she grew up, is open to visitors.



3 Saida Mannoubia, an early feminist icon

Aisha Manoubia, also known as Saida Manoubia, was born in 1180 to a conservative rural family. Her father taught her religious studies which she was keenly interested in. Aisha fled her parent's house after she became aware of plans to marry her off to a relative. She moved to Tunis and started sewing there to support herself financially. Saida Manoubia pursued her studies in Sufism in the Medina, even though education was only allowed to foreign and royal women at the time, and she thus paved the way for a subsequent generation of Tunisian women who followed a similar path. She also challenged other social norms, as she left her home unaccompanied and engaged in discussions with men. While more conservative clerics originally shunned her, she soon gained prominence within scholarly circles, as she was granted access to men-only prayer spaces, and eventually became a Sufi saint. Saida Manoubia was also known for her social engagement. She helped women in her community both spiritually and financially, and advocated for their rights. Given her bold unprecedented actions for a woman in the 12th century Tunisia, she gained a reputation for being a revolutionary woman, and a feminist icon. After her death, several locations were named after her, including a neighborhood in the western suburbs of Tunis and one of the Medina's old souks.

4 Lalla Kalthoum, the fierce princess

The legend tells the story of a fierce princess who saved her beloved husband from death in 1839. Princess Lalla Kalthoum, the daughter of Moustapha Bey, was married to Moustapha Khaznadar, the then minister of France, who later became the Grand Vizir of Tunis. Khaznadar surprised the Medina's residents during Eid when he offered his wife, Lalla Kalthoum, a carriage, making her the first woman to own one. When the grand vizir fell out of the monarch Sadok Bey, the latter sent soldiers to execute him. Princess Lalla Kalthoum hid her husband in her private chambers and uncovered her hair, as it was forbidden for men to force the entry out of her Helfaouine palace. Following the incident, Sadok Bey rescinded his execution order, and banished the vizir instead. After Lalla Kalthoum died, she was buried in the princesses' room of the Royal Mausoleum of Tourbet el Bey. Being of non-royal descent, her husband Khaznadar was buried next to the window outside her burial room.

5 Sayyida Aajoula, the Sufi Saint

Very few streets in the Medina carry the names of women, and the Sayyida Aajoula street is one of those. Born under the name Hawaa Bent Abd el Rahman el Qabsi, Sayyida Aajoula was one of the city's Sufi saints. She lived between the 15th and 16th century and was venerated by the Medina's residents as a holy figure. The saint gained her nickname, Aajoula, which literally translates to «in a hurry» in Arabic, because poor residents rushed to run their errands early on the days where they planned to visit her and ask for her blessings. The saint's old house, Da' Sayyida Aajoula, and a mosque carrying her name as well can still be seen on the Sayyida Aajoula Street which lies at the heart of the Medina's souks.

6 Women in the chachia trade

The chachia, a little red hat popular in North Africa, was once a great source of wealth for the Medina. The traditional hat is exported to neighboring countries, including Libya, Algeria, Morocco, and Nigeria. Women artisans play a crucial role in making chachias doing crochet for long hours in their houses. While their work is central to preserving the Medina's cultural heritage, they rarely take a forefront role in selling their artisanal products. Their husbands and fathers run the shops in the prestigious souk el chawachin on Ben arcus Street, and stamp the hats with their own names as brands.



7 Bab Bnet

The Girls Gate, was one of the Medina's five gates during the 13th century. It was named after a palace built in the area to the house three princesses whose father, Abu Zakariya Yahya, had just died.

8 Souk El Nisa

The women's market was a souk dedicated to women who used to buy and sell women's clothing and products. The souks specialization disappeared with time, as products of interest to women can now be found all over the souk.



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An assessment of women's
participation in the Medina
of Tunis

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