

# Spatial-Economic Effects of Structuring Projects in New City of Ali Mendjeli, Constantine (Algeria): "Ritaj Mall" as a Case Study

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## Abstract

Trade has long played an essential role in organising cities and territories, with its infrastructure representing a significant component of urban planning. Algeria, a North African state, aims to develop its towns and regions through commerce, translating this ambition into commercial infrastructure on local, regional, and super-regional scales in most cities, especially Algiers, Oran, Sétif, and Constantine. In the new city of Ali Mendjeli, 20 km from Constantine, the 2016 opening of the "Ritaj Mall" shopping centre generated unprecedented structuring effects economic, spatial, and symbolic-influencing city dynamics and attractiveness. This study used descriptive analysis to analyse the mall's structuring socio-economic effects on multiple spatial scales. Historical and survey methods (observation, interviews, and questionnaires analysed with SPSS 21) revealed effects concerning the mall's role in local urbanisation, commercial offer, imposed centrality, attractiveness, and national commercial landscape position. Despite lacking coordinated planning, the mall exemplifies a structuring project producing beneficial effects. Findings conceptually expand structuring project effects and practically inform integrating commercial infrastructure into urban planning.

**Keywords:** structuring effects, projects, the new city of Ali Mendjeli, shopping mall, urban planning.

## 1. Introduction

It is well-established in urban scholarship that cities have increasingly oriented towards the tertiary sector for decades, especially new and emerging cities, to confront the challenges of globalisation and bolster attractiveness (Coulondre, 2016). Shopping centres, as major commercial infrastructure, have been integrated as anchor structuring projects within urban planning strategies, serving as vital catalysts for augmenting the magnetism of cities. The strategic prioritisation of shopping centres represents a prevailing trend in urban governance due to their perceived potential to accelerate economic growth, reinvigorate public spaces, and broadcast municipal dynamism and competitiveness on broader geographical scales. However, the efficacy of shopping centres as bespoke structuring projects remains contingent on contextual factors, including their responsiveness to local commercial ecologies, geographic fit with spatial networks, and calibration to community preferences. Careful elucidation of how shopping centres interact with their situational idiosyncrasies can enrich scholarly and practical understanding of their potentials and limitations as dedicated structuring projects implanted to realise targeted planning agendas.

In the Algerian context, the transition from a socialist to a market-based economy initiated in 1990 reverberated through the commercial infrastructure of its cities. As the country opened to global trade, Western-style shopping centres emerged, with the 2010 debut of the Bab Ezzouar Mall<sup>1</sup> in Algiers signalling this shift. The new city of Ali Mendjeli, located 20 km from Constantine, had been strictly residential until the 2000s when the state began approving developer-driven shopping centres to stimulate economic growth. Several complexes materialised, including El Ritaj, La Coupole, and Sans Visa (Belguidoum, 2021), leading to the flagship 2016 opening of Ritaj Mall as the first regional-scale shopping centre serving the Constantine metro area.

The advent of Ritaj Mall disrupted Ali Mendjeli's urban dynamics and yielded socio-economic impacts rippling through surrounding infrastructure, mobility flows, and settlement patterns. An interdependent nexus of commercial and residential projects crystalised in the area, implicitly validating Ritaj Mall's structuring role. This paper explores whether Ritaj Mall constitutes an intentional structuring project from the vantage of the new city, examining its concrete effects and the factors potentially magnifying them. The mall represents a salient test case to probe shopping centres' potential as anchors reshaping emerging cities in Algeria and beyond. While

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<sup>1</sup> This is the first commercial and leisure center in Algeria, inaugurated on August 5, 2010, located in the new business city of Bab Ezzouar. [Source: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/193872/archives-thematique/Carton>]

unplanned in Ali Mendjeli's initial programming, Ritaj Mall's positioning, offerings, and modern aesthetic have de facto cultivated new urban centralities and flows. Findings will enrich conceptual principles on shopping centres' structuring possibilities and limitations to inform strategies on better incorporating commercial infrastructure into new city development.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This section reviews studies on structuring projects, shopping centres as structuring projects, and their implementation in new cities to establish key concepts for this study.

### 2.1. Structuring Projects

Structuring projects are strategic interventions perceived as catalysing more comprehensive socioeconomic benefits beyond their immediate locale (Spiga & Guessoum, 2012). As defined by the Domaine-du-Roy Regional County Municipality (2022)<sup>2</sup>, structuring projects "*provide significant added value to the community, have appreciable development/growth potential, [and] generate structuring benefits socially, culturally, economically.*" (p. 3). Urban projects like commercial infrastructure are often designed intentionally as structuring projects that can attract investment and reshape regional economies. Their multidimensional objectives include raising living standards, improving quality of life, stimulating the living environment, and enabling multifunctional development across sectors like agriculture, forestry, culture, health, education, and housing (Territorial Development Fund, 2019)<sup>3</sup>. When embedded in development policies and strategies, structuring projects can produce considerable, even unanticipated, effects.

Scholars categorise two essential structuring project effects (Courcier, 2003). Planned, deterministic effects align with policy ambitions to catalyse economic restructuring, spatial transformations, and symbolic impacts. Additional emergent, conditional effects involve capitalising on contingencies and synergies among local actors and conditions. This conceptual duality emphasises that structuring projects involves intended goals and unpredictable interactions with contextual factors.

### 2.2. Shopping Centres as Structuring Projects

The inception of shopping centres can be traced back to the 20th century in the United States, from where they proliferated to various corners of the globe. Defined as complexes with at least 20 stores totalling over 5,000 sq. meters of retail space by the National Council of Shopping

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<sup>2</sup> Le Domaine-du-Roy is a regional county municipality (MRC) in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region of Quebec, Canada.

<sup>3</sup> This grid is intended to be an analysis tool for projects submitted for funding applications to the Territorial Development Fund (FDT) in Canada.

Centres (CNCC)<sup>4</sup>, shopping centres build on economies of agglomeration. The CNCC differentiates five types based on size and offerings, spanning small neighbourhood centres to super-regional malls like West Edmonton Mall. Their commercial density and visitor volumes enable shopping centres to reshape localities, leading governments to implant them to restructure landscapes and jumpstart economic circuits strategically. However, as structuring projects, shopping centres' effects vary based on adaption to local settings, integration into infrastructure networks, and fit with communal needs. Context determines whether shopping centres successfully produce intended structuring outcomes versus unplanned changes in their surroundings, as illustrated in Table 1.

<b>Types of Shopping Centres</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>GLA Area</b>
Regional shopping centres	Enclosed space with stores facing inwards, connected by a common walkway containing at least 80 stores and services.	More than 40 000 m <sup>2</sup>
Super regional shopping centres	It is like regional shopping centres but with more variety, encompassing at least 150 stores and services.	Over 80,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Large Shopping Centres	Space intended for general merchandise or offers focused on conveniences. The clothing and other non-durable goods offered are broader than in small shopping centres. They total at least 40 stores and services.	Under 20,000 m <sup>2</sup>
Small Shopping Centres	These are neighbourhood-scale convenience (local supply) centres. They bring together at least 20 stores.	Under 5 000 m <sup>2</sup>
Themed Shopping Centres	These are themed shopping centres organised spatially according to a thematic criterion (e.g. facilities, manufacturer boutiques). They are not defined by their gross leasable area (GLA) or the number of stores and services.	Size Not Specified

<sup>4</sup> The CNCC (Conseil National des Centres Commerciaux) is a French organization that brings together owners of shopping centers, developers, managers, marketing specialists, investors, and other related professionals.

Table 1. Classification and Characteristics of Shopping Centres in France According to the CNCC, 2016 Source: Authors.

### 2.2.1. The Structuring Effects of Shopping Centres on Regions and Cities

Shopping centres have multiple and diverse structuring effects on regions and cities. Several researchers have highlighted these effects but from different angles and across various themes, including:

#### Economic Structuring Effects:

Badot and Lemoine (2015) studied commercial attractiveness and its relationship to tourism through the example of the "Val d'Europe"<sup>5</sup> shopping centre. The study demonstrates how thoughtfully designed shopping centres can boost tourism appeal and economics when integrated with existing attractions like amusement parks. Regarding the impact of commercial dynamics on the labour market, Salgueiro and Cachinho (2003) assessed shopping centres as good examples of job creation. The study found that shopping centres boost employment opportunities in a local area directly through retail jobs and indirectly by stimulating employment across supply chains, transport, marketing and more. The unique commercial scale and dynamics of shopping centres provide net economic benefits beyond just the on-site retail activities.

#### Physical and Spatial Restructuring:

Anais (2014) considered "shopping malls" as models for manufacturing the city in terms of spatial organisation and the centralities they impose, competing with city centres. Polko (2013) specifically studied the impact of shopping centres on the functional and spatial structure of municipalities in the outer metropolitan area of the Upper Silesia agglomeration in Poland, generating positive effects such as the construction of new commercial and service facilities, often accompanied by the reconstruction of access roads and transportation improvements.

#### Symbolic Effects:

Monnet (2000) emphasised the analysis of links between symbolic dimension and commercial centrality, and consequently urban centrality, touching on shopping centres. The research concluded that shopping centres' symbolic meaning and cultural associations are essential factors

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<sup>5</sup> "Val d'Europe" shopping center is a large retail complex located in the Val d'Europe area near Disneyland Paris in France.

directly tied to their marketplace roles and urban centrality. The dimensions are interconnected in cementing their place in urban life.

Similarly, Several shopping centre projects around the world attest to these structuring effects on different scales:

- The urban shopping centre Part-Dieu in Lyon (France), a structuring element in the city's urban project, redesigned the Lyon metropolis's catchment area by welcoming 34 million visitors annually.
- The Westfield Euralille shopping centre (France) serves the Euralille business district and receives more than 16 million visitors annually.
- The "edge cities" in São Paulo (USA) are considered seeds for suburban city construction thanks to their ability to attract new services and residents (Cary, 2016).
- The future large Infinity shopping/residential centre under construction in Valencia (Spain), extending over 380,000 m<sup>2</sup> and representing an investment of more than 350 million euros, accounting for more than 200 establishments (restaurants and various shops) and will generate more than 6,400 direct and indirect jobs according to its promoters.

### 2.3. Shopping Centres as Structuring Projects in New Cities

The subject of shopping centres in new cities needs to be addressed by researchers, notably in structuring effects. The research that marked us in this sense is that of Alexis et al. (2005) on new cities in France and the implementation of equipment integrated into them (including shopping centres) around the issue of animating the new cities, and from the "town-equipment interaction" perspective. The research explained the entire process of realising these projects by clarifying the structuring and animating role of the equipment in the urban space that must be thought about during project programming.

As for the current case study, the "Ritaj Mall" project, some Algerian researchers have approached it in a general context and within the framework of their studies on related themes such as socio-anthropology. Belguidoum (2021) addressed the question of identity in the new city of Ali Mendjeli and its relationship to commercial dynamics. In this regard, Retail (2021), in his first article, developed a literature review on shopping centres with those of Ali Mendjeli, and in his second article, in the same cases, questioned their attractiveness. Similarly, Lakehal (2020), through his study on "The new city of Ali Mendjeli put to the test of lifestyle habits," including the issue of polycentrism generated by the town's shopping centres. Overall, if we were to place these studies on the notion of structuring effect, they only touched on the project's symbolic and spatial effects.

### 3. Methods and Tools

In this article, the researcher presents an exhaustive case study using both an analytical, qualitative, and quantitative approach, relying on the descriptive analysis of data and statistics collected from the administration of the "Ritaj Mall" shopping centre, the services of EVANAM<sup>6</sup> and various administrations; in addition to the historical method; the survey method; and field investigation as introduced and explained by "Maurice Hangers" in his publication on scientific research in the field of human studies (Angers, 2015).

In this perspective, and after preliminary on-site observation (in situ observation), data collection, and compilation of key statistics, we clarified the context of the study: the new city of Ali Mendjeli, with its various spatial and temporal scales.

Moreover, a semi-structured interview was conducted in 2021 with a real estate agent located on the same site to show the impact of "Ritaj Mall"<sup>7</sup> on the real estate market in its immediate environment and the town. To collect maximum information, a questionnaire was distributed to 207 visitors randomly selected, and the results were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS 21 software.

The researcher also proceeded to record secondary and tertiary sector commercial premises: services and liberal professions in the surroundings of the mall, accompanied by photos. The last step was to interview traders established on the immediate site to better understand the interactivity between the mall and their activities.

Cartographic work on certain spatial portions supported this set of approaches and methods, developed using QGIS 3.10 software.

### 4. Context of the Study

#### 4.1. Ali Mendjeli New Town: A Territory Created from Scratch Establishing Itself

Considering Ali Mendjeli as a paradigm of spatial development, it is imperative to delve into its origins, primarily aimed at augmenting the Constantine agglomeration. The inception of this new city, situated 20 km south of Constantine (refer to Figure 1), was in contention. Established on a previously undeveloped site in 1993, it gained official recognition as a delegated wilaya (subprefecture) on December 26, 2018. With its dual purpose - academic and commercial - Ali Mendjeli boasts several pivotal infrastructures: university campuses, notably "Constantine 3 Salah Boubnider University" and "Abdelhamid Mehri Constantine 2 University", a "regional

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<sup>6</sup> EAVANAM (Etablissement d'Aménagement des Villes d'Ain Nehas et d'Ali Mendjeli) is a development agency responsible for urban planning and development in the cities of Ain Nehas and Ali Mendjeli, located in Constantine, Algeria.

<sup>7</sup> "Ritaj Mall" Constantine: The Story of a Highly Successful Shopping Center. [Source: <https://ritajmalls.com/a-propos-du-centre-commercial-ritaj-mall-constantine/>]

military hospital", a "tramway", and most relevant to this study, the "Ritaj Mall" shopping centre.

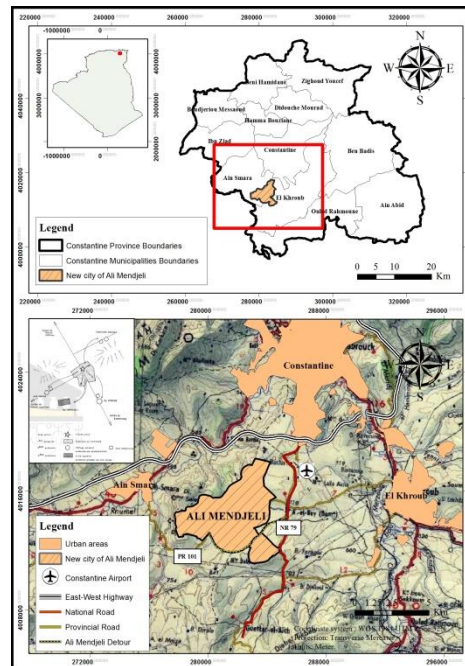


Figure 1. Geographical Location of the New City of Ali Mendjeli. Source: Adapted from Marc Cote's schema, 2015; Base map from DUC Constantine; Processed by M. YAHIOUCHE, 2022.

#### 4.2. Ritaj Mall: A Project of Significant Impact

Strategically located in Neighbourhood Unit No. 02 (District 01), the "Ritaj Mall" shopping centre's location advantage stems from its proximity to two primary arteries of the city: the ALN boulevard and a secondary boulevard, which facilitates diverse city entries. Its accessibility is further enhanced by its closeness to the "Abdelhamid Mehri Constantine 2 University", the intercity bus terminal, and the tram line (refer to Figure 2).

This private investment initiative, which opened on April 16, 2016, adheres to international standards. The "Ritaj Mall" spans an impressive area of 20,000 m<sup>2</sup>, extending over five (05) levels, including a basement. Additionally, it offers an 800-space parking facility and an outdoor recreational zone comprising playgrounds (refer to Photos 1 and 2).

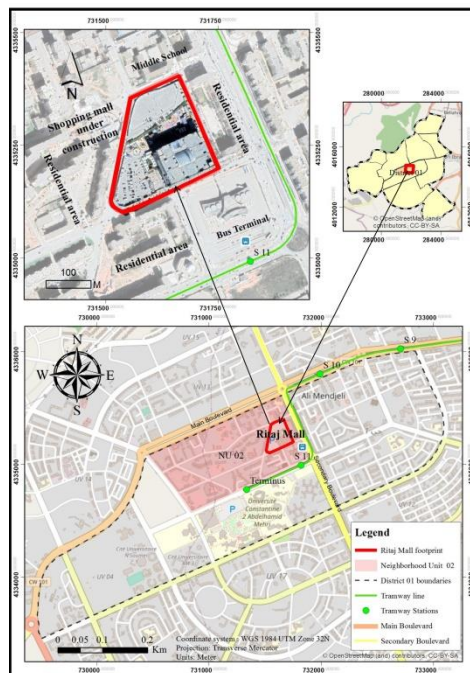


Figure 2. Location of the "Ritaj Mall" Shopping Center Relative to the New City of Ali Mendjeli. Source: Adapted from Open Street Map and SAS Planet, 2022; Processed by M. YAHIOUCHE.



Photo 1. "Ritaj Mall" Shopping Center: Exterior Views. Source: M. YAHIOUCHE, 2023.



Photo 2. "Ritaj Mall" Shopping Center: Interior Views. Source: M. YAHIOUCHE, 2023.

### 4.3. Scales of the Study

#### 4.3.1. Spatial Scales

The "Ritaj Mall" project is an architectural project whose undeniable influence extends beyond its implantation environment, and its effects are observed in several areas. For this reason, we opted for a hierarchy of the spatial scales of the study without dissociating them: from the architectural scale of the project to Neighborhood Unit 02 (NU 02) to the scale of District 01, to the scale of the entire new city of Ali Mendjeli and even beyond.

#### 4.3.2. Temporal Scale

The present study lasted three (03) years, or the period (2019-2022), with data updated in January 2023, a period marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, interrupting field investigations due to project closure.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. The Role of "Ritaj Mall" in General Urbanization

To understand the chronology of urban transformations in the "Ritaj Mall" implantation site and comprehend the consistency between these changes and the inauguration of "Ritaj Mall", it is necessary to situate the urban transformations at the scale of District No. 01 in time (Figure 3).

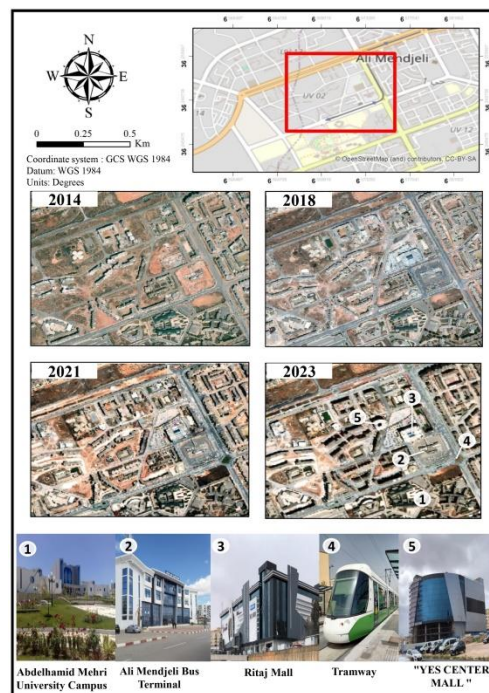


Figure 3. Urban Evolution of the Surroundings of "Ritaj Mall" (Key Phases). Source:

Adapted from Open Street Map and World Imagery Wayback;

<https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/wayback/#active=64776&ext=6.56026,36.24419,6.58189,36.25551> Processed by M. YAHIOUCHE, 2023.

According to an analysis of satellite images showing the spatial evolution of the site and various sources, five (05) major projects were identified as being implemented in the area in a meaningful chronology, as shown in Table 2:

Project	Construction period
Abdelhamid Mehri University Campus (Constantine 2)	1998-2014
Ali Mendjeli Bus Terminal	2010 -2014
The "Ritaj Mall" Shopping Center	2011-2016
The Tramway (Extension of the New Town of Ali Mendjeli)	2017-2021
The "YES CENTER MALL" Shopping Center	Under construction from 2019 until the present day.

**Table 2: Chronology of significant projects implemented in District No. 01 of the new city of Ali Mendjeli, Source: Authors**

The inauguration of the "Ritaj Mall" project in 2016 was followed by the completion of two (02) significant projects:

- The tramway (Extension of the New city Ali Mendjeli), which is part of the strategy to connect the four (04) universities of Constantine, including the Abdelhamid Mehri University campus (Constantine 2), with its route adapted to serve essential facilities in the city including the "Ritaj Mall".
- The "YES CENTER MALL" shopping centre, an unplanned project in the current POS<sup>8</sup>, is under construction on a site reserved for a cultural facility. This adaptation of the initial program by the province reflects the structuring and generating effect of the "Ritaj Mall" in its space.

The location of the mall adjacent to the Abdelhamid Mehri University campus "Constantine 2" which accommodates more than 15,000 students, the Ali Mendjeli bus station, which serves the interior of the Constantine Province, the southern and western Algerian provinces with more than 400 passengers/day (SOGRAL, 2023)<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, since its commissioning, this tramway extension transports 50,000 passengers/day from the Ben Abdelmalek Ramdane station (city centre of Constantine) to the Abdelhamid Mehri University (Setram, 2023)<sup>10</sup>. This concentration of significant projects in the same area constituted a vital urban node on the neighbourhood scale of local, metropolitan, national, and international importance (Photo 3).

<sup>8</sup> POS stands for "Plan d'Occupation des Sols" in French, which translates to "Plan for Land Use." It refers to a document or map that outlines the designated land use and zoning regulations for a specific area or territory.

<sup>9</sup> SOGRAL is the company responsible for the management of bus stations in Algeria.

<sup>10</sup> Setram is the company entrusted with the operation and maintenance of the Algerian Tramways.



Photo 3. "Ritaj Mall" Shopping Center, the Bus Station, and the Tramway: Catalysts for Major Commercial Dynamics in the New City of Ali Mendjeli. [Photo description: Aerial Image of Ali Manjeli Bus Terminal SNTV , Rtaj Mall Commercial Center , Neighbourhood Unit 2 and the Tramway Track Route ].Source: New City of Ali Mendjeli , Constantine Facebook Page. (2022)

<https://www.facebook.com/nvl.ville.infos/photos/855766325837604>

## 5.2. The Commercial Offering of "Ritaj Mall"

The Mall is integrated into a neighbourhood unit of 5,903 inhabitants with a density of 25.91 dwellings/hectare, a district with 20,554 inhabitants, and a density of 22.17 dwellings/hectare. The new city of Ali Mendjeli has more than 279,684 inhabitants (Table 3). According to the Algerian Theoretical Equipment Grid<sup>11</sup>, this project is intended for a town exceeding 300,000 inhabitants.

Designation	SPATIAL ENTITIES		
	Neighbourhood Unit No. 02 (NU 02)	District N°01	New City Ali Mendjeli
Number of inhabitants	5.903	20.554	279.684
Number of dwellings	1.447	5.724	84.185
Dwellings / ha	25,91	22,17	56,12

Table 3. Distribution of inhabitants and dwellings in the spatial entities related to "Ritaj Mall". Source: EVANAM 2020

<sup>11</sup> The "Theoretical Equipment Grid" is a document for programming urban facilities. It was developed by CADAT/BEREG (Study and Research Office for General Engineering) in 1975 and represents the most representative types of cities within the Algerian urban system.

Referring to the CNNC (National Council of Shopping Centers) in France, the Mall is in the category of large shopping centres that operate on a less-than-regional scale, given its estimated GLA of 20,000 m<sup>2</sup>. This leads to the conclusion that this shopping centre, given its characteristics, is typically intended for a retail area on the scale of the Constantine metro area, which can reach the neighbouring provinces.

### 5.3. The Overarching Commercial Centrality of "Ritaj Mall"

The inception of "Ritaj Mall" heralded a profound commercial centrality. The mall is a significant employment hub comprising 275 stores, of which 15 showcase renowned international brands like LC Waikiki, Original Marines, and Jennifer. It directly employs around 300 individuals across various departments and indirectly supports over 2,500 roles, including salespeople and waitstaff.

The commercial influence of "Ritaj Mall" is not confined to its boundaries. In its vicinity, specifically within a 100-meter radius, there exists a bustling zone comprising 200 commercial establishments—from apparel stores to eateries. Additionally, an average of 2 to 4 ground-floor residential units per block have metamorphosed into offices for professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and various agencies.

The mall's establishment has undeniably impacted the local real estate scenario. Rentals within the mall command premium rates. As the real estate agency "Le Paradis" manager articulated, "Rental prices within 'Ritaj Mall' are staggering." A comparative assessment reveals that the mall's rental rates, which range from 100,000 to 200,000 Algerian Dinars (DA) /month (approximately \$750 to \$1500), are about four times higher than similar spaces elsewhere in the city.

In the broader urban context, the mall's influence is palpable in neighbourhood units No. 01 and No. 02 (NU 01 and NU 02). Here, residential units are being repurposed for commercial use while property prices continue to surge. According to the aforementioned real estate manager, properties initially sold for 2 to 3 million DA are now fetching prices upwards of 30 million DA, marking a tenfold increase.

Additionally, "Ritaj Mall's" resounding success has magnetised further commercial interest, evidenced by the upcoming "YES CENTER MALL," encompassing a 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> area. This new venture hopes to capitalise on the established commercial gravitas of "Ritaj Mall."

In comparison to other budding commercial centres and the dynamics of the commercial centralities in the new town, "Ritaj Mall" emerges as the nucleus of commercial activity,

spawning new commercial hubs like the "Square shopping" (NU20) , "Méga MART Lalla Baya" (NU 19) (as seen in Figure 4) and influencing the appeal of established centres like "El Ritej" (NU 06) , "La Coupole" and "Sans visas" (NU 07) (refer to Figure 5) . As Lakehal (2020) aptly puts it " Ritaj Mall" is the epitome of modern western allure in Ali Mendjeli, surpassing all other contenders."

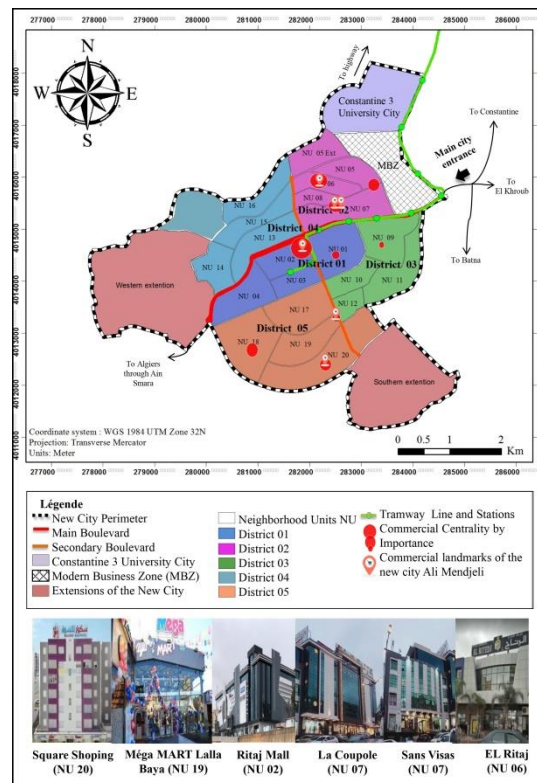


Figure 4. Shifting commercial centralities in the new town the New City of Ali Mendjeli.

Source: M. YAHIOUCHE, 2023.

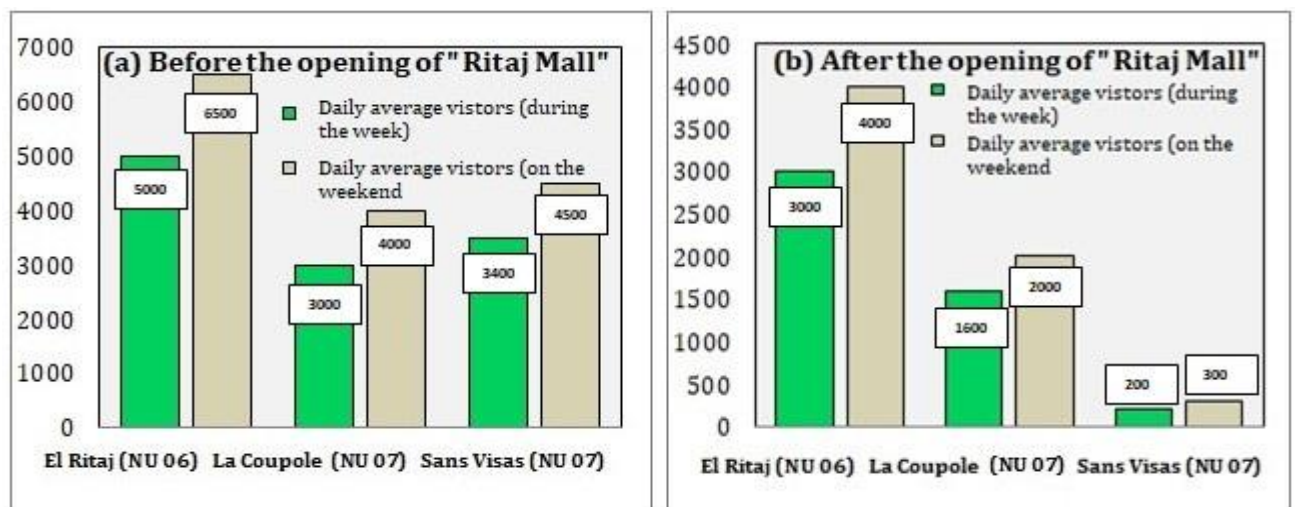


Figure 5. Both Figures 1 (a) and 1 (b) show the visitor flow to the new city's shopping centers in the new New City of Ali Mendjeli : (a) before the opening of "Ritaj Mall" and (b) after the opening of "Ritaj Mall". "Source: Author (Survey, 2021)

#### 5.4. "Ritaj Mall": A Hub of Regional and National Significance

"Ritaj Mall" stands out as a prominent centre of attraction, annually drawing millions of visitors. In 2019 alone, the mall recorded an impressive 7 million visitors, with over 700,000 vehicles utilising its parking facilities.

Its magnetic appeal is felt locally and nationally, pulling in diverse commercial streams. Our observations indicate visitors from 23 distinct provinces across Algeria. The volume of visitors from each province is influenced by its proximity to the mall. Notably, five provinces: Sétif, Skikda, Annaba, Guelma, and Mila, are identified as key catchment areas due to their significant visitor contributions, as detailed in (Table 4) and illustrated in (Figure 6).

Further insights from field surveys underscore the mall's expansive influence. Its allure is not just limited to local or national boundaries. It also attracts the Algerian diaspora from Europe and America and visitors from neighbouring Tunisia and Libya.

Provinces	Code	Provinces	Code
Adrar	1	Jijel	18
Chlef	2	<b>Sétif</b>	19
Laghouat	3	<b>Skikda</b>	21
Oum el Bouaghi	4	<b>Annaba</b>	23
Batna	5	<b>Guelma</b>	24
Béjaïa	6	Ouargla	30
Biskra	7	Oran	31
Blida	9	El Oued	39
Tebessa	12	Souk Ahras	41
Algiers	16	Tipaza	42
Djelfa	17	<b>Mila</b>	43

Table 4. "Ritaj Mall" visitors and targeted markets according to car license plates (Provinces). [The bolded provinces represent the targeted market] . Source: Ritaj Mall Administration, 2021

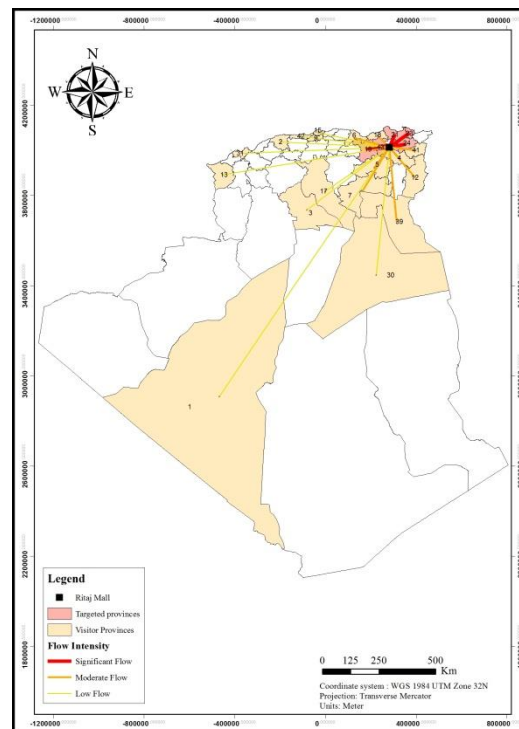


Figure 6. Visitors of "Ritaj Mall" and Target Markets by Provinces (Wilayas). Source: "Ritaj Mall" Administration; Processed by M. YAHIOUCHE, 2022.

#### 4.5. "Ritaj Mall": A Competitive Endeavor on the National Stage

Algeria's commercial arena features a selection of major strategic shopping centres, each designed from its inception to serve as regional and super-regional hubs. Some notable examples include:

- The "Park Mall" in the Province of Sétif, spanning 143,000 m<sup>2</sup>, stands as the most expansive shopping complex in Algeria, earning a place among the grandest malls in Africa.
- "Bab Ezzouar" Shopping and Entertainment Centre in Algiers covers 100,000 m<sup>2</sup> and is Algeria's second-largest commercial complex.
- "City Center "Shopping Centre in Algiers: This establishment covers 32,000 m<sup>2</sup> of retail space.
- "Grand Oran Shopping Centre": Stretching over 33,000 m<sup>2</sup>, it provides a significant shopping experience.
- "Es-Senia "Shopping Centre in Oran: Although it encompasses 100,000 m<sup>2</sup>, it remains incompletely occupied.

Despite these complexes' vast commercial offerings and extensive clientele, "Ritaj Mall" has carved out its niche. It has successfully contended with these established centres regarding annual visitor numbers, as illustrated in (Figure 7).

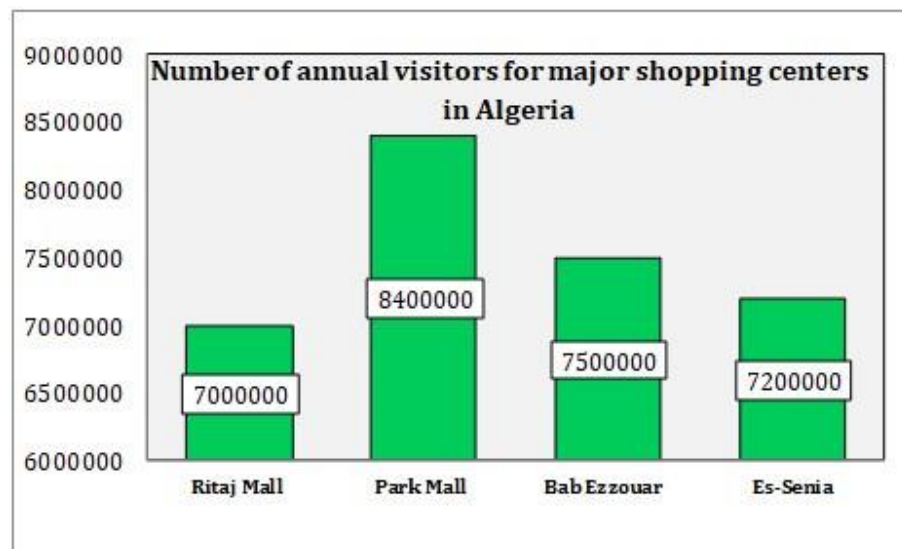


Figure 7. Positioning of "Ritaj Mall" in Relation to Regional and Super-Regional Shopping Centers by Visitor Count. Source: Various; Processed by Author, 2023.

#### 4.6. Results from Questionnaire Analysis

To comprehensively discern the underlying socio-economic impacts of "Ritaj Mall" and uncover previously unobserved nuances, it was imperative to engage with its patrons directly. A questionnaire was administered to a diverse group of 207 visitors, selected at random. The data accumulated was meticulously processed using SPSS software, the findings of which are delineated below.

Most participants were young female university students. This demographic closely aligns with the academic ethos of the nascent city of Ali Mendjeli, marked by its burgeoning student community (as depicted in Figures 8, 9&10).

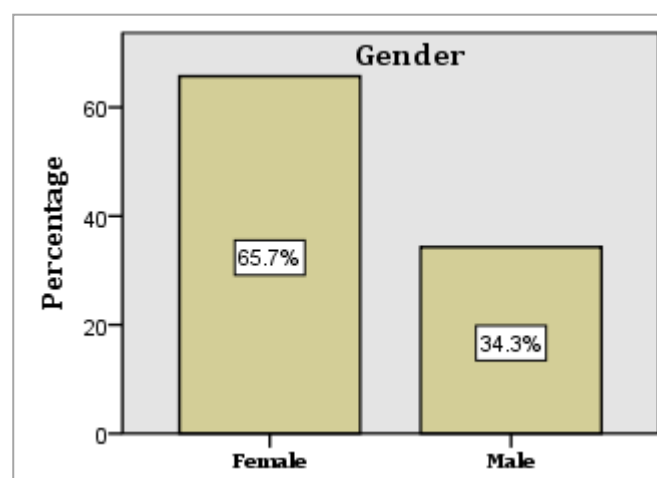


Figure 8. Distribution of Respondents by Gender. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

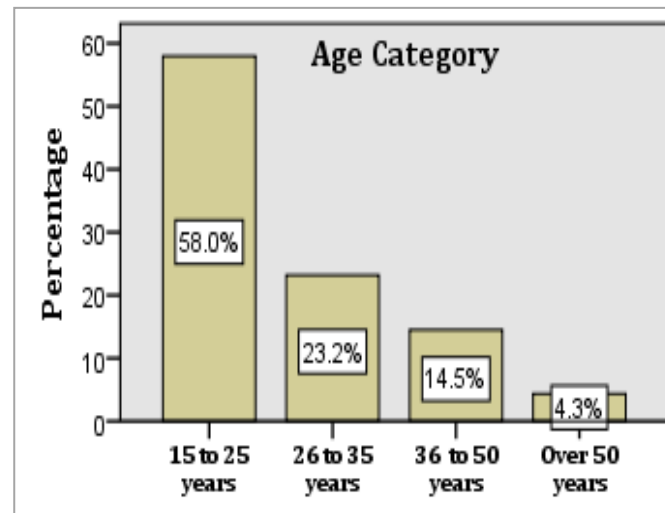


Figure 9. Distribution of Respondents by Age Group. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

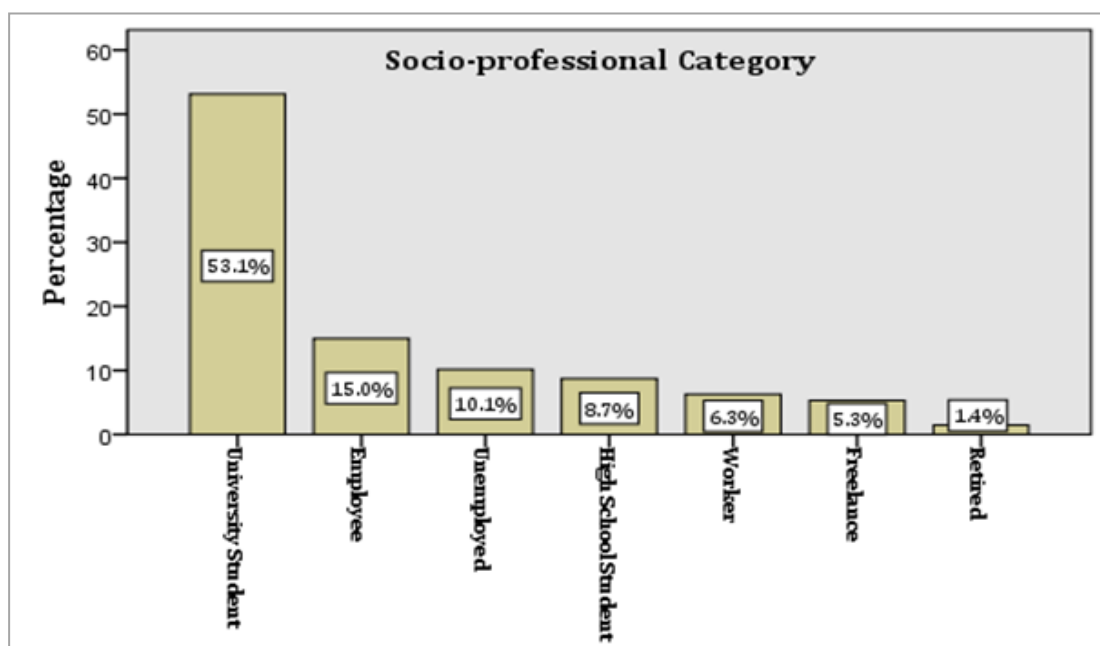


Figure 10. Socio-Professional Category of Respondents. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

The participants comprised a varied mix of residents, both from within and outside the province of Constantine (as seen in Figure 11). Their choice of transportation to the mall was diverse, though there was a marked preference for cars, tramway, and buses (Figure 12).

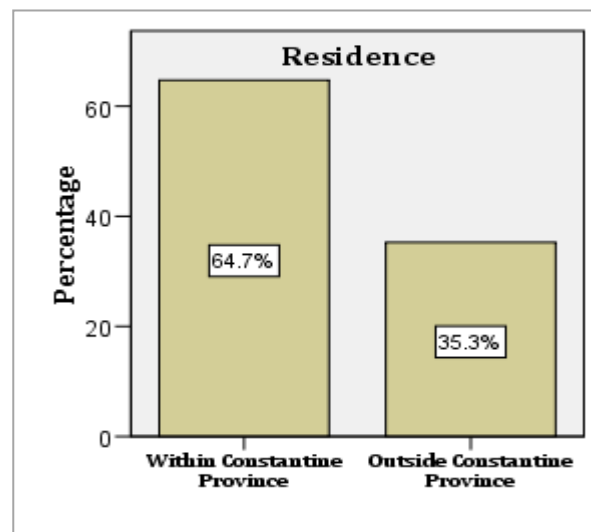


Figure 11. Residence of Respondents. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

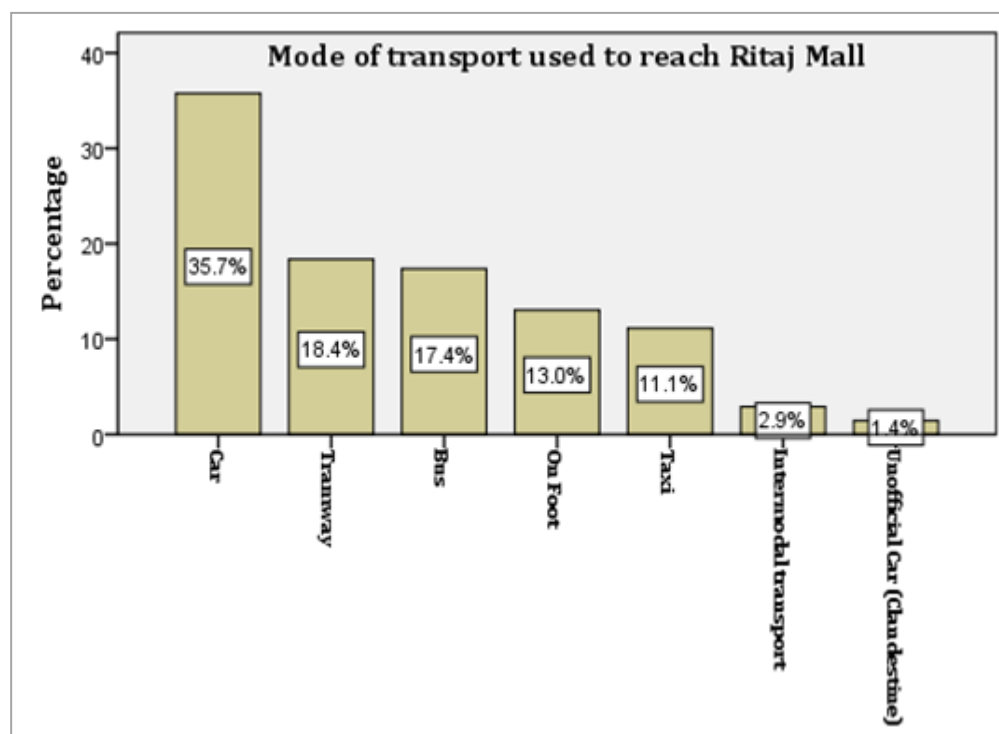


Figure 12. Mode of transport used by Respondents to reach Ritaj Mall. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

Visit frequency demonstrated a clear correlation with geographic location. For instance, most Constantine province residents frequented the mall weekly, a trend noticeably absent among those residing in downtown Constantine (Figure 13). This pattern was also evident among the inhabitants of the Wilayas that the mall primarily serves, such as Skikda, Mila, and Guelma.

The frequency of visits to the mall is inversely proportional to a Province's proximity to the new city. Specifically, eastern and central province residents like Oum El Bouaghi, Jijel, Algiers, and Médéa tend to visit monthly or quarterly. In contrast, those from other provinces visit bi-annually or even just annually (refer to Figure 14).

A noteworthy variation in visit frequency is observed among provinces with a significant student population enrolled at the universities of Constantine and Ali Mendjeli.

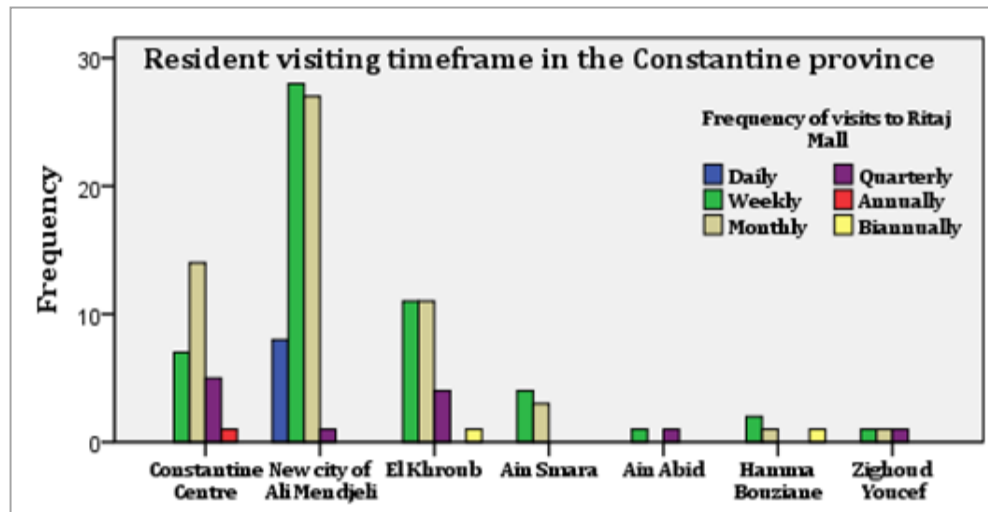


Figure 13. Temporality of Visits to "Ritaj Mall" Based on Residence in the Constantine province . Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

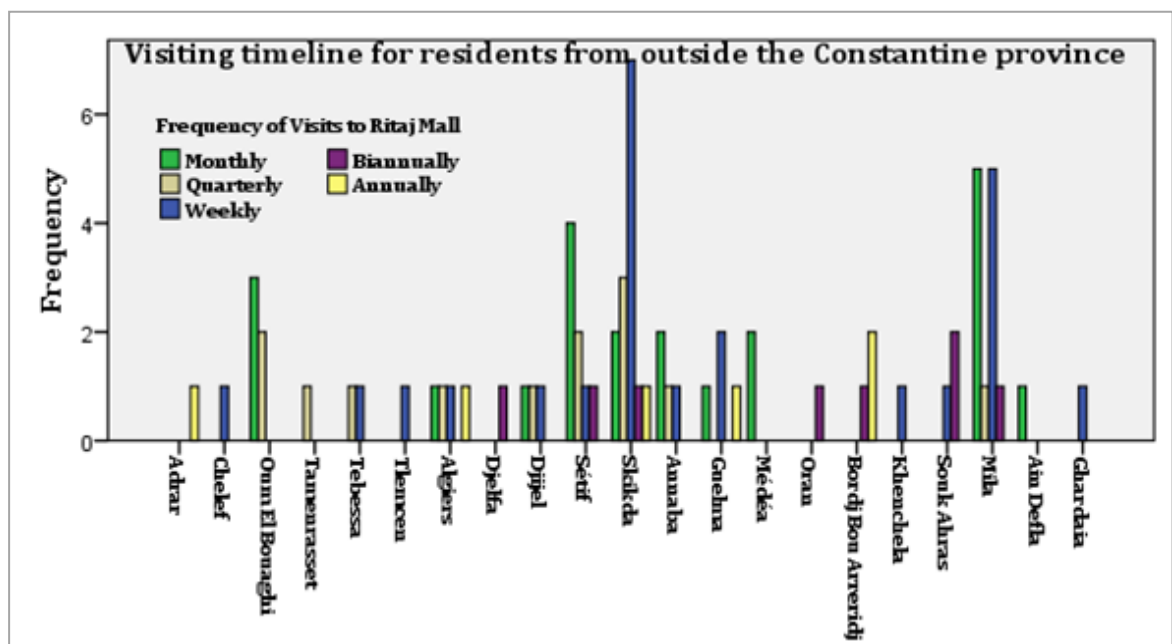


Figure 14. Temporality of Visits to "Ritaj Mall" Based on Residence outside the Constantine province. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

The respondents' predominant preference for "Ritaj Mall" stems from its vibrant, welcoming, modern, and fashionable ambience. This inclination is amplified by the conspicuous absence or scarcity of comparable facilities in their respective residential areas (Figure 14).

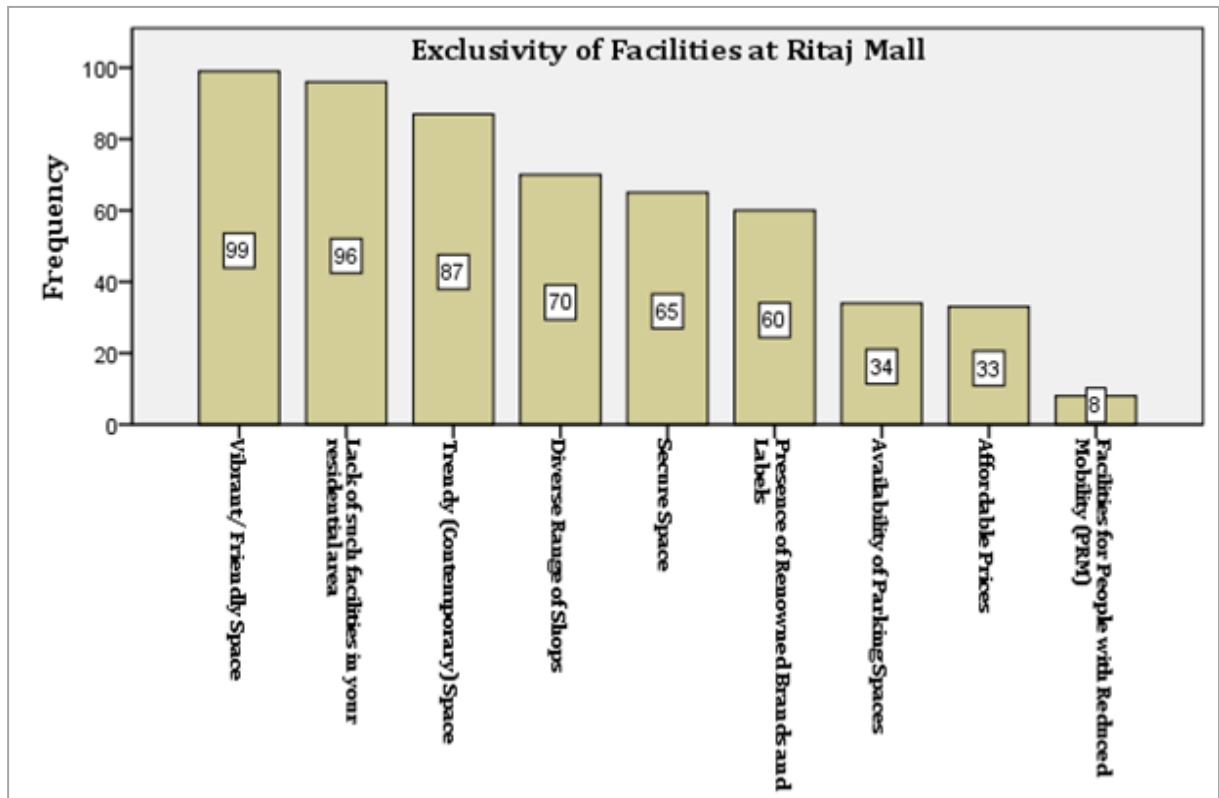


Figure 15. Exclusivity of "Ritaj Mall" Facilities. Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

Primarily, visitors frequent the mall for shopping, but other supplementary motivations include leisurely strolls, recreation, or mere curiosity (elaborated in Figure 16).

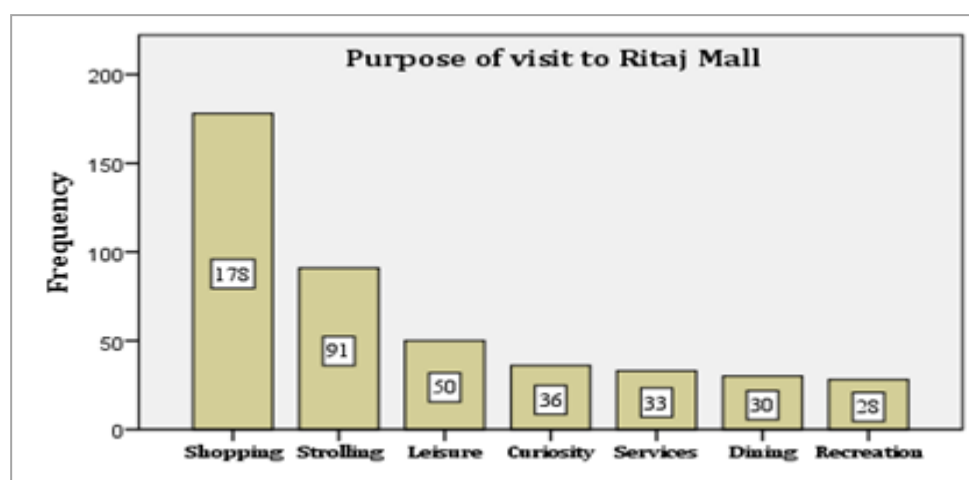


Figure 16. Purpose of Visit to "Ritaj Mall". Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

The primary channels through which participants became aware of the mall are word-of-mouth and digital media, which encompasses the mall's official website and various social networking platforms (highlighted in Figure 17).

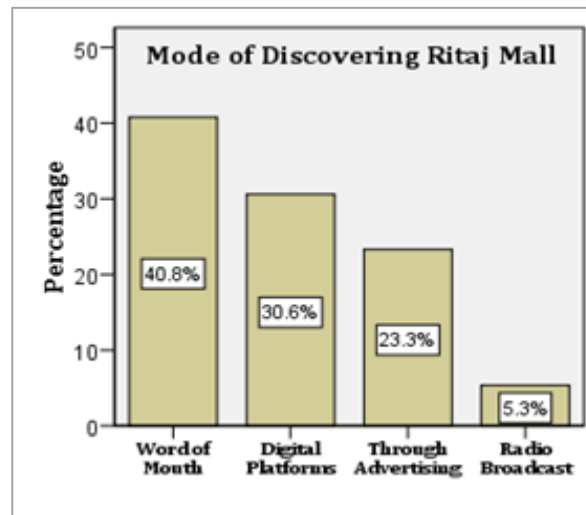


Figure 17. Means of Discovering "Ritaj Mall". Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.

Frequency tables (Source: Authors, using SPSS V.21.)

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
Female	136	65.7%	65.7%	65.7%
Male	71	34.3%	34.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 5. Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
15 to 25 years	120	58.0%	58.0%	58.0%
26 to 35 years	48	23.2%	23.2%	81.2%
36 to 50 years	30	14.5%	14.5%	95.7%
Over 50 years	9	4.3%	4.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 6. Age Category of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
High School Student	18	8.7%	8.7%	8.7%
University Student	110	53.1%	53.1%	61.8%
Unemployed	21	10.1%	10.1%	72.0%
Employee	31	15.0%	15.0%	87.0%
Worker	13	6.3%	6.3%	93.2%
Freelance	11	5.3%	5.3%	98.6%
<b>Retired</b>	3	1.4%	1.4%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 7. Socio-professional Category of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
Within Constantine Province	134	64.7%	64.7%	64.7%
Outside Constantine Province	73	35.3%	35.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 8. Residence of Respondents.

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
On Foot	27	13.0%	13.0%	13.0%
Car	74	35.7%	35.7%	48.8%
Taxi	23	11.1%	11.1%	59.9%
Bus	36	17.4%	17.4%	77.3%
Tramway	38	18.4%	18.4%	95.7%
Unofficial Car (Clandestine)	3	1.4%	1.4%	97.1%
Intermodal Transport	6	2.9%	2.9%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 9. Mode of Transport Used by Respondents to Reach Ritaj Mall.

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
Daily	8	3.9%	3.9%	3.9%
Weekly	78	37.7%	37.7%	41.5%
Monthly	79	38.2%	38.2%	79.7%
Quarterly	25	12.1%	12.1%	91.8%
Biannually	10	4.8%	4.8%	96.6%
Annually	7	3.4%	3.4%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	207	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 10. Frequency of Visits to Ritaj Mall by Respondents

Purpose of the Visit	Responses	Percentage of Observations
Shopping	178	86.4%
Strolling	91	44.2%
Recreation	28	13.6%
Services	33	16.0%
Leisure	50	24.3%
Dining	30	14.6%
Curiosity	36	17.5%
<b>Total</b>	446	216.5%

Note: Group of dichotomies tabulated at value 1.

Table 11. Purpose of Visit to Ritaj Mall

Unique Facilities at Ritaj Mall	Responses	Percentage of Observations
Lack of such facilities in your residential area	96	46.4%
Secure Space	65	31.4%
Vibrant/ Friendly Space	99	47.8%
Trendy (Contemporary) Space	87	42.0%
Availability of Parking Spaces	34	16.4%
Facilities for People with Reduced Mobility (PRM)	8	3.9%
Diverse Range of Shops	70	33.8%
Affordable Prices	33	15.9%
Presence of Renowned Brands and Labels	60	29.0%
<b>Total</b>	552	266.7%

Note: The percentages in some tables, especially Tables 11 and 12, exceed 100%. This typically indicates that multiple responses were allowed for each respondent.

Table 12. Exclusivity of Facilities at Ritaj Mall

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
<b>Valid</b>				
Word of Mouth	84	40.6%	40.8%	40.8%
Through Advertising	48	23.2%	23.3%	64.1%
Radio Broadcast	11	5.3%	5.3%	69.4%
Digital Platforms (mall's website, video vlogs, social networks)	63	30.4%	30.6%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	206	99.5%	100.0%	
<b>Missing</b>	1	0.5%		
<b>Overall Total</b>	207	100.0%		

Table 13. Mode of Discovering Ritaj Mall

From the above data, it becomes evident that the unanticipated spatial-economic ramifications of "Ritaj Mall" have arisen from an intricate web of interconnected factors. These can be distilled into the following key points:

**Geographical Significance:** The mall's strategic positioning in the Constantine metropolitan area, the third-largest in Algeria and historically a pivotal commercial junction in eastern Algeria, significantly bolsters its appeal. Further enhancing this is its central location in the emerging city of Ali Mendjeli, right at the nexus of two major connecting routes. This positioning echoes the essence of vital hubs in ancient urban designs, such as the Roman forum, Greek agora, and the Arab-Muslim market square. Such landmarks epitomise the dynamism and significance of communal public spaces fostering inter-community interactions.

**Project Accessibility:** The mall boasts a commendable level of accessibility, catering to a broad spectrum of visitors. This is facilitated by many transportation options, ranging from the east-west highway, arterial boulevards, and the central bus terminal to public transit options like trams and buses. Additionally, ample parking provisions further augment its ease of access.

**Spatial-Urban Advantages:** The presence of key infrastructures, such as the Abdelhamid Mehri University campus (Constantine 2), the Ali Mendjeli bus station, and the tramway extension of the new city of Ali Mendjeli, significantly boost the city's connectivity and identity. These projects bolster exchange centrality and reinforce the city's distinctive character.

**Project Distinctiveness:** "Ritaj Mall" stands out due to its contemporary design, comprehensive amenities, diverse attractions, presence of international brands, and a wide range of services catering to both budget-conscious and luxury-seeking consumers. The conspicuous absence of comparable shopping complexes in the eastern Algerian region is a particularly compelling factor for its popularity.

**Integration of ICTs:** Digital platforms associated with the mall, such as its official website, a Facebook page with over 500,000 subscribers, and an Instagram page boasting more than 30,000 followers, are pivotal in amplifying its visibility and introducing new offerings. Beyond mere promotional tools, these channels serve vital e-marketing functions and facilitate various delivery services. Furthermore, the city's youthful and digitally adept student demographic serves as a natural conduit for propagating diverse digital engagements.

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to scrutinise the structuring spatial-economic ramifications of the "Ritaj Mall" shopping centre and to elucidate the elements driving these impacts.

The primary spatial-economic influences attributed to "Ritaj Mall" pertain to its contributions to the urbanisation of its immediate vicinity, the array of commercial offerings it presents, the centrality it has established, its magnetism as a commercial hub, and its rank within Algeria's retail schema.

From a spatial-economic perspective, this study echoes the findings of numerous scholars. It corroborates Courcier's (2003) conclusions on the transformative capacity of structuring projects and their aptitude to reshape and renew spaces. Similarly, it is in tandem with the insights of Tadiarous et al. (2020) and El-Amrani and Brahim (2016) regarding the allure of shopping centres. Additionally, this research further reinforces Capron's (2001) perspectives on commercial centrality and the pivotal roles played by shopping centres.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this research are congruent with the assertions made by Gharbi & Knight (2017) in their book, especially concerning the decisive factors that inform the success of shopping centres, such as strategic location and accessibility. This study also introduces the innovative concept of the role of ICT as a determining factor.

The strength of this study is underpinned by the amalgamation of diverse research techniques and methodologies employed, encompassing questionnaires, interviews, and both survey and historical methods. Nonetheless, a potential limitation of this research could be the relatively modest sample size chosen for the questionnaire, which consisted of 207 participants.

## 6. Conclusion

This study underscores shopping centres' significant role in shaping projects within burgeoning towns and cities. The transformative impacts attributed to shopping centres span economic, spatial, and symbolic realms. These influences can be discerned across various urban dimensions, from the immediate vicinity of the establishment to broader scales encompassing neighbourhoods, cities, and regions, and even manifesting at national and international tiers. The

genesis of these impacts is an amalgamation of several factors, including strategic site location, accessibility, the presence of ancillary infrastructure, the distinctiveness of the project, and the deployment of ICTs.

"Ritaj Mall" serves as a testament to a project that has seamlessly assimilated within its milieu, achieving complete functional harmonisation and ushering in salutary structural changes for the encompassing city.

Interestingly, even without its incorporation in the initial plans for the new city of Ali Mendjeli, "Ritaj Mall" epitomises the prevalent trend of "accomplished fact" urban planning observed in Algeria. This scenario presents a compelling case to proactively harness such occurrences as part of a deliberate strategy, emphasising the integration and conceptualisation of commercial infrastructures as pivotal components in urban planning and territorial development agendas.

Finally, this study paves the way for more nuanced inquiries into shopping centres, exploring facets like their alignment with surrounding environs, their commercial allure, urban and commercial focal points, competitive commercial dynamics, and the infusion of ICT and digital innovations within these establishments.

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